

Revised

School District of Rhinelander
Board of Education

Regular Monthly Meeting
Monday, June 8, 2026

Minutes

The regular meeting of the Board of Education was called to order at 6:01 p.m. on Monday, June 8, 2026, in the Superior Diesel Advanced Learning Center at Rhinelander High School, 665 Coolidge Ave., Rhinelander, WI.

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

Roll Call

Committee Members Present: Mary Peterson, Duane Frey, Merlin Van Buren, Ronald Lueneburg, Patricia Townsend, Kurt Helke, and Ron Counter

Committee Members Absent: Judy Conlin and Mike Roberts

Others present at this meeting were Superintendent, Eric Burke; Director of Business Services, Bob Thom; Director of Instruction, Ryan Ourada; Director of Learning Support, Richard Gretzinger; and Director of Human Resources, Michele Cornelius. Also, in attendance were Kari Strebiger; Principal at Pelican Elementary School, Pat Karaba; Food Service Manager for Taher Food Service, Brian Paulson; Director of Activities Grades 6-12, Mike Cheslock; Community Education and School Forest Manager, Secretary/Deputy Clerk; Shelley Anderson, Heather Schaefer of the Northwoods Star Journal, and Ardith Carlton of the Northwoods River News. No other people were 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

School Board President's Report – Ron Counter – President Counter recognized the administration, staff, and students for their hard work in ensuring a successful and memorable 2026 graduation ceremony.

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

Pelican Elementary School – 2025-2026 Celebrations – Kari Strebig.

Principal Strebig presented an overview of its 2025-2026 school improvement efforts, highlighting progress in strengthening school culture, staff collaboration, and instructional practices. The presentation included improved staff and student perception survey results, implementation of targeted intervention through W.I.N. (What I Need) time, and increases in student achievement, including six-year highs in mathematics, English language arts, and social studies proficiency.

School Nutrition Standards Compliance Report – Pat Karaba.

Pat Karaba provided a detailed report on the District's school nutrition program, highlighting its alignment with federal and state regulations and its emphasis on promoting healthy eating habits among students. Key areas of the presentation included:

- Meal Pattern and Nutritional Quality: An overview of compliance with USDA nutrition standards, including caloric content, saturated fat, sodium target levels, and added sugar allowances.
- The June elementary summer school menu was provided.
- The daily food production record was explained.

Results from the Student, Family, and Community Surveys – Richard Gretzinger, Brian Paulson, and Mike Cheslock.

Richard Gretzinger presented the results of the Spring 2026 Student Survey, which achieved a 95% participation rate with 1,322 student respondents. The survey indicated continued positive trends in students' perceptions of connection, learning, the school environment, and the overall school experience. Students reported feeling respected by teachers, supported by peers, and safe at school, with improvements in school safety, student respect, and compliance with school rules.

Brian Paulson presented an overview of student participation in extracurricular activities and employment. The presentation reviewed participation rates by grade level and highlighted data related to student involvement in sports, activities, and part-time employment.

Mike Cheslock presented the results of the 2026 Family and Community Connectedness Survey. The survey reflected strong satisfaction with the School District of Rhinelander, with a recommendation score of 7.92 out of 10. Respondents identified strengths in academics, college and career readiness, extracurricular opportunities, communication, community partnerships, and the Hodag Dome. The survey also provided valuable feedback to guide future improvements while demonstrating continued positive community support for the district.

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

Director of Business Services Bob Thom reported that C.D. Smith can work on the final phases of the Rhinelander High School remodel now that school is out for summer break. C.D. Smith is exploring options for the Rhinelander High School bathrooms, as funding may be available to upgrade them. A comprehensive update will be available next month.

Revenue:

- **Interest:** \$1,299,295.07
 - **Bond Proceeds:** \$26,000,000.00
 - **Donations:** \$513,257.68
- Total Revenue:** \$27,812,552.75

Expenses:

- **Construction Services:** \$21,571,318.22
 - **Supplies:** \$283,869.28
 - **Equipment:** \$752,661.89
 - **Insurance:** \$34,899.00
 - **Fees, Permits, Etc.:** \$61,255.21
- Total Expenses:** \$22,704,003.60

- The \$26M of bond proceeds are invested in CD's and Treasury Bills with Ehlers Investment Services. The return is currently 3.16%.

Committee Chair Reports

Instruction and Accountability Committee

- The Committee met before this meeting. The Achievement Gap Reduction (AGR) Report was presented. Current strategies are working, as positive growth in student test scores has been reported.

Operations and Strategic Planning Committee

- The Committee met before this meeting. The Committee recommended the Board approve the preliminary budget.

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

- No report was given.

Discussion, Reports/Updates, and/or Action Topics

Consider Approval of the Minutes of the May 18, 2026, Regular Board Meeting.

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

Accept the minutes of May 18, 2026, as printed.

Motion passed with a voice vote.

Consider the Approval of the May 2026 Payment of Claims in the Amount of \$1,415,058.06 and the May 2026 Payment of Contracted Services in the Amount of \$580,001.59.

MOTION: R. Lueneburg, seconded by M. Van Buren.

Approve the May 2026 Payment of Claims in the Amount of \$1,415,058.06 and the May 2026 Payment of Contracted Services in the Amount of \$580,001.59.

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

Nay: None

Motion passed 7/0

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

MOTION: M. Peterson, seconded by M. Van Buren.

Accept with sincere gratitude the following gifts/donations:

- \$25 from Beau Stolzman.
- \$100 from Jim and Margaret Barnes.
- A Yamaha Baritone YEP 321 valued at \$2,000 from Mary Peterson
- A 2009 Toyota Rav-4 valued at \$6,000 from Mary (Pat) Schauder.
- Twelve new pickleball paddles and thirteen gently used pickleball paddles valued at \$500 from the Rhinelander Pickleball Club, Dennis Zielinski.
- Wildlife stickers and magnets valued at \$150 from Heidi Sorensen.
- \$100 from Joe and Judy Conlin.
- A 2022 Pace American Inc. enclosed trailer valued at \$7,500 from Paul Ellenbecker.
- \$200 from Finlan Law Firm, S.C.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Discussion and/or Action on Staff Handbook Revisions.

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

Approve the changes to the Support Staff Handbook as proposed.

Motion passed with a voice vote.

MOTION: D. Frey, seconded by M. Peterson.

Approve the changes to the Professional Employee Handbook as proposed.

Motion passed with a voice vote.

Discussion and/or Action on the 2026-2027 Preliminary Budget.

MOTION: R. Counter, seconded by R. Lueneburg.

Approve the 2026-2027 Preliminary Budget as presented at Committee.

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

Nay: None

Motion passed 7/0

Discussion and/or Action on the Timber Sale – Crystal Clear Aspen – Town of Pine Lake.

MOTION: M. Van Buren, seconded by R. Lueneburg.

The Board accept the bid from Wiitala & Vozka Logging in the amount of \$56,630.00.

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

Nay: None
Motion passed 7/0

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

- Superintendent Burke reported on the District's End-of-Year Celebration, which recognized staff achievements and service. Highlights included recognition of Mike Cheslock as the 2025 Wisconsin School Forest Award recipient, Mike Wojtusik as the 2026 Kohl Fellowship recipient, this year's Golden Apple Award recipients, CAVOC volunteers, employees celebrating 25 years of service, and the District's retirees. The event concluded with a presentation by Jim Lenz, the "Magic and Science Guy."
- He also reported that the District's Guiding Coalition met on June 8 to review districtwide culture and staff feedback, noting the positive results regarding employee perceptions and workplace culture.
- Superintendent Burke acknowledged the recent passing of former Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds Jeff Zdroik, recognizing his many years of dedicated service to the District and noting that he will be fondly remembered for his commitment and ability to make things happen.

Enter Closed Session

MOTION: R. Counter, seconded by R. Lueneburg.

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 exercise responsibility.

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

Nay: None

Motion passed 7/0

Closed Session

The Board will convene in closed session to discuss staff hiring and resignation.

Return to Open Session

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

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

Nay: None

Motion passed 7/0

Return to open session.

Open Session

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

Approve the hire of Karlee Dennis, Kiahna Weber, Michael Fossen, Poul Larsen, Jessica Kukowski, Amy Schmitz, Christopher Heitz, Janele Dupris, Haleigh Wimberger, Trista Maulson and Kayla Goranson as proposed.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

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

Approve the resignation of Alexe Cooney and Rebecca Swan as proposed.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Adjourn

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

Move to adjourn.

The motion passed with a voice vote at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Peterson, Board of Education Clerk