

Gaston County Schools
Board of Education
May 18, 2026
Regular Meeting

MINUTES

The Gaston County Board of Education met in a regular session on Monday, May 18, 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, Brent Moore, Jeff Ramsey, Janna Smith, and A.M. Stephens III.

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 of Staff Tom Nencetti, 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.

Julian Wilson from Blessed Assurance Outreach Ministries in Gastonia led the invocation.

Pledge of Allegiance

Bryce Washam, an 8th grader from Mt. Holly Middle School, led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Character Trait

Maxwell Hooks, Kindergarten, Everliegh Hooks, 4th grader, and Sarah Dean, 3rd grader, reported on the Character Trait of Perseverance.

Agenda Adoption - Action

The Board considered Agenda Adoption – Action

Chairman Crisp asked the Board to consider removing Consent Agenda Item H - Driver Education from the Consent Agenda and adding it to the Regular Agenda..

Motion to adopt the Agenda as amended without Item H - Driver Education was made by Mr. Brent Moore; seconded by Mr. A.M. Stephens III, motion carried unanimously. (9-0)

Good News – Information

Mr. Todd Hagans presented the Good News for May:

The Stanley Middle School Envirothon Teams, along with their advisor, Dianna Baxter, were recognized for their participation in the Regional and State Envirothon competitions. Over the past four years, Stanley Middle School has earned the distinction of being the top Envirothon program in North Carolina.

Mr. A.M. Stephens III presented the teams with a recognition plaque.

Students and staff of North Gaston High School were recognized for the significant achievement of earning both the Leader In Me Lighthouse School certification and Legacy School award through the Leader in Me program.

Mr. Josh Crisp presented a plaque from the Board of Education in honor of this significant achievement.

Ronald Tovilla Pablo, North Gaston High School, recently auditioned and earned the honor of becoming a member of the United States Marine Band.

Mr. Josh Crisp presented a plaque from the Board of Education in honor of his achievement.

The following students were recognized as the recipients of the Albert G. Myers Scholarship:

- Israel Aladekoba of Hunter Huss High School
- Daniella Alejos of Highland School of Technology
- Zalak Mehta of Highland School of Technology
- Lillian Morin of Gaston Early College of Medical Sciences
- Helanea Killian of Gaston Early College High School
- Alexis Odell of Gaston Early College High School

Ms. Dot Cherry presented each student with a certificate of recognition from the Board of Education.

The Gaston Early College High School Battle of the Books Team was honored for local, regional, and state competition placements. Coach and teacher Kristen Miller and the following Team members were recognized:

- Advisor Kristen Miller
- Chloe Roberts
- Valeria Romero Matias
- Samuel Becerra Henriquez
- Madison Pruitt
- Paxely Artica Alvarenga
- Lily Baker
- Katie Baker
- Daniela Garcia Trejo
- Rylee Cates

Mr. Tod Kinlaw presented a certificate of recognition to the team on behalf of the Board of Education.

The following students were recognized for Art Awards:

- Lara Forstinger, Cramerton Middle, Mid-Carolina Scholastic Art Awards
- Marina Lopez Mecabo, Cramerton Middle, Mid-Carolina Scholastic Art Awards
- Harley Tuttle, Cramerton Middle, Mid-Carolina Scholastic Art Awards
- Asia Cochran, Ashbrook High School, Best in Show at Through An Artist's Eye Exhibit

Mrs. Janna Smith presented a certificate of recognition on behalf of the Board of Education to each student.

The Holbrook Middle School Girls Basketball Team and coaches were honored for their 61-game winning streak and fifth consecutive County Championship title.

Mrs. Janna Smith presented a plaque of recognition on behalf of the Board of Education.

Stuart W. Cramer High School Men's Golf Team and Coaches were commended for their 4A State Championship win for Men's Golf.

- Lane Crotts
- Ian Irish
- Drew Mercer
- Coley Pruitt
- Jacob Rappaport
- Trip Stacey
- Britton Steede
- Luke Stevens

Lane Crotts was also recognized as the individual State Champion.

Mr. Jeff Ramsey presented a recognition plaque to the Team and a certificate to Lane Crotts on behalf of the Board of Education.

Our outstanding School Nurses were recognized and celebrated. In attendance were School Nurse of the Year, Jill Ross, Haley Malton, Abby Clark, and Health Services Director Hillary McSwain.

Mr. A.M. Stephens III presented a recognition plaque to the group on behalf of the Board of Education.

Classroom Moment – Information

Executive Directors Mr. Kevin Doran and Dr. Bryan Denton presented the Classroom Moment for May which focused on several outstanding educators in Gaston County.

(View Presentation)

Public Expression – Information

Lauren Hedrick
174 Wright Road
Gastonia, NC 28056

Re: Concerns for recent changes at Gaston Early College

Katherine Brooke Graves
1109 Peru Court
Dallas, NC 28034

Re: Continued frustrations and lack of support

Lindsay Weathers
3403 Donnington Way
Gastonia, NC 28056
Re: Cuts to school counseling positions

Heather Holt
111 Woodvale Street
Cherryville, NC 28021
Re: Proposed Closure of W.B. Beam Intermediate

Brittany Elkin
3012 High Ridge Court
Gastonia, NC 28056
Re: Support for BOE to continue pushing for funds—encouragement to lean on the community.

Krystal Helton (signed up but did not speak)
301 Adrian Street
Mt. Holly, NC 28012
Losing teachers, needing more teachers for smaller classes. More teachers to help support students with IEP's.

Cameron Cowell
3241 Wicklow Lane
Gastonia, NC 28056
Advocating for students.

Ella Robinson
3904 Cherokee Drive
Gastonia, NC 28052
Criteria for determining Chief Jr. Marshal and Valedictorian changes.

Sherry Cole
604 Rosewood Lane
Cherryville, NC 28021
Re: Naming press box at Fraley Field in Cherryville in honor of Danny Eaker. Endorsement of keeping Beam Intermediate open.

Ann Doss Helms
316 Gaither Road
Belmont, NC 28012
Re: Communication

Approval/Correction of Minutes – Action

Motion to adopt minutes as presented for the April 20, 2026 Regular meeting.

Motion made by Mr. Lee Dedmon; seconded by Mrs. Janna Smith, motion carried unanimously. (9-0)

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. Ms. Dot Cherry provided a summary report of topics considered and discussed at the most recent meeting.

(View report)

2026-2027 Gaston County Schools Budget Update - Information

Chairman Crisp recognized Superintendent Houchard, who presented a PowerPoint on the 2026-2027 Gaston County Schools Budget Update, including the amount requested by the Board of Education and the budget amount approved by the County. Statistical data was given on operating and ongoing expenses in light of the continuing insufficient funds from all sources. The approved 2026-27 local operating budget awarded by the County remained flat for the fifth year in spite of increasing costs.

(View Presentation)

Reduction in Force (RIF) - Information

Superintendent Houchard gave an update on the Reduction in Force (RIF) in accordance with Policy 7820-Reduction in Force and state law. He outlined the timeframe spanning July 2024 to July 2026. This presentation offered a comprehensive look at staffing modifications, the implementation schedule, and associated personnel measures intended to better synchronize district staffing levels with current operational requirements and financial constraints.

(View Presentation)

Feasibility Study Update - Information

Chairman Crisp recognized Superintendent Houchard, who presented information regarding the district's Feasibility Study initiatives intended to maximize resources, reduce duplicated personnel, and achieve cost savings throughout the district.

(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. Policy Revisions
- E. School Nutrition Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Status
- F. Non-CEP Student Meal Pricing Increases
- G. 2026-2027 Federal Grant Application
- H. Contracts
 - ~~Driver Education~~
 - Ashbrook High School Hallway Ceiling Grid and Tile Installations
 - Grier Middle School Rock Excavation
 - Mt. Holly MS Chiller Replacement
 - Sadler ES Chiller Replacement
 - Design -Concession Stand for South Point HS/Bessemer City HS
 - Zone 2 Lawn Care Amendment
 - American Alternative Transportation - Contract - Third Party Transportation Change Order
 - Carolina Specialty Transport Contract - Third Party Transportation Change Order
 - Primary Care Solutions Contract - Third Party Transportation Change Order
 - Department of Exceptional Children Contract Services

Motion

Motion to adopt the Consent Agenda as presented was made by Mr. Lee Dedmon; seconded by Mr. A.M. Stephens III Motion carried unanimously. (9-0)

The Board then considered the **Driver Education** Agenda Item as a separate item.

Motion

Motion to adopt the Consent Agenda as presented was made by Ms. Dot Cherry; seconded by Mr. A.M. Stephens III Motion carried unanimously. (7-2). Mr. Josh Crisp and Mrs. Janna Smith opposed.

Superintendent's Comments

Superintendent Houchard acknowledged that this Wednesday is the last day of school for students. He thanked everyone in the Gaston County Schools family for giving us a productive and successful year, and he hopes everyone enjoys their summer break.

Wednesday, August 12 – the first day of school for students – will be here before we know it, but until then, we hope everyone enjoys the summer.

High School Graduation

Our graduation season for the Class of 2026 begins tomorrow.

We have two ceremonies on Tuesday in the Myers Center at Gaston College. The Gaston Early College High School graduation ceremony is at 3:00 p.m., followed by the Gaston Early College High School of Medical Sciences ceremony at 6:00 p.m. Many of our Early College students earned an associate degree from Gaston College last week.

Looking ahead to Wednesday, we have three more graduations:
Gaston Virtual Academy at 9:00 a.m. in the Myers Center at Gaston College

Webb Street School at 11:00 a.m. in the school's gymnasium

Warlick Academy at 2:00 p.m., also in the school's gymnasium

Then on Friday evening at 6:00, we'll celebrate the Class of 2026 at our 10 traditional high schools with graduation ceremonies.

Career Signing Day

This Thursday, Gaston County Schools will recognize a special group of students during a signing ceremony that reflects growing career pathways for students.

Five students will sign letters of intent with local employers Tindol Ford and GSM Services. Similar to an athletic signing, these agreements mark their commitment to begin employment after graduation. In addition, a sixth student will sign an apprenticeship agreement with Blum, gaining hands-on training and real-world experience in the workforce.

The ceremony will be held on Thursday from 2 to 3 p.m. at the Linda Rader Staff Development Center in Cramerton.

Evening of Excellence

Last month, we held our Evening of Excellence ceremony to recognize outstanding educators and announce our "Of the Year" winners for 2026-2027. It was an outstanding event, and we would like to express our appreciation to Truist for sponsoring the ceremony again this year.

He also thanked the Gaston County Education Foundation and Courage Kia for their additional partnership support.

Two weeks ago, our Gaston County Teacher of the Year for 2026-2027, Erica Baird of Forestview High School, received her new Kia K4 from Courage Kia in Gastonia, and we are grateful to General Manager Dan Faria for making this possible for our Teacher of the Year for the fourth consecutive year.

Memorial Day Holiday

The Superintendent reminded everyone that Memorial Day is next Monday, May 25, and our school offices and central office buildings will be closed as it is a holiday for all employees.

School Nutrition Summer Feeding Program

School will be out for the summer very soon, and beginning June 1 through July 30, Gaston County Schools will provide free breakfast and lunch meals for children at locations across Gaston County. Parents can visit the Gaston County Schools website for a complete list of meal locations, dates, and times for our summer meals program.

Summer Work Hours

Gaston County Schools will implement our summer work schedule beginning Monday, June 1. Our school and central department offices will be open Monday through Thursday from 7:00 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. and closed on Friday. The summer schedule will continue through Friday, July 31.

Summer Professional Development

The Teaching and Learning Summer Series begins June 3, and registration is filling up quickly.

The summer sessions give educators across the district flexible and engaging professional learning opportunities. Sessions feature a variety of topics, hands-on activities, and convenient Wednesday meeting times.

Employees should check their email for information about how to register.

Superintendent recognized Chief of Staff Tom Nencetti, who will be retiring in a few weeks. Mr. Nencetti has over thirty years of experience and has made numerous contributions to Gaston County Schools.

Closing Remarks

Chairman Crisp expressed gratitude to Mr. Tom Nencetti for his work at Gaston County Schools and congratulated him on his retirement.

Congratulations were expressed for the Gaston County Schools High School 2026 graduates. Graduation ceremonies are a highlight of our year.

We hope everyone has a refreshing and relaxing summer.

The next Board of Education meeting will be held on June 15, 2026.

Our Committee Meetings in July will be canceled.

Although the regular Board Meeting in July is traditionally canceled, the Chairman asked Board Members to save the date of July 20, 2026, due to the likelihood of holding a July meeting. Proper notifications will be made with the proper posting.

Chairman Crisp asked the Board to consider going into Closed Session under, N.C.G.S. §143-318.11(a)(6) Personnel, and N.C.G.S. §143-318.11(a)(3) Consultation with Attorney.

Motion to go into Closed Session was made by Mr. A.M. Stephens III; seconded by Mrs. Janna Smith; motion carried unanimously. (9-0)

The Board went into Closed Session at 7:57 p.m.

The Board returned to Open Session at 8:25 p.m.

Superintendent Houchard recommended the following two-year Administrative contracts for:

Brittany Beckham

Molly Tessnear

Motion

The Motion was made by Ms. Dot Cherry; seconded by Mr. Brent Moore, that the Board Award a two-year Administrative Contract for the following:

Brittany Beckham

Molly Tessnear

A vote was taken, and motion to approve the item as presented carried unanimously. (9-0)

Administrative Placements

Superintendent Houchard informed the Board that Bessemer City High School will become an Innovation School in the second cohort.

The Superintendent announced that Josh Bromley will serve as the principal at Bessemer City High School.

Kimberly Reese will serve as the principal at Bessemer City Middle School, which will also become an Innovation School in the second cohort. She currently serves as the principal at Pinewood Elementary School.

Rebecca Wilson will serve as the principal at Gaston Virtual Academy for one year. She currently serves as the principal at Bessemer City Middle School.

Brittany Beckham will be the Principal at Belmont Middle School.

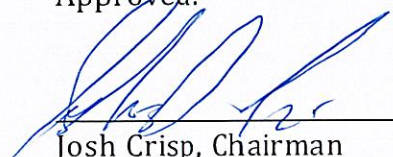
Molly Teasner will be the Principal at Pinewood Elementary School.

Adjournment

All business having been conducted, a Motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Tod Kinlaw seconded by Mr. A.M. Stephens III and the motion carried unanimously. (9-0)

The Board Meeting adjourned at 8:31 p.m.

Approved:


Josh Crisp, Chairman
[Corporate Seal]

Date Approved: 6-15-26




Morgen A. Houchard, Secretary