

Gaston County Schools
Board of Education
April 20, 2026
Regular Meeting

MINUTES

The Gaston County Board of Education met in a regular session on Monday, April 20, 2026, at 5:30 p.m. in the Central Office Boardroom at 943 Osceola Street, Gastonia, NC 28054. Those Board Members in attendance were: Chairman Josh Crisp, Vice Chairman Dot Cherry, Lee Dedmon, Tod Kinlaw, Robbie Lovelace, Jeff Ramsey, Janna Smith, and A.M. Stephens III. Brent Moore was absent.

Additional attendees include: Superintendent Dr. Morgen A. Houchard, Attorney Sonya McGraw, Associate Superintendent Tonya Kales, Assistant Superintendents Bessie Harvey and Rebekka Powers, Chief Communications Officer Todd Hagans, Chief Technology Officer Curtis Poplin, Executive Director of Human Resources Beth Suber, and Board Clerk Cindy Beck.

Chairman Crisp called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

Invocation

Pastor Justin White of Frontline Worship Center led the invocation.

Pledge of Allegiance

Spencer Powers, a 6th grader from John Chavis Middle School, led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Character Trait

Kyleigh Wiggins, 5th grade, Presley Wiggins, Kindergarten, Olivia Perez, 5th grade, and Pyper Thomas, 2nd grade, Carr Elementary School, reported on the Character Trait of Perseverance.

Agenda Adoption - Action

The Board considered Agenda Adoption – Action

Chairman Crisp suggested that fifteen minutes be added to Public Expression.

Motion to adopt the Agenda and addition of the fifteen minutes for Public Expression was made by Ms. Dot Cherry; seconded by Mr. Tod Kinlaw, motion carried unanimously. (8-0)

Good News - Information

Mr. Todd Hagans presented the Good News for April.

Lincoln Smallwood of New Hope Elementary was recognized for raising more than \$2,000 by creating his own artwork to support the school's Kids Heart Challenge for the American Heart Association.

Ms. Dot Cherry presented a certificate of recognition.

Paul Sayegh of Belmont Middle School was recognized for winning the district spelling bee, his second, and for competing in the Carolina Panthers Regional Spelling Bee, also his second, where he placed fifth this year, one spot from qualifying for the Scripps National Spelling Bee.

Mr. A.M. Stephens III presented a certificate of recognition.

The Board of Education recognized Rose Pichardo of W.C. Friday Middle School and Mackenzie Hart and Cyrus Baltimore, both of East Gaston High School, for being selected to perform at the North Carolina All-State Band Clinic.

Mrs. Janna Smith presented a certificate of recognition.

Cramerton Middle School was recognized as a Paideia School for Creative Thinking, the only accredited middle school in North Carolina.

Cramerton Middle School is one of only six schools in North Carolina to earn the Paideia Seminar Nationally Certified School distinction and one of three schools to earn the Paideia Classroom certification.

Mrs. Janna Smith and Mr. Jeff Ramsey presented a commemorative plaque in recognition of their contributions.

The Gaston Arts Council was recognized for providing a \$1,600 grant to fund clinicians for the All-County Middle School Chorus and All-County Middle School Band concerts.

Chairman Josh Crisp presented a recognition plaque to the Gaston Arts Council representatives, Ms. Stephanie Newman and Dr. Rusty Parker.

Teacher Appreciation Proclamation–Action

Chairman Crisp recognized Mr. Todd Hagans, who presented the Teacher Appreciation Week Proclamation for consideration.

Motion

The Motion was made by Mr. Tod Kinlaw, seconded by Mrs. Janna Smith, that the Board
Approve Teacher Appreciation Week Proclamation

A vote was taken and a motion to approve the item as presented carried unanimously. (8-0)

Mr. Hagans recognized Richard Morris; Emma Richards, 2024-2025 Linda Rader New Teacher of the Year; Brandon Taylor, 2024-2025 Gaston County Schools Teacher of the Year; and John Ramos, 2025-2026 Teacher of the Year.

Superintendent Houchard presented the recognition plaque to the group on behalf of all teachers in recognition of Teacher Appreciation Week.

(View Proclamation)

Classroom Moment – Information

Mrs. Tyler West presented the Classroom Moment for April on America250. Schools across the district are integrating the America250 Celebration into classroom instruction, literacy events, fine arts performances, and family engagement opportunities.

(View Presentation)

Public Expression - Information

Katherine Brooke Graves

1109 Peru Court

Dallas, NC 28034

Re: Frustrations being felt across the board from teachers about the way money is allocated and how teachers are being treated in the district.

Brittany Elkin

3012 High Ridge Court

Gastonia, NC 28056

Re: School funding, specifically operation funding, planning ahead, and appropriate direction of approved funding. Also, the school board members' behavior and representation of the community.

David Chee

1942 Sparkling Stream Drive

Belmont, NC 28012

Staff cuts forecast for next year's budget.

Sean Bates

P.O. Box 550094

Gastonia, NC 28055

Re: School Board member, Tod Kinlaw

Dionna Graham

P.O. Box 550094

Gastonia, NC 28055

Re: School Board member, Tod Kinlaw

Ann Doss Helms

316 Gaither Road

Belmont, NC 28012

Re: Tod Kinlaw's anti-Islamic social media post/statement from Indivisible Gaston

Eli Christy

3007 Eaker Drive

Cherryville, NC 28021

Re: The closure of Beam Intermediate and the negative impact it would have on the students of Cherryville.

Jibril Hough

14408 Soldier Road

Charlotte, NC 28278

Re: School Board member, Tod Kinlaw's sharing a meme that demonizes Islam. Request his removal and no tolerance for his actions. They put Muslim students in danger.

Barbara Walls
218 Dogwood Drive
Mount Holly, NC 28120

Re: To ask for the resignation of Tod Kinlaw from the Board for his Facebook posting, which violates fundamental principles of the First Amendment's "Establishment Clause".

Omar Marzouk
148 Crestwood Drive
Mt Holly, NC 28120

Re: School Board Members' accountability toward all community individuals.

Dorothy Guthrie
526 Shadow View Drive
Gastonia, NC 28054

Re: Recognition of National Library Week and the important role that librarians and media specialists play in educating our children. I would like to compliment the A.S.P.I.R.E Afterschool teachers and what they do to involve children in literacy-related programs.

Dr. Tyler Beam
221 Fisher Road
Cherryville, NC 28021

Re: W.B. Beam Intermediate Possible Closure.

Meghan McGrath
4344 Timberwood Drive
Gastonia, NC 28056

Re: School funding--appropriate use of funds.

Julie Evanega
2351 Hampton Meadows Lane
Cramerton, NC 28032

Our school system is currently facing a \$1.1 million budget shortfall. That reality did not appear overnight.

Wade Stroupe
101 C South Elm Street
Cherryville, NC 28021

Re: Cherryville Schools, in particular, Beam Intermediate.

Chairman Crisp requested a brief recess at 7:00 p.m. Meeting resumed at 7:09 p.m.

Approval/Correction of Minutes – Action

Motion to adopt minutes as presented for the March 16, 2026, regular meeting,

Motion made by Mr. Jeff Ramsey; seconded by Mr. A.M. Stephens III, motion carried unanimously.
(8-0)

Operations Committee Report – Information

Brent Moore is chair of the Operations Committee, and members are Ms. Dot Cherry, Mr. Lee Dedmon, and Mr. Tod Kinlaw. Ms. Dot Cherry provided a summary report of topics considered and discussed at the most recent meeting.

(View report)

Curriculum & Instruction Committee Report – Information

Mr. Jeff Ramsey is chair of the Curriculum & Instruction Committee, and the members are Mrs. Robbie Lovelace, Mrs. Janna Smith, and Mr. A.M. Stephens III. Mr. A.M. Stephens III provided a summary report of topics considered and discussed at the most recent meeting.

(View report)

Policy Committee Report - Information

Ms. Dot Cherry is chair of the Policy Committee, and the other members are Janna Smith and A.M. Stephens III. Mr. A.M. Stephens provided a summary report of topics considered and discussed at the most recent meeting.

(View report)

2026-2027 Gaston County Schools Budget - Action

Chairman Crisp recognized Superintendent Houchard, who presented a PowerPoint on Gaston County Schools Budget Request 2026-2027. The Superintendent had presented his budget request at the March 16, 2026, Regular Meeting. His request for consideration by the Board was for \$68.4 Million for operating funds and \$4.5 million for capital outlay. The Board adjusted his request to \$58,133,704 for Operating funds and \$4 million for capital outlay.

Motion

The Motion was made by Mrs. Janna Smith; seconded by Ms. Dot Cherry that the Board Approve the 2026-2027 Gaston County Schools Budget Request for \$58,133,704 for operating funds and \$4 million for capital outlay.

A vote was taken and a motion to approve the item as presented carried unanimously. (8-0)

(View Presentation)

School Closings/Consolidations (Process/Timeline) - Information

Chairman Crisp recognized Superintendent Houchard, who presented on the Process/Timeline for consideration of School Closings/Consolidations.

To allow for the strategic alignment of staff expertise, academic programming, and student support, ensuring consistency in curriculum delivery and academic expectations, information was given on the consolidations of both the Gaston Early Colleges and also the Gaston Virtual Academy.

By leveraging shared resources and facilities, the district can increase operational efficiency while maintaining a strong focus on student achievement, postsecondary readiness, and equitable access to high-quality educational experiences. This consolidation positions the program for long-term sustainability and growth while continuing to meet the evolving needs of students and the community.

Guided by General Statute 115C-72 and past school closings–Rhyne Elementary School in 2015, and in Forest Heights Elementary School in 2016, a feasibility study will be held and presented to the Board of Education Committees on May 4, 2026, concerning W.B. Beam Elementary. The Study will

then be made public on the Gaston County Schools webpage. An Open House at Cherryville Elementary and John Chavis Middle Schools for students and parents will then be held. A Public Hearing will be announced and held.

(View Presentation)

Consent Agenda – Action

The Board considered the Consent Agenda:

Consent Agenda – Action

Consent Agenda Item (s) will be adopted with a single motion, second vote, unless a request for removal from the Consent Agenda is heard from a Board Member.

A. Recommended Personnel

B. Budget Amendments & Budget Transfers

C. Construction/Repair Change Orders

D. Cramerton MS Right of Way and Easement acquisition from NCDOT

E. Policy Revisions

F. Contracts

- Microsoft Software Agreement
- Baseball Stadium Press Box & Concession Design
- Belmont Central and New Hope Preconstruction and Master Agreement
- Emergency repair for Hunter Huss Cooling Tower
- Forestview Synthetic Turf Field and Track Installation
- South Point Boiler Header Replacement
- Leader in Me
- 2025-2026 Content Pedagogy
- ATSI Schools - Federal Grant Path Forward

Motion

Motion to adopt the Consent Agenda as presented was made by Ms. Dot Cherry; seconded by Mr. Jeff Ramsey. Motion carried unanimously. (8-0)

Superintendent's Comments

Superintendent Houchard acknowledged that last week was a tough week for Gaston County Schools as the Reduction in Force process began. Work is ongoing to offer positions as they become available through retirements and natural attrition.

The Gaston County Schools Star Teacher-Student Awards took place on March 31, 2026. The video will be placed on our Gaston County School website and Channel 21. Superintendent Houchard thanked GSM Services for sponsoring the ceremony.

Superintendent Houchard shared a few announcements about upcoming events and activities:

The Evening of Excellence will take place this Thursday, April 23, at 6:30 p.m. at Stuart W. Cramer High School. During the program, outstanding educators and representatives from departments and divisions across Gaston County Schools will be honored, and the winners of the 2026-2027 awards will be announced. The event is sponsored by Truist Bank, with additional support from Courage Kia of Gastonia and the Gaston County Education Foundation.

Through An Artist's Eyes: Spring Art Show and Reception will take place on Sunday, April 26, 2026 at the former Armstrong Athletic Club building, 3372 Robinwood Road, Gastonia, from 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Gaston College will host Senior Night on Thursday, April 30, 2026, from 5:00-7:00 p.m. This event is open to all high school seniors who are interested in learning more about the opportunities available at Gaston College.

Sport Physicals for the coming Fall sports season will be available for school athletes on Saturday, May 9, 2026, at no cost at the Caromont Outpatient Center from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.

SUN Bucks is a program from the U.S. Department of Agriculture that helps families buy groceries during the summer months when school is out. Eligible families will receive a one-time payment of \$120 per child on a debit-like card. The card can be used to purchase nutritious food during the summer. More information can be found on our website.

Registration for Pre-K is currently in progress, with additional information available on our website.

Best wishes were extended to North Gaston High School. The Leader in Me Lighthouse School Review Team will visit the school next week. If all goes as expected, we will be able to recognize North Gaston at the May Board Meeting for the Lighthouse School of Distinction.

Closing Remarks

Chairman Crisp expressed appreciation to the community for their participation and for taking the time to address the Board.

Chairman Crisp wished the following a "Happy Birthday":
Brent Moore April 4.

The next Board meeting will be held on Monday, May 18, 2026.

Adjournment

All business having been conducted, a Motion to adjourn was made by Mrs. Janna Smith, seconded by Mr. Tod Kinlaw, and the motion carried unanimously. (8-0)

The Board Meeting adjourned at 7:41 p.m.

Approved:


Josh Crisp, Chairman
[Corporate Seal]


Morgen A. Houchard, Secretary

Date Approved: 5-18-26



Board of Education Meeting

Monday, April 20, 2026



Character Trait - Perseverance

Dr. Morgen A. Houchard, Superintendent

GASTON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION Josh Crisp – Chairman Dot Cherry – Vice Chairman

Lee Dedmon, Gastonia Township
Todd Kihlman, South Point Township
Robbie Lovelace, Cherryville Township
Brent Moore, Crowders Mountain Township



Jeff K. Ramsey, At Large
Janna Smith, Gastonia Township
A.H. Stephens, III, Riverbend Township

Dr. Morgen A. Houchard, Superintendent
943 Osceola Street, Gastonia, NC 28054
Monday, April 20, 2026
5:30 p.m.
Agenda
Regular Meeting

- I. Call to Order
- II. Invocation
- III. Pledge of Allegiance
- IV. Character Trait - Perseverance [
- V. Agenda Adoption – Action
- VI. Good News – Information
- VII. Proclamation – Information
- VIII. Classroom Moment – Information
- IX. Public Expression – Information
- X. Approval/Correction of Minutes – Action
March 16, 2026 (Regular Meeting)
- XI. Operations Committee Report - Information
- XII. Curriculum & Instruction Committee Report - Information
- XIII. Policy Committee Report - Information
- XIV. 2026-2027 Gaston County Schools Budget - Action

XV. Process/Timeline for Consideration of School Closings/Consolidations - Information

- XVI. Consent Agenda – Action
Consent Agenda Item (s) will be adopted with a single motion, second vote, unless a request for removal from the Consent Agenda is heard from a Board Member.
 - A. Recommended Personnel
 - B. Budget Amendments & Budget Transfers
 - C. Construction/Repair Change Orders
 - D. Cramerton MS Right of Way and Easement acquisition from NCDOT
 - E. Policy Revisions
 - F. Contracts
 - Microsoft Software Agreement
 - Baseball Stadium Press Box & Concession Design
 - Belmont Central and New Hope Preconstruction and Master Agreement
 - Emergency repair for Hunter Huss Cooling Tower
 - Forestview Synthetic Turf Field and Track Installation
 - South Point Boiler Header Replacement
 - Leader in Me
 - 2025-2026 Content Pedagogy
 - ATSI Schools - Federal Grant Path Forward

XVII. Superintendent's Comments

- XVIII. Closed Session – Information
 - N.C.G.S. §143-318.11(a)(3) Consultation with Attorney
 - N.C.G.S. §143-318.11(a)(6) Personnel

XIX. Adjournment

Good News

Classroom Moment

Kelly Cunningham,
Chief Accountability Officer



Classroom Moment



America250 Celebrations in
Gaston County Schools

America 250

- July 4th, 2026 is the 250th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.
- GCS students are participating in learning experiences that connect history, civic pride, and creativity.

Events and Celebrations

READ ACROSS AMERICA
Celebrate America 250!

Spirit Week
READ, WHITE & BLUE

3/2 MONDAY - American Author's Day
Dress like your favorite American author or book character.

3/3 TUESDAY - Hats Off to Reading
Wear your favorite red, white or blue hat to show love for our country and reading.

3/4 WEDNESDAY - Stars, Stripes & Stories
Celebrate stories from our 50 states by wearing stars/stripes or a state shirt.

3/5 THURSDAY - America's Future Day
Dress-to-impress to showcase our Future Leaders of America.

3/6 FRIDAY - Freedom to Read
Wear pajamas and get cozy with your favorite book.

Read Across America Spirit Week
March 2-6

Mon 3/2
Happy Birthday, Dr. Seuss (3/2)!
Wear a shirt that you can READ!

Tues 3/3
Twin Tuesday!
Find a buddy and dress the same!

Wed 3/4
Wacky Wednesday!
How wacky and tacky can you be?

Thurs 3/5
Celebrate America!
Wear your **RED, WHITE & BLUE!**

Fri 3/6
Celebrate reading at home!
Wear your favorite PJ's to school!

The Royal Sneaker Soiree is March 5th.
See Facebook or Class Dojo for details!

Events and Celebrations

Happy Birthday, America!

Song: This is America! - (Students come into the auditorium during the song.)

Speaker 1 (Jack): Two hundred and fifty years ago, 13 colonies of England united to become a nation. After signing the Declaration of Independence and winning the Revolutionary War, the United States of America was born.

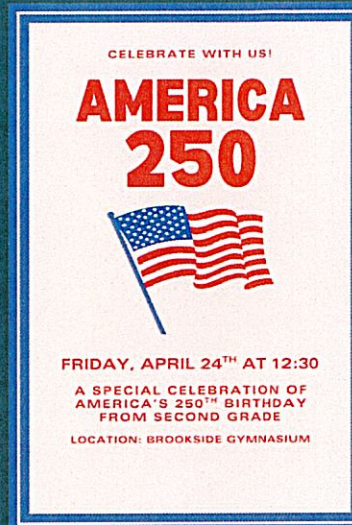


Page Patriotic Riddle

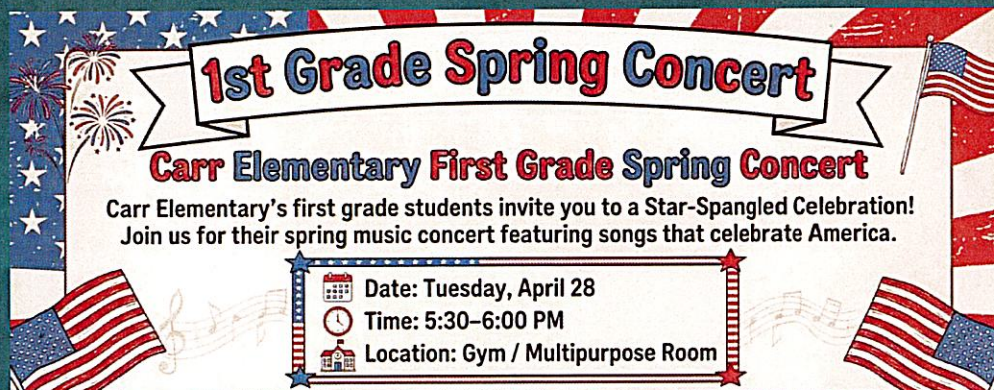
Get the answers to these riddles correct and you will unlock the location of the Hidden Liberty Bell



Events and Celebrations



Events and Celebrations

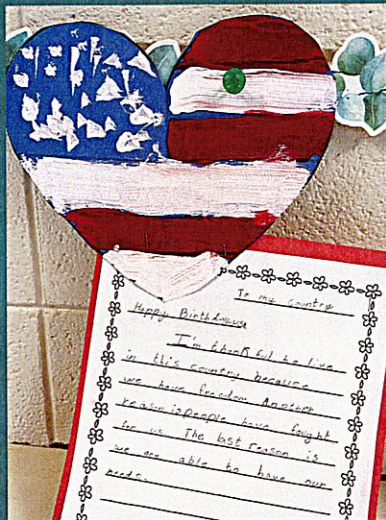


Academic Lessons & Art Projects

Happy 250th Birthday, America! Enjoy this American History Skit from the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade students in Mrs. Woods' class at Bess Elementary.



Academic Lessons & Art Projects



Academic Lessons & Art Projects



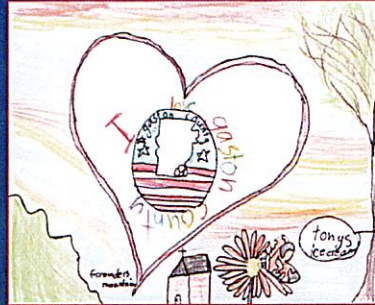
Community Partnerships



Community Partnerships

RUNNER UP

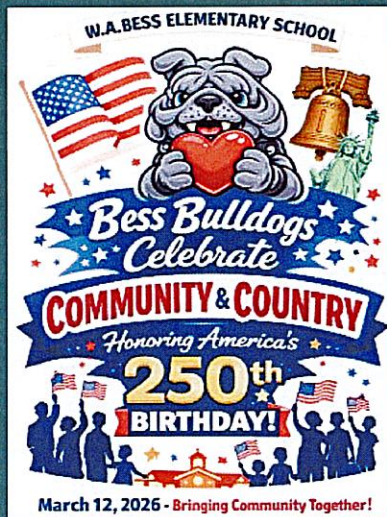
"I drew a butterfly, a flower, trees, and Crowder's Mountain to show the beautiful nature of our county. [...] The different colors that I chose show that our county is made up of many different people and things, and that helps make where we live special."



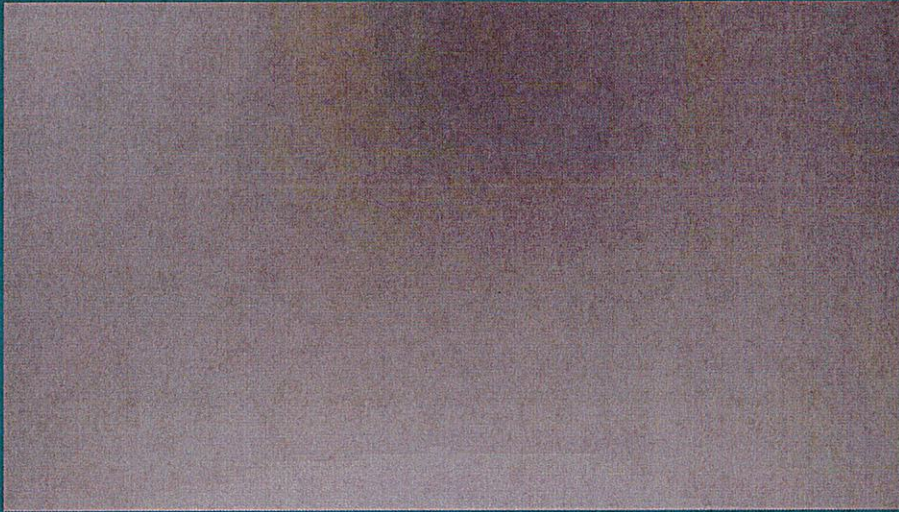
STERLING

W.A. Bess

Classroom Moment Video

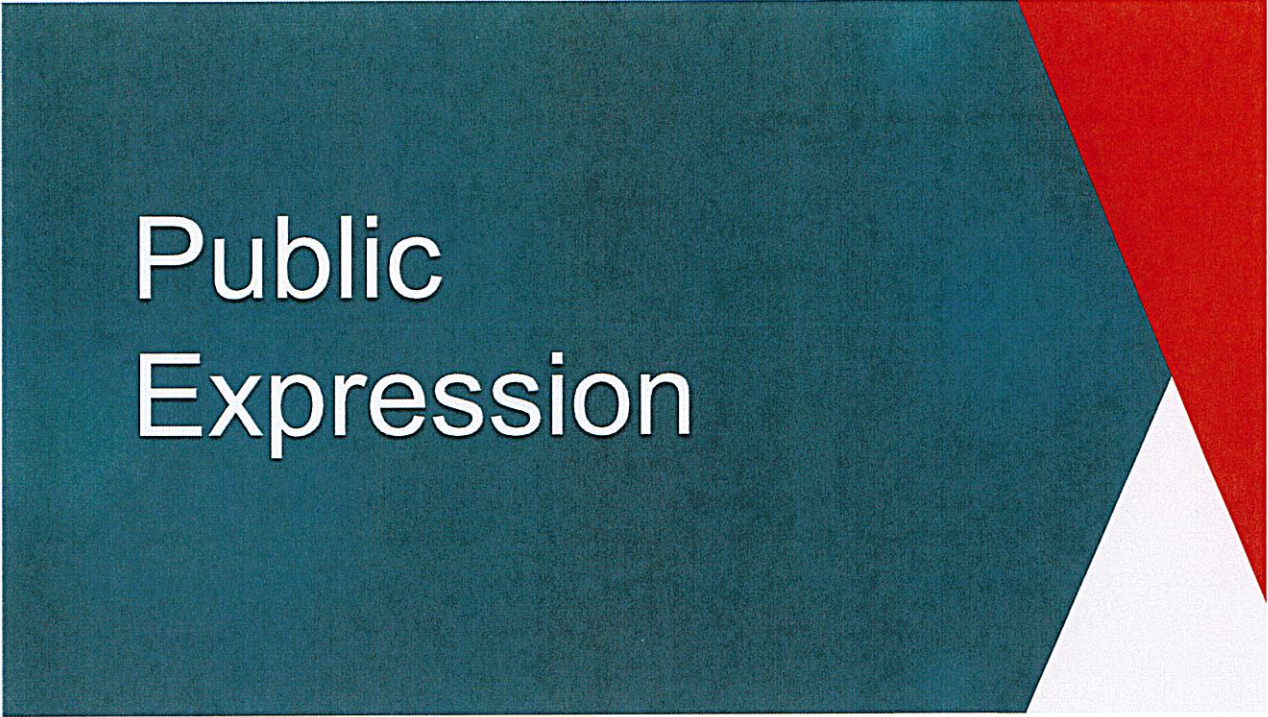


Classroom Moment Video

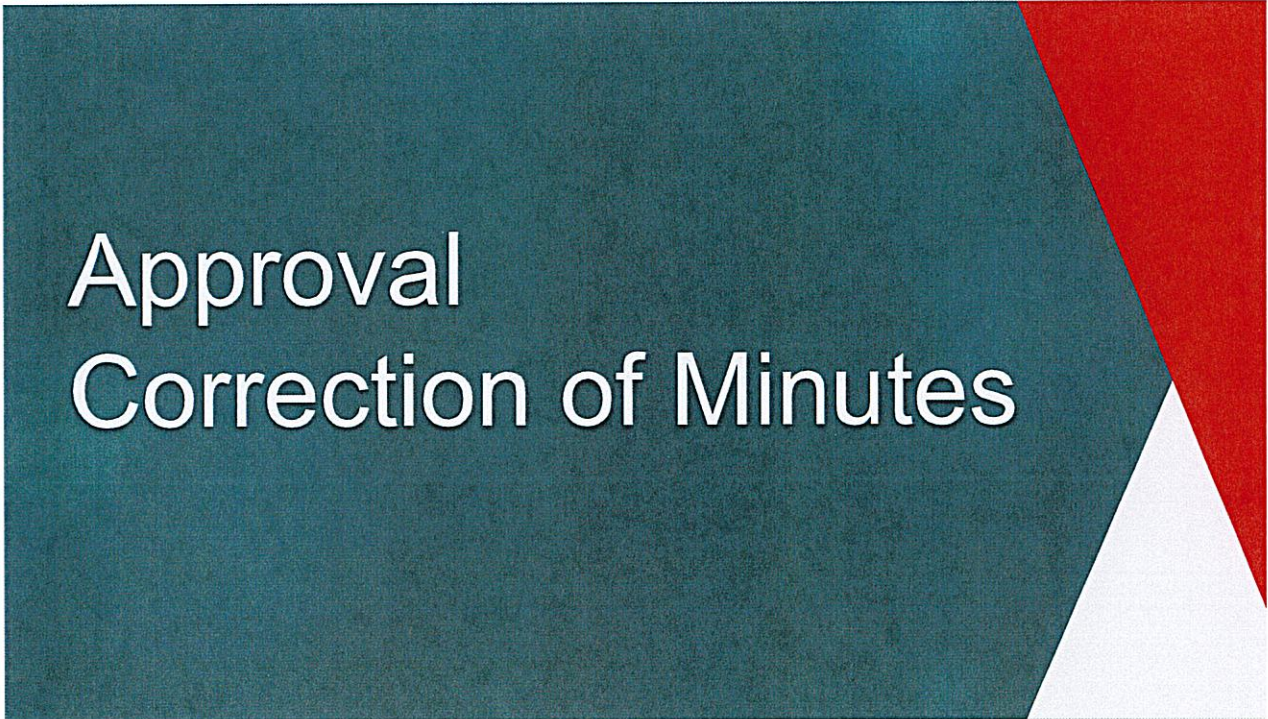


Thank you!





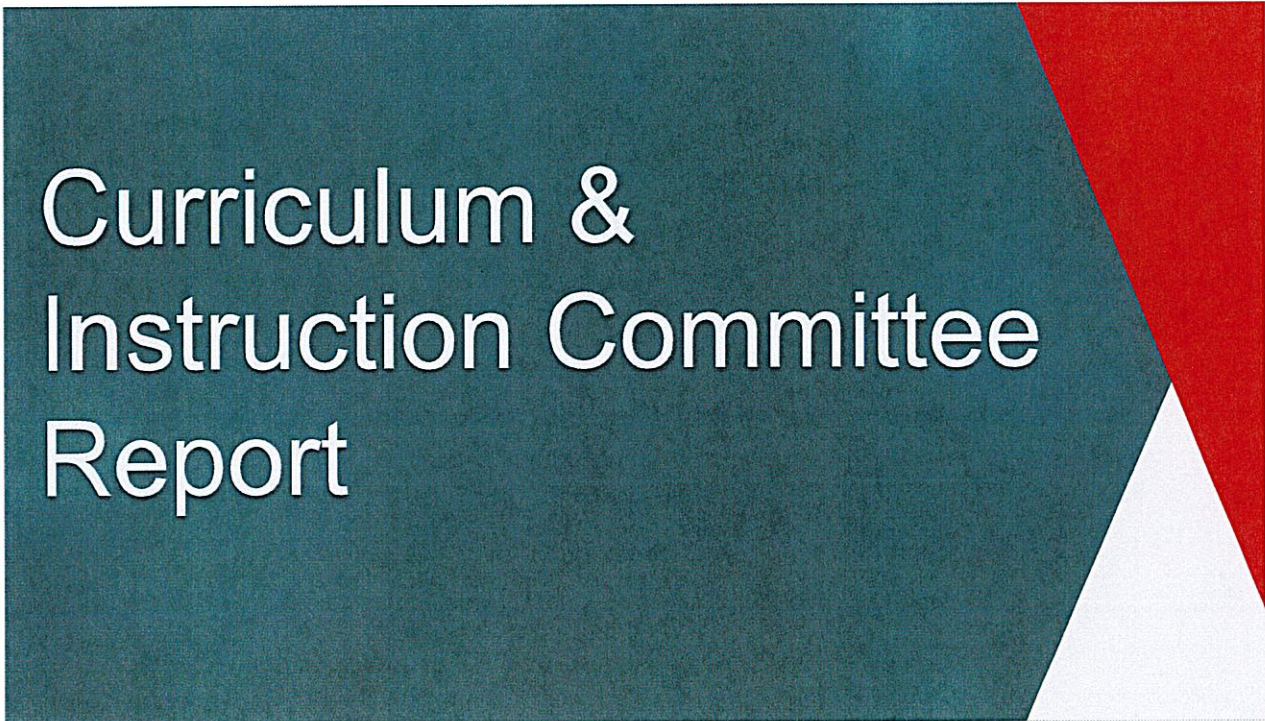
Public Expression



Approval
Correction of Minutes

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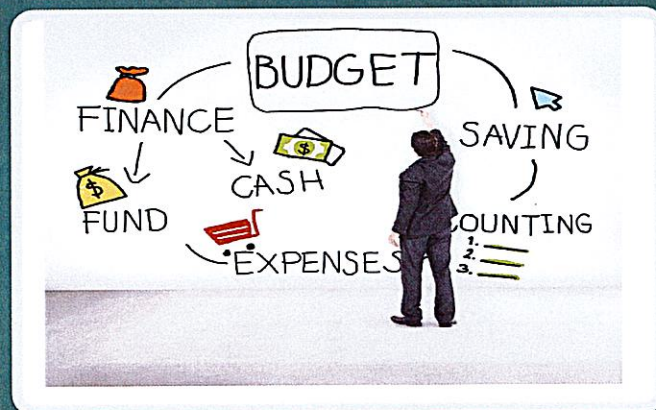
Operations Committee Report

The cover features a dark teal background with a large white arrow pointing to the right. A red triangle is positioned in the top right corner, partially overlapping the teal background and the white arrow.

Curriculum & Instruction Committee Report

Policy Committee Report

Gaston County Board of Education 2026-2027 Budget Request *April 20, 2026*



Gaston County Schools

Strategic Plan 2030



Inspire. Learn. Succeed.



Vision

To inspire success and a lifetime of learning.



Mission

To provide innovative educational opportunities for all students in a safe, nurturing learning environment.



Core Values

Excellence
We strive to be the best in the business of education.

Integrity
We are honest, ethical, and transparent in all we do.

Community
We are a team, and we support each other in everything we do.

Innovation
We embrace change and seek to improve our practice through continuous learning.

© 2019 Gaston County Schools

Priorities



Academics that Build Pathways to Student Success

Empower all students to identify, explore, and achieve their career and life goals through high-quality instruction and individualized support.



Sustainable Financial Stewardship

Ensure the strategic and transparent use of financial resources to support meaningful education and maintain long-term fiscal sustainability.



Efficient and Responsive Operations and Technology

Maintain efficient and responsive operational systems and technology that provide a safe, healthy, and supportive learning environment for all students and staff.



Comprehensive Student Support

Foster a safe and welcoming school environment by expanding access to comprehensive services that promote students' academic, social, emotional, and physical well-being.



Talent and Workforce Development

Attract, develop, and retain a talented and skilled workforce by cultivating a culture where every employee feels valued, supported, and empowered to grow professionally.



Effective Communication and Partnerships

Share clear, relevant, and timely information that fosters trust, encourages engagement, and strengthens connections across the school community.

Priorities



Academics that Build Pathways to Student Success
Empower all students to identify, explore, and achieve their career and life goals through meaningful instructional and individualized support.



Effective Communication and Partnerships
Engage, inspire, and empower students and families through meaningful and authentic communication and partnerships across the school community.



Sustainable Financial Stewardship
Ensure the strategic and transparent use of financial resources to support meaningful education and maintain long-term fiscal sustainability.



Sustainable Financial Stewardship

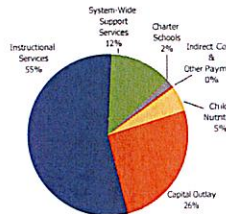
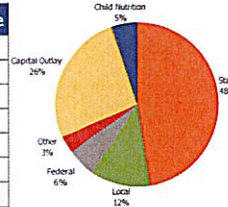
Ensure the strategic and transparent use of financial resources to support meaningful education and maintain long-term fiscal sustainability.

Funding Sources

Gaston County Schools Budgeted Revenues and Expenditures FY 2025-2026

Revenues by Source

State	\$219,986,245
Local	\$54,801,704
Federal	\$26,625,689
Other	\$15,439,434
Capital Outlay	\$120,622,817
Child Nutrition	\$ 24,266,000
Total	\$461,741,889



Expenditures by Purpose

Instructional Services	\$252,537,659
System-Wide Support Services	\$57,416,388
Charter Schools	\$6,800,000
Indirect Costs & Other Payments	\$1,841,461
Child Nutrition	\$23,541,947
Capital Outlay	\$119,604,434
Total	\$461,741,889

Local Operating Expenses

- Teacher/Instructional employee supplements
- Principal and assistant principal supplements
- Utilities and Insurance
- Central Services and Support
- Instructional supplies
- Technology - hardware, software, wireless, etc.
- Facilities salaries/benefits/contracted services
- Charter school payments

Capital Maintenance Funds

Roofing

Electrical Systems

HVAC

Technology

Vehicles

Furniture

Plumbing

Life Safety Equipment

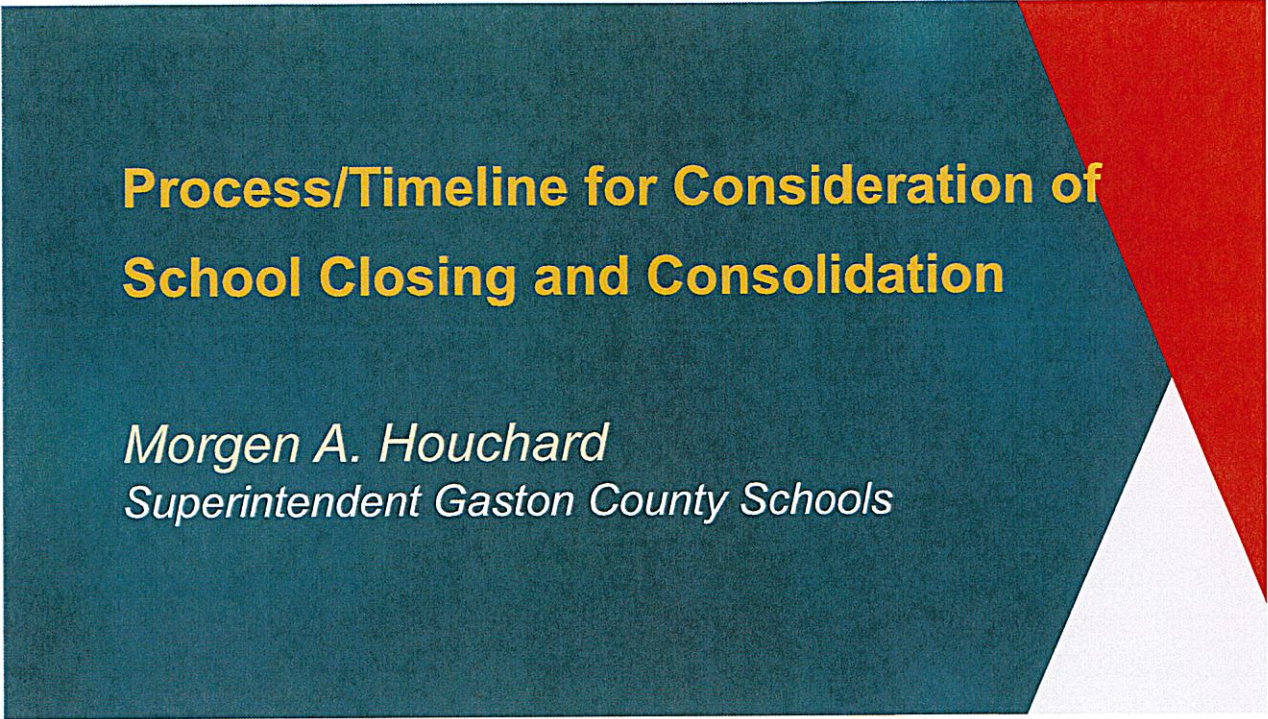
Site Improvements

Other Capital Assets

Board of Education Budget Request 2026-27

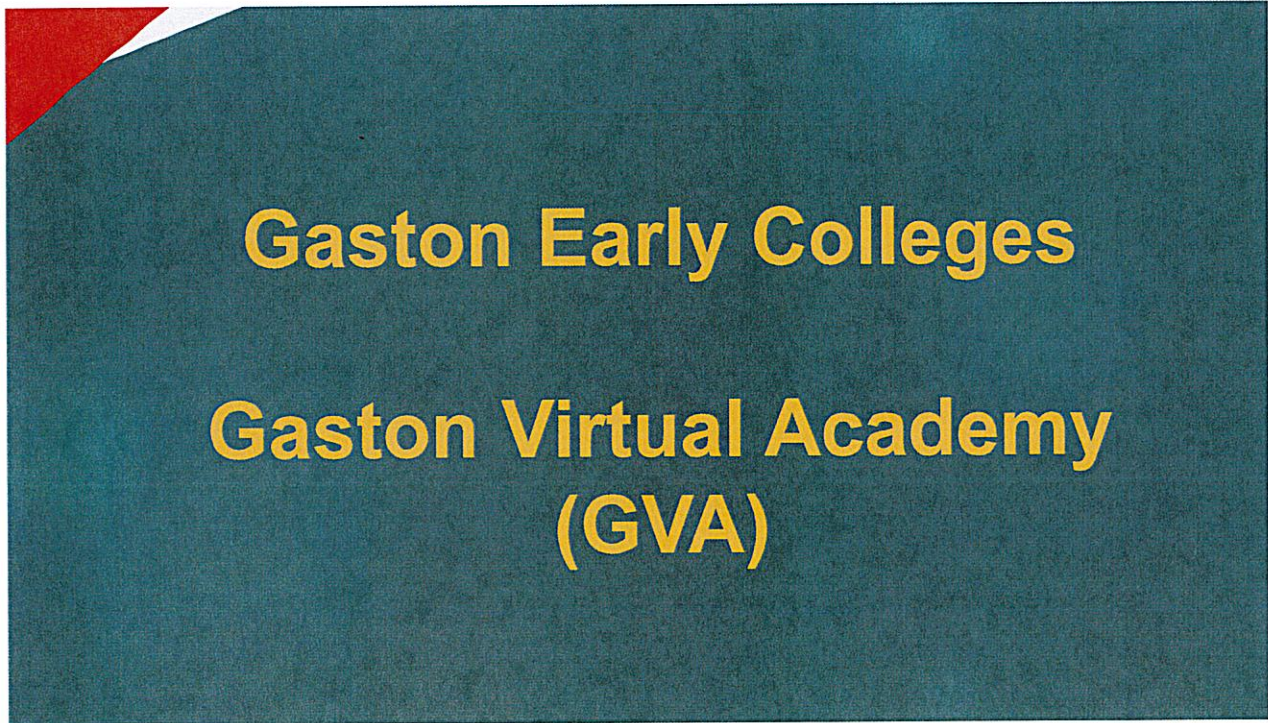
2025-26 Gaston County appropriation	\$54,801,704
Ongoing expenses (inflation, state increases)	\$2,832,000
Certified teacher supplement	<u>\$500,000</u>
Total Request	<u>\$58,133,704</u>
Capital Maintenance Request (\$0.78 Sq foot)	
Same Amount as Last Year	<u>\$4,000,000</u>

Discussion



Process/Timeline for Consideration of School Closing and Consolidation

Morgen A. Houchard
Superintendent Gaston County Schools



Gaston Early Colleges

Gaston Virtual Academy (GVA)

Gaston Early Colleges

The consolidation of Gaston Early College and Gaston Early College of Medical Sciences is intended to strengthen the district's capacity to deliver high-quality, specialized academic programming while maximizing the effective use of resources.

By combining these two innovative early college models, the district can enhance instructional opportunities, expand access to rigorous coursework, and provide a more cohesive and sustainable pathway for students pursuing college and career readiness.

Gaston Early Colleges

This unified approach allows for the strategic alignment of staff expertise, academic programming, and student supports, ensuring consistency in curriculum delivery and academic expectations.

By leveraging shared resources and facilities, the district can increase operational efficiency while maintaining a strong focus on student achievement, postsecondary readiness, and equitable access to high-quality educational experiences. This consolidation positions the program for long-term sustainability and growth while continuing to meet the evolving needs of students and the community.

Gaston Virtual Academy (GVA)

The consolidation of Gaston Virtual Academy (GVA) into brick-and-mortar campuses is designed to enhance instructional quality, strengthen staff collaboration, and ensure consistent delivery of curriculum across grade levels. By integrating virtual students and staff into established school environments, the district can provide a more comprehensive educational experience while maintaining the flexibility and strengths of the virtual model.

Overall, this consolidation supports operational efficiency, academic consistency, and improved student outcomes while ensuring a smooth and supportive transition for students, staff, and families.

Gaston Virtual Academy (GVA)

GVA elementary students and staff will transition to **McAdenville Elementary School**, allowing students to benefit from a more traditional elementary experience, including increased social interaction and access to in-person support. This transition also enables teachers to actively participate in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), fostering collaboration, alignment of instructional practices, and consistency in curriculum implementation.

Gaston Virtual Academy (GVA)

GVA middle and high school students will be housed at **Stuart Cramer High School (3rd Floor)**, creating opportunities for structured support, access to campus resources, and alignment with district-wide academic expectations. This model promotes continuity in instruction while increasing opportunities for engagement and academic success.

W. B. Beam Intermediate School

Process for School Closing or Consolidation

Consolidation of districts and discontinuance of schools

General Statute 115C-72:

Local boards of education shall have the authority to close or consolidate schools located in the same district, and with the approval of the State Board of Education, to consolidate school districts or other school areas over which the board has full control, whenever and wherever in its judgement the closing or consolidation will better serve the education interest of the local school administrative unit or any part of it .

Process for School Closing or Consolidation

General Statute 115C-72 Requires

- Thorough study of a school closing or consolidation
- Having in mind the welfare of the students to be affected
- Geographic conditions
- Anticipated increase or decrease in school enrollment
- Inconvenience or hardship that might result
- Cost of providing additional school facilities
- School board must provide a public hearing

Process for School Closing or Consolidation

Previous School Closing - Gaston County

- ▶ Rhyne Elementary School - 2015
- ▶ Forest Heights Elementary School - 2016

Process and Timeline

- ▶ General Statute 115C-72
- ▶ Resource: School Closing Procedure - Relating to the Public School of North Carolina, January - 2019
- ▶ Process and Procedures from the closing of Rhyne and Forest Heights Elementary Schools
- ▶ Feasibility study

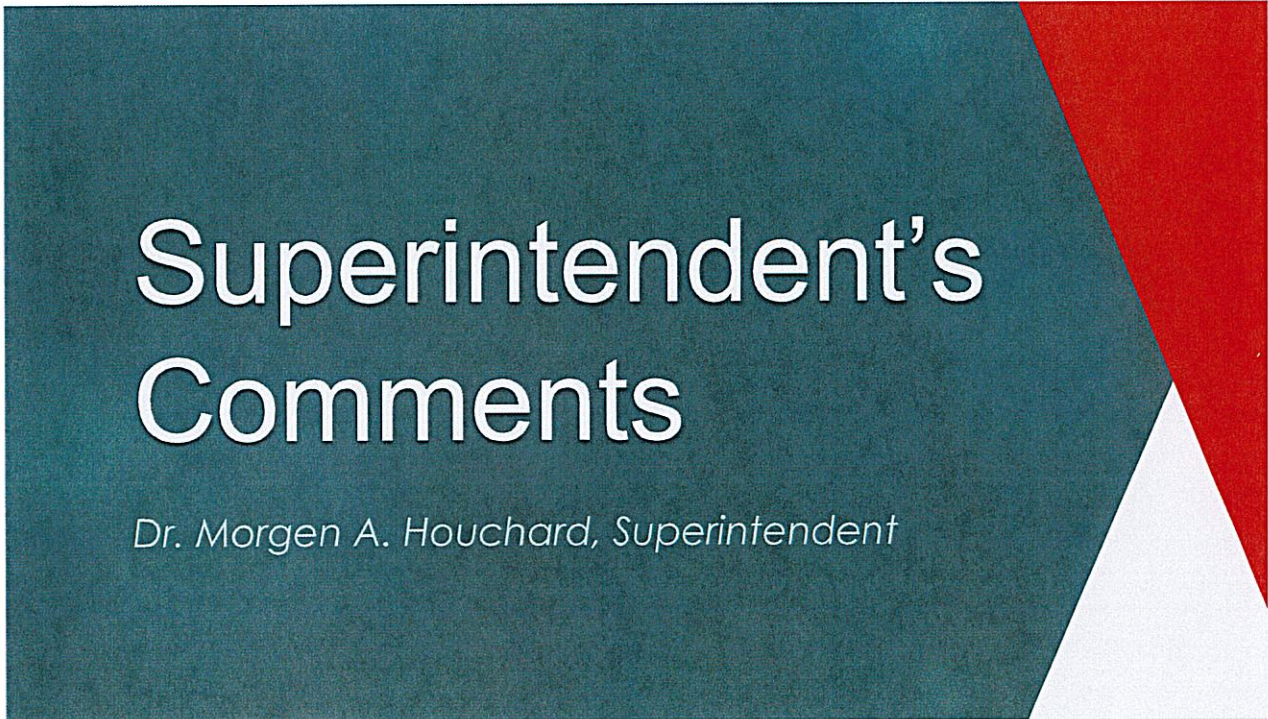
Process and Timeline

- ▶ Presentation to the Board of Education
- ▶ Study made public - Web Page
- ▶ Open House at Cherryville Elementary and John Chavis Middle Schools for students and parents
- ▶ Public Hearing
- ▶ Board of Education Recommendation and Decision

Discussion

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Consent Agenda

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Superintendent's Comments

Dr. Morgen A. Houchard, Superintendent

Board of Education Meeting

Monday, April 20, 2026



PRIDE



PROCLAMATION

Teacher Appreciation Week

MAY 4-8, 2026

WHEREAS, Gaston County Schools is proud to join school districts across the country in celebrating Teacher Appreciation Week (May 4-8) and National Teacher Day on Tuesday, May 5; and

WHEREAS, Teacher Appreciation Week is a time for communities to come together to lift up teachers and show support for what all educators do each day to go above and beyond expectations and provide a quality teaching and learning experience for all students; and

WHEREAS, in the classroom, teachers transform ordinary moments into extraordinary opportunities, and they turn curiosity into confidence, challenges into triumphs, and passion into purpose; and

WHEREAS, the teachers in Gaston County Schools are committed to ensuring student success through a concentrated focus on higher academic achievement and life-enriching opportunities in a variety of areas, including athletics, the fine arts, extracurricular activities, college prep, career training, and internships; and

WHEREAS, our educators in Gaston County Schools embrace the responsibility of ensuring that children gain the knowledge and skills necessary to be productive beyond graduation, thus preparing them to become lifelong learners and contributing members of our community.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, to honor all teachers for their important contributions to our schools and diligent efforts to positively influence the leaders of tomorrow, the Gaston County Board of Education is pleased to proclaim the week of

MAY 4-8, 2026

Teacher Appreciation Week

in Gaston County Schools and encourages students, parents, alumni, and everyone in the community to express their appreciation for teachers.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this proclamation be made a part of the minutes of the Board of Education, adopted this the twentieth day of April, 2026.

Joshua D. Crisp, Chairman
Gaston County Board of Education

Morgen A. Houchard, Superintendent
Gaston County Schools

Gaston
COUNTY SCHOOLS

shaping our future

Gaston County Schools

Operations Committee Report – March 30, 2026

The Operations Committee met at the Central Office Board Room on Monday, March 30, 2026, at 12:30 p.m. The committee consists of Chairman Brent Moore, Dot Cherry, Lee Dedmon, and Tod Kinlaw.

Our agenda discussions included the following:

•Finance Updates

Superintendent Houchard thanked the Gaston County Board of Commissioners for the \$10 million transfer to Gaston County Schools. He also shared that he will meet later this week with Hurd Isenhour Lopes (HIL) to discuss the 2025–2026 budget. Over the past six months, the district has been reviewing financial practices, including better aligning with state allotments.

•Reduction in Force (RIF)

Superintendent Houchard and Beth Suber presented information on the process for the 2026-2027 reduction in force in accordance with Policy 7820- Reduction in Force and state law.

•Utilization Study

Chief of Staff Tom Nencetti shared that Gaston County Schools is conducting a utilization study to better use school facilities and plan for future enrollment. The study aims to maximize facility use, reduce capital costs, align space with current and projected enrollment, and identify solutions that support engaging learning environments.

•School Closings/Consolidations (process/timeline) - Information

Assistant Superintendent of Operations Bessie Harvey presented the School Closings and Consolidations process and timeline for W.B. Beam Intermediate and Gaston Virtual Academy, including dates on strategic Forums, Public hearing, Senior Leaders Meetings, Operations Committee Review, and Cabinet Reviews.

•Technology Support Services Update

Chief Technology Officer Curtis Poplin reported on E-Rate funding, which supports internet connectivity and equipment. TSS will submit the required Form 471 for funding requests and will wait for approval before moving forward with \$1.36 million in needed purchases.

The Digital Learning and Media Inventory at each school is due by May 29, 2026.

•Human Resources Updates

Executive Director Beth Suber shared that Optional Benefits Open Enrollment runs through May 29, 2026. In March, the substitute fill rate was 90%, up from 82% last year, with 4,832 absences

recorded. A total of 126 employees have retired or will retire this year. Human Resources is also planning a Retirement Information Session, with details to come.

In addition, the following items were discussed by the Committee and recommended for approval on the Consent Agenda:

- Cramerton MS Right of Way and Easement acquisition from NCDOT
- Microsoft Software Agreement
- South Point Baseball Stadium Press Box & Concession Design
- Belmont Central and New Hope Preconstruction and Master Agreement
- Emergency repair for Hunter Huss Cooling Tower
- Forestview Synthetic Turf Field and Track Installation
- South Point Boiler Header Replacement

The next Operations Committee Meeting will be held on Monday, May 4, beginning at 12:30 p.m. in the Central Office Board Room.

Gaston County Schools

Curriculum & Instructions Committee Report – March 30, 2026

The Curriculum & Instruction Committee met at the Central Office Board Room on Monday, March 30, 2026 at 3:00 p.m. The committee consists of Chairman Jeff Ramsey, Robbie Lovelace, Janna Smith, AM. Stephens III.

Our agenda discussions included the following:

Finance Updates, Reduction in Force (RIF), Utilization Study, School Closings/Consolidations (process/timeline) as previously reported from the Operations Report.

•ATSI Schools – Federal Grant

Associate Superintendent Ms. Kales presented the Abre data platform, funded by the state to support ATSI subgroups and all students. The system centralizes key data to provide real-time insights and support data-driven instruction. This item will appear on the Consent Agenda for Board approval later this evening.

•Student Assignment and Choice Programs - Information

Assistant Superintendent Rebekka Powers presented updates from Student Support Services, **including:**

Schools Closed to Transfers

The list of schools closed to transfers for the 2026-2027 School Year due to capacity was presented:

Belmont Central

WA Bess

Hunter Huss

BC Central

Cramerton Middle

North Gaston

New Hope

Ashbrook

South Point

Pleasant Ridge

Forestview

Additional schools may be added based on enrollment.

•Choice Programs

Dr. Powers shared that Dr. Parker is collecting data through a CTE survey, with a report to follow. Feedback is also being gathered from the Parent Advisory Council. Additionally, the Teacher Working Conditions Survey has been completed.

•Innovation Schools 2.0

Ms. Tonya Kales outlined next steps for the Innovation Schools strategy, focusing on leadership, teacher roles, and professional development. She proposed adding one middle and one high school to the current ten, with sites still to be determined. The goal is to create a model for high-quality, data-driven teaching and learning across the district.

In addition, the following items were discussed by the Committee and recommended for approval on the Consent Agenda:

- Leader in Me - renew contract
- 2025-2026 Content Pedagogy

The next Curriculum & Instruction Committee Meeting will be held on Monday, May 4, beginning at 3:00 p.m. in the Central Office Board Room.

Gaston County Schools

Policy Committee Report – March 30, 2026

The Policy Committee met at the Central Office Board Room on Monday, March 30, 2026, at 4:30 p.m. The committee consists of Chair Dot Cherry, Janna Smith, and A.M. Stephens III.

Our agenda discussions included the following:

The committee reviewed several technology policies with guidance regarding recommended revisions from Chief Technology Officer Curtis Poplin. Policies 3220 (Technology in the Educational Program), 3230/7370 (Technology Responsible Use), and 3280/7385 (Web Page Development) were recommended for approval and will be presented on the Consent Agenda. Policy 3226 (Internet Safety) was tabled for further review.

The committee also reviewed athletic policies 3103 (Home School Dual Enrollment for Athletes), 4315 (Alcohol and Drug Abuse Policy for Student-Athletes), 4316 (Eligibility for Transfer Athletes), and 4395 (Suspension from Participating in Extracurricular Activities) with input from Assistant Superintendent Rebekka Powers. After discussion, all four athletic policies were tabled for additional review to ensure alignment with district practices and student needs.

The next Policy Committee Meeting will be held on Monday, May 4, beginning at 4:00 p.m. in the Central Office Board Room.