

BRYAN COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Monthly Newsletter of Bryan County School Board

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD:

Greetings from the Board of Education.

We hope you enjoyed your Thanksgiving Break and were able to spend some meaningful time with family and friends. As we begin Winter Break, we wish everyone a magical holiday season and a restful break.

Did you know that one reason the board began our monthly board newsletters was to directly communicate with our community? Our goal was to share our monthly work as well as answer frequently asked questions. One question we've answered lately is, "What exactly is the role of a board member? What do you even do?"

The main role of a board of education member is to focus on the academic achievement of students. This focus encompasses a wide range of areas - from supporting our teachers and staff, to helping build a positive climate and culture, to listening to feedback from community members that help the board focus on local issues of importance.

Did you know that the 2011-2012 graduation rate for Bryan County Schools was only 72.32% system wide? Our district, at that time, was trending behind almost all local districts, including Effingham, Liberty, and Bulloch. This board knew our students were capable of more. We have become laser focused on the academic success of our students - our main role.

In 2024, the graduation rate in Bryan County Schools was 94.1%, well above the state average of 87.2%. Bryan County High School and Richmond Hill High School have both significantly improved their graduation rates approximately 20% since 2012! As Bryan County Schools continues to make academic gains system-wide at every grade level, the board remains focused on continuous improvement. We are thankful for every teacher and staff member who works hard for our students and who has helped improve student achievement in Bryan County Schools.

Thank you for your continued support. See you in 2026.



Your partner in education,

*Bryan County
Board of Education*

BOARD WORK SESSION - NOVEMBER 13, 2025

SUPERINTENDENT UPDATES

- Dr. Brooksher thanked the board for coming together for a called work session this month.
- Thank you to the county officials for establishing new members with the Public Facilities Authority. The next step will be to meet with the district's bond counsel and once this occurs, a request will be made to the county to hold a Public Facilities Authority meeting. The plan is to schedule this meeting in December to authorize the district to sell bonds, but only if necessary.
- Dr. Brooksher will email board members a draft of the 2026 board meeting schedule for review. There are work sessions tentatively scheduled on two Saturdays, January 17th and April 18th. This schedule will be included for board approval at the November or December board meeting.
- Student enrollment was reviewed by individual schools and as a district overall. Enrollment has increased from the end of last year by 189 students.

DIVISION OF CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTION UPDATES

Dr. Elizabeth Bennett, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum & Instruction, presented the following updates:

- Two policies were given to the board for a first review, IBB - Charter Schools and IDFA - Equity in Sports. For the Charter Schools policy, the district would like to revise the current policy to include a timeline with flexibility since the current policy does not allow for any. The Equity In Sports policy needs to revise the term "gender" to "sex". Both policies were reviewed by GSBA prior to presenting and the noted changes are part of state law requirements.
- New athletic regions have been set by the Georgia High School Association. According to GHSA, Bryan County High School will go from a 1A school to a 2A school for the upcoming school year. On Monday, November 10th, Mr. Winter, Ms. Ennis, and Ms. Adams, representing Bryan County High School, and Dr. Bennett representing the district, traveled to appeal this decision. The team requested that Bryan County High School stay as a 1A high school; however, the appeal was denied.

DIVISION OF BUSINESS SERVICES UPDATES

Ms. Debi McNeal, Assistant Superintendent of Business Services, presented the following updates:

- Recent data indicates that the substitute fill rate is averaging 80%. The district recently transitioned to a different software that has a smoother workflow to request subs. The substitute hiring process is now streamlined leading to higher fill rates.
- A draft calendar was shared with the board that includes key dates for second semester to allow for proper planning.
- Ms. Jennifer Habets, Director of Finance, presented processes in place to ensure the district is meeting deadlines and staying compliant. Several school districts in Georgia are being reviewed for best practices due to processes not being followed as they should. This year's financial audit will be started early to prepare the district for bond requirements. The district liabilities and benefits have good processes in place each month with numerous staff involved. Quarterly reports are pulled on comp time for hourly employees and reports are sent to each supervisor for review and to make sure time is being used in an appropriate manner.
- There is segregation of duties in payroll with having two specialists. In addition, there are multiple signors when making payments. Both practices allow for appropriate checks and balances within the department.

DIVISION OF STUDENT SERVICES UPDATES

Dr. Denise Scott, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services, presented the following updates:

- Dr. Scott presented Policy JB – Student Attendance and JCDAF – Use of Electronic Devices by Students for a first review and in accordance with state requirements. These policies are already in place but require a few revisions.
- Policy JCDAF includes students K through 8. Middle and high schools have already started implementing protocols for cell phone usage and the district is working on extending this policy to K-5. Once completed and approved, all schools will adhere to the same policy.
- REACH ceremonies will be held tomorrow November 14th and next Friday, November 21st to name the newest cohort of REACH Scholars.
- Bryan Academy has graduated five students so far this year and will graduate another eight by the end of December. Congratulations to our newest graduates!

DIVISION OF OPERATIONS UPDATES

Mr. Jeff Hodges, Assistant Superintendent of Operations, presented the following updates:

- The Operations Department has conducted safety walks through all schools for exterior and interior door security.
- SchoolDog is now in place across the district. SchoolDog is a free technology tool offered by GSBA to help schools improve safety by monitoring and documenting safety priorities and facility conditions.

BOARD OF EDUCATION UPDATES

- Waterways subdivision in Richmond Hill has asked Ms. Marianne Smith and Ms. Amy Murphy to present information to their homeowners on Monday, November 17th. The board reviewed the presentation and made revisions as needed.
- Board Norms and Protocols were reviewed on chain of command.

BOARD MEETING - NOVEMBER 20, 2025

SUPERINTENDENT UPDATES

- Dr. Brooksher introduced Ms. Karen Smith, Principal of Richmond Hill Elementary School and Carver Elementary School. Ms. Smith highlighted some school level achievements that included an increased percentage of students reading at or above grade level. In addition, Ms. Smith announced that Carver Elementary is being named a CCRPI math leader school.
- Ms. Smith welcomed Ms. Kari Wilcher, teacher at Carver Elementary school who sponsors the outdoor education program. A few highlights with outdoor education include receiving the GOLD grant for Georgia Outdoor Learning Development. Ms. Wilcher was awarded the Georgia DNR Conservation Teacher of the Year, and the program has contributed to an 18% increase in 5th grade Science proficiency on the Georgia Milestones Assessment System (GMAS).
- Ms. Juli Lee, teacher at Carver Elementary and Ms. Julia Cheaves, teacher at Richmond Hill Elementary School, along with students on the Science Olympiad team shared highlights of their program.
- Ms. Brooke Bartlam, drama teacher at Carver Elementary School invited her drama students to perform a small section of their upcoming drama production, 101 Dalmatians. The drama club has strengthened confidence, communication, creativity, and collaboration amongst students at both Richmond Hill Elementary and Carver Elementary.

BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

ACTION ITEMS:

The following items were approved at the November 21, 2025 meeting:

- The October 2025 Financial Report.
- Approval of field trips at Richmond Hill Middle School for Chorus and Richmond Hill High Schools for Academic Quiz Bowl, Student Council, Young Republicans, students for visits to the High School Tech Program at the University of South Carolina – Bluffton campus, and the 12th grade class for Grad Bash 2026.
- Facilities use requests approved for Marylin Youmans School of Dance.

BOARD MEETING - DECEMBER 11, 2025

SUPERINTENDENT UPDATES

- Dr. Brooksher introduced Mr. Bivins Miller, principal of Richmond Hill High School, who welcomed the board members and the audience to the school.
- Mr. Miller made mention of the Flute Choir, directed by Mr. Stephen Hendricks, noting their performance earlier that evening prior to the start of the Board meeting.
- Mr. Miller then introduced Ms. Kay Gros, sponsor of Healthcare Occupations Students of America (HOSA) and healthcare science teacher. Ms. Gros, along with student Svava Patel spoke about the partnership with St. Joseph's Candler and how RHHS students are able to learn through hands on activities. St. Joseph's Candler is a big contributor to the district programs through donations of equipment and materials for hands-on learning.
- Dr. Brooksher would like to wish students and staff a safe and enjoyable upcoming winter break that will begin on December 19th and looks forward to welcoming everyone back in January.

BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

ACTION ITEMS:

The following items were approved at the December 11, 2025 meeting:

- The 2025 November Financial Report.
- Approval of the 2026 Board of Education's meeting schedule.
- Approval of revisions to policies IBB: Charter Schools, IDFA: Equity in Schools, and JB: Student Attendance.
- Approval to adopt policy IFBGA: Use of Electronic Devices by Students.
- Approval for the Board Chair and Superintendent to sign and submit the Georgia Department of Education Addition or Modernization to Existing Educational Facility Application for a classroom wing addition to McAllister Elementary School.
- Approval for the Board Chair and Superintendent to sign and submit the Georgia Department of Education New Site or Tear Down Rebuild Educational Facility Application to build an additional middle school in south Bryan County.
- Field trip approvals for Richmond Hill High School's Competition Cheer, Boys Soccer, Robotics, and Band.
- Facilities Use Request was approved for a Breakfast with Santa event on December 20th at Lanier Learning Center.

