#MarlboroStrong

MARLBORO COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
Regular Scheduled Meeting
Monday, January 12, 2026
Marlboro County High School
951 Fayetteville Avenue Extension
Bennettsville, SC 29512

The Regular Monthly Meeting of the Marlboro County School District Board of Trustees was held on January 12, 2026, beginning at 5:00 PM at Marlboro County High School in Bennettsville, SC.

Trustees Present:
A quorum of trustees was present for the Call to Order: Chair, Mr. Michael Coachman; Vice Chair, Mr. Michael Toms; Secretary, Mr. David Flowers, Jr., Mrs. Nikki Pruitt; Mr. Bryan Sweatt, Mr. Danny Driggers, Dr. Rippin McLeod, Jr., Ms. Angela Galloway, and Mr. Leevander McRae, Jr.

Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance:
The Pledge of Allegiance was recited. Mrs. Nikki Pruitt gave the invocation.

Call to Order:
Mr. Danny Driggers moved to call the meeting to order at 5:01 PM. Mr. Michael Toms seconded the motion. The motion carried 9-0.

Marlboro County School District Board Chairman, Mr. Michael Coachman, called the meeting to order.

Notification of the News Media:
By the S. C. Code of Laws, Section 30-40-80(d), as amended, the following were notified of the time, date, place, and agenda for the meeting: Marlboro Herald-Advocate, WBSC, WCRE, WJSG-eFM, Northland Cable, The Laurinburg Exchange, The Morning News, The Community Times, WEGX-FM, WLMC, WEWO/WAZZ, The Link, and The Shopper.

Approval of the Agenda:

Mr. Michael Toms made the motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Leevander McRae, Jr., seconded the motion. The motion carried 9-0.

Executive Session:
Mr. Michael Toms moved to enter Executive Session, and Mr. Danny Driggers seconded the motion. The motion carried 9 -0. The board entered the executive session at 5:03 PM.

- Receipt of Legal Advice Concerning Potential Ethics Concern
- Personnel Matters
- Superintendent Search

No decisions were made. No action was taken.

Mr. Michael Toms motioned to move out of the executive session, and Mr. Danny Driggers seconded the motion. The motion carried 8-0 (board member McRae left the meeting). The board came out of the executive session at 6:13 PM.

Mr. Danny Driggers motioned to approve the 3 certified resignations and 1 certified recommendation presented by the superintendent. Ms. Angela Galloway seconded the motion. The motion carried 8-0.

Election of Board Officers (Policy BD)

Vice-Chairman: Mr. Danny Driggers nominated Mrs. Nikki Pruitt
Dr. Rippin McLeod, Jr. nominated Mr. Michael Toms
Mr. David Flowers motioned to close the nominations.
Vote:
Pruitt: Mr. Danny Driggers
Toms: Mr. Michael Coachman, Dr. Rippin McLeod, Jr., Mr. David Flowers, Ms. Angela Galloway
Mr. Bryan Sweatt, abstained.

Secretary: Mr. Danny Driggers nominated Ms. Angela Galloway

Vote:
Mr. Michael Coachman, Mr. Michael Toms, Dr. Rippin McLeod, Jr., Mr. Bryan Sweatt, Mr. Danny Driggers, Mr. David Flowers, Mrs. Nikki Pruitt.

Points of Celebration

Character Education Student of the Month
Chairman Coachman, Interim Superintendent Dr. Michael Thorsland, and principals of Bennettsville Primary School and Blenheim Middle School of Discovery recognized students selected as the District Character Education Students of the Month. Brief remarks were offered, and certificates were presented.

School Board Appreciation Month
Dr. Thorsland stated that January in South Carolina is recognized as School Board Appreciation Month and serves as an opportunity for communities to thank their school board members for their service. He noted that the role of a school board member is often a thankless one, requiring attendance at numerous meetings throughout the year, typically held in the evenings, and significant personal time and commitment.
Dr. Thorsland emphasized that serving on the school board carries a tremendous responsibility, as the decisions made during board meetings impact not only students but the entire community. He expressed sincere appreciation to all nine board members for the vital role they play in Marlboro County and for their willingness to serve and advocate for students.
He further shared that, as a token of appreciation, the district prepared gifts for each board member, including items from a local vendor and, most importantly, handmade gifts from students at each school across the district.
Dr. Thorsland concluded by publicly thanking the board members for their dedication and service to the students and community of Marlboro County.
Two videos were played, thanking the Marlboro County Board of Education for the incredible impact they make each and every day.

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Michael Toms moved to approve the board meeting minutes for December 8, 2025 (Regular Scheduled Meeting) and December 10, 2025 (Special Called Meeting). Ms. Angela Galloway seconded the motion. The Motion Carried. 8-0

Public Comment

Wyvette Douglas

Mrs. Wyvette Douglas addressed the Board to follow up on her previous concerns regarding an individual who is not currently residing within the district and requested that this matter be reviewed and addressed.

Mrs. Douglas also expressed concerns regarding recent decisions related to potential staff reductions. While acknowledging that certain changes may be necessary, she urged the Board to consider employees' years of service, experience, and overall contributions to the district, rather than relying solely on lists or recommendations prepared by others.

She specifically highlighted their many years of dedicated service to Marlboro County School District and stating that their institutional knowledge, commitment to students, and impact on the community would be difficult to replace. Mrs. Douglas shared a personal account from her time as a student, noting that this indvidual played a significant role in keeping her engaged in school and supporting her success during challenging moments.

Mrs. Douglas emphasized that this individual has served the district in numerous capacities over the years and that his contributions to both the school system and the broader community are immeasurable. She respectfully requested that the Board consider his service, character, and value to the district in any personnel-related decisions.

She concluded by thanking the Board for their time, wishing them a prosperous year, and expressing that the matter remained heavy on her heart.

2024-2025 Audit Presentation- Mauldin & Jenkins

Mr. Brian Nicholson of Mauldin & Jenkins presented the results of the District's Fiscal Year 2025 audit to the Board. He introduced himself as the lead audit director for the engagement, with Mr. Daniel Anderson serving as the quality control review partner. The firm is based in Columbia, South Carolina.

Mr. Nicholson outlined the audit agenda, which included an overview of the engagement team, results of the 2025 audit, required communications, financial highlights, and time for Board questions.

He explained that the audit process is conducted in three segments: interim and planning procedures, year-end final fieldwork where the majority of testing occurs, and final review and presentation to the Board.

Mr. Nicholson reported that the audit was conducted in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards and government auditing standards. The District received a clean (unmodified) opinion on its basic financial statements, indicating they were materially correct as of June 30, 2025.

He further reported that the District's "Yellow Book" report on internal controls over financial reporting and compliance identified no material weaknesses and no significant deficiencies. This represented a significant improvement from the prior year, when five instances of material weaknesses or significant deficiencies had been reported. No instances of noncompliance were identified.

Mr. Nicholson also reviewed the Single Audit, which is required due to the District expending more than $750,000 in federal funds. The major programs audited were the Child Nutrition Cluster and the Education

Stabilization Fund (ESSER). The District again received a clean opinion, with no material weaknesses, significant deficiencies, or findings of noncompliance.

As part of required communications, Mr. Nicholson noted that significant accounting policies are disclosed in the financial statement footnotes. He commended District management and staff for their cooperation throughout the audit process, acknowledging that the process is extensive and spans from summer through late fall. He also reported that there were no proposed audit adjustments and that the required management representations had been received. He confirmed that the audit team maintained professional independence throughout the engagement.

Mr. Nicholson highlighted key financial information, stating that the District's ending general fund balance was approximately $4.9 million. He reported that the unassigned fund balance was approximately 10.1 percent, exceeding the state-required minimum of 8.3 percent (one month of expenditures). He advised that this balance should continue to be monitored as the District moves into fiscal year 2026.

He also explained that while the District experienced a decrease of approximately $2.4 million in fund balance compared to the prior year, this result was better than the originally budgeted net decrease of approximately $4.6 million.

Mr. Nicholson reported that the District implemented GASB Statement No. 101 regarding compensated absences during the current year, which did not have a material effect on the financial statements. He also noted that GASB Statement No. 103, related to improvements in the financial reporting model, will be required for fiscal year 2026 and is primarily a presentation-related change.

He concluded by informing the Board that Mauldin & Jenkins offers free quarterly continuing professional education sessions, some of which are tailored to school boards and council members. He thanked the Board and District staff for the opportunity to serve the District.

During the question and discussion period, a Board member confirmed that the general fund balance at the end of fiscal year 2025 was $4.9 million and not a negative amount as previously suggested in public discussion. Mr. Nicholson confirmed this figure and reiterated that the District's unassigned fund balance was approximately 10 percent, placing it in compliance with state requirements.

The Board acknowledged that the audit results demonstrated no loss of funds and reflected a strong financial position for the District as of June 30, 2025.

Dr. Thorsland thanked everyone on the finance team for their hard work and dedication.

Board Business Action

Approval of School Reports on Continuous Improvement Plans

Ms. Margaret Quick Primus, Director of Federal Programs, presented the South Carolina Consolidated Plan for Underperforming Districts and Schools to the Board. Ms. Primus explained that, under state requirements, districts with underperforming schools must consult with schools and community stakeholders to review and revise both school and district strategic plans. This process is conducted with the assistance of each School Improvement Council and must include either a turnaround plan or a continuous improvement plan, with required community input. The plans must be approved by the local Board of Trustees and submitted to the

South Carolina Department of Education, Office of Leadership Effectiveness, for approval by June 30, 2026. She informed the Board that the continuous improvement plan templates and supporting resources were included in the meeting packet. For the purposes of her presentation, she noted that all plans would be referred to as continuous improvement plans and would include specific strategies and goals developed by each school.

Ms. Primus reviewed the federal school support designations used by the State Department of Education, which include Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI), Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI), Priority, and Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI). She also outlined the state classifications of underperforming schools, chronically underperforming schools, and underperforming districts. Ms. Primus shared documentation provided by the State Department of Education confirming the District's designation history since 2023 and explained that the District is classified as underperforming because at least 75 percent of its schools are performing below the state average.

She provided an overview of the strategies included in each school's continuous improvement plan, noting that schools previously presented their data and improvement initiatives to the Board earlier in the year. Key strategies include after-school tutoring and instructional support in English Language Arts and mathematics, summer school programs, college and career readiness initiatives aimed at increasing ACT, SAT, and ASVAB performance, and the use of reading and math interventionists, including retired certified teachers. Additional components include instructional supplies and materials, curriculum software, and professional development, training, and consultant support. Ms. Primus also outlined the criteria for schools to exit state and federal designation status. She explained that elementary and middle schools must receive a rating of "Good" or "Excellent" for student progress and achieve an overall report card score above the initial target to exit CSI status. High schools must demonstrate a three percent increase in college and career readiness and meet the initial overall score or achieve a graduation rate of 70 percent or higher. To exit priority status, schools must no longer rank in the bottom ten percent of Title I schools statewide.

She further noted that, by the end of the three-year cycle, each school will be assigned a state technical assistance provider from the Office of School Transformation. She explained that the District's ATSI designation is based on performance indicators for students with disabilities, specifically related to increases in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding grade-level standards in English language arts and mathematics. Ms. Primus concluded by informing the Board that each school's full continuous improvement plan and a summary highlight sheet were included in the meeting packet. She stated that all plans align directly with both the individual school's strategic plans and the District's overall strategic plan.

Mr. Michael Toms motioned to approve the school's continuous improvement plan. Ms. Angela Galloway seconded the motion. The motion carried 8-0.

2nd Reading of Policies JICFB, JHE, JH, JH-R

Mr. Michael Toms motioned to approve the 2nd and final reading of policies JICFB, JHE, JH, JH-R. Ms. Angela Galloway seconded the motion. The motion carried 8-0.

26-27 School Calendar Approval

Ms. LaKeisha Cribb presented the proposed 2026–2027 academic calendar options to the Board for review and approval. She advised that the calendar recommendations were included in the Board packet.

Ms. Cribb explained that the proposed calendars are similar to the current academic year calendar, with minor differences between the two options.

She outlined the key distinctions as follows:

- **Calendar A:**
  Teachers would begin on July 21, 2026, and students would begin on July 29, 2026. This option includes the traditional week-long intersessions and scheduled holidays.
- **Calendar B:**
  Teachers would begin on July 27, 2026, and students would begin on August 3, 2026. The fall intersession would be shortened to two days due to the later start date.

Ms. Cribb reported that both calendars list May 27, 2027, as the final day of school for students and May 29, 2027, as the graduation date for Marlboro County High School.

She further informed the Board that a survey was distributed to parents and community stakeholders prior to the Christmas break to gather input on the proposed calendars. As of the most recent update, approximately 386 responses had been received, with Calendar A receiving the highest level of support.

Ms. Cribb concluded by recognizing Mrs. Davida McCall for designing the academic calendar layouts and creating the stakeholder survey.

Ms. Angela Galloway motioned to approve calendar option A. Mr. Danny Driggers seconded the motion. The motion carried. 8-0

Approval of Contract for A&E Services

Dr. Thorsland presented a recommendation to the Board regarding the selection of an architecture and engineering (A&E) services provider for the District's facilities projects.

He explained that the District frequently requires architectural and engineering services for building and renovation projects, including coordination with the Office of School Facilities at the South Carolina Department of Education. He noted that the District's previous contracts had expired, necessitating the selection of a new firm.

Dr. Thorsland stated that the proposed contract would be structured as an annual agreement, renewable for up to five years, allowing the District to maintain consistent professional support for facilities needs without rebidding each individual project.

He reported that the District solicited proposals from multiple A&E firms; however, participation was limited. Despite the low response, he indicated that the process resulted in the identification of CPL, a firm with a Columbia, South Carolina office that is seeking to expand its presence in the state. He noted that the assigned architect resides in the Columbia area and is familiar with the region. District leadership has already met with the firm and expressed confidence in its qualifications and professionalism.

Dr. Thorsland highlighted two time-sensitive projects requiring immediate architectural support. The first is at McColl Elementary–Middle School, where the District plans to construct a secure vestibule area to improve safety and security prior to building access. This project is funded through a state safety grant, which must be expended by June 30. He emphasized that securing an A&E firm quickly was essential to meeting this deadline.

The second project involves reopening the A Wing at Marlboro County High School, which houses Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Career and Agricultural Technology Education (CATE) classrooms, as well as the school's weight room.

Dr. Thorsland stated that CPL has already begun assisting with planning for both projects.

He further explained that the contract would include performance-based provisions allowing either party to terminate the agreement if expectations are not met; however, District administration anticipates a full five-year partnership. He noted that having an ongoing A&E provider will streamline future facilities work and reduce the administrative burden associated with repeatedly bidding projects.

Dr. Thorsland shared that the recommendation was reviewed collaboratively with Mr. McNeil, Mr. Davis, and Ms. Angela O'Neil from the procurement department, and that all parties expressed confidence in the firm.

He concluded by requesting Board approval to enter into a contract with CPL as the District's architecture and engineering services provider for a term of up to five years, noting that this approach aligns with common practices used by school districts across the state.

Mr. Michael Toms motioned approve to the contract for A&E Services. Mrs. Nikki Pruitt seconded the motion. The motion carried. 8-0

Policy BID

Mr. Michael Toms motioned that the board take all of the necessary steps to ensure that they are in full compliance with policy BID. Mr. Danny Driggers seconded the motion. The motion carried. 8-0

$5,000 Donation to MCHS from The American Woodmark Foundation

Mr. Michael Toms motioned to approve the $5,000 donation to Marlboro County High School from the American Woodmark Foundation. Ms. Angela Galloway seconded the motion. The motion carried. 8-0

Board Items for Discussion

Policy GDF:
During discussion of Policy GDF, the Board requested that the Superintendent revise the policy language to require that the Superintendent notify the Board of all support staff hires no later than the next regularly scheduled Board meeting. The Board further directed that the revised policy be placed on the February Board meeting agenda for first reading and consideration.

Superintendent's Report

Finance Report & School/Office Reconfiguration for Increased Efficiency

Dr. Michael Thorsland provided the Board with an update on the District's financial status and discussed preliminary considerations regarding possible district reorganization.

Dr. Thorsland directed the Board's attention to the revenue report, specifically the line item for ad valorem taxes under current revenue. He explained that the District anticipates receiving approximately $8 million in local tax revenue, which is typically received in a lump sum around January each year rather than monthly. He reported that the District had begun receiving these funds and was currently at approximately $851,000 year-to-date, or slightly over ten percent of the expected total. He stated that the District anticipates receiving the full amount within the next 30 days.

Dr. Thorsland explained that once the local tax revenue is received, the District will be able to pay outstanding obligations, primarily to the Public Employee Benefit Authority (PEBA). He noted that the District remains current on employee health insurance payments but has fallen behind on PEBA retirement contributions for the months of September through December, although July and August were paid. He stated that PEBA has been cooperative during this period and that the anticipated tax revenue will allow the District to bring all retirement payments current.

He further explained that the District's fund balance has been declining and that administration is focused on reversing this trend. He stated that if the District is able to adopt a balanced budget for fiscal year 2026–2027, it should be in a position to secure a Tax Anticipation Note (TAN) in the fall, which would prevent future delays in PEBA payments during the early months of the fiscal year. He noted that most school districts rely on this financing mechanism to manage seasonal cash flow fluctuations.

Dr. Thorsland also reported that, since July, the District has taken a conservative approach to filling vacant positions created by employee separations. He estimated that this has resulted in approximately $500,000 in salary savings to date, with the potential for additional savings as the school year progresses. He indicated that the finance office is continuing to refine these figures.

He reminded the Board that the current year's budget included a planned deficit of approximately $1.4 million. Based on the recently reported audit fund balance of $4.9 million, he explained that spending the full budgeted deficit would reduce the fund balance to approximately $3.5 million, which would fall below the state-required minimum threshold of 8.33 percent. He stated that the District's cost-saving measures are intended to minimize this reduction.

Dr. Thorsland then introduced a preliminary discussion regarding potential district reorganization for future consideration. He stated that, after several months of observing district operations, he believes modest structural changes could improve efficiency and generate annual savings exceeding $500,000, without creating significant disruption.

He proposed that the District consider relocating fourth- and fifth-grade students from Bennettsville Intermediate School (BIS) to Blenheim Middle School beginning next fall. He noted that these students currently transition to Blenheim for sixth grade and that Blenheim has a student capacity of over 900, with current enrollment of approximately 370 students. BIS currently enrolls approximately 200 students, resulting in a combined projected enrollment of approximately 570 students, which remains well within Blenheim's capacity.

Dr. Thorsland stated that he and Dr. McCall have discussed potential integration plans to maintain appropriate separation between elementary and middle school grade levels within the facility.

He further proposed that, if the BIS building were vacated, it could be repurposed to house the district office, the annex office, and potentially the alternative school program. He explained that this consolidation would centralize district operations, improve supervision and communication for future leadership, and enhance transportation efficiency, particularly for students attending the alternative program who currently travel long distances.

He also noted that consolidating these functions into one facility would allow the District to consider closing up to three buildings, thereby reducing ongoing costs related to utilities, maintenance, and building upkeep.

Dr. Thorsland explained that additional operational savings could result from eliminating duplicated positions, including one school administrator, one librarian, one school resource officer, and one nurse. He estimated these

staffing savings alone could approach $500,000 annually, in addition to facility-related savings and potential reductions in transportation costs.

Dr. Thorsland emphasized that these ideas were presented for preliminary consideration only and that formal recommendations and community engagement would be necessary before any decisions are made.

Vice Chair Michael Toms addressed the proposed reorganization discussion and expressed concerns regarding student attendance patterns and enrollment impacts at Blenheim and Clio schools.

He clarified that the proposed relocation of students applied only to fourth- and fifth-grade students from Bennettsville Intermediate School and did not include students from Clio Elementary School, which currently serves grades K–5. He noted that many of the BIS students reside in the Blenheim area and already attend Blenheim Middle School in later grades, making the transition reasonable from a geographic and transportation standpoint.

Vice Chair Toms further stated that parents are unlikely to send students to a school located farther from their residence if local options are available. He expressed concern that such changes could significantly reduce enrollment at Clio Elementary School, potentially lowering its student population to fewer than 100 students.

He recommended that the District review current enrollment data and attendance boundaries to determine how many students attending Clio reside in the Blenheim area and to assess the potential impact on Clio's enrollment.

Adjournment:
There being no further business, Mr. Danny Driggers moved to adjourn the meeting, and Mr. Michael Toms seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried 8-0. The meeting was adjourned at 7:56 p.m.

Minutes prepared by LaKeisha Jenkins-Cribb

APPROVED:

X _____
Michael Coachman, Chairman

X _____
Angela Galloway, Secretary