



## MEETING MINUTES

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APRIL 16, 2026, BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING  
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### **Vision**

Craven County Schools will be THE choice for students, staff, families, and communities as we prepare each and every learner to reach their fullest potential.

### **Mission**

Craven County Schools provides a supportive, empowering, and academically rich learning environment that inspires and engages students, staff, families, and community to build a better tomorrow.

### **Board of Education Mission Statement**

Through teamwork and commitment to the vision and mission of the Craven County School System, the Board of Education will provide leadership to the system by:

- Setting direction, priorities and policy,
- Allocating resources consistent with the priorities of the district,
- Serving as a liaison to the community, and
- Modeling the principles of continual improvement

### **Attendance**

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#### **Voting Members**

Jennifer Dacey, Board Member  
Amy Davis, Vice-Chair  
Darlene Gibbs, Board Member  
Lee Kirkman, Chair  
Patti Mason, Board Member  
Lori Spiece, Board Member

### **A. OPEN SESSION**

#### **1. Call to Order**

The Board Chair called the meeting to order at 6:01. Six members of the Board were present and there was a quorum. Not present: Lauren Kitinger

## **B. Agenda**

The agenda was adopted.

**Motion made by:** Lori Spiece

**Motion seconded by:** Jennifer Dacey

**Voting results:** Unanimously Approved

## **C. Safety Procedures - Jennifer Dacey**

The safety procedures were reviewed.

## **D. Invocation**

The Board attorney offered the following invocation for the meeting.

Board Members please pray with me,

How grateful we are, O lord, our Creator, that you have given us life. As the trees burst forth from their winter slumber, awaken us to the renewal that is ours when we receive from your hand the gifts of this season. As the deer longs for water, so our souls seek refreshment from their deepest thirst. Quench our desires with the assurance that from you alone flows all the blessing we require for this day.

As deep calls to deep, so we call to you, who by day bestow your steadfast love and by night offer us the solace of your tender care.

Our help and our God, we offer ourselves and our prayers to you. Amen.

Psalm 42:1-2,7

This prayer was closely drawn from that given by Chaplain Margaret Grun Kibben to the U.S. House of Representatives on 4/6/26

A copy of the original prayer is available at <https://chaplain.house.gov/archive/>.

## **E. Pledge of Allegiance -Lori Spiece**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

## **F. Acknowledgements**

The Chair acknowledged the meeting attendees.

## **G. PROCLAMATION: Month Of the Military Child - Patti Mason**

Patti Mason read the Proclamation from North Carolina Governor Josh Stein naming April, 2026, the Month of the Military Child.

## **H. PROCLAMATION: School Library Month - Darlene Gibbs**

Darlene Gibbs read the Proclamation from North Carolina Governor Josh Stein naming April 2026, as School Library Month.

## **I. PUBLIC HEARING: FY 2026-2027 Local Current Expense and Capital Outlay Budget Request**

No public members signed up to speak regarding the FY 2026-2027 Local Current Expense and Capital Outlay Budget Request.

## **J. PUBLIC INPUT**

Public input began at 6:07 p.m. and ended at 6:58 p.m. The following individuals addressed the Board:

1. Brian Wright
2. Robert Johnson
3. Anna Wood
4. Austin Layer
5. Cleopatra Hargett-Lawton
6. Megan Carlson
7. Richard Wilson
8. A.K. Foluke
9. Linda Henry
10. John Waddell

## **K. BREAK**

The Board took a ten-minute break.

## **L. MINUTES**

### **1. Regular Meeting Minutes**

A motion and second were made to approve the Board meeting minutes for the following meetings/dates:

- February 19, 2026 - Monthly Meeting
- March 10, 2026 - Budget Work Session
- March 17, 2026 - Work Session
- March 19, 2026 - Monthly Meeting
- March 24, 2026 - Special Called Budget Work Session

**Motion made by:** Patti Mason

**Motion seconded by:** Amy Davis

**Voting results:** Unanimously Approved

### **2. Closed Session Meeting Minutes**

A motion and second were made to approve the closed session meeting minutes for the following meetings/dates:

- March 10, 2026 - Budget Work Session -closed
- March 17, 2026 - Work Session -closed
- March 19, 2026 - Monthly Meeting -closed
- March 24, 2026 - Special Called Budget Work Session -closed

## M. SUPERIOR SYSTEMS

### 1. FY 26-27 Local Current Expense and Capital Outlay Budget Request - Superintendent Dr. Matthew Cheeseman and Chief Finance Officer Heidi Daly

Superintendent Dr. Cheeseman and Chief Finance Officer Heidi Daly presented the proposed FY 2026–2027 Local Current Expense and Capital Outlay Budget, providing an overview of long-term funding trends, enrollment decline, inflationary pressures, and the district’s current low ranking in local appropriations. They explained that despite declining student enrollment, fixed and variable costs have continued to rise, creating ongoing budget pressures. They also reviewed the district’s projected fund balance, noting that available funds would be insufficient to sustain operations while maintaining a recommended minimum reserve, resulting in a funding gap of \$3.8 million for operations.

Based on this analysis, Dr. Cheeseman recommended requesting an additional \$3.8 million in local operating funds and \$1,437,537 in additional capital outlay funding, with the possibility of refinement pending county funding decisions and final state budget adjustments.

Board members discussed the proposal, with Patti Mason expressing concern about the potential tax impact associated with the full \$5.2 million combined request that will cause the commissioners to raise taxes at 4 cents on the dollar and stating an inability to support the recommendation for that reason. Other members voiced support for the budget request, citing the reasonableness of the proposal, the importance of fully presenting district needs, statutory county responsibility for school facilities, and confidence in the thoughtful and intentional development of the budget. Several members also expressed appreciation for the administration’s work in improving the district’s financial planning and positioning the request for presentation to county commissioners on May 4th.

A motion and a second were made to approve the FY 26-27 Local Current Expense and Capital Outlay Budget Request with a majority approval. Voting against: Patti Mason.

**Motion made by:** Jennifer Dacey

**Motion seconded by:** Lori Spiece

#### ***Voting results:***

Yes: Jennifer Dacey

Yes: Amy Davis

Yes: Darlene Gibbs

Yes: Lee Kirkman

No: Patti Mason

Yes: Lori Spiece

## **2. GAB Tentative Decision on Proposed School Closure - Superintendent Dr. Matthew Cheeseman**

Superintendent Dr. Cheeseman presented the timeline and process for a tentative decision regarding the proposed closure of Graham A. Barden School, explaining that a “yes” vote would not close the school but would allow the process to continue with community information meetings, a public hearing, and a final Board decision anticipated in May. He reviewed that the recommendation followed the Board’s previously approved process and consideration of required factors, including facility conditions, enrollment, operating costs, transportation, and other statutory considerations.

Board members discussed the proposal and emphasized that a tentative “yes” vote was solely to continue the process and provide additional opportunities for public input, not a final decision on closure. Members expressed appreciation for the Graham A. Barden staff and school community, commended the thoroughness of the closure summary report, and acknowledged the difficulty of the decision. Discussion also included broader concerns about financial pressures affecting community schools and the importance of continued public engagement as the process moves forward.

A motion and a second were made to approve the tentative decision on the proposed Graham A. Barden School closure.

**Motion made by:** Patti Mason

**Motion seconded by:** Amy Davis

▮ **Voting results:** Unanimously Approved

## **N. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

### **1. Discussion of Public Input**

Board members thanked speakers for their public input and emphasized the Board’s responsibility to listen to and represent the community.

### **2. AH Bangert Scholarship Recipients**

The Board received recommendations for the 2025–2026 Bangert Scholarship recipients and alternates, with 31 student applications reviewed and nine recipients selected representing both early colleges and traditional high schools. To preserve surprise recognition at school awards ceremonies, the names of recipients were not announced publicly. Appreciation was expressed to the selection committee for its work in reviewing applications and selecting recipients from a highly qualified pool. A motion and second were made to approve the recommended scholarship recipients and alternates.

**Motion made by:** Darlene Gibbs

**Motion seconded by:** Jennifer Dacey

▮ **Voting results:** Unanimously Approved

### 3. Board Comments/Celebrations

Board members shared the following updates, recognitions and celebrations from across the district:

- The Board recognized Holly Tolston, Director of Career and Technical Education, for being selected as a key community influencer and earning the opportunity to fly with the Blue Angels, congratulating her on the honor and celebrating the significance of the recognition for the district.
- Board members recognized School Library Month and expressed appreciation for school librarians and their role in fostering student learning and engagement.
- Members commended the staff at Graham A. Barden, particularly the exceptional children staff, for their professionalism and dedication to the students.
- The Board highlighted the success of the Trent Woods fifth-grade Invention Convention, praising student innovation, presentation skills, and problem-solving abilities, all which demonstrate strong student achievement.
- Members shared their positive experience during the recent Legislative Day at Grover C. Fields, commending student participation, staff planning and the engagement of legislators and County Commissioners in learning more about district needs and school programs.
- Board members also recognized and complimented the success of the A-Team banquet, Brinson Memorial's Math Night and community partnerships, including support from local businesses and volunteers, as examples of meaningful collaboration and student enrichment opportunities.

### O. CONSENT AGENDA

#### 1. Out of State/Water Activity Field Trip

Motion made by: Lori Spiece

Motion seconded by: Amy Davis

| **Voting results:** Unanimously Approved

### P. CLOSED SESSION

A motion and second were made to enter into closed session pursuant to N.C. General Statute § 143-318.11(a)(3) and (a)(6) to consult with an attorney in order to protect the attorney-client privilege between the attorney and the public body and to consider the qualifications, competence, performance, or condition of appointment of a public officer or employee or prospective public officer or employee. The closed session began at 7:56 p.m. and was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

### Q. PREMIER PROFESSIONALS

#### 1. Human Resource Services Report - Asst. Superintendent of HR Dr. Lakesia Boone

A motion and second were made to approve Human Resource Services Report 10.

**Motion made by:** Patti Mason  
**Motion seconded by:** Jennifer Dacey

| ***Voting results:*** Unanimously Approved

## **R. ADJOURN**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:53 p.m.

**Motion made by:** Patti Mason  
**Motion seconded by:** Jennifer Dacey

| ***Voting results:*** Unanimously Approved