APPROVED

Griffin School District #324

Minutes

Griffin School Board Meeting

Date and Time
Wednesday January 28, 2026 at 6:00 PM

Location
Griffin School Library
6530 33rd Avenue NW
Olympia, WA 98502

Board Meeting Zoom Link

Directors Present
Blair Baker, Emma Rose, Julie Osterberg, Tesa Frevert, Trish Hefton

Directors Absent
None

Guests Present
Alex Jones, Allison Adair, Carrie Pipkin, Erin Hagen, Future Tech students and their families., Jason Pipkin, Karen Lett, Kim Ferra, Kirsten Rue, Rebekah Keiser, Traci Johnson

I. Opening Items

A. Record Attendance

B. Call the Meeting to Order

Trish Hefton called a meeting of the board of directors of Griffin School District #324 to order on Wednesday Jan 28, 2026 at 6:00 PM.
Blair Baker made a motion to Approve the Agenda for January 28, 2026.
Julie Osterberg seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

C. Future Tech & Board Recognition

The meeting walked down to the Middle School, to visit Jason Pipkin's Future Tech class, and students presented projects that they have been working on.
The School Board recognized Mr. Jason Pipkin for his instrumental efforts in establishing the Future Technology program.

Superintendent Rue noted that the program was Mr. Pipkin’s brainchild. Last year, he initiated a conversation with the Superintendent to share his vision and innovative ideas. His proposal resonated deeply with the district's goals, leading to a collaborative effort to bring the concept to life.

While the administration assisted with scheduling logistics, Superintendent Rue emphasized that Mr. Pipkin performed the "heavy lifting" to build the curriculum and launch the course.

D. School Board Recognition Month

In honor of School Board Recognition Month in January, Superintendent Rue took a moment to recognize the district's directors. She shared that, as Superintendent, it had been a privilege to work with the five board members over the past two years. She noted that they had learned a great deal together regarding the complexities of running and governing a school district.

Superintendent Rue expressed her gratitude for the board’s support during her transition as a new Superintendent. She remarked that they had been open to new ideas, many of which had proven successful for the district. She emphasized that stepping up to serve as a board member was a significant commitment, reminding the audience that these individuals served without pay.

She noted that the directors served because they believed in the Griffin school system, the community, and the goal of making the school an exceptional place for students. Superintendent Rue concluded by stating that the board understood the importance of investing in the community’s youth, as they represented the future. She expressed her deep appreciation for the board's ongoing dedication and service.

II. Public Comment

A. Comments from the Public

No comments from the public.

III. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Approval of Board Meeting Minutes - December 17, 2025

Blair Baker made a motion to approve the minutes from Griffin School Board Meeting on 12-17-25.
Tesa Frevert seconded the motion.
Director Osterberg noted a mis-spelling of her last name in Section C. Correction was made.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

B. Approval of Study Session Minutes - January 14, 2026

Blair Baker made a motion to approve the minutes from Griffin School Board Study Session on 01-14-26.
Tesa Frevert seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

C. Approval of Warrants & Payroll

D. Approval of the Enrollment Report

E. Approval of the Personnel Report

F. Review of Public Records Requests

G. Approval of All Consent Agenda Items

Blair Baker made a motion to Approve all Consent Agenda Items.
Tesa Frevert seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. State of the District

Superintendent Rue gave a presentation of the current State of the District 2026.

District Achievements and Student Success

Superintendent Rue opened the presentation with significant news regarding the district's service to students with disabilities. Historically, the state had identified Griffin as a school in need of improvement in this area. However, recent Washington School Improvement Framework (WSIF) data—which integrates achievement in math, English Language Arts

(ELA), student growth, and attendance—showed a consistent upward trend in performance for students with disabilities over the last two years.

The Superintendent also highlighted the success of Griffin students transitioning to high school:
94.6% of the Class of 2025 graduated on time. The average GPA for these students was 3.22.
Griffin students significantly outperformed the state in 9th-grade success rates, with 92.1% on track to graduate compared to the state average of 72%.

Strategic Planning and School Improvement

The district remained focused on its Strategic Plan, specifically targeting three areas: Mathematics, Climate and Belonging, and Family Engagement.

Math: The district implemented "Math Boost" during elementary "WIN" (What I Need) time and provided professional development through iReady.

Belonging: Efforts included expanding enrichment courses, clubs, and student leadership opportunities. Plans were initiated to include student representatives on the School Board.

Engagement: The district successfully restructured middle school open houses and elementary family meetings. Additionally, the Instructional Materials Committee (IMC) was revitalized with parent representatives to review health and ELA curricula.

Facilities and Capital Projects

Superintendent Rue provided an update on projects funded by the local capital levy:

Completed: A high-efficiency propane boiler system was installed, kitchen hot water tanks were replaced, and the gym wall was repaired.

Water Quality: Although PFAS was detected at the source, filtration systems on bottle-filling stations successfully removed all detectable traces. The district committed to a source-fix for Summer 2026.

Upcoming: Planned upgrades included LED lighting, energy-efficient heat pumps for classrooms, and a library remodel to create a flexible teaching space.

Technology: The district completed a refresh of classroom projectors and teacher laptops, alongside the purchase of 75 new student iPads.

Fiscal Overview and Budget Challenges

Superintendent Rue detailed the district's financial health, noting that Griffin maintained the second-lowest tax rate in Thurston County at 1.8222 per $1,000. She clarified the "Ghostbuster Rule" of school finance: the district manages five distinct funds that cannot be "crossed" or blended.

The Superintendent expressed concern regarding the General Fund cash flow, which had trended downward since 2019. By December, the fund reached 8.08%, falling below the board-mandated 8.33% threshold. She identified several factors driving this instability:

Underfunded Substitutes: State funding for substitutes covered roughly one to two months of actual costs.

Inflation: Utilities and insurance costs rose by $200,000 over three years, far outstripping state allocations.

The Prototypical Model: The Superintendent argued that the state’s funding model was inadequate. For example, the state funded only 1.3 Paraeducator positions, while Griffin required 14 to meet student needs.

The Superintendent concluded by emphasizing that while the district was not currently stabilized, she was committed to working with the board to reverse these trends and protect the district's fiscal future.

She asked if there were any questions.

Director Rose requested clarification on the specific risks associated with falling into "binding conditions." She noted that while there had been significant discussion regarding the importance of avoiding state oversight, the practical consequences remained a concern. She asked if the primary risk was simply that the state would assume the authority to make the district's financial decisions, thereby stripping the local board of its governing power. She noted it was important to clearly articulate what was at stake for the Griffin community should the district lose its financial autonomy.

Superintendent Rue explained that the prospect of entering binding conditions was a primary topic of concern among education leaders. She noted that in many of her professional meetings, there had been ongoing discussions regarding centralization—specifically the idea of the state pulling school districts together.

She shared that there was a growing sentiment among some superintendents that the state might be willing to allow districts to reach a zero balance as a catalyst for forced consolidation. She emphasized that the most significant risk in this scenario was the loss of local control. She concluded by stating that the district and the community would likely

need to have a serious conversation regarding the value and importance of maintaining their local autonomy.

Director Rose sought to put the current fiscal crisis into a historical context. She inquired whether it was accurate to state that more school districts were currently in binding conditions than at any other time in recent history.

Superintendent Rue confirmed that the number of districts in binding conditions had increased significantly since the previous year and anticipated that even more would reach that status by the end of the current fiscal year. The discussion noted a sharp contrast between the current financial landscape and the period prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, or even the decade leading up to it, suggesting a systemic shift in the stability of school district budgets across the state.

Superintendent Rue acknowledged the validity of the concerns regarding binding conditions, noting that she had engaged in private discussions with other local superintendents on the matter. She reported that several small, neighboring districts within the Educational Service District (ESD) were quietly exploring whether they might eventually need to "join forces" to survive financially.

She provided a specific example of a small district that had remained financially healthy by creating a robust online school. By enrolling approximately 2,000 students from across the state, that district generated significant revenue, whereas its neighbors continued to struggle. Superintendent Rue raised a critical question for the board and the state: whether such models provided a "fair shake" for all students and how a system of forced or voluntary consolidation would actually function.

She concluded by emphasizing that consolidation was a "big, heavy thing to ponder," but insisted that the community and the board must decide where they stood on the issue rather than ignoring it.

Director Rose observed that while the district's enrollment appeared to have stabilized recently, there was a broader, well-documented demographic shift resulting in fewer school-aged children across the region. She sought to emphasize the critical link between these population trends and the district’s financial health.

She noted that because the state’s Prototypical Funding Model is driven entirely by student headcount, any future decline in enrollment would cause a corresponding decrease in state funding. Director Rose suggested that this relationship needed to be explicitly "called out," as even a minor drop in student numbers would further reduce the already inadequate funding levels allocated for staffing and operations.

Superintendent Rue agreed with Director Rose’s suggestion to explicitly highlight the link between enrollment and fiscal health. She committed to developing a presentation slide

that illustrated the impact of declining birth rates—a demographic reality she believed many in the community might not fully realize.

Furthermore, Superintendent Rue provided critical context regarding the district's current enrollment composition. She noted that approximately 20% of the student body attended Griffin via Choice Transfers from other districts. She emphasized that being an "attractive choice" served the district and its taxpayers well, as these students brought in essential revenue, including:

State Apportionment: Basic education funding based on headcount.
Title Dollars: Federal funding for specific student support programs.
Special Education Funding: State and federal dollars for individualized education services.

The Superintendent concluded by noting that the district relied heavily on these transfers to maintain its current enrollment levels. She indicated that this dependency was an important factor for the board to consider in long-term strategic and fiscal planning.

V. POLICY - REVIEW

A. 2106 Program Copmpliance

Julie Osterberg made a motion to Approve the Review of Policy 2106.
Blair Baker seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

B. 6030 Financial Reports

Julie Osterberg made a motion to Approve the Review of Policy 6030.
Tesa Frevert seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

C. 6040 Expenditures in Excess of Budget

Julie Osterberg made a motion to Approve the Review of Policy 6040.
Tesa Frevert seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

D. 6213 Reimbursement for Travel Expenses

Julie Osterberg made a motion to Approve the Review of Policy 6213.
Blair Baker seconded the motion.
The board **VOTED** to approve the motion.

VI. DISTRICT REPORTS

A.

Finance Director's Report

Finance Director Kim Ferra provided the board with budget status reports for each of the district's five funds, with a primary focus on the General Fund.

Seasonal Cash Flow Trends

Director Ferra addressed the cash flow concerns previously raised by Superintendent Rue. She noted that December and January typically represented the lowest points in the district's financial schematic. She explained the anticipated "bounce back" in the fund balance:

April Property Tax Collection: The second half of property tax collections in April usually provides a significant influx of revenue.
Year-End Expenditure Shifts: Toward the end of the school year, costs for substitutes and various other operating expenses naturally diminish, allowing the fund balance to stabilize before the fiscal year ends.

Budget Development and Mitigation Strategies

Director Ferra reported that both the administrative and finance teams recommended an early start to the upcoming budget cycle. She stated that the district would begin "dissecting" expenditures immediately to identify exactly how funds were being utilized.

The goal of this early intervention was to:

Mitigate Deficits: Identify areas of overspending to "stop the bleeding."
Restructure and Reallocate: Reform existing spending patterns to ensure resources are directed more effectively.
Ensure Solvency: Create a more sustainable and solvent financial situation for the district moving forward.

Director Ferra concluded by assuring the board that the finance department was committed to a rigorous review process to address the current fiscal challenges.

B. Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Rue concluded the meeting by highlighting several key initiatives and upcoming events, noting that much of her earlier report had been covered during the State of the District presentation.

Program and Facilities Updates

Restorative Center Launch: The Superintendent announced the opening of the district's new Restorative Center, coinciding with the start of the new semester. Student advocates

had been selected and were prepared to begin staffing the center during periods 3, 4, and 6. The program was designed to enhance the district’s response to students' social-emotional and behavioral needs through a processed, supportive approach.

Long-Range Planning: A hard copy of the Long-Range Facilities, Grounds, and Technology Plan was provided to the board. The document detailed completed projects, those currently in progress, and future initiatives that remained part of the district's strategic roadmap.

Legislative Advocacy

Superintendent Rue informed the board that the following day was Public Education Advocacy Day in Olympia. She planned to monitor several key bills, with a particular focus on:

Transitional Kindergarten (TK): The district had been collecting data and "student stories" to advocate for the continued funding and importance of the TK program.
Legislative Strategy: The Superintendent committed to communicating with the board and the broader community regarding specific bills that required public support or testimony during the current legislative session.

VII. Closing Items

A. For the Good of the Order

Performing Arts: The school play was scheduled for Friday and Saturday evenings.

Music: The Kindergarten and First Grade (K-1) concert was set for the following evening.

Staff Appreciation: The board and Superintendent acknowledged the significant training and effort the staff had put in throughout the first semester to launch the new restorative programs.

B. Executive Session

The Board of Directors held the Executive Session in the Boardroom in the District Office.

No decisions were made.

C. Adjourn Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, and upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the meeting was adjourned at 9:27 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Trish Hefton

"Where students thrive, feel valued, and shape a better world."