

The Rockbridge County School Board held a Special Called Meeting on Tuesday, September 29, 2026, at the County of Rockbridge Administration Building.

Present: Chairman Kathleen Burant, Trustees Corey Berkstresser, Neil Whitmore, Catie Brown, Lenna Ojure, Superintendent Dr. Phillip Thompson, Clerk Heather Bennington

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Burant called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Chairman Burant reflected on the superintendent search process, framing it as a highly significant journey that began following the retirement announcement of Dr. Thompson earlier in the year. To navigate the search, the school board partnered with the Virginia School Boards Association, conducted community surveys, and interviewed leadership teams across central offices and local schools to gather essential feedback. Out of 15 applicants, the board selected six candidates to interview based on how closely their qualifications matched the desired profile, praising the entire applicant pool for their expertise, diverse backgrounds, and strong leadership skills. Expressing deep appreciation for the community's trust and input throughout the multi-month process, Chairman Burant noted that the experience fostered meaningful personal and professional growth for the board members while ensuring the division's search was guided by high standards.

Trustee Whitmore detailed the timeline, statistics, and evaluation process of the superintendent search, which began with a public announcement in February. In April, the board collected 177 responses from an 11-question community survey, mirroring engagement levels from 2017, with participation split among parents (28%), teachers (26%), and other division employees (23%). Following the application posting on June 1, the search drew 23 inquiries and 15 complete applications (10 from Virginia, 5 out-of-state; 8 men and 7 women), which were narrowed down to six interviewees through two vetting meetings with the Virginia School Boards Association team. Emphasizing that the high quality of the candidates reflected the strong reputation built by local school staff, Trustee Whitmore noted that the board held initial interviews on September 3, selected two standout finalists, and completed the final interview stage on September 15.

Trustee Brown expressed pride in the board's execution of the superintendent search process, highlighting the strength of the candidate pool. Beyond evaluating applicants, Trustee Brown noted that the experience served as a valuable learning process for the board, allowing members to gain a clearer, unified understanding of the school division's needs and future direction.

Trustee Ojure commended outgoing Superintendent Dr. Thompson and his leadership team for establishing a strong foundation that attracted high-caliber applicants to the division. Reframing initial doubts about the volume of applicants for a division of their size, Trustee Ojure highlighted that the total applicant pool ultimately exceeded expectations. Expressing optimism for the future, Trustee Ojure praised the candidates' passion, innovative educational ideas, and deep commitment, noting that it was encouraging to see a knowledgeable and thoughtful new generation of leaders ready to advance their careers.

Trustee Berkstresser noted that while all six interviewed candidates were capable of being successful in the role, the board was particularly impressed by one candidate. Trustee Berkstresser highlighted the candidate's extensive depth and breadth of educational knowledge, areas of expertise, and experience, expressing that the board feels fortunate to have selected them as the new superintendent.

Chairman Burant outlined the qualifications, background, and key attributes that led the board to recommend Dr. Ricky Bolling as the new superintendent for Rockbridge County Public Schools. Highlighting Dr. Bolling's extensive educational credentials, including degrees from UVA's College at Wise, Lincoln Memorial University, UVA, and the University of the Cumberland, Chairman Burant noted his rich experience as a math teacher, counselor, principal, higher education professor, and superintendent in Bath County and Clarke County. Chairman Burant emphasized Dr. Bolling's strength in uniting people around common goals, pointing out how perfectly this aligns with Rockbridge County's upcoming 2027 strategic planning process. Describing him as an approachable, collaborative listener and a proven change-maker.

ACTION

Chairman Burant read the following motion for appointment: I move that the School Board appoint Dr. Ricky Bolling to the position of Division Superintendent for Rockbridge County Public Schools for a term commencing on January 01, 2027 and ending on June 30, 2030. Furthermore, I move that the Chairperson and Clerk be authorized to execute an employment agreement with Dr. Ricky Bolling for this term, as detailed in the attached contract. Motion was made by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Ojure, and passed by 5-0 vote.

NEW BUSINESS

Dr. Ricky Bolling expressed his gratitude to the board for appointing him as the next superintendent of Rockbridge County Public Schools, noting his family's connection to the area and his deep admiration for the community's assets, history, and educational institutions. Outlining his leadership philosophy, Dr. Bolling emphasized that his early priority will be to listen actively to understand local needs, build trust through consistent personal interactions, and focus on fostering a positive school culture and climate to drive student learning. He highlighted the importance of prioritizing people, supporting the vulnerable, and recognizing that personal stories rather than raw data move communities forward. Closing with reflections on shared individuality and the non-linear path to success, Dr. Bolling expressed honor in taking on the role while paying tribute to the character and legacy of outgoing Superintendent Dr. Phillip Thompson.

CLOSED MEETING

Under Virginia Code § 2.2-3711.A(1) of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, Chairman Burant recommended that the Board go into a Closed Meeting. The subject of the portion of the session was the discussion of personnel. Motion was made by Trustee Ojure, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, and passed by 5-0 vote.

The board entered into the Closed Meeting at 4:45p.m.

The Board returned to Open Session at 6:22 p.m.

Trustee Whitmore read the following motion to Certify the Closed Meeting:

Whereas, the Rockbridge County School Board has convened a closed meeting on this date pursuant to an affirmative recorded vote and in accordance with the provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act; and;

Whereas, § 2.2-3712.D of the Code of Virginia requires a certification by this School Board that such closed meeting was conducted in conformity with Virginia law;

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Rockbridge County School Board hereby certifies that, to the best of each member's knowledge, (i) only public business matters lawfully exempted by Virginia law were discussed in the closed meeting to which this certification applies, and (ii) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion convening the closed meeting were heard, discussed, or considered.

Upon initial motion of Certification of Closed Meeting by Trustee Whitmore, and seconded by Trustee Ojure, the motion passed by the following roll call vote:

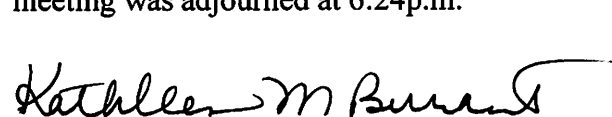
Trustee Whitmore	- Aye
TrusteeBerkstresser	- Aye
Trustee Brown	- Aye
Trustee Ojure	- Aye
Chairman Burant	- Aye

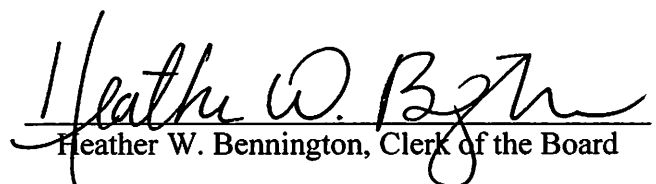
SCHOOL BOARD

The next regular meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, October 13, 2026 / 5:30 PM / Location: Maury River Middle School, Lexington, Virginia.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Brown, and passed by a 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 6:24p.m.


Kathleen M. Burant, Chairman


Heather W. Bennington, Clerk of the Board