

School District of Rhinelander
Board of Education

Regular Monthly Meeting
Monday, April 20, 2026

MINUTES

The regular meeting of the Board of Education was called to order on Monday, April 20, 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 included Superintendent Eric Burke, Director of Business Services Bob Thom, Director of Instruction Ryan Ourada, and Director of Human Resources Michele Cornelius. Also, in attendance were Crescent Elementary School Principal Alex Bontz, Megan Cihla, Vivian Lamers, Ella Heck, Kiley Pooch, Ella Miljevich, Nicole Losch, Emily Schiek, Tatiana Vadis, Kamden Kostrova, Secretary/Deputy Clerk Shelley Anderson, Heather Schaefer of the Northwoods Star Journal, and Ardith Carlton of the Northwoods River News. Eleven other people also attended.

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

- Shari Wendland thanked the Board on behalf of the James Williams Middle School Family and Consumer Education (FACE) and Technical Education Departments for supporting the remodel to enhance the FACE and Technical Education spaces and improve our school. She distributed fresh cookies from the students.
- Hayley Schiek and Ella Miljevich spoke regarding the cell phone policy for the 2026/2027 school year.

Report Topics/Updates

President's Report – Ron Counter – No report/comments were given.

Vice-President's Report – Judy Conlin – No report/comments were given.

Thanks a

Rhineland High School: Updates from the Spring Break Trips to Belize and Spain – Megan Cihla, Matthew Nichols, Nicole Losch, and Alison Flores.

Matthew Nichols and Alison Flores were unable to attend the meeting. Megan Cihla, along with students Vivian Lamers, Ella Heck, Kiley Pooch, and Ella Miljevich, presented an overview of the 2026 Belize STEM trip. The trip was designed to provide students with hands-on learning experiences in science, technology, engineering, and math through real-world environmental and cultural exploration.

Nicole Losch was joined by students Emily Schiek, Tatiana Vadis, and Kamden Kostrova, who shared reflections on their recent trip to Spain, describing meaningful personal growth, increased independence, and a deeper understanding of different cultures and perspectives. Students highlighted how the experience expanded their worldview and strengthened communication and problem-solving skills.

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

Director of Business Services Bob Thom reported that the final phase of the Rhineland High School construction project is temporarily paused through the end of May due to the school being in session.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony for the James Williams Middle School remodel was held prior to the meeting and was well attended. The overall project remains on schedule and within budget.

Revenue:

- **Interest:** \$1,292,752.79
- **Bond Proceeds:** \$26,000,000.00
- **Donations:** \$513,157.68
- Total Revenue:** \$27,805,910.47

Expenses:

- **Construction Services:** \$21,485,935.51
- **Supplies:** \$280,607.28
- **Equipment:** \$682,492.28
- **Insurance:** \$34,899.00
- **Fees, Permits, etc.:** \$60,088.07
- Total Expenses:** \$22,544,022.14
- The \$26M in bond proceeds is invested in CDs and Treasury Bills with Ehlers Investment Services. The return is currently 3.16%.

Committee Chair Reports

Instruction and Accountability Committee

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

Operations and Strategic Planning Committee

- Mike Roberts – The Committee recommended agenda item d to the Full Board.

Employee Relations Committee

- Duane Frey – The Committee recommended agenda item f to the Full Board.

Capital Projects Ad Hoc Committee

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

CESA 9 Representative Report

- No report was given.

Discussion, Reports/Updates, and/or Action Topics

Consider Approval of the Minutes from the March 23, 2026, Regular Board Meeting.

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

Approve the minutes of the March 23, 2026, Regular Board Meeting as printed.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Consider the Approval of the March 2026 Payment of Claims in the Amount of \$1,846,432.75 and the March 2026 Payment of Contracted Services in the Amount of \$508,264.45.

MOTION: M. Roberts, seconded by R. Lueneburg.

Approve the March 2026 Payment of Claims in the Amount of \$1,846,432.75 and the March 2026 Payment of Contracted Services in the Amount of \$508,264.45.

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

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:

- \$200 from Merlin Van Buren.
- \$100 from Patrick and Catherine Albrecht.
- \$25 from Julie McKenzie.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Discussion and/or Action on Revisions to Policies Relating to Administration, Professional Staff, Support Staff, and Operations.

MOTION: M. Roberts, seconded by R. Lueneburg.

The Board approve the revisions to the following policies:

Policy 1213 – Student Supervision and Welfare

Policy 3213 – Student Supervision and Welfare

Policy 4213 – Student Supervision and Welfare

Policy 8462 – Student Abuse and Neglect

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Discussion and/or Action on Resolution Adopting the Rhinelander Safe Routes to School Plan.

MOTION: J. Conlin, seconded by Roberts.

BE IT RESOLVED, that the School District of Rhinelander hereby adopts Resolution 3.24.2026.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the School District of Rhinelander staff is directed to begin implementing this SRTS Plan by coordinating efforts among both entities who created this plan (School District of Rhinelander, and City of Rhinelander).

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Discussion and/or Action on Proposed Staff Salary Adjustments and Percentage Increases for All Other Employee Groups for the 2026-2027 School Year.

MOTION: D. Frey, seconded by K. Helke.

Board approve the step movement on the existing pay scale for teachers in the 2026-27 school year and a 3.00% increase for all other employees.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Superintendent's Report – Eric Burke – School Year Updates and Celebrations

- Superintendent Burke expressed appreciation to all who attended the James Williams Middle School ribbon-cutting ceremony, noting strong attendance from community members, parents, community partners, Board members, and staff. He highlighted that initial conversations with community partners began in 2022, leading to voter support of the building referendum in 2024.
- The District hosted the Northwoods Career & Collaborative Summit on April 15, 2026, at the Cedric A. Vig Outdoor Classroom (CAVOC). The event included representatives from Nicolet College, CESA 9, and five area school districts. Discussions focused on expanding college and career opportunities for students and supporting workforce and community development in the Northwoods region.

Enter Closed Session

MOTION: R. Counter, seconded by M. Roberts.

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.

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 hiring, resignations, and retirement.

Return to Open Session

MOTION: M. Roberts, 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 Rodney Sternhagen and Debbie Schultz as proposed.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

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

Approve the resignation of Michole Hegeman, Sallie Spencer, and Samantha Stieber, effective the end of the 2025-2026 school year as proposed.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

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

Approve the retirement of Michael Wojtusik, effective at the end of the 2025-2026 school year, as proposed.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Adjournment

MOTION: P. Townsend, seconded by D. Frey.

Move to adjourn.

The motion passed with a voice vote at 6:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Peterson, Board of Education Clerk