

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, December 10, 2024, at the County of Rockbridge Administration Building.

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

CALL TO ORDER

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

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA: None

STUDENT / STAFF RECOGNITION:

Mr. Rick Bain, Supervisor of Human Resources, introduced employees who received the REDOT Award, [Rockbridge Employees Doing Outstanding Things]. This is an award designed to highlight the great things our employees are doing. This award is given quarterly, with nominations by a co-worker or an administrator. There are sixteen employees who were recognized during the second quarter:

Christopher Braun	- Central Elementary School
Karen Duff	- Central Elementary School
Lorin Wilhelm	- Fairfield Elementary School
Cathy Whitesell	- Fairfield Elementary School
Katrina Leonard	- Fairfield Elementary School
Tate Ramsey	- Mountain View Elementary School
Gregory Shanks	- Natural Bridge Elementary School
Carson Richards	- Natural Bridge Elementary School
Steve Tomlin	- Natural Bridge Elementary School
Jack Riley	- Maury River Middle School
Lisa Gay-Milliken	- Maury River Middle School
Erin Poulin	- Maury River Middle School
Amy Henson	- Rockbridge County High School
Andy Martin	- Rockbridge County High School
Holly Ferguson	- Central Office (Family and Community Liaison)
Rhonda Humphries	- Central Office (Clerk of the School Board)

Mr. Timothy Martino, Assistant Superintendent, provided an overview of the Virginia Board of Education's Continuous Improvement. Rockbridge County High School demonstrated an increase in the Graduation and Completion Index (GCI) for each of the past three years with a total increase across the three years of four percent or more; and demonstrates a decrease in the dropout rate for each of the past three years, with the total reduction across three years of 15 percent or more of the first year's dropout rate. Chairman Whitmore presented the Award to Dr. Mike Craft, Principal, Rockbridge County High School.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

- Minutes: 1) November 12, 2024 [Regular Meeting]; 2) November 14, 2024 [Joint Meeting with Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors]; December 4, 2024 [Discipline Committee Hearing]
- Field Trip Requests
- Fundraiser Requests
- Application for Use of Facilities
- Appointments and Resignations

Appointments

Professional Staff

Cecily Bramhall, Teacher, Central Elementary School, effective January 3, 2025

Terence McCabe, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, effective January 3, 2025

Appointments

Support Staff

Wendolyn Gilmer, Teacher Assistant, Rockbridge County Public Schools, effective December 11, 2024

Cory Stout, Teacher Assistant, Rockbridge County Public Schools, effective December 11, 2024

Shauna Burden, Teacher Assistant, Maury River Middle School, effective December 11, 2024

Natalie Nelson, Teacher Assistant, Central Elementary School, effective January 3, 2024

Substitutes

Olivia Endo
Mary Ruley
Garret Huffman
Ashley Brogan
Reagan Woody

Food Service

Kimberly Buchanan
Richard Skipper

Custodian

Samantha Moran

Professional Staff

Leave of Absence

Amy Zickafoose, Teacher Assistant, Rockbridge County High School, effective November 11, 2024

Support Staff

Resignation

Robert Ayers, Custodian, Rockbridge County High School, resigning effective November 15, 2024

Amanda Hough, Teacher Assistant, Maury River Middle School, resigning effective December 6, 2024

Professional Staff

Retirement

Jeffrey Bailey, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, retiring effective December 4, 2024

Winter Coaches 2024-2025

RCHS

Wrestling

Travis Tomlin, Volunteer Coach

• **Business Items**

- Approved appropriation for Rockbridge Innovation Center in the amount of \$200,000.00.
- Approved request to authorize the Treasurer of Rockbridge County to pay debt service in the amount of \$356,590.63.
- Approved wire debt service for duly appropriated 2023 VPSA Bond funds in the amount of \$344,372.00.
- Approved appropriations to Fund 50 for news grants in the amount of \$527,313.00.
- Approved Monthly Financials in the amount of \$3,866,026.04.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

BUDGET PLANNING:

Mr. Jason Kirby, Chief Business Officer, provided an update on Fiscal Year 2026. A Budget Work Session was held on December 5, 2024 with discussion of potential budget priorities including employee salaries, health insurance, rising non-personnel costs, and potential needed positions. There was also discussion regarding the numbers for the second year of the budget biennium for the state which includes our Local Composite Index (LCI) of .4847 and our potential estimated ADM and how those numbers may impact our upcoming budget. The FY26 state budget also includes a compensation supplement of 3% for SOQ positions, about 45% of RCPS positions, but the challenge moving forward is looking at the rising LCI which means we get less money from the state, while also dealing with a smaller enrollment number. Administration will continue to analyze the internal budget requests and projections. The first budget for FY26 is expected to be released by the Governor later in December as we work towards the next budget discussion with the Board of Supervisors in January 2025.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: None

INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:

Ms. Holly Ferguson, Family and Community Liaison, provided information on Rockbridge County Public Schools Supports through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. Ms. Ferguson stated that students are classified as McKinney-Vento if they are living in the following places due to a lack of a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence: Emergency or transitional shelter; motel, hotel, or campground due to lack of an adequate alternative; car, park, public place, bus or train station, or abandoned building; doubled-up with relatives or friends due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reasons; migratory child, if also living in one of the aforementioned nighttime residence. Ms. Ferguson provided examples of assistance that has been provided such as students have received clothing, blankets, air mattresses, sleeping bags, personal care items, and other goods as needed;

- All families identified were assisted in signing up for Thanksgiving meals and the toy drive through Feed the Need Foundation;
- Two students have accessed free vision exams and glasses;
- Two families have received bunk beds through Care Portal.
- Trustee Berkstresser inquired if there are community partners.
 - Ms. Ferguson stated that Care Portal is utilized.
 - Trustee Ojure inquired who operates Care Portal.
 - Ms. Ashley Rhodenizer, Director of Special Education, stated that Care Portal is a national organization with a liaison, Ms. Rhonda Sedovy, in Rockbridge County.
- Trustee Ojure inquired as to the role of Ms. Ferguson.
 - Ms. Rhodenizer stated that Ms. Ferguson builds a relationship with the family to help make decisions and checks up on students.
- Trustee Brown inquired how to bridge the gap and also how students are identified.
 - Ms. Ferguson stated that she is in constant contact with the school counselors. The assistance is based on need; she then creates referrals and provides resources and organizations so that parents can help themselves. Students are identified through school registration and as the need arises.
 - Mr. Martino stated that families who may be in crisis mode are assisted by Ms. Ferguson who helps them understand and helps them to gain access so that needs are met.

Mr. Martino provided an update on Fine Arts in Rockbridge County Public Schools. The following are highlights:

Elementary: Year three of art expansion; two full time art teachers; all learners receive art instruction once a week; music instruction access all grade levels, multiple performances each school year.

Secondary: Programs continue to grow as follows:

- MRMS [2022 - 137 students; 2023 - 258 students; 2024 - 282 students];
- RCHS [2022 - 313 students; 2023 - 447 students; 2024 - 487 students];
- The Trivium continues to win yearly awards with Brian Hamelman;
- Erin Allen and Miranda Fitzgerald lead our theatre program which is in its fourth year.

Central Office: Every two months student artwork is displayed in the main hallway.

Mr. Paige Owens, Director of Technology and Career and Technical Education, provided an update on the Rockbridge Innovation Center. He stated that there has been astounding progress and that the Certificate of Occupancy was received on December 6, 2024. Teachers are moving furniture and supplies into classrooms in preparation to open on January 6, 2025, even though there may be some items that may arrive late. The Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundation Funding Campaign raised over \$200,000 in promises for equipment, items for the Community Room, and firefighter equipment. The Community Room is nearing completion with speakers and microphone in place. He stated that training is beginning for staff in the operation of machines and technology. He stated that there are still a few punch-list items to be taken care of. He expressed his appreciation to Mr. Kurt Bennett, RCPS Maintenance and project Clerk of the Works for keeping the project on track.

- Chairman Whitmore expressed his appreciation of enthusiasm shown with this project in seeing the project come together. He reflected that it will have a tremendous impact on the future of our students who stay in Rockbridge County, and also for those who move away from the community.
- Superintendent Thompson stated that there will be a ribbon cutting ceremony to include public officials and patrons, to be scheduled after the holiday.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS: None

ACTION ITEMS:

Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Ojure, the board voted 5-0, to approve the 2025-2026 Calendar, as presented.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Ojure, the board voted 5-0, to approve the Rockbridge County Public Schools Cell Phone Policy, as presented.

- Chairman Whitmore stated that he initially had concerns about taking possession of student property, but policy allows that a student can have access after an emergency or crisis situation has been contained, once the "OK" has been given by administration, but not during the actual event.
- Superintendent Thompson stated that a survey was completed by teachers who are in agreement with the policy, along with parents.
 - Chairman Whitmore stated that the survey results reflected consistency and led to a positive policy.
- Trustee Burant echoed that the removal of cell phone distraction allows for students to learn and pay attention during instructional time.
- Superintendent Thompson stated that there are other school divisions who adopted a similar policy in August 2024 and are pleased with the outcome being more student personal interaction and conversations in the cafeteria and hallways.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Ojure, the board voted 5-0, to approve the Rockbridge County High School Program of Studies, as presented.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Brown, seconded by Trustee Berkstresser, the board voted 5-0, to approve the Maury River Middle School Program of Studies, as presented.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Ojure, the board voted 5-0, to approve the Rockbridge Church Lease Renewal, as presented.

NEW BUSINESS:

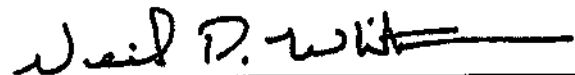
Trustee Burant provided an overview of a few events held by Rockbridge County Public Schools over the past month, such as the CTE Fair at Maury River School and the Rockbridge County High School PTSA Craft Fair. She stated that she is concluding the collection of memorabilia for the Rockbridge Innovation Center.

SCHOOL BOARD

The next regular meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, January 14, 2025 / 5:30 PM / Location: County of Rockbridge Administration Building, Lexington, Virginia.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Brown, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 6:25 p.m.



Neil D. Whitmore, Chairman



Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board