

**Board of Education Meeting**  
**October 13, 2025**  
**6:40 PM, in the Stearns Education Center Boardroom**

**Members Present:** Chairman Ashworth, Vice-Chairman Mr. Covil, Ms. Allen, Ms. Gibbs, Ms. Jackson, Ms. Page, Mr. Stich

**Members Absent:** None

**Others:** Superintendent Todd Murphy, Director of Curriculum and Instruction Jan Crump, Human Resource Specialist Tonya Odel, Director of Operations Brandon Schweitzer, and Attorney Chris Campbell.

**Call to Order and Welcome**

Mr. Ashworth called the meeting to order at approximately 6:40 PM and welcomed all in attendance.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Student Presentation – Polk County High School**

The 2025–2026 Polk County High School HOSA (Health Occupations Students of America) Chapter Officers, accompanied by teachers Ms. Emily Pereira and Ms. Candace Jackson, delivered a presentation highlighting the chapter’s past and current events, and future plans.

**Special Work Session**

A special work session was held prior to the regular scheduled board meeting to hear school improvement plan presentations. All school improvement plans were attached to the electronic agenda for review. Each school principal and a selected Improvement Team representative briefly presented the goals and highlights of their school improvement plans. Chairman Ashworth called for questions or comments after each presentation.

**Approval of September 8, 2025 Board Minutes (Action)**

Chairman Ashworth called the Board’s attention to a copy of the September 8, 2025 Board Minutes. Mr. Ashworth asked if there were any additions or corrections and there were none. Mr. Ashworth entertained a motion to approve minutes as presented. Ms. Allen made the motion to approve the minutes as presented. Mr. Stich seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

**I. INSTRUCTIONAL**

**School Improvement Plans - Jan Crump (Action)**

Ms. Crump addressed the Board regarding the School Improvement Plans that had been presented during the special work session held prior to the regular board meeting, confirming that there were no outstanding questions or concerns. Hearing none, Mr. Ashworth requested a motion to adopt the plans. Ms. Gibbs moved to approve the School Improvement Plans, and Ms. Page seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

**Overnight Field Trip Requests –Todd Murphy (Action)**

Superintendent Murphy requested approval from the Board to approve the overnight PCHS FFA Field Trip – The 71<sup>st</sup> Annual Land Judging Career Development Event. Chairman Ashworth called for a motion to approve the presented

overnight field trip request. Mr. Stich made a motion to approve the request and it was seconded by Ms. Gibbs. The overnight field trip request for the PCHS SkillsUSA Field Trip was approved 7-0.

### **Head Start Annual Report – Laura Jane Howald (Information)**

Laura Jane Howald, Preschool Director, presented the 2024–2025 Head Start Annual Report to the Board. She reviewed key information from the report, including budget summaries and child outcome data. The program maintained an average monthly enrollment of 80 students. Notably, nearly one-third of the children served had special needs or an Individualized Education Program (IEP), reflecting an increase compared to previous years. In the area of Health Compliance, the Preschool Program achieved near-perfect compliance. Additionally, under the School Readiness domain, the program met or exceeded all state benchmarks. The 2024-2025 Preschool funding sources totaled \$1,745,702. The 2024-2025 Head Start expenditures totaled \$803,117 and the 2025-2026 Head Start budget is \$803,117. Chairman Ashworth asked if there were any questions or comments. There were none.

## **II. ADMINISTRATIVE**

### **Occupational Therapist Pay Scale- Tonya Odel (Action)**

Human Resource Specialist, Tonya Odel presented the newly required state Occupational Therapist pay scale to the Board. Following the presentation, Chairman Ashworth asked if there were any questions; there were none. He then called for a motion to adopt the pay scale. Mr. Covil moved to approve the Occupational Therapist pay scale, and Ms. Page seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously, 7–0.

### **2025-2026 Budget Resolution- Debbie Lovelace (Action)**

Debbie Lovelace, Finance Officer, presented the attached 2025-2026 budget resolutions to the Board. The 2025-2026 Budget Resolution was included in the electronic agenda for review prior to the Board meeting. She communicated there will be future changes in the resolution as DPI releases more information regarding the 2025-2026 budget. Chairman Ashworth requested a motion to approve the 2025-2026 Budget Resolution as presented. Ms. Allen made a motion to approve the 2025-2026 Budget Resolution, seconded by Ms. Jackson. The 2025-2026 Budget Resolution was approved 7-0.

### **Safe Schools/Crisis Plans – Todd Murphy (Action)**

Superintendent Murphy informed the Board that the details of the Safe Schools/Crisis Plans had been distributed electronically. He noted that, due to the confidential nature of the plans, any questions or discussion should take place during closed session. Chairman Ashworth then asked whether the Board wished to discuss in closed session or proceed with a vote. As there were no questions, the Board elected to vote. Ms. Jackson made a motion to approve the Safe Schools/Crisis Plans, which was seconded by Ms. Allen. The motion carried unanimously, 7-0.

### **Facility Needs Assessment Contract – Brandon Schweitzer (Action)**

Dr. Schweitzer reviewed the *Facility Needs Overview* handout and the accompanying presentation that was electronically attached to the agenda. The district's most recent Facility Needs Assessment was completed in 2020 and, as required by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, must be conducted every five years. This contract fulfills the state requirement, provides a five-year roadmap for facility planning, supports data-driven capital investment decisions, and positions Polk County Schools to pursue future state and bond funding opportunities. Key components of the plan include an inventory of existing facilities, condition indicators, capacity and utilization analysis, programmatic needs, future growth projections, cost estimates, and project prioritization.

Performance Services, Inc. has offered to assist Polk County Schools with our Facility Needs Assessment. They will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of all sites and facilities owned or operated by the District. These services will be provided at no cost to the District and are intended to establish the foundation for a potential long-term partnership.

This assistance will not in any way guarantee any contract moving forward. Performance Services, Inc. will present their findings to the Board and assist in any future presentations.

Mr. Covil inquired whether Attorney Chris Campbell saw any concerns regarding the proposed partnership. Mr. Campbell stated that he believes Performance Services, Inc. is employing a marketing strategy to increase their visibility in North Carolina but saw no objections to the partnership.

Chairman Ashworth then called for a motion to approve the Facility Needs Assessment Contract. Mr. Covil made the motion to approve the contract, which was seconded by Mr. Stich. The motion passed unanimously, with a vote of 7-0.

### **III. OLD BUSINESS**

#### **Cell Phone Policy – Todd Murphy (Information)**

Superintendent Murphy provided the Board with a brief update on the district's Cell Phone Policy. Administrators have been actively exploring ways to enhance the policy's enforceability to better support teachers in the classroom.

As part of this effort, the district has partnered with Yondr to implement secure phone pouches. This initiative is funded through a grant from the Polk County Community Foundation. Beginning October 20, 2025, Yondr pouches will be introduced at both Polk County High School and Polk County Early College.

Under this program, students will retain possession of their phones, which will remain secured inside personal, individual pouches that can only be unlocked at designated times. The use of individual pouches also supports hygienic practices.

Feedback from administrators at both schools has been positive, indicating a smooth implementation process thus far.

#### **Needs-Based Grant – Todd Murphy (Information)**

The Needs-Based Grant application has been submitted, with a proposed plan to construct a Career and Technical Education (CTE) building on the Polk County High School campus. This new facility would replace the existing modular classrooms, expand the district's CTE program offerings, and provide a dedicated space to house the Alternative Learning Program. Superintendent Murphy informed the Board that the project has the full support of the Polk County Board of Commissioners, who also had to signed off on the grant submission. He expressed his appreciation for their continued partnership and steadfast commitment to advancing education in Polk County.

### **IV. NEW BUSINESS**

#### **NCSSA-Franklin Covey Partnership – Todd Murphy (Information)**

Superintendent Murphy informed the Board that Polk County Schools has been selected to participate in a strategic partnership with FranklinCovey, a globally recognized organization specializing in professional development. FranklinCovey is renowned for its expertise in performance improvement, leadership development, and organizational transformation through comprehensive training, coaching, and consulting services. Through an initiative led by the North Carolina School Administrators Association (NCSA) in collaboration with FranklinCovey Education, all district leaders and school principals will receive professional development over the next two years—at no cost to the district.

Superintendent Murphy emphasized that this is a significant opportunity for the district. The training sessions will be conducted locally, which eliminates expenses related to travel and lodging, resulting in further cost savings. The total value of the grant exceeds \$300,000.

**Six County STEM Collective**

Superintendent Murphy announced that Polk County Schools has joined a six-county collaborative to establish a STEM Education Collective aimed at advancing science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education across the region. A team of 15 representatives from Polk County Schools—many of whom are classroom teachers—will participate in this initiative. Meetings and training sessions will be held at Lenoir-Rhyne University in Hickory, NC.

This collaborative effort is made possible through the support of the Burroughs Wellcome Fund, NC Science, Mathematics, and Technology Education Center, and the Successful Practices Network. Throughout the school year, participants will engage in multiple days of professional development focused on strengthening STEM instruction and alignment with college and career readiness goals. The knowledge and strategies gained through this initiative will be brought back to the district to enhance STEM education and better prepare students for success in both higher education and the workforce.

**V. INFORMATION**

- Preschool Monthly Report
- Pre-K Financial Report
- Monthly Financial Report
- Month-to-Date Credit Card Report

**NCSBA OFFERED OPTIONAL BOARD TRAINING**

- 2025/2026 NCSBA Video Library
- Annual Conference- November 12-14, 2025- Greensboro, NC
- Core Training- January 12, 2026 – Raleigh, NC
- Advanced Leadership Series: Advocacy in Action – January 13, 2026 – Raleigh, NC

**VI. PUBLIC INPUT**

There was no public input.

**VII. CLOSED SESSION**

**Closed Session**

At 7:21 PM Mr. Ashworth entertained a motion to go into closed session for the purposes of discussing personnel. Ms. Gibbs made the motion to go into closed session and it was seconded by Ms. Page. The motion carried 7-0.

**RETURN TO OPEN SESSION**

Resumption of Regular Session: With all discussion concluded in closed session, Mr. Ashworth called for a motion to return to open session. At 8:05 pm, Ms. Allen made a motion to return to open session. Ms. Jackson seconded the motion. The motion carried 7-0.

Mr. Ashworth called the Board’s attention to those matters on the personnel agenda that required Board approval. Mr. Ashworth asked the Board’s pleasure in regard to a motion. Ms. Allen made the motion to approve the recommendations of the Superintendent and the Human Resource Specialist. Ms. Page seconded the motion. The motion carried 7-0.

**Action:**

Name	Position	School	Hometown	College	Licensure Area	Years Exp
Kalie McCrain	Speech Therapist	Tryon	Zirconia	Western Carolina	Speech	7
Savanna Parris	Science Teacher	PCMS	Saluda	Meredith	El Ed (K-6)	0
Evangeline Petoia	Afterschool Group Leader	Tryon	Tryon	N/A	N/A	N/A
Rhonda Brown	Temporary Part-Time Custodian	Tryon	Tryon	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Information:</b>						
Name	Position	School				
Julie Burke	Math Teacher	PCMS	Transferred from Substitute to Teacher			
Jodi Everts	Spanish Teacher	PCMS	Resigned			
Matt Gratz	Science Teacher	PCMS	Resigned			
Elizabeth Mallory	Math Teacher	PCMS	Resigned			
Cindi Rhodes	Social Studies Teacher	PCHS	Retiring			
Leah Hudgens-Bey	Receptionist	PCHS	Resigned			
Bo Barron	Custodian	TES	Resigned			

**VII. ADJOURNMENT**

With no more business to come before the Board, Mr. Ashworth declared the meeting adjourned at 8:06 pm.

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 Mr. Ashworth, Board Chair

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 Todd Murphy, Board Secretary  
 TM/TO/RC