Hamlet, North Carolina
September 8, 2026

The Richmond County Board of Education met in regular session on September 8, 2026, at 5:00 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 Neal Ramee, Board Attorney.

Meeting Commencement
After noting that a quorum was present, Cory Satterfield, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. Bess Shuler requested a Moment of Silence and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Minutes
On a motion by Jerry Ethridge, seconded by Bobbie Sue Ormsby, the open session minutes of August 11, 2026, were unanimously approved.

Recognition of Inspiring Excellence Awards
Cameron Whitley introduced Angela McDonald, Principal of Ellerbe Middle School, who presented plaques to two of her staff members: Nikki Covington and Vanecia Johnson. These recipients were honored for their outstanding contributions and dedication to students and the school community.

Bus Rodeo Recognition
Cameron Whitley and Benji Parsons recognized Laura Gillespie, who has served as a Richmond County Schools bus driver for eight years. Laura Gillespie won the Richmond County Schools Bus Rodeo and advanced to the state competition, where she placed fourth among 33 drivers.

Benji Parsons shared that Laura Gillespie is an excellent driver and noted that she helped coordinate Richmond County Schools' first Bus Rodeo. Laura Gillespie added that she was the first female driver to place at the state level. The Bus Rodeo consists of an obstacle course designed to test drivers' skills.

The Board congratulated Laura Gillespie on this outstanding achievement.

LJ Bell Updates
Blair Bordeaux, President of Bordeaux Construction, presented an update on the design and construction of the new LJ Bell Elementary School. He reviewed two proposed project schedule options and recommended that the Board proceed with Option 2, which provides for an August 2029 opening. He explained that Option 2 provides additional time for design, cost estimating, value management, and owner input, as well as greater flexibility in utilizing the remaining needs-based grant funds. The schedule also allows for a more organized summer move-in and provides approximately five months of schedule float.

Bobbie Sue Ormsby asked about the drawback of Option 1.

Blair Bordeaux explained that Option 1 provides very little schedule float, leaving little room for delays related to regulatory review, weather, or other unforeseen circumstances. He also noted that the accelerated schedule could limit the ability to fully utilize the remaining needs-based grant funds.

Bobbie Sue Ormsby asked Blair Bordeaux to explain what is meant by “owner input” during the design process under Schedule Option 2.

Blair Bordeaux explained that Mosley, the project designer, will provide cost estimates and value-management options at major design milestones, allowing the district to evaluate the cost impact of design choices and determine how available funds should be allocated. Examples included exterior facade materials, color schemes, and decisions regarding the gymnasium and potential New Markets Tax Credit funding.

Blair Bordeaux further explained that Option 2 provides greater funding flexibility by maintaining contingencies and allowances for items such as rock and unsuitable soils. Once actual site construction costs are known, remaining funds may be redirected to additional project needs identified during the design process while remaining within the grant award.

Blair Bordeaux requested that the Board approve moving forward with Option 2 for the new LJ Bell Elementary School, with a fall 2029 opening.

Chairman Satterfield asked Blair Bordeaux to clarify the expected completion timeline for public knowledge, noting that the school is scheduled to open in August 2029 and asking whether the building would be substantially complete several months earlier.

Blair Bordeaux explained that the building should be complete, with only punch list items remaining, unless the New Markets Tax Credit or the use of remaining project funds creates additional work.

Ronald Tillman made a motion to approve moving forward with Option 2 for the new LJ Bell Elementary School, with an August 2029 opening. Jerry Ethridge second the motion and the Board voted unanimously.

2025-2025 Fiscal Year Annual Audit Presentation
Dale Smith, the district auditor, presented the financial statement for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2026. He noted that the report is labeled “Draft” due federal government being late releasing the federal compliance supplement. This document outlines required compliance procedures for all U.S. government departments, including the Department of Education. Although a draft version has been provided, the final copy has not yet been released.

Dale Smith stated that, despite this, his firm has completed all necessary testing on the district’s financial statements and does not anticipate any changes once the federal compliance supplement is issued. The “Draft” label will remain until the audit can be formally finalized.

The audit is divided into two major sections.

1. <u>Financial Section</u>

- The firm issued a clean, unmodified opinion, indicating that all amounts and disclosures are reliable and free from material misstatement or error.

Dale Smith provided an overview of key financial figures for the district’s General Fund as of June 30, 2026:

- Cash and Cash Equivalents: $2,094,907
- Total Assets: $2,126,425
- Total Liabilities: $485,139
- Total Fund Balance: $1,641,286

The Fund Balance represents an increase of about $26,000 compared to what was reported in June 2025.

Dale Smith reviewed the School Nutrition Program, including the program's revenues and expenditures for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026.

The School Nutrition Program reported a net increase in fund balance of $323,750 for the year, compared to a $120,000 loss in 2025 and a $476,000 loss in 2024.

The program experienced a year-over-year improvement of approximately $443,000, marking the second consecutive year of significant improvement. The improvement was primarily attributed to a reduction in operating expenditures, particularly salaries and benefits.

Cash balances increased by approximately $401,000, resulting in a year-end balance of approximately $1.4 million as of June 30, 2026.

Dale Smith noted that continued improvement in the program's financial performance could allow the School Nutrition Program to resume paying indirect costs in the near future.

2. Compliance Section

Dale Smith reported on the compliance audit, which included testing of the district's internal controls and the expenditure of state and federal grant awards. He explained that compliance audits are required annually for state and federal grants received by the district. This year, detailed testing was conducted for the School Fund, School Nutrition Program, and lottery funding.

Dale Smith reported that all three areas received unmodified audit opinions, indicating that no internal control weaknesses or reportable findings were identified. He explained that the audit included extensive testing of expenditures and payroll transactions and that, based on the testing performed, the district's funds appeared to be spent in accordance with the budgets adopted and approved by the Board.

Dale Smith also reviewed the required communications letter provided as part of the audit. He reported that there were no difficulties or disagreements with management, no uncorrected financial statement items, and no reportable issues identified during the audit.

Dale Smith concluded that the district received a very positive audit report, with no significant findings noted. He also stated that the district's financial condition had improved significantly during the year and that the district's finances were in good shape.

Dale Smith thanked the Board for their attention and invited members to contact him with any questions as they review the report.

Local Testing Report and Annual Local Testing Program Survey
Jennifer Taylor presented the Local Testing Report and Annual Local Testing Program Survey and requested Board approval of the survey for the 2026–2027 school year.

Jennifer Taylor explained that, in compliance with North Carolina General Statute 115C-174.12D, Richmond County Schools is required to complete and submit a Local Testing Program Survey to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. In even-numbered years, districts must also report their two-year averages for the number of local tests administered and the average testing time.

Two-Year Local Testing Averages

Jennifer Taylor reported that Richmond County Schools is below the state averages in both categories:

- Average number of tests: Richmond County Schools - 47; State average - 53.1
- Average testing time: Richmond County Schools - 40.5; State average - 59.2
- The district reduced its average number of tests from 57 to 47 and its average testing time from 64.5 to 40.5.
- Because the district is below the state averages in both categories, no action plan is required to reduce local testing.

2026–2027 Local Testing Program

Jennifer Taylor explained that local testing includes assessments initiated and implemented districtwide by the school system. It does not include federal or state mandated assessments or teacher directed assessments.

The 2026–2027 local testing program includes:

- Grades 4-8: i-Ready Reading Diagnostics
- Grades K-8: i-Ready Math Diagnostics
- Grade 2: CogAT (Cognitive Abilities Test) administered universally as a screener to identify students for AIG services.

Jerry Ethridge asked if the CogAT administered to all second-grade students?

Jennifer Taylor confirmed that the CogAT is administered universally to all second-grade students. She explained that, in the past, teachers identified individual students for testing; however, the district now administers the assessment to all students at the second-grade level.

On a motion by Jerry Ethridge, seconded by Bess Shuler, the Board voted unanimously to approve the annual local testing program.

Let's Go Learn Update

Melvin Ingram provided the Board with an update on Richmond County Schools' partnership with Let's Go Learn, a contracted service that provides a behavior support framework and professional development to help build staff capacity around student behavior. The partnership began as a pilot at two schools and has since expanded districtwide. The work focuses on moving from a reactive approach to student behavior to a more proactive approach that emphasizes early intervention, data-informed decision-making, problem-solving, coaching, and monitoring.

Melvin Ingram reported that from the 2024-2025 school year to the 2025-2026 school year, behavior referrals decreased from 7,053 to 6,675, a reduction of 378 referrals. Out-of-school suspension days decreased from 6,880 to 5,554, a reduction of 1,326 days. He noted that these reductions cannot be attributed solely to Let's Go Learn, but the data are consistent with the district's proactive approach to student behavior.

Melvin Ingram explained that Let's Go Learn fits within the district's existing Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) structure. At Tier 1, the focus is on establishing strong classroom environments and behavioral practices that support all students. At Tier 2, school-based teams identify additional targeted support for students who need them. Teams use data, observations, and structured problem-solving to determine appropriate support rather than simply escalating from one consequence to another. The process includes training, problem solving, coaching, and monitoring to support consistent implementation.

Ronald Tillman asked who serves on the behavior problem-solving teams at each school?

Melvin Ingram explained that the teams include school counselors, administrators, teachers, and a lead teacher or coach. The teams also work with teachers who need support.

Bess Shuler asked if the behavior problem-solving team is replacing the school assistance team?

Melvin Ingram explained that the behavior problem-solving team is in addition to the school assistance team. The behavior team focuses specifically on establishing strong behavioral supports and ensuring appropriate Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions are in place.

Daryl Mason asked how the district plans to support teachers who may have stopped submitting behavior referrals because they feel that referrals are not appropriately addressed or that submitting a referral does not result in meaningful action. He noted that some teachers view the referral process as a waste of time when the only response they receive is an administrative conference with the student.

Melvin Ingram explained that the district looks at behavior referral data in conjunction with the Teacher Working Conditions Survey to identify patterns or concerns related to how discipline is being addressed at individual schools. When the data indicates that teachers feel behavior is not being appropriately addressed, the district can have conversations with the school leadership team to determine what may be occurring and what additional support may be needed.

Melvin Ingram emphasized that the goal is not simply to reduce the number of behavior referrals. The district wants to ensure that student behavior is appropriately addressed, that teachers feel supported, and that students receive the assistance they need to successfully return to the classroom. He noted that there may be underlying factors contributing to repeated behavior concerns that need to be identified and addressed.

Daryl Mason expressed concern that principals may feel pressure to keep referral numbers low because the district is focused on reducing referrals.

Melvin Ingram responded that the district has not directed principals to avoid acting on referrals simply to reduce the numbers. He stated that the Superintendent has emphasized the importance of addressing behavior at the school level and that the district will support schools in doing so.

Chairman Satterfield commended Richmond County Schools for the work being done to support students and teachers and address student behavior.

New LJ Bell - Bordeaux Construction Manager at Risk Contract
Steven King presented the Construction Manager at Risk (CMaR) contract between Richmond County Schools and Bordeaux Construction for the Board's consideration and approval. The contract has been reviewed and recommended for approval by Tharrington Smith.

Steven King explained that the contract consists of three fee categories:

- Preconstruction Fee: $262,188, which is the only fee established in the contract at this time.
- Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP): To be determined after the design is completed and the project is competitively bid by the contractor.
- Construction Fee: Bordeaux Construction's fee for construction-related services, including overhead and profit, which will be established through a future contract amendment.

Steven King requested that the Board approve the preconstruction portion of the contract in the amount of $262,188. He explained that amendments to the contract would be brought back to the Board for approval once the GMP and construction fee have been determined.

Scotty Baldwin made a motion to approve the preconstruction fee in the amount of $262,188. Ronald Tillman seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously to approve the motion.

Construction Updates
Steven King presented the following construction updates to the Board:

East Rockingham Elementary School	• Installed +-450 LF fencing to stop ATV's
LJ Bell Elementary School (Hawthorne Ave)	• Exploratory demo at gym week of 9-7-26 • Weekly design/schedule meetings with RCS, Moseley, Bordeaux
Mineral Springs Elementary School	• 3 Mobile classrooms ready for surplus
Rockingham Middle School Auditorium Remodel	• Auditorium remodel – Complete
Richmond Senior High School	• Softball infield grading – Work to start this month • Baseball additional fencing – Complete • Baseball sound system – Planning • Football/stadium sound system – Planning • Graduation stage – Planning • Fire alarm system replacement – Planning • Partial roof replacement – Planning

*WIP = Work in Progress

Policies for Adoption
Cameron Whitley presented the conclusion of the 30-day review period, asking the Board to adopt amendments for the following policies.

Policy Numbers:
- Policy: 2200 Election of Officers Organization of Board
- Policy: 3510 Religious-Based Exemptions from School Programs
- Policy: 5150-7313 Reporting to External Agencies
- Policy: 6220 Operation of School Nutrition Services
- Policy: 6402 Participation by Historically Underutilized Businesses

- Policy: 6420 Contracts with the Board
- Policy: 6442 Vendor List
- Policy: 9115 Prequalification of Bidders for Construction Projects
- Policy: 9120 Bidding For Construction Work
- Policy: 9125 Participation by Minority Business
- Policy: 9300 Naming Facilities

Prior to approval of the policies, Board Attorney Neal Ramee recommended an additional revision to the policy governing the election of Board officers to incorporate the statutory requirement that, in a Board election year, the organizational meeting take place within 60 days after newly elected Board members are sworn in. He explained that the existing policy would generally meet this requirement, but the additional language would account for circumstances in which the regular organizational meeting schedule did not.

During discussion of the policies presented for approval, Daryl Mason expressed concern about removing provisions related to minority and historically underutilized businesses. He stated that removing references to minority businesses and related provisions could further disadvantage minority and small businesses and hinder progress toward a more inclusive community. Mr. Mason stated that he could not support the changes to those policies and wanted his opposition reflected in the record.

Ronald Tillman shared Daryl Mason's concerns, particularly regarding the removal of language specifically addressing minority communities. He expressed concern about the broader impact of eliminating policies and language intended to address groups that have historically faced barriers and stated that, as a minority Board member, he found it difficult to support those changes. Ronald Tillman also expressed concern that similar changes were beginning to affect schools and could negatively impact efforts to create an inclusive school community.

Neal Ramee explained that the General Assembly eliminated the state's Historically Underutilized Business Office and the requirements associated with it, prompting the recommended policy changes. He noted that some requirements previously applicable to minority businesses now apply to small businesses and that the Board could approve the current revisions while directing staff and legal counsel to explore whether a new or revised policy could appropriately address the concerns raised under current law.

On a motion by Scotty Baldwin, seconded by Jerry Ethridge, the Board voted 4 to 3 to adopt the policies as presented. Yes votes: Chairman Satterfield, Scotty Baldwin, Jerry Ethridge, and Bobbie Sue Ormsby. No votes: Ronald Tillman, Daryl Mason, and Bess Shuler

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Policies for Review
Cameron Whitley presented the following policies for a 30-day review.
Policy Numbers/Regulation Code:

- Policy: 2340 Parliamentary Procedures
- Policy: 2210 Duties of Officers

Board Voting Delegates
Dr. Joe Ferrell informed the board that it is time to submit names for voting delegates for the NCSBA. Jerry Ethridge, Ronald Tillman, Scotty Baldwin, and Bess Shuler volunteered to be listed as potential delegates. The NCSBA's annual delegate meeting will take place at 4 p.m. on Monday, November 9, 2026, in Greensboro, NC, as part of the Annual Conference, which allows school boards to engage in NCSBA advocacy and decision-making.

Board Members' Comments

Chairman Satterfield

- Convocation was great
- Schools have great energy
- Congrats to the faculty and staff
- The Board would like to go on a party spree this year just to say “Thank-You” to everyone.

Scotty Baldwin

- The band will play for the NHRA race again this year. The race is scheduled for September 25th at Rockingham Dragway. Thankful the businesses want to highlight our students.

Jerry Ethridge

- Support our Raiders
- Rockingham Middle School’s auditorium and is beautiful

Bobbie Sue Ormsby

- Visited schools and they were very inviting
- Love seeing the positive social media posts on Facebook
- The Ed Foundation will soon be giving $1,000 to one teacher at each school.

Bess Shuler

- Thanks to all the school staff
- Thanks to Ed Foundation for giving prizes during Convocation.

Daryl Mason

- When you celebrate and appreciate staff they work harder

Superintendent’s Comments

- Friday is September 11th - 25 years since 9/11. We will pause at Friday night’s football game to remember that day, the lives lost, and honoring military veterans and first responders.
- October’s Board meeting will be on Monday, October 12 due to the Fall Law Conference.
- The yellow and gray folders contain information about the upcoming conferences.
- Upcoming LEAD training information has been provided to the Board.

Cory Satterfield citing NCGS 143-318.11(a)(1), (3), and (6) requested a motion to go into closed session.

On a motion by Ronald Tillman, seconded by Jerry Ethridge, the board voted unanimously to go into closed session at 6:37 p.m.

On a motion by Jerry Ethridge, seconded by Bobbie Sue Ormsby, the board voted unanimously to reconvene into open session at 7:31p.m.

Personal

Danielle Meeks presented the personnel report and addendum for Board approval.

On a motion by Jerry Ethridge, seconded by Daryl Mason, the board voted unanimously to approve the personnel report and addendum.

Chairman Satterfield stated that a motion was needed to amend the agenda to include litigation against social media companies.

Ronald Tillman made a motion to amend the agenda to include litigation against social media companies. Scotty Baldwin seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously to approve the motion.

Chairman Satterfield stated that a motion was needed to approve a retainer agreement for legal representation by the firm.

Scotty Baldwin made a motion to approve the retainer agreement for legal representation by the firm. Bobbie Sue Ormsby seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously to approve the motion.

Adjourn
There being no further business, on a motion by Scotty Baldwin, seconded by Bobbie Sue Ormsby, Chairman Satterfield adjourned the meeting at 7:38 p.m.