

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, August 13, 2024, at the County of Rockbridge Administration Building.

Present: Chairman Neil Whitmore; Trustees Corey Berkstresser, Catie Brown, Lenna Ojure, Kathy Burant; Superintendent Phillip Thompson, Deputy Clerk Timothy Martino.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Whitmore called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA: None

STUDENT / STAFF RECOGNITION:

Mr. Paige Owens, Director of Technology and Career and Technical Education, recognized Ms. Cheyenne Clark, student, and Ms. Amanda Grimm, teacher, who attended the FCCLA National Leadership Conference this past summer and recognized them for their achievements. During the conference, both were honored with awards and recognitions. Mr. Owens highlighted Ms. Clark's accomplishment in the "Say YES to FCS" competition, where she earned a silver medal. Ms. Clark also signed a commitment to pursue a career in teaching and will begin her journey this fall at Johnson and Wales University. Additionally, Ms. Grimm, one of the FCCLA advisors at RCHS, was recognized as a Master Adviser at the conference.

CONSENT AGENDA

Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Ojure, the board approved the following items on the Consent Agenda:

- Minutes: 1) May 30, 2024 [Special Meeting]; 2) June 11, 2024 [Regular Meeting]; 3) July 18, 2024 [Special Meeting]; 4) July 29, 2024 [Special Meeting]
- Field Trip Requests
- Fundraiser Requests
- Application for Use of Facilities
- Surplus Vehicles
- Religious Exemption Request
- Appointments and Resignations

Appointments

Professional Staff

Kinley Thomas, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, effective 2024-2025 school year
Alexis Barbee, Teacher, Fairfield Elementary School, effective 2024-2025 school year

Support Staff

Amy Hayes, Secretary, Fairfield Elementary School, effective August 19, 2024
Alyssa Swisher, Teacher Assistant, Maury River Middle School, effective August 14, 2024
Amanda Hough, Teacher Assistant, Maury River Middle School, effective August 14, 2024
Jyoti Bhandari Pandey, Teacher Assistant, Rockbridge County High School, effective August 14, 2024

Professional Staff

Resignation

Sylvie Slusser, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, resigning effective July 26, 2024
Ann Knepper, Teacher, Rockbridge County Public Schools, resigning effective June 30, 2024

Support Staff

Resignation

Lisa Lawrence, Teacher Assistant, Rockbridge County High School, resigning effective August 1, 2024
Jatniel Carvajal Rodriguez, Community School Grant Coordinator, Rockbridge County High School, resigning effective June 30, 2024

Fall Coaches 2024-2025

RCHS

Football

Martin Cox, Head Coach
Peter Lampman, Assistant Coach
Conner Christofferson, Assistant Coach
Irvin Jones, Assistant Coach
Ben Kabzinski, Assistant Coach
Dan Taylor, Assistant Coach
Taylor Austin, Assistant Coach
Alex Lanktree, Assistant Coach

Golf

David Miller, Head Coach
Boys' Cross Country
Julie Tisone, Head Coach
Louise Uffelman, Assistant Coach
Dave Salge, Volunteer Coach
Girls' Cross Country
Julie Tisone, Head Coach
Jen Ludtke, Assistant Coach
Jennifer Showalter, Volunteer Coach

Cheerleading

Shannon Bryan, Head Coach
Ellie Kabzinski, Assistant Coach
Sarah Parnell, Volunteer Coach
Lindsey Ramsey, Volunteer Coach

Volleyball

Gabriel Wagner, Head Coach
Haileigh Patterson, Assistant Coach
Justin Madsen, JV Head Coach
Jaden Harrison, JV Head Coach

Maury River Middle School

Volleyball

Candace Camden, Head Coach

Cross Country

Leyna Hansley, Head Coach

Football

Daniel Taylor, Head Coach
Irvine Jones, Assistant Coach

Cheer

Erin Poulin, Head Coach

Winter Coaches 2023-2024

RCHS

Wrestling

Logan Davis, Head Coach

Club Sponsors

RCHS

Newspaper, Mary Holton
Yearbook, Brian Hamelman
SCA, Jessika Crance
Academic Team, Patrick Bradley
Academic Team Assistant, Chris McGrath
National Honor Society, Stephanie Brooks

MRMS

FFA, Molly Marshall
NJHS, Courtney Diette
Destination Imagination, Sarah Shultz
Gifted, Lisa Gay-Milliken
Activities Coordinator, Tasha Polly

CES

Gifted, Elizabeth Schmidt

FES

Destination Imagination, Cathy Whitesell

NBES

Gifted, Beth McElroy

MVES

Gifted, Brandon Smith

- Business Items
 - Approved Monthly Financials for June 25, 2024 in the amount of \$1,295,245.86.
 - Approved appropriation for NBE HVAC Replacement in the amount of \$3,283,226.00.
 - Approved appropriations to Fund 50 for new grants in the amount of 218,488.00.
 - Approved appropriations to Fund 50 for carryover grants in the amount of \$971,359.00.
 - Approved Monthly Financials for August 13, 2024 in the amount of \$4,459,492.18.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

One person addressed the board concerning the psychological safety of our K-5 students, specifically regarding the explicit content in books available to them.

One patron addressed the board as the parent of a student who graduated from RCHS in 2021. The parent expressed appreciation for the Dual Enrollment (DE) program at RCHS. The parent shared that her son entered Virginia Tech with 31 credits, which allowed him to immediately focus on his major during his first year. As a result, he was able to graduate a year early. The patron expressed deep gratitude for the opportunity her son had to take those classes at RCHS.

BUDGET PLANNING: None

COMMITTEE REPORTS: None

INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:

Mr. Timothy Martino, Assistant Superintendent, informed the Board that all six schools in the district are fully accredited by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). He shared the School Accreditation reports with the Board, highlighting key areas of focus. Mr. Martino specifically pointed out the Science section, discussing the Science and Engineering Questions, which differ from traditional multiple-choice questions. He explained that the district will support teachers in understanding these question types to ensure student success on the tests. Mr. Martino carefully reviewed the accreditation reports for each school, celebrating their achievements while also addressing areas for improvement. For example, he noted the need to strengthen Science at NBE, address the Achievement Gap in English and Math at MRMS, and tackle the Achievement Gap in Math and Chronic Absenteeism at RCHS. He emphasized that while there is much to celebrate in our schools, there is also important work ahead. Mr. Martino expressed pride in the leadership at each school and commended the teachers for their hard work and dedication.

INFORMATIONAL ITEM:

Mr. Rick Bain, Supervisor of Human Resources, presented information regarding the orientation for new professional staff at RCPS. This year, the orientation program was expanded to four days due to the extensive amount of information provided, which was previously condensed into just two days. RCPS welcomed twenty-five new staff members, including eight elementary school teachers, eleven middle school teachers, four high school teachers, and two new division staff members. Among them, six are first-year teachers, and nineteen are experienced educators, which is a positive addition to the district. The orientation activities included a welcome from the superintendent, introductions of the central office staff, overviews of benefits and payroll, and details on the mentoring program. Professional development sessions covered topics such as Infinite Campus,

Canvas, Clever, Smartfind, and an introduction to Project-Based Learning (PBL). Sergeant Wimer provided a safety overview as well. One significant change this year is the restructuring of the mentorship program, now based on a tiered system. This system includes a school-based mentor, a division-level mentor, and directed professional development (PD) sessions over 2-4 days focused on addressing the specific needs of new teachers. The district is continuing with the HOPE (Having Opportunities with Professional Educators) initiative. Additionally, a new teacher-support level has been introduced. There will be targeted PD to ensure teachers feel supported and are successful in their roles. A new component of the orientation program was a teacher panel, where six veteran teachers answered a wide range of questions, both professional and personal, from the new staff members. This initiative, along with the ongoing support from the HR department, is designed to build strong relationships and ensure new teachers feel welcomed and supported within the district.

Mr. Randy Walters, Chief Operations Officer, provided updates on three key projects:

NBES HVAC Renovation:

A major HVAC renovation project took place at NBES. Work commenced the day after school ended, and the contractors are now 95% complete. Mr. Walters noted that Bill Kessinger, a retired maintenance worker for RCPS, assisted the HVAC team throughout the project. While the building is now air-conditioned, Mr. Walters expressed his gratitude to the staff who worked all summer without air conditioning. The only tasks remaining are a final walkthrough and reconciliation of the punch list. Additionally, the custodial staff managed to wax the floors and clean the building before the teachers returned last week.

Transportation Office Relocation:

The team moved into the new transportation office three weeks ago, though they are still in the process of fully settling in. The base station radio tower, currently located on Wallace Street, will soon be relocated to the new transportation office. They are also working through the punch list for the new building.

Rockbridge Innovation Center Update:

Significant progress was made on the RIC over the summer. A major milestone was achieved when Dominion Power connected electricity to the building. This allowed the contractors to condition the building, enabling the proper installation of the HVAC system.

ACTION ITEMS:

Dr. Thompson presented on the "Family and School Partnership," expressing gratitude for the improvements in chronic absenteeism at Rockbridge County High School, while emphasizing that there is still much work to be done. Mr. Shaun Sparks, Assistant Principal, Rockbridge County High School, also addressed the Board, explaining the continued focus on student success, particularly through consistent school attendance.

Mr. Sparks discussed how the approach to addressing absenteeism has evolved. While the traditional focus on truancy and the Code of Virginia remains important, the concept of chronic absenteeism represents a newer, more comprehensive approach. Regardless of the reason for a student's absence, chronic absenteeism acknowledges the academic impact of missed school days, which ultimately hinders student success. The high school's strategy now includes a stronger partnership with families, emphasizing the importance of communication. Chronic absenteeism affects every student population at RCHS, and the school has utilized resources like Attendance Works to develop their new plan. The overarching goal is to help students develop positive habits that will contribute to their success both in school and later in life. A key proposal is that students who are chronically absent may lose credit. The focus is on defining success individually for each student. To support this initiative, Ms. Bridget Ramsey has been appointed as the attendance clerk, serving as the primary point of contact with families.

When a student misses three days of school, she will call home to determine the cause. Additionally, a Student Support Team (SST) will be involved in addressing attendance issues. The SST will implement interventions tailored to the specific needs of each student. The school is also working closely with families to establish clear communication lines, helping them understand the importance of staying connected with the school even as their children progress beyond elementary school.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Ojure, the board voted 5-0, to approve Policy JED-R1 [Attendance Regulation].

Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Ojure, seconded by Trustee Brown, the board voted 5-0, to approve the School Crisis Plans, as presented.

NEW BUSINESS:

Chairman Whitmore extended his warmest wishes for a successful and enriching new academic year. He expressed his enthusiasm for the many exciting developments taking place within RCPS, noting that these advancements bring a deep sense of pride to everyone who lives and works in the Rockbridge area. He highlighted that the remarkable achievements of our students and staff are truly commendable and are a testament to the dedication and hard work of our entire community. He stated that these positive changes and accomplishments not only benefit our educational environment but also reflect the strong spirit and commitment of our district. His sincere hope is that this year continues to build on these successes, fostering growth and excellence across all levels.

SCHOOL BOARD

The next regular meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, September 10, 2024 / 5:30 PM / Location: County of Rockbridge Administration Building, 150 South Main Street, Lexington, Virginia.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Brown, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 6:35 p.m.


Neil D. Whitmore, Chairman
Timothy J. Martino, Deputy Clerk of the Board