

MINUTES OF THE  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING  
Of the Board of Education  
Riverside School District No. 96  
Held on Wednesday, December 3, 2025  
Central Elementary School

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING

20-578 A. President Wesley Muirheid called the Regular Business Meeting to order at 7:00 p.m., and on roll call the following members were recorded as being present:

Mr. Barsotti
Ms. Gunn
Ms. Kachlic
Mr. Olech
Mr. Hunt
Ms. Claps
Mr. Muirheid
Absent:
None

Also in attendance were Superintendent Martha Ryan-Toye, Director of Teaching and Learning Angela Dolezal, Interim Director of Finance Mark Kuzniewski, Director of Technology Molly Marquardt, Director of Maintenance and Facilities Zachary Pros, Central Principal Pete Gatz, Communication Consultant Molly Castor, DLA Architect Ryan Kelley, Board of Education recording clerk Cathy Perino, a community member, and Riverside TV videographer.

B. Welcome to Central Elementary School.

Principal Gatz welcomed the board to Central School and shared the great things happening at Central School. Principal Gatz thanked the Board of Education for all they do for the students of District 96.

C. Public Comment/Response.

There were no public comments.

D. Changes to the Agenda.

There were no changes to the agenda.

E. Committee Reports

1. Facilities Committee - Mr. Olech.

a. Blythe Park Playground.

- At the October 15th board meeting, the Board directed DLA to proceed with Option 2. This design features natural-looking elements tailored for gross motor skills, sensory engagement, and imaginative play. By slightly expanding the existing footprint, the new layout will increase the playground's capacity.
- Mr. Olech introduced Ryan Kelley of DLA Architects to present the revised plans following a comprehensive public review process with the Village of Riverside. This update incorporated feedback from the Preservation Commission (Nov. 3),

the Landscape Advisory Commission (Nov. 11), Parks & Recreation (Nov. 17), and the Board of Trustees (Nov. 20).

- Key discussion points included:
  - The board reviewed technical specifications for drainage proximity, the long-term replacement costs of engineered wood fiber surfacing, and the budget impact of decorative cobblestone accents and curbing.
  - In alignment with the Village's broader park updates, a partnership has been established where the Village of Riverside will assume responsibility for all annual maintenance once construction is complete.
- Next Steps:
  - The board thanked Mr. Kelley for his presentation. The project is scheduled to go out for bid in January, with final cost numbers expected shortly thereafter.

2. Personnel Committee - Mr. Barsotti

- a. Morale Survey Overview.
  - On October 14th, Teacher Institute Day, District 96 administered the EAB Staff Morale Survey to all certified and non-certified staff across our five schools. This marks the second year of utilizing the EAB platform, which replaced the surveys conducted by Eklund Consulting/Vital Network since 2021.
  - For this session, an addendum prepared by Educational Leadership Solutions was included to provide a comprehensive comparison between the 2025 5Essentials District Report, the 2025 EAB Morale Survey, and the 2022 Family Engagement Survey.
  - The transition to EAB was a collaborative decision between teachers, staff, and administrators.
  - Participation rates increased significantly this fall compared with the Spring 2025 survey, reflecting higher staff engagement. The district acknowledges Molly Marquardt for her assistance in administering this survey.
  - Beyond this tri-annual survey (conducted in Fall, February, and May), the district maintains a feedback-rich environment through exit interviews, new "stay interviews" for tenured staff, professional development evaluations, and the annual 5Essentials survey.
  - Board Discussion & Feedback
    - The Board commended the inclusion of paraprofessionals in the survey and requested that future data be disaggregated to enable comparison of teacher and paraprofessional responses.
    - Key points of discussion included:
      - Clarification on open-ended question examples and whether "neutral" responses could be reduced by modifying the questions or goals.
      - The Board appreciated the district's commitment to "keeping the pulse" on morale, noting that these results are a "fantastic" baseline for growth.
  - Next Steps & Action Items
    - The administration will explore presenting these results to the Board on a tri-annual basis.
    - Moving forward, the district will focus on:

- Communicating specific actionable steps taken in response to survey data.
- Consulting with the vendor to compare District 96 results against peer districts and industry best practices.
- Implementing a "Staff Spotlight" to celebrate successes.
- Continuing to view district culture through a Board-level lens to identify areas for continuous improvement.
- The Board reaffirmed its commitment to fostering a positive culture and to supporting initiatives that improve the district environment for all staff.

3. Family Engagement Committee - Ms. Kachlic.

- a. Communications Update from Molly Castor.
- Molly shared a district communications progress report & strategic outlook.
- This report highlights the district's progress in social media growth, website optimization, and new initiatives designed to foster deeper community connections while empowering our staff in their own communication efforts.
- D96 has successfully expanded our digital footprint to reach a broader audience through the following:
  - Audience Expansion: Increased District Instagram followers by 50% through targeted content.
  - Professional Presence: Launched the official District LinkedIn page to highlight recruitment and institutional achievements.
  - Capacity Building: Conducted social media training for "School Champions" to decentralize and diversify our storytelling.
  - Looking Ahead: We are transitioning to a comprehensive content calendar to ensure a consistent, high-quality posting cadence.

Our website remains the primary source of truth for our stakeholders.

Current efforts focus on:

- Content Integrity: Ongoing audits of page content and homepage updates to ensure accuracy and relevance.
- Data-Driven Strategy: Continuous review of page analytics to understand user behavior and improve navigation.
- Looking Ahead: Collaborating with principals on localized message creation and increasing promotion of the "Community Connection" page.
- To streamline information sharing and tell our "good news stories," we are moving forward with:
  - Centralized Hub: Developing a communications "hub" to serve as a one-stop resource for staff and parents.
  - E-Newsletters: Implementing a recurring (monthly or quarterly) e-newsletter to maintain consistent contact.
  - Partnerships: Strengthening ties with West40 and local community partners to align messaging and expectations.
  - PTA Alignment: Working to bridge the gap between PTA communications and district goals for a more unified voice.
- By updating the Superintendent's message quarterly and providing principals with the tools for consistent messaging, significant progress has been made in a short window. The communication goals remain to build a sustainable communications infrastructure that celebrates our students and supports our educators.

- b. Parent Leadership Team Meeting - November 21
  - Members Kachlic and Olech shared highlights from the November 21st meeting.

4. Education Committee - Mr. Hunt.

- a. Chronic Absenteeism.
- The board reviewed the first-trimester report, noting results that fall below state averages. Members discussed the significant variability between schools, identifying it as a key area for further inquiry.
- The board expressed gratitude to the District 96 staff for their dedication to supporting local families with essential resources. Additionally, the administration was thanked for the report; the board emphasized that discussing these metrics several times a year provides vital oversight. Finally, leadership acknowledged the ongoing efforts of both principals and staff in addressing these challenges.

  

- b. School Citizens of the Year (SCOTY) Award.
- At the request of our fifth-grade teachers, District 96 will participate in the West40 SCOTY Awards program this year. The SCOTY Awards, short for *School Citizens of the Year*, is a regional recognition program sponsored by West40 Intermediate Service Center to celebrate student achievement, leadership, and character across the many districts West40 serves.
- The SCOTY Awards recognize students who exemplify exceptional leadership, kindness, and citizenship within their school communities. While academic performance and participation in school activities are considered, they represent only a small part of the overall selection process. The primary emphasis is on students who consistently exemplify positive character, empathy, and service to others.
- Each participating school is encouraged to establish local selection criteria to guide the nomination process. In District 96, fifth-grade teachers and principals will collaborate to identify one student per school who embodies the SCOTY values. This year, one fifth-grade student from Ames, Blythe Park, Central, and Hollywood Elementary Schools will be selected as the 2025-2026 SCOTY Award recipient for their respective school.
- The selected students will be recognized at a spring banquet hosted by West40, where they will join other honorees from across the region in celebrating their leadership and contributions to their school communities.
- Participation in the SCOTY Awards provides District 96 with another meaningful opportunity to highlight and celebrate the outstanding character and citizenship demonstrated by our students, reinforcing our district's commitment to develop not only academic excellence but also empathy, integrity, and service.
- The board was thanked for their direction on this matter, and the administration will bring the district's selection criteria back to the board regarding this event.

5. Finance Committee - Ms. Claps.

- Ms. Claps shared that preliminary discussions have been held regarding finances. If the board has feedback on what is or isn't provided to them, please contact Salina.

6. Policy Committee - Ms. Gunn

- Ms. Gunn shared that PRESS Policies #120 and a few D96 policies edits will be brought to the board for first reading at the January board meeting.

F. Public Comment/Response.

There were no public comments.

G. Future Meeting Dates.

1. December 17, 2025 - Regular Business Meeting, 7:00 p.m. in the LRC at Hauser. (The Board will enter into Closed Session at 6:15 p.m., if necessary, and return to Open Session at 7:00 p.m.).
2. January 7, 2026 - Committee of the Whole Meeting at 7:00 p.m. in the library at Blythe Park School.
3. January 21, 2026 - Regular Business Meeting, 7:00 p.m. in the LRC at Hauser. (The Board will enter into Closed Session at 6:15 p.m., if necessary, and return to Open Session at 7:00 p.m.).

H. Adjournment.

The meeting adjourned at 8:29 p.m.

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December 3, 2025

Date Recorded

Date Approved

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President, Board of Education

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Secretary, Board of Education