

School District of Rhinelander
Board of Education

Regular Monthly Meeting
Monday, November 17, 2025

MINUTES

The regular meeting of the Board of Education was called to order on Monday, November 17, 2025, 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, Duane Frey, Merlin Van Buren, Ronald Lueneburg, Patricia Townsend, Kurt Helke, and Ronald Counter

Board Members Absent: Mary Peterson and Mike Roberts

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; Shari Wendland, Dean of Students Crescent Elementary, Jeff Welk; Addie Biermeier, Lucy Shepard, Robyn Kulba, Lorelai Aylesworth, Secretary/Deputy Clerk, Shelley Anderson, Beckie Gaskill of the Northwoods River News, and Heather Schaefer of the Northwoods Star Journal. Fourteen 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.

Rhinelander Education Association Representative - Shari Wendland – Brief update on current district activities and progress.

Shari Wendland updated the Board on recent and upcoming school activities. She highlighted that Board Members Merlin Van Buren and Kurt Helke spoke to students on November 7 and noted the Veterans Day Program held on November 11. She reported that Student Council members traveled to Stevens Point on November 17 and shared information about the upcoming student production of *Oliver*, scheduled for November 20–23. Shari also distributed the December dress-up day schedule and encouraged Board members to attend. She concluded by inviting all Board members and students present to participate in a brief learning demonstration.

Crescent Elementary School – CARES Cadets Program Presentation – Principal Alex Bontz (not in attendance), Dean of Students Jeff Welk, and Crescent Elementary students.

- Crescent Elementary School Dean of Students, Jeff Welk, introduced the CARES Cadets - Addie Biermeier, Lucy Shepard, and Robyn Kulba. CARES stands for Cooperation, Assertiveness, Responsibility, Empathy, and Self-Control.
- These five traits demonstrate good character, build relationships, and make Crescent a place where everyone feels welcome and respected.
- Cadets model positive behavior, help others, and take care of our school. Being a CARES Cadet means you're not just doing a job, you're showing leadership, kindness, and teamwork in everything you do.
- Addie Biermeier - Being a Crescent CARES Cadet makes us proud! We're learning to lead, communicate, and create meaningful change in our school community.
- Lucy Shepard - CARES Cadets support the school through roles like Safety Patrol, Library Helpers, Flag Folding, School Beautification, meal-time support, and helping in classrooms. A favorite job is reading with younger students. She emphasized that all roles reflect the CARES traits and show that authentic leadership means helping others, showing kindness, and doing what's right.
- Crescent 5th grader Robyn Kulba explained that becoming a CARES Cadet starts with an application and interview to show responsibility, kindness, and dependability. Selected students make a promise to do their jobs well, be positive role models, and seek support when needed. She emphasized that being a CARES Cadet is about leadership, pride, and service to others—living the values that make Crescent a great school. Robyn concluded, "Crescent CARES—because we care about our school, classmates, and community!"

Rhineland High School Student Council – Lorelai Aylesworth – Angel Tree Preview and the November Leadership Conference.

- Student Council member, Lorelai Aylesworth, informed the Board that the Student Council is supporting four local families this holiday season through the Angel Tree project.
- Students attended leadership conferences in Mosinee on November 12 and will also participate in a conference in Stevens Point on November 18.

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

- Director of Business Services, Bob Thom, reviewed the summary of revenues and expenses through November 3, 2025. He reported that the overall project is moving along with around \$18,000,000 spent to date.
- The office at James Williams Middle School will be operational beginning today, November 17.

- The technical education areas should be near completion by mid-December.

Revenue:

- **Interest:** \$1,111,848.53
 - **Bond Proceeds:** \$26,000,000.00
 - **Donations:** \$414,158.00
- Total Revenue:** \$27,526,006.53

Expenses:

- **Construction Services:** \$14,403,889.56
 - **Supplies:** \$254,951.41
 - **Equipment:** \$432,535.47
 - **Insurance:** \$34,899.00
 - **Fees, Permits, etc.:** \$53,015.85
- Total Expenses:** \$15,179,291.29

The \$26M in bond proceeds is invested in CDs and Treasury Bills with Ehlers Investment Services. The return has been 4.12%.

Local Report Card Update – Eric Burke, Ryan Ourada, Bob Thom, Michele Cornelius, and Richard Gretzinger.

The School District of Rhinelander reviewed progress across four core strategic areas. Three areas exceeded expectations, and one met expectations.

1. Student Learning & Success – 3/5 (Meets Expectations)

- DPI Report Card overall score: 62.3 – Meets Expectations.
- Hodag Readiness significantly exceeds expectations with strong growth in life and career readiness.
- ACT composite growth from 9th to 11th grade increased by 2.5 points (from 15.4 to 17.9).
- Forward Exam: Over 40% of students scored Meeting/Advanced in ELA and Math.
- Strengths include readiness indicators and strong ACT growth.

2. Operational & Financial Stewardship – 4/5 (Exceeds Expectations)

- Budget, audit, facilities, safety, and technology all rated at or above expectations.
- Facilities improved across multiple schools; referendum passed for major upgrades at RHS and JWMS.
- Fund balance remains at policy minimum (21%); careful budgeting will be needed going forward.
- Technology infrastructure and device replacement plans remain strong.

3. High-Performing Teams – 4/5 (Exceeds Expectations)

- Strong staff engagement (3.85/5) and staff satisfaction (3.75/5).
- Updated hiring process and superintendent interviews have strengthened recruitment.
- Staff turnover remains low with a 7.24% three-year average.

- First-year staff retention is 85%.
- PLC work significantly exceeds expectations.

4. Engagement & Connectedness – 4/5 (Exceeds Expectations)

- Student survey results improved across all areas (learning, experience, environment, connection).
- Over 90% of students report positive engagement indicators (trying their best, feeling respected, having friends).
- Family rating: 7.5/10, Community rating: 7.9/10, both up from prior years.
- Participation in school/community activities remains strong—80%+ at elementary and middle school.

Summary

The district continues to excel in operational stewardship, staff culture, and engagement with students, families, and the community. Academic performance shows growth and notable strengths, with targeted areas for improvement reflected in the Meets Expectations rating for Student Learning & Success.

Committee Chair Reports

Instruction and Accountability Committee

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

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

- No report was given.

Discussion, Reports/Updates, and/or Action Topics

Consider Approval of the Minutes from the October 20, 2025, Regular Board Meeting.

MOTION: R. Lueneburg, seconded by K. Helke.

Approve the minutes of the October 20, 2025, Regular Board Meeting as printed.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Consider Approval of the Minutes from the October 27, 2025, Annual Meeting of the Electors.

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

Approve the minutes of the October 27, 2025, Annual Meeting of the Electors as printed.

R. Counter abstained.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Consider Approval of the Minutes from the October 27, 2025, Special Meeting – Budget and Tax Levy.

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

Approve the minutes of the October 27, 2025, Special Meeting – Budget and Tax Levy as printed.

R. Counter abstained.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Consider the Approval of the October 2025 Payment of Claims in the Amount of \$4,418,758.71 and the October 2025 Payment of Contracted Services in the Amount of \$885,914.49.

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

Approve the October 2025 Payment of Claims in the Amount of \$4,418,758.71 and the October 2025 Payment of Contracted Services in the Amount of \$885,914.49.

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

Nay: None

Motion passed 7/0

Review of the October Budget Status Report

Bob Thom, Director of Business, reported that October included three payrolls, and payroll figures will level out in December, allowing for more accurate comparisons. He also noted that overall payroll and benefit expenses are currently tracking in line with the budget.

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

MOTION: J. Conlin, seconded by M. Van Buren.

Accept with sincere gratitude the following gifts/donations:

- \$250.00 from the Rhinelander Lions Club
- \$150.00 from Patti Rouman, Rouman Amusement Company
- Materials and labor valued at \$300.00 from Island Bay Printing.
- Classroom snacks valued at \$25.00 from Mike Freund.
- Three hundred mini pumpkins valued at \$75.00 from Beth Wallschlager, Hanson's Garden Village.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Discussion and/or Action on Second Readings of New Proposed Policies Relating to Professional and Support Staff.

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

The Board approve the second reading of:

- Policy 3419.01 - Privacy Protections of Self-Funded Group Health Plans and Related Benefits
- Policy 4419.01 - Privacy Protections of Self-Funded Group Health Plans and Related Benefits

The motion passed with a voice vote.

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

Superintendent Eric Burke reported that this week is Support Staff Appreciation Week and extended thanks to all staff who contribute to making SDR a great place. He also noted that the musical Oliver opens on Thursday and runs through the weekend. All are invited to attend the free performances featuring live music by students, staff, and community members.

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 exercises responsibility.

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

Nay: None

Motion passed 7/0

Closed Session

The Board moved to closed session and discussed staff hiring.

Return to Open Session

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

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

Nay: None

Motion passed 7/0

Return to open session.

Open Session

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

Approve the hire of Morgan Pappas as proposed.

The motion passed with a voice vote.

Adjournment

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

Move to adjourn.

The motion passed with a voice vote at 6:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Shelley Anderson, Secretary/Deputy Clerk