Virginia:

AT A CONTINUED MEETING of the Nelson County Board of Supervisors at 6:00 p.m. in the Former Board Room located on the fourth floor of the Nelson County Courthouse, in Lovingston, Virginia.

Present: Ernie Q. Reed, Central District Supervisor –Chair
Dr. Jessica L. Ligon, South District Supervisor – Vice Chair
Jesse N. Rutherford, East District Supervisor
Candy McGarry, County Administrator
Amanda B. Spivey, Assistant County Administrator/Deputy Clerk
Grace E. Mawyer, Director of Finance and Human Resources

School Board
Margaret Clair, Trustee, Central District - Chair
Ceaser Perkins, Trustee, South District
George Cheape, Trustee, East District
Dr. Amanda Hester, Nelson County School Superintendent
Ms. Shannon Irvin, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction

Absent: J. David Parr, West District Supervisor
Thomas D. Harvey, North District Supervisor

School Board
Shannon Powell, Trustee, West District
Janet Turner-Giles, Trustee, North District

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. Clair called the School Board meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Mr. Reed convened the Board of Supervisors meeting at 6:00 p.m. with three (3) Supervisors present to establish a quorum. Mr. Parr and Mr. Harvey were absent.

II. JOINT MEETING BETWEEN BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AND SCHOOL BOARD

Mr. Cheape moved to approve the Nelson County School Board agenda as presented. Mr. Perkins seconded the motion, which passed unanimously (5-0) by voice vote.

Dr. Hester stated that there are assumptions and challenges as they work through the budget. She said March 24 is the deadline for the Governor to approve and send the budget back to the General Assembly, and they are assuming the General Assembly budget will be approved. Dr. Hester said they are working off an enrollment of 1,417 and a health insurance increase of 12%. She referred to continued operations of equipment and federal grants, including IDEA for special education, Title I for at-risk students, Title II for professional development, Title III for ESOL students, Title IV for innovative learning, and other grants, noting IDEA, Title I, Title II, and Title IV as especially impactful.

Dr. Hester stated they assume they will receive those funds for the coming school year. She said challenges include inflation and rising costs, as well as the difficulty of finding qualified, endorsed, certified individuals for specific positions. Dr. Hester noted there is also an enrollment decline, slowing somewhat but expected to continue over the next five to ten years. She stated that state mandates and uncertainty of funding are significant, as much recent education legislation has been proposed without sufficient funding, creating unfunded or underfunded mandates.

Dr. Hester said four major differences exist from the previous budget: salary increases, health insurance, safety, and new positions. She stated the salary increase provides a 3% raise, but explained that the 3% raise is specified for standards of quality (SOQ) positions, which typically cover two-thirds of personnel. Dr. Hester said the teacher scale will increase by 2.97%, support staff and bus drivers by 3%, and admin staff by an average of 2.61%. She said they are targeting veteran staff, especially those with fifteen years or more, calling them master teachers and staff, and emphasizing the value of minimizing turnover.

Dr. Hester stated the health insurance increase is 12%, noting no increase last year. She said safety remains a priority, with continued improvements in cybersecurity and threat detection technology, and emphasized protecting their most valuable assets. Dr. Hester said three positions are being added: an assistant principal at the elementary school, which would provide a full-time addition at each elementary school, rather than sharing one assistant principal between the two elementary schools; an additional elementary teacher; and an additional special education teacher due to projected enrollment increases in specific areas. She stated sharing an assistant principal was attempted twice but found not conducive to supporting all students or staff.

Ms. McGarry asked for Dr. Hester to explain the step that is included for the support staff and bus drivers.

Ms. Irvin explained that their salary scales are seniority based, so for each year of service, an employee moves a different step that is typically 1/2% of salary; so if they increase the scale 2.5%, a half-step increase would total 3%.

Dr. Hester stated that the local composite index is a complicated formula, but it serves as the established funding platform for school divisions. Dr. Hester said that there was a drastic increase in their LCI from the previous biennium, and they are now in the second year of that period. She said that a new LCI is expected to be released in November, but currently, they are working with .6645—a significant increase compared to surrounding areas.

Dr. Hester said that this means Nelson as a locality is expected to pay 66.45% of the budget, with the state responsible for the remaining 33.5 or 33.6% of the SOQ cost. She clarified that when people hear about a raise, it is not so straightforward; SOQ positions receive a 3% raise, but the LCI component is deducted. She noted that the locality must make up the difference.

Dr. Hester explained that they have advocated to state legislators and representatives to reconsider the funding formula, emphasizing that for small, rural resort areas, it does not accurately reflect their capacity to support education. She said that this funding, based on the state's calculations, is what they receive. Dr. Hester reminded everyone that the LCI is .6645 and clarified that if the SOQ alone were funded, the number would be about two-thirds, which does not accurately reflect what is necessary to operate.

Mr. Cheape said that's also part of the larger conversation they've been trying to have with the state legislators, but just the whole funding formula in general, including the SOQs, needs to change.

Dr. Hester noted that she is not aware of straight funding off of SOQ to be successful.

Dr. Hester said it will require a healthy reflection on how these issues work and impact the various localities. She stated that in Waynesboro, there is no upset because the rate dropped and is so low. Dr. Hester said the highest rate is .8 and the lowest she has seen is around .18, with Bath County at .8 due to being rural and having a resort area. She stated again that there is no local control over this situation, and they have to live by it. Dr. Hester emphasized the importance of the issue, explaining that although SOQ funding exists, the LCI part makes it difficult to analyze in detail.

Dr. Hester said that reviewing all the details, the expenses changed by $1.76 million, and increases are seen in salary enhancements, salary increases, and fringe benefits, totaling over a million dollars. She stated that the net new positions - the three positions discussed earlier are included in these costs, along with joint operations through PREP, Piedmont Regional Education Program. She explained that PREP is a special education program used for placements in educational classrooms like Ivy Creek and for parent resources, vision support, and other special needs services. She stated that capital outlay included $355,000 for buses.

Dr. Hester said that purchase services include Zero Eyes, a threat detection technology integrated with software and camera systems, which she described as an added layer of safety. She stated that this safety measure is expensive, costing $97,000. She added that utilities, Internet, travel, and miscellaneous expenditures were also increasing, while materials and supplies, communication, and fund transfers were decreasing.

Dr. Hester said the result is a revenue increase minus an expenditure increase, which leads to an economic deficit of $1,614,298 as the bottom line. She stated that per pupil expenditures are a common question and described the issue as complicated and not an apples-to-apples comparison. She explained that while one school division may spend $23,000 per student, the next may spend $20,000, with different components making up the costs.

Dr. Hester said the blended raw data includes all money sources—state, local, federal, grants—and that grant money is assumed to be fully used. She explained that seeking alternative funding sources still factors into the total expenditure, which is not always local funding.

Dr. Hester emphasized the increasing SPED population and growing special needs, which require more and more intensive services, driving up costs. She stated that the blended raw data for all students is $23,909;

for regular education students only, $20,551; for special needs students only, there is a drastic increase to $38,643. She said that many expenditures are mandated, leaving little flexibility, and include outside placement, residential day, and multiple student services. She explained these are costly but necessary, as some students require environments outside of comprehensive school classrooms, and those services demand greater expenditures.

Dr. Ligon asked if this was happening all through the state at the rate that it is here.

Dr. Hester responded that it is increasing here, partly due to greater recognition of needs. She reported that they were seeing it more with their younger kids, noting that there is more assessment with younger kids, and they recently addressed developmental needs at a pre-K and kindergarten registration, with some students coming in with potentially undiagnosed cerebral palsy. Ms. Clair indicated that localities must provide services for kids who are not enrolled in local schools, as stipulated by law.

Mr. Reed commented that urban areas tend to have resources available to students; rural areas do not.

Ms. Irvin stated that the schools are responsible for kids aged 2–21, which covers them before and after school age.

Dr. Hester pointed out that not all of the kids are in classrooms every day, but the schools are still equally responsible to provide services—and not all of those are all day, such as speech therapy. She stated that with facilities like Ivy Creek, where enrollment in the program has dropped but the per-pupil cost increases because they still have to provide the services and pay for space.

She stated that when there are discipline or behavioral issues, those students are still required to be educated and provided with services and cannot just be suspended indefinitely. She said there must be a pathway to provide that, and it's getting tougher and tougher to find open vacancies in some of these programs, along with the program costs going up.

Dr. Ligon said she had heard that there are children with disciplinary action who have been kicked out of public schools, and those families move to Nelson because we provide more to children who cannot attend school. She asked if that was true. Mr. Cheape commented that it was unverifiable and there was no way to know. Dr. Hester explained that if a student was still under disciplinary, depending on what that was for, wherever they try to move to and enroll, that school division is going to have to request records. She said that to her knowledge, that is something that she would look into. Dr. Ligon commented that this was prior to Dr. Hester's tenure when she had heard this. Dr. Hester commented that she did not know how other school divisions could bypass providing the necessary services their residents.

Dr. Ligon asked what percentage of SPED kids need to be part of the population where the School Division just starts offering these services and is not driving them around. She said her question pertained to what the threshold is before the County stops driving SPED students around and they figure out how to fix the problem here. Dr. Hester said that they see that with the addition of the Early Childhood Special Education classes, because of the threshold of having no more than eight (8) students per class. She noted that these students are taught in-house and that number would grow. She said in maintaining a proper student-teacher ratio, they would have to keep adding staff.

Dr. Hester explained that as long as they are required to provide those services and those on the IEP team have decided that is the appropriate least restrictive environment, that is what the Schools have to provide. She said if they were to create a program that is in-house, that would require them to have the space and the qualified individuals to provide those services in the appropriate environment. She emphasized that it's increasingly difficult to find counselors and behavioral specialists; as an example, they are currently looking for an executive director of Ivy Creek. She added that larger localities like Albemarle may be trying to create some programs internally. Mr. Cheape said that if they were to research every type of special education disability and put them into a list, the School Division would have to put programs in place to cover everything on that list. He commented that he had never seen a one size fits all scenario, and to employ that many people would have an adverse impact on the School budget. He noted that the School Division was currently sharing those costs by driving students to other places. Dr. Hester noted enrollment fluctuations and the fact that the School Division constantly monitors IEPs and the services required, and then assigns staff accordingly, which may require shifting staff members from one school to another.

Mr. Rutherford suggested that an ongoing Board discussion is economies of scale and the capability to provide services regionally.

Mr. Cheape pointed out that if localities like Albemarle start providing services in house, the cost for other localities goes up because they are assuming more of the share.

Ms. Irvin mentioned that Ivy Creek is a portion of the PREP program, but PREP also covers vision, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and other services.

Mr. Rutherford asked for the state's per-pupil allotment.

Ms. Irvin confirmed that it is $4,800 per student.

Dr. Hester continued with her presentation, stating that smaller class sizes—particularly for younger ages—better support student achievement than a regular class size either with or without an aide. She said they participate in K–3 class size reductions and work to lower those ratios and provide the best environment. Dr. Hester said additional cost drivers are buses, increasing energy costs, and aging facilities, with the newest building being from 2003. She said that student performance and staff is enhanced with extracurricular activities, which is a lifeline especially for rural kids, and those things do cost money. She stated that the schools also provide curriculum to support multiple career pathways, which also helps rural children. She noted that grants also go into their budget, and they strive to find extra money that does not come from County taxpayers.

Dr. Hester commented that live birth rates and an aging population have both contributed to enrollment drops, and projections for the coming year are 1,423, with increases at Rockfish but leveling out elsewhere. In addition to an increased number of SPED students between last year and this year, Dr. Hester said they are also seeing a significant increase in the number of English language learners or RL learners—from 20 students in 2023-2024 to 84 students in 2024-2025. She noted that there is a large Hispanic population in the Rockfish area but a fairly significant population throughout the entire County. She stated that this means the effort placed on staff to communicate with and support them is even greater.

Dr. Hester said she provided a document with additional detail regarding student transportation needs, including mileage and conditions. Dr. Hester said several years ago, routes were combined in the afternoon as a cost-saving measure. She stated that they recommend a 15-year vehicle replacement cycle, but currently they are not meeting this recommendation. Dr. Hester said there are 21 buses in the fleet which exceed the recommended age, and three are out of service awaiting repairs. She noted that there are four buses in this budget request, which have an estimated cost of $150,000 each. She said those are C3 series with air conditioning, which is now considered necessary. She said there are currently two electric buses in the fleet.

Mr. Reed asked if buses were paid for when ordered or when delivered. Dr. Hester and Ms. Irvin clarified that buses ordered are paid for upon delivery, which was about one year from the order date.

Dr. Hester said support for the maintenance and operation needs was appreciated, and moving forward with renovations is necessary. She stated all four schools are aging in different ways, mentioning that the middle school is the newest, built in 2003, while the high school consists of a 1955 wing, a 1970 wing, and a 2000s section. Dr. Hester said that high school projects focus on the 1955 wing but aim to bring all areas up to the 21st century, primarily addressing MEP needs so students receive services they deserve.

She added that Tye River was constructed in 1995 and has had some HVAC upgrades, while Rockfish, built in 1999, requires urgent HVAC replacement and operator controls. Dr. Hester stated these issues—especially with air conditioning—are the main challenges, particularly during summer and the start and end of school years. She said their ongoing Honeywell service helps but the School Division has been advised that these needs are urgent.

Dr. Hester said staffing remains a high priority, as hiring the best delivers the strongest services for students, which they deserve. She stated they struggle to fill certain positions as fewer people enroll in education or counseling programs at higher education institutions, making competition among school divisions fiercer. She said retirements among veterans and the effects of the great resignation are also impacting staffing, with more people leaving education for private sector jobs with different stressors.

She stated that as a service industry, 80% of their budget is allocated to personnel. Dr. Hester said they anticipate a 12% increase in health insurance costs, and are requesting the ability to reinstate the previously cut elementary school principal, a full-time elementary teacher—depending on enrollment—and a special education teacher for IEP roles. Mr. Reed asked if substitute teachers were considered support staff and whether they also received any across the board increases. Dr. Hester noted that they were not necessarily support staff. Ms. Irvin confirmed that they did typically provide the substitute teacher positions with cost of living adjustments. Dr. Hester commented that it was becoming more and more difficult to find substitutes.

Dr. Ligon asked if the capital outlay for buses at $355,000 meant they were planning on buying buses through the school budget as well as requesting them from the County.

Ms. Irvin responded that it did not, explaining that the capital outlay figure is just for accounting purposes, as it includes anything that costs over $5,000. She explained that the $300,000 is a net of a reduction of switches that they bought last year, and they were adding $600,000 for new buses. She said that it nets out to about $300,000 or so, which was the change from year to year.

Mr. Cheape said that they wanted to put the buses in the budget this year because they had been in the capital budget previously which meant that they only bought buses when the County had that money available. He said that they have only bought a few in the last 7 years—and they had about 24 buses that were out of spec according to the state.

Ms. McGarry noted that she had taken the Schools request of $1,614,298 and subtracted the $600,000 to use the County's non-recurring funds. Mr. Cheape clarified that it would be in the schools operating budget, but the County would take it out of non-recurring funds.

Dr. Ligon stated that she went to the bus garage and spoke with Mr. Ashley, who said they need four or five new buses every year for a while. Mr. Cheape said that was accurate.

Ms. Clair commented that they used to have regular conversations about capital items, but that has fallen off in the last few years. Dr. Ligon asked what other capital items may be in dire need as well. Ms. Clair noted that the HVAC at Rockfish needed replacement and it was a significant amount of money. Mr. Cheape explained that the School Division had a service contract with a company that took care of these things, but as they near end of life, the manufacturer no longer provides support for them and then they are unable to buy replacement parts.

Mr. Rutherford said they had seen a few versions of the School's capital budget in the last few years, with the amount at about $30–40 million, and the high school renovation conversations had dominated.

Dr. Hester said that through the high school renovation, many items from the CIP were being addressed. She stated that progress was being made, but since her time there, the efficiency and problems with the HVAC system at Rockfish had only increased. Dr. Hester said that the need for improvement had grown significantly. She stated that people in the community were voicing concerns, and they were addressing these as best they could. She noted ongoing lever replacements at Tye River. She stated that although the system was built in the 1990s, that was now quite some time ago. Dr. Hester said she believed that, as time goes on, replacing the system would only become more challenging and costly. She stated that both the availability of materials and the process of completing the work would present increasing difficulties.

Dr. Hester emphasized that the schools are prioritizing efficiency and staying within budget parameters, as she does not want to have to come back to the Board for additional funding. She noted that Moseley was the architectural firm working on the high school renovation, and they had been great to work with in this regard. Dr. Ligon asked if Tye River's HVAC also needed replacing. Ms. Irvin noted that had been done in 2013. Dr. Hester indicated that neither elementary school had air conditioning in the gym, noting that they had been built that way. She commented that it could get pretty warm during P.E. class in May. She noted that would be something to consider renovating in the future.

Mr. Rutherford noted that the school enrollment had declined by about 200 to 300 students since 2017. He noted that lots of people were waiting later to have children, if at all. He asked what the student population may look like in five to ten years, and what Nelson County could do to keep enrollment from declining further. Mr. Reed noted that people moving into the County tend to be beyond the age of having children. He said that one of the things the County was trying to prioritize in the Comprehensive Plan, was housing and family housing, but the lead time would take years.

The boards discussed the development of enrollment projections, noting that there is no way to estimate exactly how many kids in the community go solely to private schools.

Ms. Irvin said the County used to do a triennial census whereby they would go to houses and count, but the state discontinued that for safety reasons and relies on Weldon Cooper Center data.

Dr. Hester mentioned that some families are split, with children in both public and private schools.

Mr. Reed commented that the accreditation statistics that the Schools have achieved were pretty remarkable over the years. Dr. Hester noted that they were trending upward academically. She said one of their elementary schools had not been fully accredited due to chronic absenteeism. She said that some of the accreditation components are not within their control. She reported that a new accreditation model would be coming into place soon and they were in the process of evaluating it so they would know what they were working towards.

Mr. Rutherford asked if something had changed with the attendance policy, perhaps per the governor.

Dr. Hester explained that compulsory attendance is a law, and there are federal expectations related to chronic absenteeism—which was missing ten percent of the school year or more. She noted that this was all absences together – excused, unexcused, and suspensions. She said that truancy is unexcused absences, which is different. She noted that chronic absenteeism has been around since 2017, but with COVID, they saw a huge increase in chronic absenteeism. Dr. Hester indicated that there was a direct correlation with attending school regularly and better performance academically. She said there has been increased focus on addressing absenteeism, and the schools' accreditation is attached to attendance.

Dr. Ligon noted that there is also a financial impact related to absenteeism. Dr. Hester confirmed that the average daily membership (ADM) does have a financial component tied to it. Dr. Ligon asked if attendance had gotten better. Dr. Hester responded that it has gotten better, and they are getting much closer to their pre-COVID numbers, and the goal is to drop below 15% chronic absenteeism at all schools. She mentioned that they have a "buyback" after-school program in which students can remediate previous absences by attending at least three hours.

Dr. Ligon commented that she has not been impressed with MACAA, the promises that they make, what the County gives to them versus how much the County gets back. She said they have an interim director who came before the Board recently—and he could not articulate why they were asking for more money. She asked where that puts the Schools with the after-school program if the County does not fund MACAA.

Dr. Hester explained that when she first arrived to Nelson, the School Division was using the YMCA for after-school program, and then in February of that school year, the YMCA gave two weeks' notice that they were no longer going to be providing the after-school program. She noted that the after-school program had been well attended, and then there was a decline in enrollment and staffing shortages. She noted that for awhile, the School Division filled in the gaps for after-school. She said that MACAA was then able to provide those after-school services, but it was a struggle to get it set up, as well as huge gaps in communication. She noted that it was hard to get parents to commit to something if they do not know what is being offered.

She said that MACAA pulled out completely from Head Start in this region, but some other localities are able to do that directly, but Nelson is not and is thus using CDI. She said this year, they were able to work something out with MACAA for afterschool—and while it started late, communication was much better. She said that by the time the afterschool program started with MACAA, most parents had found alternative afterschool care. She noted that there are 5 kids at each elementary school location, as well as four or five kids in Project Discovery at the high school.

Dr. Hester emphasized that if families have the knowledge and confidence that the programs will be there start to finish, those numbers will very likely increase. She mentioned that the Heritage Center is trying to develop and implement daycare and some after-school care.

She reiterated that Nelson is using MACAA for after-school right now, and she is truly thankful for that service. She added that this is a great conversation to have with families right now in terms of how many kids might use the after-school program the following year.

Ms. Clair commented that historically, MACAA has had a notable presence in the County, and the services provided to the community go beyond school programs.

Mr. Cheape mentioned that the Head Start pullout was an implosion, with about four days' notice.

Dr. Hester agreed that it was chaotic and frustrating, but said MACAA resolved that issue and provided more reliable leadership. She added that the more kids they can try to serve in pre-K and before, the better it is for everyone, not just families.

Mr. Reed said he wondered if there might be an opportunity to invest in their own resources to provide this.

Dr. Hester said they are working with other divisions to develop strategies and pursue grant funding. Ms. McGarry reported that MACAA had brought in an interim director who is a contracted consultant, and he was brough in to revamp the agency and help MACAA to hire a new executive director. Dr. Ligon asked Dr. Hester whether she would put any continued faith in MACAA when it seems they have failed the School

Division more than once. Dr. Hester stated that she would need to talk to the MACAA director to pinpoint the specific issues and have an independent conversation about what they are able to provide and how to ensure accountability. Dr. Hester indicated that she would reach out to MACAA's interim director, John Edwards. Mr. Rutherford suggested it would be good for MACAA to be reporting to the School Board because they are providing services to the Schools.

The Board agreed that it would be highly beneficial to have that conversation, in part to help inform the Board as to what is viable and whether the County should continue to invest in MACAA's programs.

Dr. Hester said she would like to run the numbers on how much it costs the schools to provide the after-school programs themselves—she commented that very few people want to do it for $20 an hour.

The Board also concurred that the agency was at or near a breaking point where if they falter, the County will not continue to invest in them, despite their long history with service provision.

Board members agreed that this would be extremely helpful.

Dr. Hester stated that she has no problem asking them directly what the plan is moving forward to staff the after-school program and when they are going to start to look for enrollments. Mr. Perkins pointed out that MACAA was funded by the County and the School was the facility for the programs/services contracted by MACAA with the County. He said that when MACAA stopped providing certain services, then it fell back on the schools to provide those services. Dr. Ligon commented that how she saw that, was that the County paid MACAA for the service, and then the Schools ended up paying to do the service that MACAA had promised. She said that was frustrating. Ms. McGarry commented that the Schools had bore the cost to provide the service. Mr. Perkins noted that it was through no fault of the Schools, other than to provide for the needs of the families.

Dr. Hester mentioned that the high school is trying to create a community job fair to hold in May, and she asked that the County help engage businesses and community services to get them in front of the kids.

Mr. Perkins agreed that this was beneficial, and he mentioned a young man who started working with a business here but had never heard of it in his entire time in high school here. He said there was opportunity for businesses to come promote what they do and that they have jobs available in the County.

Dr. Ligon commented that the job fair is a lovely idea, but in her experience, the students who have come through her business and spent a few hours a week do not know what it is to be a quality employee—they do not understand the importance of being on time and often lacked communication skills. She added that two of them could not type, and it becomes a burden on the business owner to "raise more kids" in addition to the ones they have at home.

Mr. Cheape said he hears that all the time in his job and throughout the communities he works in.

Dr. Ligon stated that she would like to know that there is a program or class through the schools that teach those soft skills.

Dr. Hester responded that they are working really hard to develop graduates to be ready for the workforce and meeting the five Cs: communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and courage (leadership). She emphasized that these dynamics start at home and are the same at school, with significant effort put into just getting kids to show up at school every day. She added that the schools have also talked with Blue Ridge Medical Center, with their staff saying that parents come to them and don't know what to do when their kids are refusing to do anything.

Mr. Rutherford asked if there was currently a mentor program in existence. He noted that the Nelson County Homebuilders Association had discussed the concept of a mentorship opportunity and could suggest businesses interested in participating.

Dr. Hester responded that the schools are revamping some work-based learning opportunities, including folding them into accreditation. She said they would like to establish some work shadowing, internships, and externships, working with Dr. Yarzebinski to identify businesses and coordinate the effort. She added that adults need to set the behavior modeling for kids in terms of how to behave in a professional environment, with cell phones and social media being a huge issue all around. Dr. Hester commented that the younger generation is willing to forgo higher salaries for more time off. She noted that was a problem that we would all have to deal with.

Mr. Cheape said in his experience when he was teaching, they had a really robust internship program, and any student who was able to, was working. He said they would work well because their grade depended on it. He commented that his experience with employers is that it is a direct correlation to how much the worker is responsible for in their personal life. He explained that for a young person just recently graduated high school and still living at home, their odds of being a great, dynamic employee at the start, were diminished because they did not have any bills. He noted other dynamics that have been created because of COVID, people being able to stay on their parents' insurance for longer periods of time, and other factors. He said that kids were staying home longer, marrying later, and having kids later or not at all. He commented that the desire for more time off rather than higher pay was because they did not need as much money, noting that there were no consequences for actions.

Dr. Hester reported that they recognize the need for soft skills and were trying to embed them into classroom learning. She noted that they wanted the students to be successful as they go into the workforce.

Ms. Clair stated that she was part of a panel at the Youth Philanthropy Council, which was established as part of the Virginia Governor's School Project in 2024. She said that Council worked with the Nelson County Community Fund and Community Fund of the Central Blue Ridge, with both of those organization funding the Council. Ms. Clair said the kids on the panel were amazing and brought up truly pertinent questions about needs in the County, with the idea of going to middle school and elementary school and bringing the philanthropy concept back to the other kids.

Dr. Hester stated that there are both teachers and kids working really hard, and they need to continue moving collectively to understand how to contribute locally and create pathways for youth beyond school. She said they need to identify where job opportunities are, and there are ongoing conversations with PVCC and CATEC. She confirmed that she has also been working with CVCC and would continue to forge that path.

The boards talked about the urgent need for water and wastewater operators. Mr. Cheape commented that he got into the water and wastewater business in 1995 and it was like that then, and now there was a critical need. Mr. Perkins noted that some localities are having to hire outside firms to manage those systems—which turns into a nightmare. Mr. Reed commented that what's required to operate those systems today is extremely complex compared to what it used to be.

Mr. Cheape said that SCADA is a computer monitoring and valve/pump control system, which allows operators to manage a bigger plan with more functions and fewer people. He said the licensure has remained the same for a long time, but they have changed some of the testing parameters. He added that if you didn't have a college degree, you must do six months in a Class Four or higher class to get a Class Four license.

Dr. Ligon asked if the sentiment was still working your way up from the bottom, or if the expectation was that you wouldn't need to do that to get ahead.

Mr. Cheape responded that the issue is having people move from one company to another, so it's harder to grow your own employees. He said that students are being taught that they need to start at the bottom, but that's not always the case, and young people have an expectation that they should be paid top dollar—which the current worker shortage was playing into those expectations.

Dr. Hester stated that the lessons of ethics, manners, hard work, or mental health support are falling on the schools instead of entities that previously provided them, including home support. She said the schools need help to do that, but there must be a collective effort to set the tone. She said that part of that includes outreach to coordinate resources and identify which are providing needed supports and services.

Both Boards expressed appreciation for the time to meet that evening.

III. OTHER BUSINESS AS PRESENTED

There was none.

IV. ADJOURNMENT (CONTINUE TO MARCH 25, 2025 AT 10 A.M. FOR A BUDGET WORK SESSION)

At 8:01 p.m., Mr. Rutherford moved that the Board of Supervisors adjourn and continue their meeting to March 25, 2025 at 10:00 a.m. Dr. Ligon seconded the motion. Supervisors approved the motion by vote of acclamation and the meeting adjourned.

Mr. Cheape moved to adjourn the School Board meeting and Mr. Perkins seconded the motion. School Board members approved the motion by vote of acclamation and the meeting adjourned.