Hamlet, North Carolina
July 29, 2026

The Richmond County Board of Education met in a quarterly work session on July 29, 2026, at 1:00 p.m. The meeting was held at the Central Office in Hamlet, North Carolina.

The members present were Cory Satterfield, Chairman; Scotty Baldwin, Vice-Chairman; Bobbie Sue Ormsby; Jerry Ethridge; Ronald Tillman; Daryl Mason; and Bess Shuler.

The administrators present were Dr. Joe Ferrell, Superintendent; Dr. Kate Smith, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction; Danielle Meeks, Executive Director of Human Resources; Melvin Ingram, Assistant Superintendent of Safety and Operations; Dawn Jordan, Executive Director of Finance; Cameron Whitley, Executive Director of Communications and Policy; and Eva DuBuisson, Board Attorney.

Meeting Commencement
After noting that a quorum was present, Cory Satterfield, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 1:06 p.m. Chairman Satterfield requested a Moment of Silence and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Advanced Teaching Roles
Danielle Meeks, Executive Director of Human Resources, presented the proposed implementation of the Instructional Teacher Leader (ITL) model for the 2026-2027 school year. She explained the district plans to use the model as an implementation trial while awaiting notification of the Advanced Teaching Roles (ATR) Grant in October. Danielle informed the Board that the grant application had been completed, Board approval would be requested prior to submission, participating schools had been contacted, and a sample board approval letter used by other districts had been provided for the Board's review.

Ronald Tillman asked about the anticipated grant amount.

Dr. Kate Smith stated the grant is expected to total approximately $800,000.

Daryl Mason asked whether the proposal was similar to the district's aspiring administrator program.

Dr. Kate Smith explained that the existing program focuses on developing future administrators, while the Advanced Teaching Roles model is designed to develop teacher leaders who remain in the classroom. She noted the program would initially be implemented at the middle school level because instructional coaches remain in elementary schools and explained the model would provide leadership opportunities for exemplary teachers while allowing them to continue teaching students.

Bess Shuler asked whether Advanced Teaching Role teachers would support Beginning Teachers.

Danielle Meeks explained that while they would not necessarily serve as the officially assigned mentors, they would provide professional development, classroom support, co-planning, and co-teaching opportunities.

Bobbie Sue Ormsby noted that the state used to pay for Beginning Teacher mentors but eventually eliminated that funding.

Bess Shuler discussed the elimination of state funding for Beginning Teacher mentors and the value of utilizing the district's strongest teachers to support new educators.

Scotty Baldwin asked about the selection process for Advanced Teaching Role teachers.

Dr. Kate Smith reviewed the competitive application process, explaining that candidates would complete a portfolio documenting coaching experience, EVAAS data, and other qualifications. Participants would be selected for interviews based on their portfolios, and the interviews would be conducted with support from Opportunity Culture. She noted that the district would then provide schools with a list of teachers qualified to serve in Advanced Teaching Role positions.

Dr. Kate Smith also explained that the program would allow the district to redirect Title I funding previously used for instructional coaches while providing participating teachers with leadership stipends. She stated that the model is intended to be sustainable long-term, would cost significantly less than funding full-time instructional coaches, and would strengthen teacher retention while providing additional support for Beginning Teachers and struggling teachers. She further explained that participating teachers would continue to receive planning time through the use of highly qualified teacher assistants, who could supervise students while teachers provided coaching and co-planning support to colleagues.

Danielle Meeks informed the Board that the proposal would return as an action item at the August 11 Board meeting to allow submission of the grant application by the August 14 deadline.

Facilities Optimization and Long-Range Planning
Dr. Ferrell opened the discussion by explaining that the purpose of the work session was to allow the Board and staff to have a more in-depth conversation about facilities optimization and long-range planning. He encouraged staff members to participate in the discussion and assist in answering Board questions throughout the presentation.

Dr. Ferrell informed the Board that, despite significant budget challenges, the district expects to add approximately $25,000 to its fund balance for the fiscal year as a result of strategic planning and cost-saving measures implemented over the past several years. He recognized employees across the district for taking on additional responsibilities to help achieve those savings. He also reviewed projected reductions in state funding totaling a little over $700,000 for the coming year, noting those reductions do not include increased hospitalization and retirement costs that will further impact the district's budget.

Dawn Jordan added that the district's hospitalization costs increased by approximately $425 per employee for the current year. She noted that the district did not request the increase but is nevertheless responsible for covering the additional expense.

Chairman Satterfield stated that, in his opinion, one of the greatest challenges facing public education beyond teacher and administrator pay is the way schools are funded and how funding is allocated.

Dr. Ferrell reviewed the community input received following the Board's April 14 discussion of cost-saving measures. He reported the district received 32 suggestions addressing areas including energy efficiency, transportation, staffing, facilities, service contracts, and budgeting. He explained many of the recommendations reflected initiatives already underway, including LED lighting upgrades, chiller replacements, improved bus routing efficiency through TIMS, and ongoing reviews of vendor contracts. He also summarized reductions already implemented by the district, including program enhancement positions, support staff, teacher assistants, and teaching positions. Dr. Ferrell stated additional reductions in assistant principals, ISS support, or athletics would have a more direct impact on students.

Dr. Ferrell reviewed the proposal to explore a solar, agricultural STEM magnet school at Ellerbe Middle School. He recognized the work completed by Debra Quick in researching the concept and explained that the Board would be asked to provide direction regarding whether they wanted to consider a magnet school.

Bess Shuler asked how the district planned to address the 5.5 teaching positions eliminated through state allotment reductions.

Dr. Ferrell and Dawn Jordan explained that those reductions had already been incorporated into staffing allocations for the upcoming school year and were accomplished through vacant positions and attrition rather than eliminating current employees.

Dr. Ferrell stated that staffing reductions have reached a point where additional savings will likely need to come from reducing the number of facilities the district operates. He reviewed declining enrollment, noting the district has lost approximately 1,000 to 1,100 students since the last school closure while continuing to operate more buildings than needed. He outlined potential school closure studies for Ashley Chapel Education Center, Cordova Middle School, Ellerbe Middle School, and West Rockingham Elementary School, explaining that Ashley Chapel would remain as the district's alternative school but could potentially be relocated to another facility. Dr. Ferrell requested Board direction regarding both the proposed magnet school and whether formal school closure studies should be conducted.

Jerry Ethridge made a motion directing staff to further explore the proposed magnet school. He stated that the district must identify new ways to attract and retain students and that he believed a magnet school could help achieve that goal.

Bobbie Sue Ormsby expressed support for gathering additional information, stating she had reviewed the materials previously provided and believed the proposal warranted further study. She shared that she definitely does not want to see Ellerbe Middle School close but feels the magnet school is something that should be researched.

Chairman Satterfield shared concerns about establishing a magnet school based on his previous experience in a school system that operated one. He stated that while magnet schools may experience initial success with the support of grant funding, they can become financially challenging once the grant funding expires. He noted that the district's rural location could make it difficult to maintain sufficient student enrollment and interest in a magnet program. He expressed concern that, under those circumstances, a magnet school could become a financial burden on the district. He concluded by stating that, in his opinion, the district is not currently in a financial position to establish a magnet school.

Bess Shuler asked whether a school designated as a magnet school would always be required to remain a magnet school.

Chairman Satterfield responded that, once a school is designated as a magnet school, it is intended to operate as one.

Bess Shuler asked whether a magnet school would continue to provide the same educational standards and meet the requirements of the general curriculum.

Chairman Satterfield responded that the school would continue to meet all state curriculum requirements. He explained that its CTE programs would emphasize agriculture, STEM, and solar energy, allowing interested students to pursue those areas. He added that students in the Ellerbe area who chose not to attend the magnet school would need to be transported to other schools, resulting in additional transportation costs for the district.

Daryl Mason asked how long grant funding would be available if the district established a magnet school.

Chairman Satterfield responded that additional research would be needed to determine the grant's requirements and duration.

Ronald Tillman stated that he was interested in learning more about the proposal before making a decision. He suggested that additional information should include the grant requirements, the duration of grant funding, and whether grant funds could be used for capital needs, including the potential expansion of Mineral Springs Elementary School into a K–8 school. He indicated that he would support gathering additional information about the magnet school while also continuing to study potential school closures.

Daryl Mason stated that he supported vocational education opportunities and believed an agriculture and solar magnet school could provide valuable workforce preparation. He also emphasized the need to determine whether the program would be sustainable after grant funding ended and whether there would be sufficient long-term student interest to support the program.

Scotty Baldwin stated that he was pleased the district was evaluating all potential cost-saving measures, including Ashley Chapel Education Center, Cordova Middle School, Ellerbe Middle School, and West Rockingham Elementary School. He emphasized the importance of reviewing all options holistically and transparently so the community could see that every possibility was being considered.

Scotty Baldwin stated that he did not see himself supporting the closure of Ellerbe Middle School because of the distance and travel time students would face attending another middle school. He added that he believed other Board members shared similar concerns. Although he questioned the value of spending money on a third-party study for a school he did not believe would ultimately close, he acknowledged that conducting the study might be necessary to ensure transparency.

Board members clarified that the pending motion was not to establish a magnet school but for staff to gather additional information for future Board consideration.

Jerry Ethridge restated his motion, confirming that he would like staff to gather additional information regarding a potential magnet school at Ellerbe Middle School and return the information to the Board to consider whether to move forward with opening a magnet or not.

Chairman Satterfield asked Jerry Ethridge whether he would be willing to amend his motion to state that the Board would consider the magnet school study after making a decision regarding potential school closures. Jerry Ethridge declined and stated that he wished to keep his motion as originally presented.

Bess Shuler seconded the motion. The motion passed 5–2. Yes votes: Jerry Ethridge, Ronald Tillman, Bobbie Sue Ormsby, Daryl Mason, and Bess Shuler. No votes: Chairman Satterfield and Scotty Baldwin.

Scotty Baldwin stated that he believed the proposed magnet school is great idea. However, he expressed that the district currently has many priorities and would prefer to complete the cost-saving initiatives and strengthen the district's fund balance before taking on another major initiative.

Chairman Satterfield agreed that conducting the potential school closure studies should remain the district's priority. He noted that the district should not "put the cart before the horse" by pursuing a magnet school before addressing its current facility needs. He stated that the district should first address its capacity issues by evaluating potential school closures, reducing the number of buildings, and eliminating mobile classrooms, and then evaluate the feasibility of a magnet program if appropriate.

Bobbie Sue Ormsby asked about the proposed school closure study for Ellerbe Middle School. She noted that when the proposal was presented in the spring, some analysis had already been completed and included in the presentation. She asked how much additional study would be necessary for Ellerbe Middle School if the Board already knew it would not be considered for closure.

Dr. Ferrell explained that the information previously presented regarding Ellerbe Middle School was an internal preliminary analysis prepared by district staff to estimate potential cost savings. He noted that the preliminary analysis projected approximately $1.5 million in savings if Ellerbe Middle School were closed. He stated that North Carolina law requires a formal school closure study before a school can be considered for closure. He explained that a formal study would include additional analyses, such as student travel times, attendance zones, and other required factors that were not included in the district's preliminary review.

Bobbie Sue Ormsby questioned whether conducting a formal school closure study for Ellerbe Middle School would be worthwhile if the majority of Board had no intention of closing the school.

Dr. Ferrell acknowledged the concern but stated that several Board members had consistently emphasized the importance of evaluating all potential options to ensure transparency. He noted that conducting both a potential magnet school study and a potential school closure study for Ellerbe Middle School at the same time was an unusual situation. However, he stated that he did not believe conducting the school closure studies and the magnet school study simultaneously would affect the outcome of either study.

Bess Shuler asked about the anticipated cost of conducting formal school closure studies.

Dr. Ferrell stated that additional research would need to be done to determine the anticipated cost. He reminded the Board that when the district hired Jim Watson to conduct its facility study, the cost was approximately $30,000. He noted that Jim Watson is not currently conducting school closure studies. Dr. Ferrell shared that he had asked Jim Watson what he believed an independent consultant would likely charge to conduct school closure studies for four schools. Based on that conversation, he estimated the cost would be approximately $40,000 to $50,000 for all four studies, if the district hired an external consulting firm.

Bobbie Sue Ormsby asked whether the district could conduct effective school closure studies without hiring an outside consultant.

Dr. Ferrell explained that district staff could perform preliminary analyses, similar to the one completed for Ellerbe Middle School. However, he believed outside assistance would be necessary, particularly for attendance zone redistricting, to ensure the work was completed accurately and impartially.

Chairman Satterfield asked whether the state could assist with conducting attendance zone redistricting.

Eva DuBuisson explained that NC State provides this service; however, the district would be responsible for the cost associated with having the work completed.

Scotty Baldwin asked whether a TIMS integration could assist with attendance zone redistricting.

Dr. Ferrell stated that he was unsure if a TIMS integration was available. He explained that, given the impact of changing school attendance zones on families, it would be important to have an independent company conduct the redistricting process to ensure it was completed accurately. He noted that many families make housing decisions based on assigned school attendance zones, making an impartial process essential.

Daryl Mason stated that he believed the district should conduct studies on all four schools. He added that the Board needs complete information regarding the potential cost savings associated with each individual school so that the Board can have further discussion and make informed decisions regarding potential school closures.

Scotty Baldwin stated that although spending $40,000 for an independent third party to conduct school closure studies may seem like a significant expense, if the studies result in $3 million in annual savings, it would be a worthwhile investment. He made a motion to have an independent third party conduct school closure studies on all four schools. Daryl Mason seconded the motion.

Ronald Tillman asked whether the cost of conducting the studies would come from fund balance.
Dr. Ferrell and Dawn Jordan explained that the cost would be paid from local funds.

Scotty Baldwin amended his motion to direct the Superintendent to solicit bids from independent third-party consultants to conduct school closure studies for all four schools and return the proposals to the Board for consideration. The amendment was seconded by Daryl Mason and approved by a vote of 6–1. Jerry Ethridge voted no.

Chairman Satterfield handed the gavel to Scotty Baldwin. Chairman Satterfield made a motion directing the Superintendent to pursue the school closure study process before gathering additional information regarding the proposed magnet school. He stated that he believed the facility planning process should occur first and that the magnet school discussion should follow.
Daryl Mason seconded the motion.

After consultation with Eva DuBuisson, it was determined that the motion did not conflict with the Board's earlier action regarding the magnet school proposal, as it addressed the order in which staff would complete the work.

The motion was approved by a vote of 4–3. Yes votes: Chairman Satterfield, Scotty Baldwin, Daryl Mason, and Ronald Tillman. No votes: Jerry Ethridge, Bobbie Sue Ormsby, and Bess Shuler.

Bobbie Sue Ormsby asked whether closing the former Rohanen Primary School, which currently houses the Maintenance and IT departments, and relocating those departments to a school site could provide financial benefits. She shared that she believed, in the past, if a department was located at a school, the district could use state funding.

Dr. Ferrell explained that if technology is located at a school, the district may be able to use some E-rate funding that would not be available while technology is located off a school campus.

Bobbie Sue Ormsby asked if these were the types of things the Board would begin discussing once the school closure reports were received.

Dr. Ferrell confirmed that the school closure studies would provide information regarding potential savings and other considerations for the Board to review.

Motion to Enter Closed Session
Cory Satterfield citing NCGS 143-318.11(a)(1) and (6) requested a motion to go into closed session.

On a motion by Scotty Baldwin, seconded by Daryl Mason, the Board voted unanimously to go into closed session at 2:25 p.m.

The Board reconvened into open session at 3:08 p.m.

Personal
Danielle Meeks presented the personnel report for Board approval.

On a motion by Scotty Baldwin, seconded by Ronald Tillman, the board voted unanimously to approve the personnel report.

Adjourn
There being no further business, on a motion by Scotty Baldwin, seconded by Bobbie Sue Ormsby, Chairman Satterfield adjourned the meeting at 3:13 p.m.