

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, December 14, 2021. The meeting was held at Maury River Middle School.

Present: Chairman Wendy Lovell; Trustees Corey Berkstresser, Kathy Burant, Heather Hostetter, and Neil Whitmore; Superintendent Phillip Thompson and Clerk Rhonda Humphries.

CALL TO ORDER

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

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA:

Superintendent Thompson addressed the two previous incidents that took place at Rockbridge County School. The following are his comments:

"I think it is safe to say that most within our community are aware that we had two appalling events occur at Rockbridge County High School a little over a week ago. One of these events was an Anti-Semitic display by two students. And on another day in a completely unrelated event, another student brought a handgun into the school. Obviously, both of these events are completely unacceptable, disruptive, and potentially harmful to the well-being of our students and community, and acts such as these will not be tolerated by our school division. With that said, these two events will not define Rockbridge County High School. We have wonderful students and a dedicated staff and these events will not permanently stain their school. Since these events, I've had many conversations with Dr. Craft and he and I are in agreement that we need to use these events to create an even stronger Rockbridge County High School."

Dr. Mike Craft provided a brief overview of the recent events at Rockbridge County High School. The following are his comments:

Thank you Dr. Thompson. Madam Chair and members of the board I would like to provide a brief overview of the recent events at the high school. On behalf of Rockbridge County High School, I would like to apologize to everyone that was affected by the hurtful and disturbing anti-Semitic post initiated by two of our students. This is not what we stand for at Rockbridge County High School, and it is not indicative of our student body as a whole. We are taking positive steps to educate our students as to why such actions are inappropriate, and we will use all available resources to prevent events such as this in the future. We have several initiatives in the planning stage; however, these plans are subject to change to best meet the needs of our school community: These activities are to run concurrently.

We will be providing professional development for our teachers and staff. This professional development will focus on how to identify and discourage inappropriate or disparaging behaviors, and the proper procedures for dealing with inappropriate behaviors. The content will be tailored to the unique needs of our building and will utilize people with specific expertise, along with our school staff. The first formal professional development is planned to be on a January workday.

We will also be providing educational opportunities for our students. We are currently working to schedule our first speaker to provide assemblies during the school day, and we plan to also provide an after school event for the public to attend. A combination of small group meetings and larger assemblies will be used to promote a positive school climate where everyone feels safe and welcome at Rockbridge County High School.

We are currently forming advisory groups that represent as many aspects of our school community as possible, including different backgrounds, beliefs, and life experiences. The purpose of these groups is to open a dialogue among students, to gather information, and to increase understanding and tolerance in our school environment. Through these conversations, we will explore how to capitalize on our current strengths and how to improve where weaknesses may exist.

These are a few of the many strategies that we will utilize to ensure we are providing a positive environment for all of our students.

It is an administrator's nightmare to discover that a weapon has been brought onto school property. On December 2, a student brought a gun to Rockbridge County High School, and thanks to alert students and staff, we were able to locate the weapon and confiscate it within minutes and without incident. I would like to thank all involved at Rockbridge County High School and our Sheriff's Office personnel for the professional way this incident was handled.

There a multitude of decisions that have to be made in these situations, and my focus was making sure that everyone in our building was safe and secure. Thankfully, that is how this situation ended. Going forward, school safety will continue to be a primary focus of our school. We will continue to evaluate and modify our procedures and safeguards to best keep our school safe. Mr. Walters will have some comments on school safety in RCPS shortly.

In closing, I would like to remind everyone that a student's education extends beyond Rockbridge County High School. I encourage everyone to be active participants in your students' education and to partner with Rockbridge County High School to give our students the best education possible.

Rockbridge County High School is a great school. This is made possible by a tireless professional staff, and the best students in the world. Let us use the recent events to grow as a school community, and be better than ever.

Mr. Randy Walters, Chief Operations Manager, provided an overview of safety measures the school division has put in place to increase safety across all campuses of Rockbridge County Public Schools.

- Chairman Lovell expressed her appreciation to Mr. Walters for reminding the board and community for what has been done for our school community regarding safety.
- Chairman Lovell expressed her appreciation to Dr. Craft for handling these very difficult situations with grace and strength.

RECOGNITION / SPECIAL PRESENTATION:

Ms. Debbie Pruett, Vice-President, Rockbridge County Public Schools Educational Foundation provided an overview of grants that have been provided by the foundation to teachers of Rockbridge County Public Schools.

The following employees are a recipient for the November RCPS REDOT (Rockbridge Employees Doing Outstanding Things) Award:

Jamie Vest Youngblood, Rockbridge County High School
 Penni Allen, Maury River Middle School
 Marlene Coffey, Maury River Middle School
 Phyllis Cash, Maury River Middle School
 Tonya Fontenot, Maury River Middle School
 Jennifer Floyd, Mountain View Elementary School
 Katie Smith, Mountain View Elementary School
 Sue Ellen Haver, Central Elementary School
 Jen Ludtke, Central Elementary School/Central Office
 Christy Imler, Fairfield Elementary School
 Jane Swartz, Fairfield Elementary School
 Kristyn Mazingo, Natural Bridge Elementary School

CONSENT AGENDA

Upon recommendation by Chairman Lovell, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Burant, the board voted 5-0, the following items on the Consent Agenda:

- Minutes: 1) November 9, 2021 [Regular Meeting]; 2) November 10, 2021 [Special Meeting]; 3) November 15, 2021 [Joint Meeting with Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors]
- Field Trip / Bus Use Requests
- Fundraising Requests
- Application for Use of Facilities
- Appointments and Resignations

APPOINTMENTS

Professional Staff

Vicki Stevens, Principal, Maury River Middle School, effective February 1, 2022

Support Staff

Ray Hotinger, Custodian, Central Office, time-sheet, effective January 4, 2022

Car Driver

Jeffrey McCray

Lyle Grant

Substitute Teachers

John Whitelock, III
Kerrilyn Cooper
Leah Johnson

Winter Coaches 2021-2022**Rockbridge County High School****Girls' Basketball**

Graceon Armstrong, Girls' Assistant Basketball Coach

Retirement**Professional Staff**

Donna Straub, Teacher, Central Elementary School, retiring end of the
2021 – 2022 school year
Gail Clark, Teacher, Mountain View Elementary School, retiring end of the
2021 – 2022 school year
Cindy Snyder, Teacher, Fairfield Elementary School, retiring end of the
2021 – 2022 school year
Earnestine Runkle, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, retiring end of the
2021 – 2022 school year
Kimberly Loy, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, retiring end of the
2021 – 2022 school year

Retirement**Support Staff**

Alecia Armentrout, Payroll Specialist, Central Office, retiring June 30, 2022
Linda Weeks, Bus Driver, Transportation, retiring effective November 30, 2021

Business Items

- Approved debt service payments due January 15, 2022 to US Bank for Rockbridge County Public School VPSA in the amount of \$502,511.74.
- Approved appropriations to Fund 50 in the amount of \$61,817.00.
- Approved Monthly Financials in the amount of \$3,355,600.81.

Superintendent Thompson announced that as part of the Consent Agenda approval, Ms. Vicki Stevens, has been named as Principal of Maury River Middle School.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Chairman Lovell stated the guidelines for the Public Comment period and added that one person may speak for three minutes one time during the Public Comment period.

Seven patrons addressed the board requesting the banning of the Confederate flag and imagery from Rockbridge County Public Schools.

One patron addressed the board stating that there is a lack of discipline in schools and that people in charge need to move out because they are not doing their job.

One patron addressed the board stating that the school division has violated rights of parents through action and policy; feels it is not the school's role to teacher children about sexuality; feels that some books in the libraries need to be removed if criminal offenses are described; asked for the immediate resignation of Dr. Thompson. Patron stated that the list of safety measures provided by Mr. Walters are equipment and not protocol.

Two patrons addressed the board requesting the banning of the Confederate flag and imagery from Rockridge County Public Schools, while also citing concerns addressed at a town hall meeting.

One patron addressed the board citing that anytime pressure is added to a school system it causes cracks with deep challenges and a threatening environment that need to be addressed; the crack has been ongoing for two decades. Patron feels the problems are the real pandemic citing that pressure is being applied to schools that widen the cracks.

One patron addressed the board regarding the need for community-based committees, lack of transparency, requested that recording of meetings be available for later viewing, requested more details in minutes, addressed the enrollment rate, and that the first instinct after the recent incidents was not to inform the parents.

One patron addressed the board citing an elementary school student situation who has an IEP accommodation in which the parent feels the child's needs were not met because the child was retained without parent permission; requested a response from Superintendent Thompson regarding earlier inquisition of a social media account in which sexual assault at Rockbridge County High School stating that there has been no follow-up in notifying principals.

One patron addressed the board inquiring if the Rockbridge County School Board is a member of the National School Board Association. Asked how much the school board pays to be a part of this organization, citing that the taxpayer money is used to block school choice, uses ideas from the CRT playbook, and is being taught because the school system pays for it.

One patron addressed the board stating that the parents need to protect their children, asked that all adults listen to what the kids are telling them, act to fix it now, protect now.

One patron addressed the board referencing "Together We Are Rockbridge" which symbolizes unity; feels there are divisive programs and focus is not being put on children; focus should be on building relationships and educating children; children as well as adults should be held accountable.

BUDGET PLANNING: None

COMMITTEE REPORTS: None

INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:

Dr. Melanie Falls, Director of Testing and Instructional Data, provided a Local Alternative Assessments Update that included the following highlights:

- Local school boards and division superintendents will continue to certify through the annual Standards of Quality compliance assurance that instruction has been provided and local alternative assessments measuring eh SOL and adhering to the Board's guidelines administered in the 2014 eliminated SOL test subject areas.
- 2014 Eliminated SOL Test Subject Areas: Grade 3 History, Grade 3 Science, Grade 5 Writing, United States History, and United States History from 1865 (Grade 5), and United States History from 1865 (Grade 6)
- The **Guidelines for Local Alternative Assessments: 2021-2022 and Beyond** were adopted by the VBOE in June of 2021.
- Inquiry Design Model (IDM) is a process for creating journey-drive inquiries (assessment system):
Teachers provide the students with a compelling question and supporting questions;
Teachers design formative tasks to answer the question; and
Teachers provide the sources students must use to formulate their response.
- Timeline for Implementation:
November 22 and 23, 2021: Professional Development for Teachers.
January 14, 2022: First drafts due to Central Office for review with the Virginia Quality Criteria Tool for feedback/revision.
February 1 – April 29, 2022: Implementation/Scoring of the assessment by:
Information parents at least 5 days in advance;
Scoring the assessment and providing feedback to both students and parents; and
Providing final outcomes to Central Office
- Chairman Lovell inquired how it will be assessed if the approach is successful.
 - Dr. Falls stated that it is expected that once teachers go through it one time with their students and realize that they can be successful with this approach, they will find it successful.
 - Mr. Martino stated that the instruction side aligns with the PBL initiative and Department of Education. The model allows students at different levels to show their talents.

Mr. Paige Owens, Director of Technology and Career and Technology Education, provided a Career and Technical Education (CTE) Overview that included the following highlights:

- **CTE Data:**
 - 5 Middle School Programs;
 - 18 High School Programs;
 - 2,538 students are educated daily, which may include duplicates;
 - 7 Dual Enrollment Programs.
- **CTE Work-based Learning:**
 - Ms. Robyn Sherman is the Work-based Learning (WBL) Coordinator, part-time for 2021-22 and will become full-time 2022-2023;
 - There are currently 200 students;
 - There are currently 11 WBL categories.
 - The Work-based Learning goal is to get every student a WBL experience before graduation.
- **CTE Program Highlights of Trade and Industry:**
 - Building Trades
 - Automotive Trades
 - Auto Body Technology
 - Electronics
 - Welding
 - Skills USA-Winterize Rockbridge
 - Automotive Service Center
 - Auto Body Camaro Restoration
 - Large class numbers
 - Finishing Habitat House
 - Scholarships
 - Electronics Credentials have 100% rate on exam
 - Senior Electronics Projects
- **CTE Program Highlights of Health and Medical Sciences:**
 - Nurse Aide and EMT
 - Clinicals
 - 100% credential pass rate
- **CTE Program Highlights of Agriculture Education:**
 - Small Animal Care
 - Veterinary Science
 - Equine Science
 - Biological Applications in Agriculture
 - Horticulture
- **CTE Program Highlights of Technology Education:**
 - Engineering Drafting and Design
 - Architectural Drafting and Design
 - Aerospace Technology
 - Manufacturing
 - Communication Systems
 - New Manufacturing Communication Systems Lab
- **CTE Program Highlights of Family and Consumer Science:**
 - Culinary Arts
 - Hospitality, Tourism and Recreation
 - Nutrition and Wellness
 - Virginia Teachers for Tomorrow
 - Catering
 - Bakery
- **CTE Program Highlights of Business and Information Technology:**
 - Computer Information Systems
 - Design Multimedia Web Technology
 - Cybersecurity – Partnering with David Jones and VMI to create a Cyber Club
 - Accounting
 - Economics and Personal Finance
 - FBLA

- Chairman Lovell inquired if Ms. Sherman, Work-Based Learning Coordinator, will be tracking graduates of the program to see if they are locally hired.
 - Mr. Owens stated that all CTE completers are tracked as required by the Virginia Department of Education, by reaching out to students a year later.
 - Chairman Lovell expressed her sentiment that it demonstrates the value of the CTE Program.

INFORMATIONAL ITEM:

Dr. Mike Craft, Principal, Rockbridge County High School, and Ms. Rhonda Pedigo, School Counselor, Rockbridge County High School, provided information on the Rockbridge County High School Program of Studies for 2022-2023.

- Trustee Burant inquired about teacher certification in order to teach dual enrollment and what must teachers do to be certified.
 - Ms. Pedigo stated that the staff reviews which degrees new hires have and there have been classes offered to staff members in order to become certified.
 - Mr. Martino stated that if a teacher has Master's Degree they do not have to obtain a full other degree and added that there have been several teachers at the high school who have been willing to take this on. The course offerings at Rockbridge County High School are beyond robust and provide a real service for students.
 - Ms. Pedigo also stated that in the last two and a half years, there have been, on average, 400 seats in the dual enrollment program filled, reflecting that in a school with 1,000 students, it is very impressive.
 - Chairman Lovell stated it is really a testament for students who are interested in to studying in Virginia to be able to go into college with college credit obtained in high school.
- Trustee Whitmore inquired what the cost is per credit.
 - Ms. Pedigo stated that there is an agreement with Dabney S. Lancaster Community College, with the fee being \$157.50 per credit, if taken independently.
 - Mr. Martino stated that students are not deterred if finance is an issue
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the Board of Supervisors have helped in the past if there was a financial issue for a student.

ACTION ITEM:

Upon recommendation by Chairman Lovell, motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, the board voted 5-0, to approve the 2022-2023 School Calendar as presented.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Lovell, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Burant, the board voted 5-0, to approve the Rockbridge Church Lease to run from January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Lovell, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, the board voted 5-0, to approve the addition of three additional members to the Rockbridge Area Special Education Advisory Council so they may begin serving beginning at our next scheduled meeting in January.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Lovell, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Burant, the board voted 5-0, to approve the \$1,000 stipend for all permanent employees.

- Chairman Lovell expressed her appreciation for heroics at every level this year, which is proving to be harder than the last; "Together We Are Rockbridge".
- Superintendent Thompson stated that the stipends are well worth all that teachers and staff are doing.

NEW BUSINESS:

Chairman Lovell expressed her sentiment of sadness that this is the last Rockbridge County School Board meeting for Trustee Heather Hostetter, stating that Trustee Hostetter advocated at every step for students and was the voice of reason. Trustee Hostetter cares for students of our Rockbridge community.

Trustee Hostetter stated that she truly appreciated the opportunity to serve on the Rockbridge County School Board and has learned a lot in her four years working with the administrative staff and reflected that all have learned along the way. She stated that she plans to remain involved with Rockbridge County Public Schools.

SCHOOL BOARD:

The next regular monthly meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, January 11, 2022 at 5:30 p.m. The meeting will be held at Maury River Middle School, 600 Waddell Street, Lexington, Virginia.

ADJOURNMENT:

Upon motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Burant, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 7:43 p.m.


Wendy W. Lovell, Chairman


Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board