

Gaston County Schools
Board of Education
August 17, 2026
Regular Meeting

MINUTES

The Gaston County Board of Education met in a regular session on Monday, August 17, 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, and A.M. Stephens III. Mrs. Janna Smith 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, Interim Chief Financial Officer Bryan Denton, 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 Chris Howell of Sandy Plains Baptist Church, Gastonia, NC, led the invocation.

Pledge of Allegiance

Mason Powers, an 11th grader from Cherryville High School, led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Agenda Adoption - Action

The Board considered Agenda Adoption – Action

Motion to adopt the Agenda as presented was made by Mr. Lee Dedmon; seconded by Mr. Brent Moore, motion carried unanimously. (8-0)

Good News – Information

Mr. Todd Hagans presented the Good News for August:

Rex Dover was recognized as a 2026 recipient of the North Carolina Governor's Volunteer Service Award for his outstanding service to individuals with intellectual disabilities. A South Point High School student and top-ranked member of his class, Mr. Dover has recruited and trained volunteers and helped establish the Belmont Chapter of Abilities Tennis of North Carolina, providing tennis instruction and mentoring to individuals with intellectual disabilities. He has also secured grants to expand academic enrichment and literacy opportunities.

The Board congratulated Mr. Dover and 2026 Ashbrook High School graduate Tupelo Guzauskas, who also received the statewide honor, recognizing Gaston County Schools' distinction of having two students receive the 2026 award.

Ms. Dot Cherry presented Mr. Rex Dover with a certificate of recognition.

The Board recognized six Gaston County Schools band programs receiving the Program of Distinction honor from the North Carolina Bandmasters Association: Belmont Middle School, W.C. Friday Middle School, Cherryville High School, East Gaston High School, South Point High School, and Stuart W. Cramer High School.

The Board recognized the band directors and representatives in attendance and commended the programs for achieving the highest level of recognition within the Association's Program of Merit. The honor recognizes programs demonstrating excellence in musical performance, student achievement, leadership, advocacy, and community engagement. The Board expressed appreciation for the directors and students for their continued commitment to excellence.

Mr. Tod Kinlaw presented each school representative with a plaque of recognition.

The Board recognized Jayden Nolley of Stuart W. Cramer High School for winning the 4A State Championship in the 400-meter dash. As a sophomore, Mr. Nolley won the event with a time of 48.99 seconds at Truist Stadium at N.C. A&T State University, narrowly defeating the second-place finisher.

Mr. Nolley also competed in the 200-meter dash and 4x400-meter relay at the state championship. The Board congratulated him on this outstanding achievement and wished him continued success in the upcoming track and field season.

Mr. Jeff Ramsey presented a certificate of recognition.

The Board recognized Mason Powers of Cherryville High School and Madison Potter of Forestview High School for their selection to represent Region VI on the North Carolina High School Athletic Association's Student-Athlete Advisory Council.

The Board noted that the council members were selected based on academic and athletic achievement, leadership, sportsmanship, and service to their schools and communities. Mason and Madison were commended for their accomplishments and for representing Gaston County Schools in this statewide leadership role. The Board congratulated them on this outstanding achievement and wished them continued success.

Ms. Dot Cherry presented a certificate of recognition to both students.

Dr. Denton currently serves as our interim Chief Financial Officer. He most recently served as an Executive Director of Secondary Instruction and has also served as a school administrator in our district.

Earlier this summer, Dr. Denton was recognized by the North Carolina School Superintendents' Association and the North Carolina Alliance for School Leadership Development as one of four statewide recipients of the Dr. Samuel Houston Jr. Leadership Award.

This annual award recognizes graduates of the Aspiring Superintendent Program, which is designed to develop and empower transformational leaders for North Carolina's public schools.

The award honors leaders who demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement, high ethical standards, strategic planning, student achievement, and preparing students for the workforce of the future.

Mr. A.M. Stephens III presented Dr. Denton with a plaque of recognition.

Mr. Hagans shared the following announcements about upcoming events:

The news team from WBTV News will broadcast live from Grier Middle School starting at 6:00 a.m. this Friday.

The newscast from 6:00 until 7:00 a.m. will be broadcast on TV, and the newscast from 7:00 until 8:00 a.m. will be on the WBTV streaming service.

During the newscast, Grier will take the spotlight with stories about the new school building and construction of the athletic fields; how the arts are playing a role in the school's new STEAM Academy; and the principal, Dr. Jessica Mellon, serving this year as the Gaston County Principal of the Year.

Also, the 2026 high school football season kicks off this Friday night, and we hope everyone will come out and support our teams.

Friday nights are about more than football. It is an opportunity to bring our communities together and celebrate our student-athletes, coaches, cheerleaders, dance teams, and marching bands.

Back this year are our Friday Night Football pep rallies on Facebook, and this Friday's pep rally is at North Gaston High School – so be looking for us on Facebook this Friday afternoon. All of our Board members are welcome to join us for the pep rally at 2:30 p.m.

(View Presentation)

Public Expression – Information

Mitch Jones (not present when called)

2343 South Point Road

Belmont, NC 28012

Re: School Bus Safety

Dionna Graham

305 Zander Woods Court

Mt. Holly, NC 28120

Re: Schools' Budget and Equity

Sean Bates

201 West Blvd

Gastonia, NC

Re: Accountability and budget

Jerry Whitlock
1018 Ramsey St
Stanley, NC 28164
Re: Reading for Kids and Thanking the School Board

Chez Adams
1218 Monroe Dr
Gastonia, NC 28054
Re: Chromebooks

Approval/Correction of Minutes – Action

Motion to adopt minutes as presented for the June 15, 2026, Regular meeting.

Motion made by Mr. Jeff Ramsey; seconded by Mr. Tod Kinlaw; 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. Ms. Dot Cherry provided a summary report of topics considered and discussed at the most recent meeting.

(View report)

Budget Updates - Information

Budget information was presented by Interim Chief Financial Officer Bryan Denton.

An update on the State Budget signed by the Governor on July 7, 2026. This budget covers the 2026-27 fiscal year.

Projected salary increases and bonuses, including the anticipated implementation timelines, were reviewed.

The district's retirement contribution rate increased by 5.8%, to 26.1% of an employee's salary. This represents a 20.39% increase over the 2019-2020 rate.

The district's health insurance contribution increased by 5%, to \$8,925, representing a 41.52% increase over the 2019-2020 amount.

Funding was also included to continue teacher performance bonuses for AP courses, certain CTE courses, grades 3-5 reading, and grades 4-8 mathematics.

Dr. Denton also shared an update on the local budget, noting that on July 14, the Gaston County Board of Commissioners approved an additional \$5 million in operating funds for Gaston County Schools, bringing total local operating support for the 2026-2027 fiscal year to \$59 million. The county also approved \$1.2 million in annual capital funding. In accordance with state law, approximately 12 percent of the additional operating allocation, or about \$600,000, will be allocated to charter schools.

Official Depository Designation – Action

Chairman Crisp recognized Interim Chief Financial Officer Bryan Denton, who presented a Presentation on Official Depository Designation.

(View Presentation)

Motion

The Motion was made by Mr. Brent Moore; seconded by Mr. Tod Kinlaw, that the Board approve the Official Depositories for each School/Department. Mr. A.M. Stephens III recused himself from the vote.

A vote was taken and motion to approve the item as presented carried unanimously. (7-0)

(View Presentation)

Appointment of School Treasurers – Action

Chairman Crisp recognized Interim Chief Financial Officer Bryan Denton, who presented a Presentation on the Appointment of School Treasurers.

Motion

The Motion was made by Ms. Dot Cherry; seconded by Mr. Tod Kinlaw, that the Board approve Treasurers for Each School.

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

(View Presentation)

Appointment of School Treasurers – Action

Interim Chief Financial Officer Bryan Denton was recognized by Chairman Crisp to deliver a presentation regarding the Appointment of School Treasurers.

(View Presentation)

Motion

Ms. Dot Cherry made a motion, seconded by Mr. Tod Kinlaw, for the Board to approve Treasurers for Each School.

Following a vote, the motion to approve the item as presented passed unanimously. (8-0)

Summer Project Update – Information

Chairman Crisp recognized Ms. Bessie Harvey, who presented a summary of recently completed Summer Projects. Key projects that were highlighted included:

- Emergency Radio Projects across multiple schools
- Ceiling Tile and Grid Replacement at Ashbrook and Hunter Huss
- HVAC Repair Renovations
- New Camera and Intercom Replacements at Cherryville Elementary, Belmont Central Elementary, and Catawba Heights Elementary
- Security Vestibules at Ashbrook High School and Bessemer City Primary
- Forestview High School field renovation

(View Presentation)

Annual Surplus Report – Information

Chairman Crisp recognized Ms. Bessie Harvey, who gave an update on the annual surplus sales report. During the 2025-2026 school year, we received \$17,760 from the sale of surplus items.

(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. Board Policy Updates
- E. Academic Services-District Literacy Intervention Plan
- F. AIG Plan 2025-2028 Revision
- G. Beginning Teacher Support Program (BTSP) Plan
- H. Contracts
 - Academic Services Resources and Contract Services
 - Amendment- Cropper GIS Contract
 - Amendment to South Point HS Header Repairs
 - Mt Holly Middle Shop Building Demolition
 - North Gaston Boiler Replacement
 - School Nutrition Request to Pay Sole Source Vendor
 - AHU Controller Upgrade at Stuart Cramer High School
 - 1st Amendment - Fire Alarm Panel, Inspections & Certification at WC Friday
 - Temporary Construction Easement Stuart Cramer HS

- Trash Removal at All GCS Locations (Intent to Renew)
- Pest Control Contract Services
- Minor Roof Repairs - Carver & Sons Roofing, Inc
- Installation of IPEMA-Certified Mulch at All GCS Playgrounds
- Renewal of Landscaping contract services for the 2026-2027 school year for Zone 2
- Renewal of Landscaping Contract Services for Zone 5
- Renewal Zone 6 Lawncare
- Landscaping for Zone 1
- Renewal for 2026-2027 Landscaping for Zone 3

Motion

Motion to adopt the Consent Agenda as presented was made by Mr. A.M. Stephens III; seconded by Mr. Lee Dedmon. Motion carried unanimously. (8-0)

Superintendent's Comments

The Superintendent thanked students, staff, families, and the Gaston County Schools community for their efforts in providing a successful opening to the 2026–2027 school year. He acknowledged the normal beginning-of-year adjustments involving transportation, enrollment, and class assignments and expressed appreciation for everyone's patience and cooperation.

The Superintendent provided a reminder to the Board regarding mandatory professional development workdays scheduled for September 16, October 28, February 10, and April 14, during which students will not have school. These sessions will cover instruction-focused topics such as effective teaching practices, grade-level academic standards, progress monitoring, data evaluation, and classroom management.

The Superintendent reported that 2025–2026 testing and accountability results will be released by the North Carolina State Board of Education on September 2. Gaston County Schools anticipates overall gains in reading, mathematics, science, and academic growth and looks forward to sharing and celebrating the results.

The Superintendent reminded the Board that Monday, September 7, is Labor Day and a holiday for students and employees. The September Board committee meetings have been moved to Monday, September 14.

Closing Remarks

Chairman Crisp thanked everyone for their support of the Board of Education and Gaston County Schools and expressed excitement about students returning for a successful year of learning and celebrating the district's accomplishments in September.

The next scheduled Board of Education Meeting will be held on September 21, 2026.

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 Ms. Dot Cherry; seconded by Mr. Brent Moore; motion carried unanimously. (8-0)

The Board went into Closed Session at 6:42 p.m.

The Board returned to Open Session at 7:20 p.m.

Administrative Contract - Action

Superintendent Houchard recommended the following individual for a 2-year Principal contract:
Carlene Falter

Motion

The Motion was made by Mr. A.M. Stephens III; seconded by Mr. Brent Moore, that the Board Award a two-year Principal contract for Carlene Falter.

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

The Superintendent announced that Ms. Falter would serve as the Principal at W.B. Beam Intermediate School.

Motion

Mr. A.M. Stephens made a motion that Gaston County Schools join the multi-district social media litigation as set forth in the attached short-form complaint and that we approve the retainer agreement with Tharrington Smith.

The Motion was made by Mr. A.M. Stephens III; seconded by Ms. Dot Cherry, that the Board
Approve the multi-district social media litigation as set forth in the attached short-form complaint and the retainer agreement with Tharrington Smith.

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

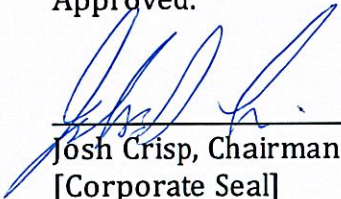
To provide clarity, Chairman Crisp issued a statement regarding the delay in Chromebook distribution at Ashbrook and Hunter Huss High Schools. He affirmed the district's commitment to ensuring every student receives a functional device, emphasizing that technology is vital to instruction and helps compensate for state textbook funding limitations. Additionally, Chairman Crisp advised the public to contact the schools directly to obtain factual and comprehensive information.

Adjournment

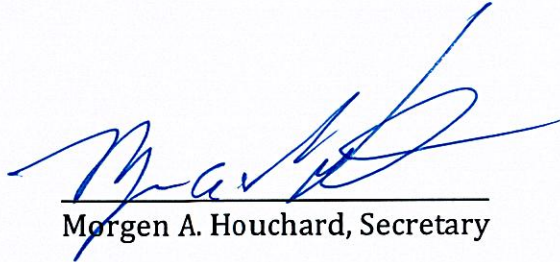
All business having been conducted, a Motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Tod Kinlaw, seconded by Ms. Dot Cherry, and the motion carried unanimously. (8-0)

The Board Meeting adjourned at 7:23 p.m.

Approved:



Josh Crisp, Chairman
[Corporate Seal]



Morgen A. Houchard, Secretary

Date Approved: 9-21-26

