

DRAFT

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, April 8, 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 5:30 p.m.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA: None

STUDENT / STAFF RECOGNITION:

State Championship Recognition: Mr. Adam Haynes, Athletic Director, recognized Mr. Spencer Pfaff, Senior Student, Rockbridge County High School. Mr. Pfaff competed on March 4, 2025 in the VHSL State Swimming Championships. With a time of 20.53 seconds in the 50-yard freestyle, Mr. Pfaff set a new state record and claimed his second consecutive Class 3 State Championship in the event. He also captured the Class 3 title in the 100-yard freestyle, breaking the longest-standing RCHS swim team record—set by William Copeland in 2004—with a time of 46.76 seconds.

Virginia State Leadership Conference for Educators Rising: Mr. Paige Owens, Director of Technology and Career and Technical Education, recognized Ms. Emmalee Grimm, Freshman Student, Rockbridge County High School. Ms. Grimm attended the Virginia State Leadership Conference for Educators Rising the first weekend in March, where she earned first place in her competition, "Exploring Non-Core Subject Teaching Careers." This is a remarkable achievement for Ms. Grimm, an aspiring educator and dedicated member of the Rockbridge County High School Chapter of Educators Rising, a career and technical student organization designed to support and prepare students for future careers in education.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

- Minutes: 1) March, 2025 [Regular Meeting]; 2) March 20, 2025 [Joint Meeting with Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors]
- Field Trip Requests
- Fundraiser Requests
- Application for Use of Facilities
- Surplus Vehicles
- Religious Exemption Request
- Appointments and Resignations

Appointments

Professional Staff

Shaun Sparks, Principal, Rockbridge County High School, effective January 1, 2026

Hannah Smith, Teacher, Mountain View Elementary School, effective 2025-2026 school year

Amy Porterfield, Media Specialist, Natural Bridge Elementary School,
effective 2025-2026 school year

Daniel Shelton, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, effective 2025-2026 school year

Shauna Burden, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, effective 2025-2026 school year

Support Staff

Thomas Ashcraft, Custodian, Rockbridge County High School, effective April 9, 2025

Kathryn Harris, Payroll Specialist, Central Office, effective July 1, 2025

Food Service Substitute

Patrick Flaherty

Spring Coaches 2024-2025

Rockbridge County High School

Boys' Soccer

Jeffrey Tomlin, Interim Boys' Head Varsity Soccer Coach

Jacob Lee, Boys' Varsity Volunteer Coach

Jacob Cornejo, Boys' Varsity Volunteer Coach

Boys' Lacrosse

Pierson Hull, Boys' Assistant Lacrosse Coach

Daniel Grimm, Boys' Assistant Lacrosse Coach

Support Staff
Resignation

Wyatt Higgins, Custodian, Rockbridge County High School, resigning effective March 17, 2025
Katrina McNeil, Teacher Assistant, Maury River Middle School,
resigning effective March 25, 2025
Brooke Hicks, Food Service, Central Elementary School, resigning effective March 24, 2025
Ashley Cornett, Food Service, Mountain View Elementary School,
resigning effective April 1, 2025

Professional Staff
Resignation

Thomas Taylor, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, resigning effective end of
the 2024-2025 school year
Josh Bowen, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, resigning effective end of
the 2024-2025 school year

- Business Items
 - Approved appropriation for Rockbridge Recreation and Renovations to Study from the ESCROW account in the amount of \$50,000.
 - Approved appropriations to Fund 50 for news grants in the amount of \$624,363.00.
 - Approved Monthly Financials in the amount of \$3,824,462.04.

Chairman Burant expressed how inspired she continues to be by the efforts of teachers and staff to connect students with local resources such as Charles Barger, Boxerwood, and VMI. She emphasized how much she values students having meaningful learning experiences right here in Rockbridge County.

Leadership Announcement – Rockbridge County High School

Superintendent Thompson expressed his appreciation to Dr. Mike Craft for his dedicated service to Rockbridge County High School and congratulated him on his upcoming retirement.
Superintendent Thompson then announced that the School Board has approved the promotion of Mr. Shaun Sparks as the new principal of Rockbridge County High School, effective January 1, 2026. Mr. Sparks brings a strong educational background to the role, holding a Bachelor of Business Administration from Radford University, a Master’s in School Counseling from Liberty University, and an Educational Leadership endorsement from James Madison University. His experience spans multiple roles, including high school teacher, Director of School Counselors, Assistant Principal in another Virginia division, Director of Career and Technical Education, Principal of a high school CTE center, and Supervisor of Student Services. For the past two years, he has served as Assistant Principal at Rockbridge County High School, where he has already made a meaningful impact on students and staff.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

One patron spoke to the board on behalf of the Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundation and shared that in recently visiting schools to speak with principals and reaffirm the Foundation’s mission, each principal expressed enthusiasm about partnering with the Foundation to support teachers. The patron emphasized the Foundation’s commitment to providing meaningful assistance to help educators deliver high-quality education to Rockbridge County students.

One patron spoke to the board with concerns about the overall performance and climate at Maury River Middle School. In addition to academic concerns, the patron spoke about communication and administrative practices while stating that some parents feel intimidated when raising concerns expressing the patron’s feeling that there is no clear, consistent process for protecting students who report bullying. Patron is working with the Virginia Department of Education and will be leading a petition effort in the county to advocate for changes on behalf of Rockbridge County students.

BUDGET PLANNING:

Mr. Jason Kirby, Chief Business Officer, provided the board with an update on the budget process. He noted that the governor’s review was completed on April 2, 2025 with little new information at this time, noting that the governor has until May 2, 2025 to finalize the state budget. He stated that while it appears likely that the budget will include a \$1,000 allocation for staff, the timing of that funding remains uncertain. Mr. Kirby emphasized that the division is in a “wait and see” position until the final budget is released by the state.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: None

INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:

Ms. Tracy Hinty, Supervisor of Federal Programs, provided an update on preschool programming in Rockbridge County Public Schools, emphasizing the shared vision between Rockbridge County Public Schools and the Virginia Department of Education to expand access to high-quality preschool and child care for our youngest learners. Ms. Hinty shared that the division promotes preschool through the website for Rockbridge County Public Schools, Facebook page, and printed flyers.

- Trustee Ojure inquired how many preschool students are currently served by Rockbridge County Public Schools. She also inquired about the potential for program growth.
 - Ms. Hinty stated that there are currently seventy-five students enrolled. She explained that expansion depends on the available space in each school, but the division is committed to finding creative solutions, given the tremendous value of early childhood education.
- Trustee Ojure inquired on the use of public buildings such as churches.
 - Ms. Hinty clarified that any facility partnering with Rockbridge County Public Schools must first be licensed as a child care center in order to meet VDOE requirements.
- Chairman Burant inquired how many students are currently on the waitlist.
 - Ms. Hinty stated that over sixty children are waiting for placement.

Dr. Melanie Falls, Director of Testing and Instructional Data, provided a high-level overview of Virginia's new unified accountability system, which merges state accreditation and federal accountability into a single model known as the School Performance and Support Framework (SPSF). This new system evaluates schools across three major components: Mastery, Growth/Graduation, and Readiness, with scores ranging from 0 to 100. Based on their composite score, schools are placed into one of four categories: Distinguished, On Track, Off Track, or Needs Intensive Support. The SPSF adapts across grade levels, with Mastery weighted most heavily in elementary schools, while high schools incorporate Graduation and postsecondary readiness through the 3E Framework (Enrollment, Employment, or Enlistment). Chronic absenteeism, student growth via VVAAS, and advanced coursework are key indicators at various levels. Dr. Falls emphasized that the purpose of the new model is not to label schools, but to determine the appropriate level of state support. VDOE will provide tiered support for schools identified as Off Track or in need of intensive assistance beginning Fall 2025. As a division, Rockbridge County Public Schools is taking a proactive approach to understanding and implementing the new system. School leaders and faculty are being engaged through overview sessions and ongoing communication. The division is also participating in weekly VDOE webinars to stay current as guidance evolves. The goal is clear: to lead through this transition thoughtfully and to ensure every school—and every student—is supported in meaningful ways.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS: None

ACTION ITEMS:

Upon recommendation by Chairman Burant, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Ojure, the board voted 5-0, to approve the application for the Carl Perkins Career and Technical Education Funds Grant, as presented.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Burant, motion by Trustee Brown, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, the board voted 5-0, to approve the Rockbridge Area Special Education Council, as presented.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Burant, motion by Trustee Brown, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, the board voted 5-0, to approve the Annual Special Education Grant 205-2026, as presented.

NEW BUSINESS:

Chairman Burant stated that she recently spoke at the Virginia Farm Bureau's meeting where she had the opportunity to highlight CTE opportunities available to Rockbridge County students. Ms. Robyn Sherman Work Based Learning Coordinator, provided a tour and shared the division's Work-Based Learning (WBL) highlights, while Mr. Corey Wallace, CTE Teacher, generously provided dinner for attendees.

Chairman Burant stated that she and Trustee Ojure toured the new regional center for Mountain Gateway Community College (MGCC) in Buena Vista. She reported that MGCC has selected CTE and workforce development programs including medical careers, welding, cybersecurity, diesel mechanics, building trades, heavy equipment operation, massage therapy, maintenance mechanics, and CDL training. The new site will also feature a Pearson testing center for credentialing. Trustee Burant thanked John Ranione for the informative tour and noted that this facility will serve as a strong complement to the CTE offerings at Rockbridge County High School. The project has been fully funded through grants and private donations.

Chairman Burant and Trustee Ojure attended the recent music program at Natural Bridge Elementary. Chairman Burant commended the students on their performance and expressed appreciation to the RCPS Foundation for funding musical instruments for the program. She also recognized music teacher Ms. Lacey Lynch for her leadership and the program’s success.

Chairman Burant and Trustee Whitmore attended the Chamber of Commerce’s State of the Community Breakfast. Chairman Burant expressed her appreciation of the opportunity to hear from elected officials and noted that education remains a top priority in the region, alongside other key initiatives and challenges.

SCHOOL BOARD

The next regular meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, May 13, 2025 / 5:30 PM / Location: County of Rockbridge Administration Building, Lexington, Virginia.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Ojure, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 6:43 p.m.

Kathy M. Burant, Chairman

Timothy J. Martino, Deputy Clerk of the Board