

School District of Rhinelander
Board of Education

Regular Monthly Meeting
Monday, January 19, 2026

MINUTES

The regular meeting of the Board of Education was called to order on Monday, January 19, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. in the Superior Diesel Advanced Learning Center at Rhinelander High School, 665 Coolidge Avenue, Rhinelander, WI.

Ronald Counter, Board President, led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call

Board Members Present: Judy Conlin, Mary Peterson, Mike Roberts, Duane Frey, Merlin Van Buren, Ronald Lueneburg, Patricia Townsend, Kurt Helke, and Ronald Counter

Board Members Absent: None

Others present at this meeting were: Superintendent, Eric Burke; Director of Human Resources, Michele Cornelius; Director of Learning Support, Richard Gretzinger; Director of Business Services, Bob Thom; Director of Instruction, Ryan Ourada; Principal of Central Elementary, Amanda Olson, Dean of Students Pelican and Central Elementary, Tyler Johnson, Jenny Prom, Associate Principal Rhinelander High School, Matt Knott, Amanda Beuning, Jeff Rauworth, Kelci Seaman, Secretary/Deputy Clerk, Shelley Anderson, Heather Schaefer of the Northwoods Star Journal, and Ardith Carlton of the Northwoods River News. Nineteen other people were also present.

Declaration of Public Notice

President Counter indicated that the 'Declaration of Public Notice' was printed with the meeting agenda. This notice identifies the public places where the meeting agenda was posted and/or shared.

Citizens/Delegations

- No citizens/delegations wished to address the Board.

Report Topics/Updates

President's Report – Ron Counter – no report/comment was given.

Vice-President's Report – Judy Conlin – no report/comment was given.

Central Elementary School – Central Elementary: Where Growth Meets Purpose – Amanda Olson, Lindsey Casper, Tyler Johnson, Jenny Prom, Jace White, Harper Marten, and Grace Raduechel.

- Central Elementary staff and students presented an overview of the school’s mission, vision, and values, highlighting a positive and welcoming school culture with a strong sense of belonging. Enrollment includes 266 students in EC–5 with approximately 61 staff members, including contracted staff. School perception survey results showed significant growth in staff trust, leadership support, and confidence in decision-making, as well as improved student discipline practices and social-emotional supports. Academic data indicated student growth exceeding national averages in literacy and math. High-quality instruction, instructional coaching, and SEL integration were noted as key factors in continued success.

Update on the Hodag Expanded Program – Amanda Beuning, Jeff Rauworth, and Kelci Seaman.

- The Hodag Expanded Program staff provided an overview of the Hodag Expanded Program for the 2025–2026 school year. The program supports students with behavioral, emotional, mental health, AODA, and special education needs through individualized instruction, consistent schedules, and wraparound supports. Community-based experiential learning opportunities were highlighted. Program successes included students transitioning back to full-day schedules at JWMS and RHS, and increased school and community support.

Recognition of Amanda Beuning for Obtaining National Board Certification.

- Director of Learning Support, Richard Gretzinger, introduced Amanda Beuning.
- Amanda achieved National Board Certification in Wisconsin by demonstrating exceptionally strong teaching practices above and beyond state licensure standards, earning recognition as an accomplished educator with a commitment to continual professional growth.
- This is the highest professional credential in K-12 teaching in the United States.

Referendum Construction Project Update on Budget Status and Funding – Bob Thom.

- Director of Business Services, Bob Thom, reported that electricians are working second shift at Rhinelander High School, so there is less disruption during the school day.
- James Williams Middle School will be using more of the new classroom spaces in the second semester.
- Rhinelander High School will be completed over the summer.

Committee Chair Reports

Instruction and Accountability Committee

- The Committee recommended agenda items e and f to the Full Board.
- A summary of the Plan-On-A-Page update that was presented at the committee meeting was given.

Operations and Strategic Planning Committee

- No report was given as the Committee did not meet.

Employee Relations Committee

- No report was given as the Committee did not meet.

Capital Projects Ad Hoc Committee

- No report was given as the Committee did not meet.

CESA 9 Representative Report

- Merlin Van Buren, the Board's representative to CESA 9, shared an update on the successes of the Excellence in Education program.
- He reported that 86% of teachers who earned their licenses within the past five years through the program—designed for individuals with bachelor's degrees outside of education—remain in the teaching profession.
- In contrast, teachers who obtained licensure through traditional pathways show a significantly higher rate of leaving the profession within the first five years.

Discussion, Reports/Updates, and/or Action Topics

Consider Approval of the Minutes from the December 15, 2025, Regular Board Meeting.

MOTION: R. Lueneburg, seconded by J. Conlin.

Approve the minutes of the December 15, 2025, Regular Board Meeting as printed.

M. Roberts and Patricia Townsend abstained.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Consider the Approval of the December 2025 Payment of Claims in the Amount of \$1,137,482.64 and the December 2025 Payment of Contracted Services in the Amount of \$727,115.21.

MOTION: M. Roberts, seconded by K. Helke.

Approve the December 2025 Payment of Claims in the Amount of \$1,137,482.64 and the December 2025 Payment of Contracted Services in the Amount of \$727,115.21.

Aye: J. Conlin, M. Peterson, M. Roberts, D. Frey, M. Van Buren, R. Lueneburg, P. Townsend, K. Helke, R. Counter

Nay: None

Motion passed 9/0

Review of the December Budget Status Report.

- Bob Thom, Director of Business, reported that the District remains on budget.
- He noted that Special Education Aid continues to be monitored, with a potential State funding level of 38.5%. Each one percent change in funding represents approximately \$70,000 for the District.
- Lauterbach & Amen, LLP, the District's audit firm, reclassified \$1.3 million from the fund balance to the health insurance fund balance to ensure adequate coverage of liabilities related to the District's self-insured health plan.
- It was emphasized that these funds were not expended, but rather transferred between accounts.
- The auditors may consider reversing this entry as of June 30.
- Ken Zastrow of USI will provide additional information at the February Employee Relations Committee meeting.

Consider Acceptance of Various Gifts/Donations Contributed to the District.

MOTION: M. Peterson, seconded by M. Roberts.

Accept with sincere gratitude the following gifts/donations:

- Coupons for custard for a year valued at \$270 from Culver's, Krystal Fochs
- Snacks valued at \$500 from Larry and Jill Petersen, Larry and Judith Kleinschmidt, Becky Priebe, Richard and Vicki Voss, Ellen Lieck, and Sue Johnson
- \$520 from Randy and Jennifer Lepak
- 12 deluxe hoops, 1 ultra-lite cage ball set, 24 bean bags, 12 large stacking buckets, 24 colored foam dice set, and 12 giggle and play stepping stones valued at \$302.96 from Geralyn Karl
- A tv valued at \$50 from Michele Cornelius
- \$200 from Brian Bart

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Discussion and/or Action on the 2026 Summer School Proposals.

MOTION: J. Conlin, seconded by M. Peterson.

The Board approve the 2026 elementary, middle school and high school summer school sessions as proposed.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Discussion and/or Action on the 2026-2027 School Year Calendar.

MOTION: J. Conlin, seconded by M. Peterson.

The Board approval of the 2026-2027 school year calendar as proposed, with graduation to be held on Friday, May 28, 2027.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Discussion and/or Action on the 2026-2027 Public School Open Enrollment Determination of Availability.

MOTION: P. Townsend, seconded by J. Conlin.

School District of Rhinelander to approve or deny 2026-2027 regular education student open enrollment applications pursuant to state requirements and based on the criteria outlined in the District's Open Enrollment Program #5113. For the School District of Rhinelander to deny any open enrollment applications for the 2026-2027 school year for students requiring special education programming or services due to zero spaces available in the following service areas: early childhood special education, elementary cross-categorical special education, middle school cross-categorical special education, high school cross-categorical special education, deaf and hard of hearing, visually impaired, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech and language pathology.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Superintendent's Report – Eric Burke – School Year Updates and Celebrations - No report was given.

Enter Closed Session

MOTION: R. Counter, seconded by J. Conlin.

Enter closed session pursuant to

- a. Wis. Stats. 19.85 (1) (c), to consider employment, promotion, compensation, or performance evaluation data of any public employee over which the governmental body has jurisdiction or exercises responsibility.

More specifically, consider staff resignation.

Aye: J. Conlin, M. Peterson, M. Roberts, D. Frey, M. Van Buren, R. Lueneburg, P. Townsend, K. Helke, R. Counter

Nay: None

Motion passed 9/0

Closed Session

The Board will convene in closed session to discuss staff hire(s), resignations(s), and retirement(s).

Return to Open Session

MOTION: D. Frey, seconded by R. Lueneburg.

Aye: J. Conlin, M. Peterson, M. Roberts, D. Frey, M. Van Buren, R. Lueneburg, P. Townsend, K. Helke, R. Counter

Nay: None

Motion passed 9/0

Return to open session.

Open Session

MOTION: J. Conlin, seconded by D. Frey.

Approve the hire of Karlee Denis and Tiffany Papapetru as proposed.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

MOTION: J. Conlin, seconded by R. Counter.

Approve the resignation of Paula Norman effective the end of the 2025-2026 school year as proposed.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

MOTION: J. Conlin, seconded by R. Counter.

Approve the retirement of Michael Laggis effective the end of the 2025-2026 school year as proposed.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Adjournment

MOTION: J. Conlin, seconded by D. Frey.

Move to adjourn.

The motion passed with a voice vote at 7:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Peterson, Board of Education Clerk