

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, February 18, 2025, at the County of Rockbridge Administration Building.

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

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Burant called the meeting to order at 5:07 p.m.

**CHANGES TO THE AGENDA:** None

**STUDENT / STAFF RECOGNITION:**

Superintendent Thompson took a moment to express gratitude to the board members in recognition of School Board Appreciation Month, highlighting their countless hours spent attending meetings, engaging with the community, and addressing citizen concerns. He emphasized that their work is critical to the success of the division, despite the minimal compensation they receive for their service. Board members were presented with certificates in honor of their service.

Superintendent Thompson recognized the week of February 17-21 Clerk Appreciation Week, expressing deep appreciation for the dedication of Mrs. Rhonda Humphries and her instrumental role in ensuring the board operates efficiently.

Superintendent Thompson recognized the Rockbridge County High School Trivium Staff and Mr. Brian Hamelman for their outstanding accomplishments in student journalism. This year, the Rockbridge County High School yearbook, Worlds Collide, earned several prestigious accolades:

- Virginia High School League (VHSL) – First Class Evaluation
- American Scholastic Press Association (ASPA) – First Place with Special Merit (One of only four yearbooks nationwide to receive this distinction.)
- ASPA – Most Outstanding High School Yearbook for 2024 (One of just five awarded in the country.)

Superintendent Thompson commended Mr. Hammelman’s leadership and his ability to foster students’ strengths, noting that the Trivium program embodies Gold Standard Project-Based Learning. He emphasized that the students' work is not only a creative and academic endeavor, but also a competitive, nationally recognized achievement.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

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

- Minutes: 1) December 17, 2024 [Discipline Committee Hearing]; 2) January 14, 2025 [Regular Meeting]; 3) January 16, 2025 [Joint Meeting with Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors]; 4) January 30, 2025 [Discipline Committee Hearing]
- Field Trip Requests
- Fundraiser Requests
- Application for Use of Facilities
- Appointments and Resignations

**Appointments**

**Support Staff**

Ruth Carter, Teacher Assistant, Rockbridge County High School, effective February 12, 2025

**Car Driver**

Emily Staton

**Food Service**

Danielle Ramsey

Dana Lotts

**Substitute**

Stephanie Haraway

**Food Service Substitutes**

Robin Brown

**Spring Coaches 2024-2025**

**RCHS**

**Boys Lacrosse**

David Jones, Head Coach

**Professional Staff**

**Resignation**

Andrew Simon, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, resigning end of the 2024-2025 school year

Martin Cox, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, resigning effective February 17, 2025

Janell Carr, Teacher, Natural Bridge Elementary School, resigning effective end of the 2024-2025 school year

**Support Staff**

**Resignation**

Ashlee Frias, Teacher Assistant, Rockbridge County High School, resigning effective February 10, 2025

**Professional Staff**

**Retirement**

Mike Lenoir, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, retiring end of the 2024-2025 school year

Martha Dudley, Teacher, Natural Bridge Elementary School, retiring end of the 2024-2025 school year

Rebecca Fleshman, Teacher, Mountain View Elementary School, retiring end of the 2024-2025 school year

Kristie Funkhouser, Reading Specialist, Natural Bridge Elementary School, retiring end of the 2024-2025 school year

Karen Duff, Teacher, Central Elementary School, retiring end of the 2024-2025 school year

- Business Items
  - Approved appropriation, donation from Claude Moore Opportunities, Inc for CTE in the amount of \$14,000.00.
  - Approved appropriations to Fund 50 for news grants in the amount of \$76,071.00.
  - Approved Monthly Financials in the amount of \$3,756176.35.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** None

**BUDGET PLANNING:**

Mr. Jason Kirby, Chief Business Officer, provided a FY26 budget update, noting that the Rockbridge County Public Schools finance team is reviewing the latest budget proposals from both the House and Senate. Key highlights include:

- The removal of the cap on support positions, resulting in \$222.9 million in additional direct aid to local school divisions across the Commonwealth.
- An increase of \$52.8 million in Special Education statewide funding.
- A \$1,000 bonus for instructional staff, with no local match required.
- The Senate aims to distribute this by June 1, while the House proposes distribution by September 1.
- A state-funded 3% raise for SOQ positions, which requires a local match.

Mr. Kirby noted that since this is the second year of the biennium budget, the division is hopeful that the finalized state budget will be completed soon.

**COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

Trustee Brown provided an update on the Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundation Committee, announcing that the Cornhole Tournament is scheduled for September 20, 2025 at the Virginia Horse Center. She also reported that the Rockbridge Innovation Center campaign has raised \$470,750, nearing the halfway point toward its \$1 million goal, with most contributions coming from community donations.

**INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:**

Mr. Paige Owens, Director of Technology and Career and Technical Education, provided a progress update on the Rockbridge Innovation Center (RIC), outlining its three key goals:

- Expanding 21st-century learning opportunities for students.
- Strengthening connections between the school system and the business community.
- Ensuring the center is accessible and inclusive for all students.

Mr. Owens highlighted the ongoing interest in the center, noting that tours and events continue to bring business leaders, educators, and community members to the facility. He shared that the Culinary program recently launched meal services for teachers, which has been well received. He stated that Region 5 CTE directors will visit the facility on March 6, 2025. He reflected that minor facility adjustments remain such as lock and door updates, minor roof leaks, and final touches on the greenhouse, but emphasized that the project is 99% complete.

- Dr. Thompson praised KNA Contracting, LLC and Spectrum Design for their commitment to ensuring that the facility meets all expectations before their final exit. He stated that there are plans for a spring ribbon-cutting ceremony, inviting the community to see firsthand what their investment has built.

**INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:**

Chairman Burant introduced a discussion on visitor policies and requested that Dr. Thompson elaborate on existing protocols. Chairman Burant stated the following:

*"A number of our constituents and families have expressed the need for us to identify our policies and procedures with regard to immigrants and the possibility of federal law enforcement coming into our schools. Our Rockbridge County Public Schools' mission is to provide a safe, inclusive, and student-centered environment. We want to reaffirm that our current policies and procedures recognize the importance of ensuring the safety, security, and well-being of ALL students, staff, and families within our community. While we don't anticipate visits from law enforcement, we want to remain prepared, just as we have procedures in place for other school contingencies. Our policies and procedures ensure the privacy and safety of our students. We also comply with all legal standards set forth by the Commonwealth and federal government."*

- Dr. Thompson emphasized that the division's primary objective is to create a welcoming and secure environment for students. He assured the board that central office staff and school administrators routinely review and refine visitor procedures to align with best practices and legal compliance.
  - Trustee Whitmore stressed the importance of periodically reviewing policies to ensure they remain in alignment with statewide mandates and executive orders.

**ACTION ITEMS:**

Superintendent Thompson stated that the board typically reviews and updates governance norms each January following board reorganization.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Burant, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Ojure, the board voted 5-0, to approve the School Board Governance Norms, as presented.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

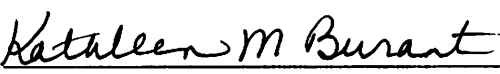
Superintendent Thompson acknowledged the passing of Mr. Robert "Bob" Gilbert, a former Rockbridge County School Board member who served from 1996 until 2008. He served as Vice Chair and also as Board Chair, during his tenure. Superintendent Thompson described Mr. Gilbert as a man of deep integrity and dedication to the students of Rockbridge County. He extended heartfelt condolences to Mr. Gilbert's wife, Kathy, and their children.

**SCHOOL BOARD**

The next regular meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, April 11, 2025 / 5:30 PM / Location: County of Rockbridge Administration Building, Lexington, Virginia.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Upon motion by Trustee Whitmore, seconded by Trustee Brown, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 5:50 p.m.

  
Kathy M. Burant, Chairman

  
Tim Martino, Deputy Clerk of the Board