

The Rockbridge County School Board held a special joint meeting with the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors on Thursday, March 20, 2025. The meeting was held at the Rockbridge Innovation Center.

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

Board of Supervisors Members Present: Leslie Ayers, R.W. Day, D.E. Lyons, David McDaniel; Spencer Suter, County Administrator and Clerk to Board. Absent: A.J. Lewis.

CALL TO ORDER

School Board Chairman Burant called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

FY26 BUDGET UPDATE

Mr. Jason Kirby, Chief Business Officer, stated that the Governor has until March 24, 2025 to act on the General Assembly budget and that the General Assembly is scheduled to meet again on April 2, 2025 with hopes of a complete budget at that point. He stated that the Local Choice employee health insurance quote came down to 6.3% from a conservative estimate of 19% that was provided earlier. Currently, it is still a waiting game to receive the final numbers.

Superintendent Thompson stated that the Rockbridge County School Board approved the Categorical Estimate of Needs FY26 on March 11, 2025, which was then sent to Mr. Spencer Suter.

Mr. Spencer Suter, County Administrator, stated that the Finance Committee has met and that the RCPS Categorical Estimate of Needs FY26 aligns with what they have, with the exception of a 5% raise, as proposed by the Rockbridge County Public Schools. The Board of Supervisors is proposing a 3% raise across the board for all constitutional positions and county employees. He stated that a 3% raise for the school division still makes the county budget \$700,000 off between revenues and expenses. He stated that Mr. Ashton Harrison, County Finance Director, sent an email to department heads with a request to identify anything that could be cut, which helped to close the gap. Revenue numbers from the state on sales tax tends to be optimistic.

- Mr. Harrison stated that they have included the purchase of four busses in the budget.
- Chairman Burant inquired if the 6.3% Local Choice helped with the county budget.
 - Mr. Suter stated that it was very helpful and that the county came in at the estimated 10%, which was no increase/no decrease for them.
- Supervisor McDaniel stated that the Finance Committee appreciates the Rockbridge County School Board going to bat for a 5% raise for employees but stated that it does look like it will be a 3% raise.

Mr. Suter expressed appreciation for receiving the Categorical Estimate of Needs prior to the March 31 deadline. This allowed the process to work and for needed discussions to take place.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION

Supervisor Ayers asked for highlights of the Rockbridge Innovation Center.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that there will be a ribbon cutting ceremony on June 5, 2025 with formal invitations to be extended to Rockbridge Board of Supervisors with a potential to speak. Mr. Corey Wallace, Culinary Department, will provide refreshments. This will allow the community to see the Rockbridge Innovation Center and to see what their money funded.
- Chairman Burant stated that there has been great response from the community with the Community Room being utilized for civic meetings.
 - Superintendent Thompson echoed the positive comments that have been received from several CTE Directors from around the region who took a tour of the Rockbridge Innovation Center.

Mr. Harrison stated that there is not a lease signed yet for the new financial software. There have been meetings held with the RCPS Finance Department staff and county IT staff who are working together.

Superintendent Thompson stated that a meeting has taken place in respects to the Capital Improvement Plan. Administration met with Dominion Power Lighting Engineer regarding the baseball and softball fields and their possible help with the light poles and plans. He stated that they are working together for a better plan. It is hoped that Dominion Power may help purchase and install the lights.

- Trustee Burant inquired on a completion date.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that it depends on funding but is optimistic that it will be complete by next spring, in time for baseball season.

Supervisor Ayers inquired on the Feasibility Study regarding the area of the parking lot/Recreation Center.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that Perkins and Orrison has completed site surveys of the area across from RCHS for a potential recreation center, which includes community needs as well. Their study includes electric, water, and topographical as well as everything needed to draw up plans. The study has now been given to Spectrum Design who are completing a two-step process, which includes 1) parking lot/Recreation Center; and 2) RCHS proper. The purpose of the study is to project what the cost could be in six to seven years. Spectrum Design staff is studying both projects and is planning to hold committee meetings for their programming needs and what needs to be designed. This should happen in the next few weeks.
 - Supervisor Ayers inquired who will be part of the discussion.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that teachers, administrators, School Resource Officers will be involved in the RCHS proper study. The parking lot/recreation study will involve himself as Superintendent, PE coaches, athletic directors, and if possible, representative(s) of the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors.
- Mr. Suter stated that with the completion of the Transportation Facility, parking is tight at the Bus Garage, and they are looking at expanding the parking lot from the gas pumps to the interstate to allow for more parking.
 - Superintendent Thompson inquired how many more feet of parking would be gained.
 - Mr. Suter replied there could potentially be twenty-five more feet for parking.

Supervisor Ayers inquired if RCPS is now fully staffed.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that the division is not fully sure of what the needs will be for the next school year. He stated that applicant pool reflects that things are getting back to the way it was pre-covid with some teachers already being hired for the 2025-2026 school year.
- Mr. Timothy Martino, Assistant Superintendent, stated that more of the applicants have completed a college program, are fully licensed and endorsed, and have student-teaching experience.


Supervisor McDaniel inquired if the Feasibility Study has any focus on lights, while noting that the junior lot has new lights.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that Safety Grant funds are helping with the lighting to doubling the amount of exterior wall lights, replace and add parking lot lights. He expressed that there will be more progress over Spring Break when students are not in the building.
- Trustee Brown noted that the new lights will be bright LED lights

Supervisor Ayers stated that there will be an Executive Committee Meeting on April 24, 2025 and that the next Joint Meeting will be held on May 15, 2025.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Whitmore and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 5:21 p.m.


Kathy M. Burant, Chairman


Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board