

Board of Education Meeting
March 9, 2026
6:30 PM, at 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, Finance Officer Debbie Lovelace, and Attorney John Henning, Jr.

Call to Order and Welcome

Mr. Ashworth called the meeting to order at approximately 6:30 p.m. and welcomed all in attendance.

Pledge of Allegiance

Student Presentation

Principal Adam Giles introduced students from Polk Central Elementary School, accompanied by Guidance Counselors Ashley Bell and Langlee Rogers, and fourth-grade teacher Marsha Davis. The students gave a presentation on the Character Strong program, which the school began implementing this academic year. Ms. Rogers spoke about the program, and the students performed a song for the Board. Ms. Rogers reported that the program has been well received by students and staff and noted a decrease in behavior issues since its implementation.

North Carolina Department of Instruction Academic Awards – Todd Murphy

Superintendent Todd Murphy presented awards from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction recognizing academic achievements for the 2024–2025 school year. Polk Central Elementary, Sunny View Elementary, Polk County Middle School, and Polk County Early College were recognized for meeting Expected Academic Progress. Saluda Elementary School received recognition for Exceeding Expected Academic Progress. Polk County Early College was also honored for outstanding progress, achieving a 95 percent graduation rate.

Approval of February 9, 2026 Board Minutes (Action)

Chairman Ashworth called the Board's attention to a copy of the February 9, 2026, 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. Mr. Stich made the motion to approve the minutes as presented. Ms. Jackson seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously, 7-0.

I. INSTRUCTIONAL

Overnight Field Trip Request – Todd Murphy (Action)

Superintendent Todd Murphy requested Board approval for two overnight field trips: the NCFFA State Dairy Judging Career Development Event in Winston-Salem, NC, scheduled for April 10–11, 2026, and the PCMS NCDOT Bridge Building Competition in Raleigh, NC, scheduled for April 16–18, 2026. Chairman Ashworth called for a motion to approve the overnight NCFFA State Dairy Judging Career Development Event. Ms. Gibbs made a motion to approve the request, which was seconded by Ms. Allen. The motion passed 7–0. Chairman Ashworth called for a motion to

approve the overnight PCMS NCDOT Bridge Building Competition. Ms. Gibbs made a motion to approve the request, which was seconded by Ms. Jackson. The motion was approved 7-0.

II. ADMINISTRATIVE

Budget Amendment – Debbie Lovelace (Action)

Finance Officer Debbie Lovelace presented the budget amendment included in the agenda. Chairman Ashworth opened the floor for questions and there were none. Chairman Ashworth requested a motion to approve the budget amendment as submitted. Ms. Stich made the motion, and Ms. Page seconded. The motion was approved 7-0.

Audit Contract – Debbie Lovelace (Action)

Debbie Lovelace presented to the Board regarding the Audit Contract with Anderson, Smith, and Wyke, LLC. Taking action at this meeting will approve them to continue with the audit contract for the 2026-2027 school year. Chairman Ashworth called for a motion to approve the audit contract. Mr. Stich made a motion to approve the audit contract with Anderson, Smith, and Wyke, LLC and it was seconded by Mr. Covil. The 2026-2027 Audit Contract was approved 7-0.

Head Start Continuation Grant 2026-2027 – Lori Byars (Action)

Chairman Ashworth recognized Lori Byars, Preschool Director, for presentation of the Head Start Grant continuation application. Ms. Byars reviewed the documents attached to the Board Agenda including the proposed Head Start budget, the Self-Assessment Summary and Improvement Plan, the Training and Assistance Plan, and Program Goals Progress Update. The Head Start grant budget total will be \$790,290 which includes \$12,827 of restricted money for technical assistance and training of staff. Mr. Ashworth called for questions or comments and there were none. Ms. Allen made a motion to approve the Head Start Continuation Grant and it was seconded by Mr. Stich. The Head Start Continuation Grant was approved on a vote of 7-0.

School Readiness Report – Lori Byars (Information)

Preschool Director Lori Byars presented the 2025–2026 Polk County Schools Preschool School Readiness Plan. The goals were approved by the Polk County Schools Preschool School Readiness Committee on February 12, 2026. The preschool program provides comprehensive services for up to 144 children, including those with and without special needs. Polk County has 80 Head Start slots across nine classrooms at four sites: Polk Central Elementary (3 classrooms), Saluda Elementary (1 classroom), Sunny View Elementary (1 classroom), and Tryon Elementary (4 classrooms).

Student Device Bid Proposal – Brandon Schweitzer (Action)

Dr. Brandon Schweitzer, Director of Operations, presented a proposal to purchase student Chromebook devices. The proposal was to purchase 250 Lenovo 100e Gen Chromebooks. The winning bid proposal was \$102,746.88. After review, Chairman Ashworth called for a motion to approve the Student Device Bid Proposal. Ms. Allen make the motion, which was seconded by Mr. Stich. The motion was approved unanimously, 7-0.

III. OLD BUSINESS

None

IV. NEW BUSINESS

Superintendent Murphy provided the Board with an update regarding recent national concerns involving Lifetouch, a company that has historically provided school photography services to schools across the United States. Mr. Murphy stated that Polk County Schools is aware of the situation and, at this time, has not been contacted by any local or federal law enforcement agencies regarding any breach of student data within the district.

Superintendent Murphy informed the Board that the district is actively monitoring the situation and maintaining communication with local law enforcement. Should the district receive any notification or if circumstances change, he emphasized that the administration would remain transparent and promptly inform the Board.

Mr. Murphy also stated that the district plans to review its vendor relationships to ensure that appropriate safety and data protection protocols are in place. Currently, however, Polk County Schools have not received any indication of a student data breach.

Superintendent Murphy reiterated his commitment to keeping the Board informed and stated that the district will work in coordination with the Board should any additional steps be necessary to address these concerns.

Chairman Ashworth asked how many schools within Polk County Schools currently use Lifetouch. Superintendent Murphy responded that Polk County Middle School (PCMS) and Polk County High School (PCHS) are the only two schools utilizing Lifetouch services.

Attorney John Henning, Jr., commented that his firm represents several clients who also use Lifetouch and that similar questions have arisen among them. He stated that, as Mr. Murphy previously noted, they are not aware of any specific data breaches related to these concerns. Mr. Henning added that the reported association with the Epstein matter involves a corporate officer within a parent company of Lifetouch and does not appear to be directly related to Lifetouch's school photography operations.

V. INFORMATION

Pre-School Monthly Report Presented to the Board
February Head Start Council Minutes Presented to the Board
Pre-K Financial Report Presented to the Board
Monthly Financial Report Presented to the Board
Month to Date Credit Card Report Presented to the Board
Optional Teacher Workday – April 3
Spring Break – April 6 – April 10
Special Olympics- PCHS – May 1

NCSBA OFFERED OPTIONAL BOARD TRAINING

Spring Law Virtual Conference - March 19 - 8:30 AM - 12:00 PM
Governance Webinar: Community Engagement for Student Achievement – April 23 - 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Summer Leadership Conference - Wrightsville Beach - June 15 - June 19
NCSBA Video Training Library

VI. PUBLIC INPUT

There was one community member who wished to offer public input. A verbatim account of public input and all open meeting Board discussion is available via digital audio recording.

VII. CLOSED SESSION

Closed Session

At 7:17 PM Mr. Ashworth entertained a motion to go into closed session for the purpose of discussing personnel. Mr. Covil made the motion to go into closed session, and it was seconded by Ms. Gibbs. 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 8:13 pm, Ms. Gibbs made a motion to return to open session. Ms. Allen seconded the motion. The motion carried 7-0.

Chairman 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. Mr. Stich 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.

Information:

Name	Position	School	
Gail Spitznogle	EC Director	Central Office	Retiring
Elizabeth Hart	School Psychologist	All	Retiring
Sharon Johnston	EC Teacher	TES	Retiring
Amy Jo Scott	Family Services Specialist	All	Retiring
Madison Butler	Wheel Teacher	PCMS	Resigned
Cynthia Gibson	Afterschool	TES	Resigned
Lily Earney	Teacher Assistant	TES	Resigned
Savanna Adams	Teacher	PCES	FMLA
Alston Rikard	Teacher	PCMS	FMLA
Mary Rikard	Guidance Counselor	TES	FMLA
Amber Styles	Teacher	PCES	FMLA

Action:

Name	Position	School	Hometown	College	Licensure Area	Years Exp
Blair Ruth	Teacher Assistant	PCMS	Mill Spring	N/A	N/A	N/A
Bryan "Keith" Jenkins	EC Teacher Assistant	PCHS	Mill Spring	N/A	N/A	N/A
Victoria Denton	Pre-K Floater	TES-Forbes	Columbus	N/A	N/A	N/A
Evelyn Dailey	Afterschool Group Leader	Sunny View	Tryon	N/A	N/A	N/A
Taylor Russell	Afterschool Group Leader	Sunny View	Columbus	N/A	N/A	N/A
Denise Kennedy	Teacher	Saluda	Requested unpaid one-year leave of absence			

VII. ADJOURNMENT

With no more business to come before the Board, Mr. Ashworth declared the meeting adjourned at 8:14 pm.

Mr. Ashworth, Board Chair

Todd Murphy, Board Secretary
TM/RC