

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, March 11, 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 Clerk Rhonda Humphries.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Burant 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:

Heather Murphy	- Central Elementary School
Adrienne Fallen	- Central Elementary School
Keith Folsom	- Central Elementary School
April McElroy	- Central Elementary School
Kristen Floyd	- Central Elementary School
Diana Johnson	- Fairfield Elementary School
Diana Hatcher	- Natural Bridge Elementary School
Melissa Tomlin	- Natural Bridge Elementary School
Michele Staton	- Mountain View Elementary School
Heather Floyd	- Maury River Middle School
Rebecca Cruz	- Maury River Middle School
Michelle Steiner	- Rockbridge County High School
Gwen Gosney	- Rockbridge County High School
Brenda Kerr	- Rockbridge County High School
Susan Perry	- Transportation
Kim Hamilton	- Central Office

CONSENT AGENDA

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

- Minutes: 1) February 18, 2025 [Public Hearing]; 2) February 18, 2025 [Regular Meeting]; 3) February 26, 2025 [Discipline Committee Hearing]; 4) March 6, 2026 [Discipline Committee Hearing]
- Field Trip Requests
- Fundraiser Requests
- Application for Use of Facilities
- Surplus Vehicles
- Appointments and Resignations

Appointments

Professional Staff

Garret Huffman, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, effective 2025-2026 school year
Michelle Oehmke, Teacher, Natural Bridge Elementary School, effective 2025-2026 school year

Substitute(s)

Ryan King
Mark Miller
Joyce Lackey
Madison Kennedy
Isaac Fairchilds
Brooke Franklin
David Katz
Makenna Newell

School Nurse Substitute(s)

Carla Smith
Amanda Henry

Spring Coaches 2024-2025**Rockbridge County High School****Baseball**

Travis Roadcap, Head Varsity Baseball Coach
 Nick Perlozzo, Assistant Varsity Baseball Coach
 Brian Smith, JV Baseball Coach
 Jamie Hostetter, Volunteer Baseball Coach
 Justin Wenger, Volunteer Baseball Coach

Softball

Keston Pelter, Head Varsity Softball Coach
 Delmas Beverley, Assistant Softball Coach
 Jessica Walker, JV Softball Coach
 Keith Moore, Volunteer Softball Coach
 Cari Floyd, Volunteer Softball Coach
 Chloe Persinger, Volunteer Softball Coach

Boys' Soccer

Michael Kelly, Boys' Head Varsity Soccer Coach
 Mark Roeder, Boys' Varsity Assistant Coach
 Bright Frimpong, Boys' Varsity Volunteer Coach

Girls' Soccer

Danny Wheeler, Girls' Head Soccer Coach
 Carrie Dietz, JV Soccer Coach
 Jeffery Tomlin, Girls' Volunteer Soccer Coach
 Courtney Smith, Girls' Volunteer Soccer Coach

Boys' Lacrosse

David Jones, Boys' Head Lacrosse Coach
 John Whitelock, Boys' Assistant Lacrosse Coach
 Seth Goodhart, Boys' Volunteer Lacrosse Coach
 Pierson Hull, Boys' Volunteer Lacrosse Coach
 Anthony Merida, Boys' Volunteer Lacrosse Coach

Girls' Lacrosse

Susan Nye, Head Girls' Lacrosse Coach
 Sammy Moore, Girls' Assistant Lacrosse Coach
 Haiden Lancaster, Girls' Assistant Lacrosse Coach

Boys' Tennis

Scott Youngdahl, Boys' Head Coach
 Brian Barney, Boys' Tennis Volunteer

Girls' Tennis

Mark Sholes, Girls' Head Tennis Coach
 Michael Moorman, Girls' Volunteer Tennis Coach

Outdoor Track

Jennifer Showalter, Head Outdoor Track Coach
 Tyler Staton, Assistant Outdoor Track Coach
 Eric Wilhelm, Assistant Outdoor Track Coach

Maury River Middle School**Outdoor Track**

Jennifer Showalter, Head Outdoor Track Coach
 Tyler Staton, Assistant Outdoor Track Coach
 Eric Wilhelm, Assistant Outdoor Track Coach
 Lewis Amber, Assistant Outdoor Track Coach

Professional Staff**Resignation**

Ben Kabzinski, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, resigning effective end of the 2024-2025 school year

Professional Staff**Retirement**

Terri Wheeler, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, retiring effective end of the 2024-2025 school year
 Michael Craft, Principal, Rockbridge County High School, retiring January 1, 2026

- Business Items
 - Approved appropriation, for school bus in the amount of \$560,000.00.
 - Approved appropriations to Fund 50 for news grants in the amount of \$38,623.00.
 - Approved Monthly Financials in the amount of \$4,036,416.12.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

One patron spoke on behalf of the Rockbridge Regional Library Board of Trustees. They held their annual retreat in the Community Meeting Room at the Rockbridge Innovation Center. They were given a tour of the facilities and were very pleased with the multitude and complexity of the courses offered to Rockbridge County students and were amazed at the depth of instructional opportunities in industry certifications. The Culinary Department provided an excellent lunch. The patron expressed appreciation for the board being allowed to use the facilities and also wants to let other civic groups know that the Community Room is available for use. The patron noted that the Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundation is also utilizing the meeting room monthly. The patron expressed that need to continue to expose Rockbridge County to the wide variety of technical courses offered at the Rockbridge Innovation Center.

One patron spoke on behalf of the NAACP and the Irma Thompson, Educators of Color program, an initiative of the Rockbridge NAACP. The patron spoke in regards to the lack of diversity in the Rockbridge County Public School system. The patron, on behalf of the Rockbridge NAACP, made the following recommendations to the school division when searching for replacements in the school district: widen the search for educators of color, take persons of color with the teams who attend job fairs at colleges and universities, especially at HBCU, and be intentional to hire educators of color.

One patron spoke stating that concerns continue with the issues of psychological readiness and safety of our youngest children, especially grades K-5, regarding certain books and other educational materials that might be age-inappropriate. The patron commended the Rockbridge County School Board for being exceptionally responsible about the safety, protection, and happiness of our Rockbridge County children. The patron stated that the main library does not have any age-inappropriate books or materials in the areas accessible to this young age group. Patron stated that with the likelihood of new books on witchcraft and the fantasy books with gruesome illustrations, asked the board if there is a need to subject our youngest children to such darkness, confusion, and violence. The patron requested that if an evil book is protested, that such a book be immediately moved to a separate section, still available to young children, but only with the parent's signed permission.

- Chairman Burant asked for, and received clarification, that the main library referred to is the Rockbridge Regional Library.

BUDGET PLANNING: None

COMMITTEE REPORTS: None

INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:

Dr. Dan Fallen, Assistant Principal, Rockbridge County High School, provided a Cell Phone Policy Update. The highlights of his presentation are below:

- Implementation Timeline:
 - December 10 - School Board adopted
 - December 12 - Admin explained to students
 - December 18 - QA with staff
 - January 1 - Policy in effect
 - January 3 - Faculty discussion on protocol
 - January 6 - Students returned to RCHS
- What are people saying:
 - Teachers: General consensus of positive effects, that it has worked well, and that it is helping students to self-regulate.
 - Students: General consensus of ease of adjustment, lunch has been better as students are talking with each other, and that the policy has been beneficial.
 - Noted Needs and considerations: some students need music when working independently and that there are course-specific needs.

- **Observations:**
 - Students are much more engaged in face-to-face conversations;
 - No phones in view in classrooms;
 - Teacher uniformity and consistency;
 - About 7-10 reported infractions daily;
 - About 1/3 of infractions are earbuds;
 - Easing social anxiety.
- Trustee Whitmore stated that he has heard mostly positive comments from parents. He also stated that in the Virginia School Board Association news it reflected that some divisions around the state of Virginia are making the policy even more restrictive. He reflected that he feels that Rockbridge County Public Schools began with a good medium.
 - Dr. Fallen stated that the policy has had positive responses from staff and students.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:

Mr. Paige Owens, Director of Technology and Career and Technical Education, stated that a new initiative was started in February as part of CTE appreciation month. A daily CTE program is highlighted via social media that reflects the offerings of a specific program and what students are doing in the program. Mr. Owens then provided information on the application for the 2025-2026 Carl Perkins Career and Technical Education Funds Grant. He stated that a question which has been asked over the years is what is the determination of how much money we get. The formula which takes into consideration the state's population, our local population, not necessarily student population, but the population of students who are in the lower poverty level and is based off of our lower income level. The Annual Performance Report should be received by early April. The information will be updated in the report before school board approval in April. The Board will be requested to approve the submission of the Carl Perkins Career and Technical Education Funds Grant at the April meeting.

- Trustee Ojura inquired if this is private funding or state funding and inquired if we know if the funds are actually in place.
 - Mr. Owens stated that the money comes from the state but there are federal strings attached with directives on how to spend the funds with school divisions then applying for reimbursement.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that Rockbridge County Public Schools have not yet experienced anything negative in regards to finances or federal grants, with no loss of funding, at this time.
 - Chairman Burant stated that the plan is really about improving our program and finding innovative ways to spend funds.
 - Mr. Owens stated that it helps with professional development, sending students to conferences, and sending our special population students to competitions.

Ms. Ashley Rhodenizer provided information on the Rockbridge Area Special Education Advisory Council for 2025 members who the Board is required to formally approve. This will be presented for approval at the April board meeting.

- Trustee Ojura inquired what the criteria is when selecting persons for the council.
 - Ms. Rhodenizer stated that they try to find diverse groups, noting that most of the people on the list have an interact or interface with students with disabilities from birth to adulthood and beyond. The platform also includes private and home school parents.
- Trustee Ojura inquired, and received confirmation, that home instructed students receive services.

Ms. Ashley Rhodenizer provided information on the Annual Special Education Grant 2025-2026. It is anticipated that updated information will be presented in April. The Rockbridge Area Special Education Advisory Council will review all documents at their next meeting, as required. This will be presented for approval at the April board meeting.

ACTION ITEMS:

Superintendent Thompson stated that the calc tool was just received and essentially represents what the House and the Senate have released; they are similar and did not have to put out two different ones this year, which is helpful. He noted that until the Governor actually signs his budget, and another calc tool is released, it will not be known what funding will be from the state and how to plan. He stated that school divisions are required by the Code of Virginia to provide our locality, Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors, with a Categorical Estimate of Needs every year by March 31.

Fund 50 – Categorical Estimate of Needs – FY26

Categories	FY26 Projected	Percent
Instruction – 61 (Fund 50)	\$28,296,481	72.1%
Administration & Health – 62 (Fund 50)	\$ 2,836,950	7.2%
Pupil Transportation - 63 (Fund 50)	\$ 2,835,110	7.2%
Operations & Maintenance – 64 (Fund 50)	\$ 3,736,680	9.5%
Facilities – 66 (Fund 50)	\$ 20,000	0.1%
Technology – 68 (Fund 50)	\$ 1,523,364	3.9%
Fund 50 Site Operating Budget	\$39,248,583	100.0%

Fund 50 – Expected Revenue Sources – FY26

Revenue Source	FY25 Projected	Percent
Estimated State Revenue Funding (FY26)	\$19,527,651	49.8%
Estimated Local Revenue Funding (FY26)	\$17,870,340	45.5%
Estimated Tuition Revenue Funding (FY26)	\$ 1,690,000	4.3%
Estimated Other Revenue Funding (FY26)	\$ 160,592	0.4%
Fund 50 Site Operating Budget	\$39,248,583	100.0%

- Trustee Ojura inquired if there is still a percentage increase for teachers.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that as of now, a five percent increase is included. He noted that the state will only give up to their portion of three percent. The SOQ positions will be all they will pay for; factor in our relatively high LCI, when compared to surrounding neighbors, the locality has to fund the majority of the three percent raise to all employees in order to make it work. The Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors have been good to our school division in previous years and hope that we can do that again this year with a minimum of three percent, hopefully more.
- Trustee Whitmore inquired if the health is locked in at 6.3 percent.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that our broker will try again to negotiate to get an even better rate.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Burant, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Ojura, the board voted 5-0, to approve the Categorical Estimate of Needs – FY26 in the amount of \$39,248,583.

NEW BUSINESS:

Chairman Burant acknowledged the passing of Dr. Julia Van de Water, who was Rockbridge County High School Librarian for nine years.

Chairman Burant stated that she enjoys sharing news of the Rockbridge Innovation Center with outside guests. She met with retired CTE teachers and staff who toured the facilities. She expressed her appreciation to all who had a part in the renovation.

Chairman Burant went to the culminating event of Natural Bridge Elementary School with their One School One Book event. She asked principals to continue inviting school board members to attend their events.

Chairman Burant expressed her appreciation to Eric Wilson, a teacher at Lylburn Downing Middle School, who led a three day event relating to local history. He asked a question which can be applied to the Rockbridge Innovation Center. The writing prompt was: going back fifty years, or going ahead fifty years, what is it that you want to see displayed in a display case. She is anxious to hear what the students of RIC want to have in their display case fifty years from now.

SCHOOL BOARD

There will be a Joint Meeting with the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors on Thursday, March 20, 2025 / 5:00 PM / Location: Rockbridge Innovation Center.

The next regular meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, April 8, 2025 / 5:30 PM / Location: County of Rockbridge Administration Building, Lexington, Virginia.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Whitmore, seconded by Trustee Ojura, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 6:34 p.m.



Kathy M. Burant, Chairman



Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board