

WEST VIRGINIA BOARD OF EDUCATION

Capitol Building 6, Suite 600
1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East
Charleston, West Virginia

MINUTES

April 8, 2026

I. Call to Order

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance led by Mr. Dunlevy. President L. Paul Hardesty called the meeting of the West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE) to order at 9:00 a.m. on April 8, 2026, in Capitol Building 6, Suite 600, 1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East, Charleston, West Virginia.

The following members were present: President L. Paul Hardesty, Vice-President Victor L. Gabriel, Robert W. Dunlevy, Cathy L. C. Justice, James D. Paul, F. Scott Rotruck, Dr. Christopher A. Stansbury (via remote), Nancy J. White (via remote), Gregory F. Wooten (via remote), and ex officio members Michele L. Blatt, State Superintendent of Schools, West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) and Sarah Armstrong Tucker, Chancellor, West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission and West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education.

II. Approval of Agenda

Prior to approval of the agenda, President Hardesty announced that *Item IV (Delegations)* would be moved to before *Item IX (WVBE Member Updates and Request for Information)*. President Hardesty then called for a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Dunlevy moved, and Mr. Gabriel seconded, that the agenda be approved. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

III. Recognitions

Ms. Kelly Massinople, WVDE Office of Support, recognized the following Exemplary Practice Schools for Academic Achievement: Crum PK-8 (Wayne County), George Washington Middle School (Putnam County), and Guyandotte Elementary School (Cabell County). Next, Ms. Stacey Losh, WVDE Office of Research, recognized the following Exemplary Practice Schools for Attendance: Jayenne Elementary School (Marion County), Huff Consolidated Elementary/Middle School (Wyoming County), and Huntington High School (Cabell County). After recognition, representatives from each school addressed the board.

IV. School Safety Report

Mr. Micah Whitlow and Mr. James Agee provided a school safety update that included the number of threats reported and managed in March 2026. Mr. Whitlow also informed the board that he had participated in a panel discussion at the West Virginia Design and Construction Expo relating to crime prevention through environmental design and outlined the four components built on natural surveillance. Dr. Paul requested Mr. Whitlow to provide information about schools identified as “persistently dangerous” as defined by the Every Student Succeeds Act.

V. State Superintendent Reports

Superintendent Blatt informed members that there are 208 students graduating this year who are participating in the Grow Your Own Teacher Program and displayed a specialized stole that will be

distributed to each of those students to wear during their high school graduation ceremony. Additionally, the participants will be given a “future teacher” sticker and letters of encouragement written by Milken Educators. Superintendent Blatt explained that the Grow Your Own Teacher Program is continuing to expand, as it currently has 400 students participating. Next, Superintendent Blatt informed the board members that they have a copy of the FY2027 Budget Book and the 2026 Green Book in their meeting packets.

VI. Consent Agenda

President Hardesty called for a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Mr. Dunlevy moved, and Mr. Gabriel seconded, that the Consent Agenda be approved. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote approving the following:

- Approved the WVBE minutes of the March 11, 2026, meeting.
- Approved the employment of substitute teachers in areas of critical need and shortage policy for Marion County.
- Approved retirement affidavits for submission to the Consolidated Public Retirement Board.
- Approved Boone County Schools’ Launchpad alternative certification program for special education, in partnership with the WVDE.
- Approved Boone County Schools’ Launchpad alternative certification program for general education, in partnership with the WVDE and Marshall University.
- Approved Concord University Partnership Agreement with Logan County Schools for Certified Teacher of Record positions.
- Approved Mingo County's 2020-2030 Comprehensive Educational Facilities Plan (CEFP) amendment.
- Approved Wetzel County’s 2020-200 CEFPP amendment.
- Approved the West Virginia School Board Association’s End-of-Year Regional Training.

VII. West Virginia University (WVU)

Next, President Hardesty announced that the board was going to jump to *Item VIII B (West Virginia University)* on the agenda for a presentation by WVU President Michael T. Benson. President Benson informed the members that WVU is the largest educator of teachers in the state and that 158 candidates were currently completing residency or student teaching requirements. President Benson explained that his goal is to visit all 55 counties by the end of May and that he will have visited 42 counties by the end of the day. President Benson is working to introduce students to post-secondary options before the 10th and 11th grades, which has historically been when the information is shared with students. President Benson believes that the time to address post-secondary options with students is in 7th, 8th, and 9th grade. According to President Benson, this approach is proving to be successful in South Carolina, and he is working on implementing the practice in West Virginia.

VIII. Common Ground Partnership updates, expansion of Purple Star Awards for Post-Secondary Education, and an Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) statement of support from the WVDE

Mr. Robert Mellace, WVDE Office of Educator Development, provided an update on Common Ground Partnership achievements. According to Mr. Mellace, West Virginia has a strong record of citizens volunteering to enlist in the military at a higher rate than most states. Mr. Mellace talked about the unique issues that students from military families face and the numerous ways that participants in the Common Ground Partnership have assisted in resolving them. Mr. Mellace explained that 49 West Virginia schools participated in Military Signing Week and related events last year, resulting in 288 students being recognized for their commitment to enlistment in the United States Armed Forces. Additionally, the number of Purple Star schools has grown to a total of 315 schools, each of which has a trained military family point of contact, links to helpful resources, and an annual Purple Up Day celebration to recognize the strength and resilience of military children experiencing the deployment of a loved one. The following also addressed the board: Johnnie Ross, West Virginia Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve; Commissioner Nickolas Lambruno, Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission; Dr. Rikki McCormick, West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission's Office of Veterans Education and Training. After the presentation, Superintendent Blatt signed an Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve statement displaying a commitment to support and assist employees serving in the United States Armed Forces whenever they are called to serve and upon their return to employment at WVDE.

IX. Discussion of Legal Matters

Mr. Gabriel moved, Mrs. Justice seconded, that the board enter executive session under the attorney-client privilege exemption, authorized by W. Va. Code §6-9A-3 for discussion of item C (Discussion of Legal Matters) on the agenda. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote. President Hardesty announced that the board was entering executive session at 10:49 a.m. The Board returned from executive session at 11:25 a.m. without taking any action.

X. WVBE and WVDE Personnel Matters

President Hardesty called for a motion to approve the WVBE personnel matters included in the agenda attachment. Mr. Gabriel moved, and Mr. Rotruck seconded, that the WVBE personnel matters included in the agenda attachment be approved. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote. President Hardesty then called for a motion to approve the WVDE personnel matters included in the agenda attachment. Mr. Dunlevy moved, and Mr. Paul seconded, that the WVDE personnel matters included in the agenda attachment be approved. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

XI. Delegations

Mr. Seth Distefano, West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, spoke about the rollback in child labor laws. Ms. Janet Bedline and Ms. Susan Perry, Stand for Kids, talked about the importance of adhering to the current vaccination laws. Mr. Mickey Blackwell, West Virginia Principals Association, addressed assessment testing, and the diversity of astronauts on the Artemis II space shuttle.

XII. WVBE Member Updates and Requests for Information

Dr. Paul reported that he had attended the Inwood Early Learning Academy Groundbreaking Ceremony in Berkeley County and requested information regarding WVBE Policy 2419. Specifically, Dr. Paul requested an analysis of what areas are grounded in federal vs. state law and/or policy. Mr. Rotruck reported that he attended the Focus Forward Conference in Morgantown. Chancellor Tucker talked about the passage of the financial aid bill during the 2026 Regular Legislative Session and how it would simplify the financial process. Mrs. Justice talked about attending the West Virginia Girls' Basketball State Tournament.

XIII. Future Meetings

President Hardesty announced that the next regular meeting of the West Virginia Board of Education would be on May 13, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. in Charleston, West Virginia.

XIV. Adjournment

President Hardesty called for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Gabriel moved, and Mr. Dunlevy seconded, that the meeting be adjourned. Upon the call for the question, the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m. on a voice vote.

Minutes approved by the Board on May 13, 2026

L. Paul Hardesty, President

Victor L. Gabriel, Vice President

NOTE:

All agendas, attachments, materials distributed during the meeting, and audio recordings are available through the WVBE website or office pursuant to Policy 1241, Notice and Conduct of Meetings.

Minutes were recorded by:

Tina Payne, Board Secretary

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