

Anderson County Board of Education
907 North Main Street, Suite 202, Anderson, South Carolina 29621
February 17, 2026

Call to Order: Vice Chairman, Dr. Gary Burgess, called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Upon his arrival, Chairman Mike Upton presided over the remainder of the meeting

Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance: Mr. David Blanding gave the invocation, after which, everyone joined in the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

Board Members' Present: The following board members were present at the meeting: Mr. Mike Upton, Dr. Gary Burgess, Mr. C. Nakia Davis, Mr. David Blanding, Dr. Doug Atkins, Dr. Vaughn Parfitt, Mr. Greg Balog, Mr. Mark Williamson by Zoom, and Mrs. Susan Binninger ex officio.

Board Members Absent: Rev. Jason Dorriety

Approval of Agenda: Mr. Nakia Davis made a motion to approve the agenda. Dr. Vaughn Parfitt seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

Approval of Minutes: Dr. Doug Atkins made a motion to approve January 20, 2026, meeting minutes and Mr. David Blanding seconded the motion. They were approved unanimously.

Recognition of Media and Patrons / Public Comment Period: Dr. Gary Burgess welcomed Mr. Ken Martin of Martin Smith & Company to the meeting.

2024-2025 External Audit Report: Mr. Ken Martin of Martin Smith & Company presented the financial statements and audit results for the 2024/2025 fiscal year. The audit was conducted in November 2025. He explained that the audit was performed in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards and applicable governmental auditing standards, which require the collection of extensive information and the performance of substantive testing procedures. Mr. Martin noted that Mrs. Binninger has successfully established and continues to maintain a strong system of internal controls for the last two years. Mr. Martin reported that revenues increased by 14%, while expenses remained relatively consistent, resulting in an increase in net assets of approximately \$250,000. He stated that the Department of Education is operating within its means and exercising prudent financial management with respect to its funds and facilities. He further noted that the fund balance is maintained to address future challenges and opportunities and that it has been restored to a healthy level over the past one to two years. Mr. Martin also addressed questions raised by Board members and provided additional clarification as requested.

Dr. Burgess inquired about the types of strong internal controls that should be in place. Mr. Martin responded that an effective system of checks and balances is essential to safeguard cash balances and other assets. He emphasized the importance of segregation of duties to ensure that no single individual has responsibility for both handling cash and issuing payments. He further noted that when complete segregation is not feasible, a higher-level review should be conducted in detail to ensure transactions are managed appropriately and internal controls are functioning as intended.

Chairman Upton inquired whether any additional staff training was recommended. Mr. Martin responded that no additional training was necessary at this time. He noted that a representative from Martin Smith & Company met with Mrs. Binninger and Mrs. Sibert to review current procedures and discuss potential improvements to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. Mrs. Binninger has adopted the recommended procedural updates for the Department of Education.

Mr. Williamson inquired whether the current approval thresholds and internal controls are consistent with GASB and GAAP standards. He also asked whether, in the auditor's opinion, the Department is in good standing with respect to its existing controls.

Mr. Martin responded affirmatively, stating that the approval thresholds and internal controls are appropriately aligned with applicable standards. He further noted that the controls are established at a prudent and reasonable level, reflecting a conservative and sound approach to financial oversight.

Mr. Balog asked Mr. Martin if he saw any problems.

Mr. Martin said no not at this time. He feels like everything is moving along very nicely.

Overview and Data on Truancy-Truancy Supervisors

Mrs. Anna Hall explained that a student between the ages of 6 and 17 is considered truant if he or she has three consecutive unexcused absences or accumulates a total of five or more unexcused absences during the academic year.

She further defined chronic absenteeism for grades K–12 as a student who misses 50% or more of the instructional day for any reason for 10% of the enrollment period. Mrs. Hall noted that all types of absences contribute to chronic absenteeism, including excused and unexcused absences, as well as suspensions.

Mrs. Hall also reviewed the truancy process. Schools first identify truant students and schedule intervention meetings. Students and parents who fail to attend the scheduled meeting or who accumulate additional absences after the Attendance Intervention Plan (AIP) meeting are referred to the County Department of Education. Additional interventions may then be implemented, including referrals to diversion programs and, if necessary, court hearings.

Mrs. Casey Arflin reported that 587 referrals have been received thus far during the 2025–2026 school year. She further stated that she and Mrs. Hall have processed 26 Orders to Attend and 12 Rules to Show Cause court cases to date this school year. Mrs. Arflin also presented data reflecting the number of referrals from each district in prior years, as well as the total number of court cases during the 2024–2025 school year.

Mrs. Arflin discussed several ongoing challenges, including difficulty making contact with families, locating guardians, delayed referrals from schools, limited court availability, lack of cooperation from some guardians, limitations of external agencies, and older students demonstrating a lack of motivation.

She highlighted progress made through the implementation of a district-wide parental note policy, annual countywide training, and the use of court-ordered sanctions. Mrs. Arflin and Mrs. Hall also conduct countywide truancy training each year for all five districts, inviting administrators and attendance clerks to participate.

Chairman Upton stated that the Board fully supports both of you in your respective roles. He further emphasized that consistent student attendance is essential to ensuring a quality education.

Dr. Parfitt inquired whether the alternative school was an available option.

Mrs. Hall responded that students are offered the opportunity to attend the alternative school to address absenteeism concerns prior to pursuing further action through the court system.

Dr. Burgess inquired whether the students involved fell within a particular social demographic.

Mrs. Arflin responded that they do, noting that the majority of the cases originate from District Five.

Mr. Blanding inquired as to whom the schools direct their truancy referrals.

Mrs. Arflin responded that referrals from the schools are submitted to her and to Mrs. Hall.

Mr. Williamson inquired about the timeframe between a school's referral and the implementation of an action plan. He also asked whether students might continue to accrue absences during that interim period and how such situations are managed by the Department of Education.

Mrs. Arflin explained that, unfortunately, there could be a delay. She noted that the timeframe depends on how promptly the school submits the referral and how quickly the student can be scheduled and seen by the department's office.

Mr. Balog inquired whether there was a predominant group contributing to truancy cases. Mrs. Hall explained that, at the elementary level, truancy issues are typically attributable to parental factors. She noted that there is often an increase in truancy during the 9th and 10th grades; however, attendance patterns generally stabilize in the 11th and 12th grades.

Mr. Williamson asked whether there was anything the Board could do to assist. Mrs. Hall responded that continued support of Mrs. Binninger in her work would enable her to effectively continue addressing truancy matters.

Mr. Burgess inquired whether there had been an increase in absenteeism among Hispanic students in light of recent immigration-related concerns. Mrs. Hall responded that there may have been a slight increase during the previous school year; however, she noted that there has not been a significant increase within the district.

Chairman Upton inquired whether there were any cases involving bullying. Mrs. Hall confirmed that there have been some cases involving bullying. She stated that efforts are made to gather all relevant information from both students and parents, and that the department works closely with the schools to address and resolve these matters.

Mr. Davis expressed concern regarding the increase in truancy numbers within District Three. Mrs. Arflin responded that the increase may be attributable to the district's implementation of the five-parental-note policy this year. She indicated that the truancy figures are expected to align more closely with those of the other districts by the end of the school year.

Mr. Davis recommended that Mrs. Binninger contact the five school districts to coordinate presentations by Mrs. Arflin and Mrs. Hall at their respective board meetings.

Reports

A. Renaissance Academy Report: Mrs. Binninger provided the board members with the monthly report on enrollment information for the academy. Mrs. Binninger stated that there are 78 students currently enrolled as of February 16, 2026. This time last year, there were 84 students enrolled. This is a decrease of 6 students from last year. There are fourteen in the process of enrolling, for a total of 92 students. On the back side of the report, reasons for students leaving the academy are identified.

B. Administrator's Report:

1. 2024-2025 External Audit Reports for Anderson County School Districts 1-5:

Anderson School District One: Mrs. Binninger reported that the Governmental Funds combined fund balance is approximately \$77,540,000, compared to \$81,725,000 in the prior year. She explained that the decrease in fund balance is primarily attributable to a reduction in the Capital Projects Fund. While the Food Service Fund and General Fund reflected stable performance, those balances were offset by an increase in the Debt Service Fund.

The unassigned fund balance for the General Fund is approximately \$33,981,000, representing about 30% of total General Fund expenditures. She further stated that the school district's governmental funds revenues were approximately \$165 million, while expenditures totaled approximately \$184,715,000.

Additionally, the district's debt increased by approximately \$4,693,000, or 3%, during the current fiscal year. The outstanding debt as of June 30, 2025, was \$168,733,705.

Anderson School District Two: Mrs. Binninger reported that the Governmental Funds combined fund balance was approximately \$23.8 million, compared to \$23.7 million in the prior year. The unassigned fund balance for the General Fund was approximately \$14.1 million, representing about 35% of total General Fund expenditures.

She further stated that the school district's governmental funds revenues totaled approximately \$58.5 million during fiscal year 2025, while governmental fund-type expenditures were approximately \$58.4 million. Additionally, the district's debt decreased by approximately \$3.1 million, or 38%, during fiscal year 2025. The outstanding debt balance at the end of the fiscal year was \$5,049,000.

Anderson School District Three: Mrs. Binninger reported that the Governmental Funds combined fund balance was approximately \$16,842,667, compared to \$11,675,598 in the prior year. This total includes unassigned General Funds, Capital Projects, Debt Service, and Custodial Funds.

The unassigned fund balance for the General Fund was \$8,047,663, reflecting an increase of \$520,725 over the previous year. She further stated that the district's governmental fund-type revenues totaled \$44,947,416, while expenditures were \$39,181,749.

Additionally, District Three's debt increased by approximately \$191,261 during the fiscal year, resulting in an outstanding debt balance of \$18,288,411.

Dr. Gary Burgess inquired about what percentage of the total fund balance is attributed to the General Fund. Mrs. Binninger responded that she had not calculated that percentage but would calculate it and send it to him.

Anderson School District Four: Mrs. Binninger announced that Governmental Funds Combined Fund balance was negative \$32,983,040. This is a decrease of \$56,692 from the prior year. The main reason for this is because the school building fund showed a decrease as the district spent approximately \$66 million on the construction project. The unassigned fund balance for the General Fund was \$10,681,661 which is an increase of \$664,257 over the prior year. The district's total debt increased by \$11 million during the current fiscal year. The district's revenues were \$66,394,678. The expenditures were \$132,489,201. The debt increased by approximately \$11,059,036 during the fiscal year, bringing their outstanding debt to \$109,993,380.

Anderson School District Five: Mrs. Binninger reported that the combined fund balance for Governmental Funds is \$167,070,000, representing an increase of approximately \$21,529,000. The unassigned fund balance within the General Fund totals \$38,170,000, which is approximately 25% of total fund expenditures. She further stated that the district's governmental fund revenues were approximately \$226,855,000, while expenditures totaled approximately \$205,344,000. In addition, outstanding debt decreased by \$10,894,000 during the fiscal year, resulting in a current outstanding debt balance of \$151,979,949.

2. Legislative Update:

Mrs. Binninger announced that the House has passed the Boat Bill and would now go to the Senate. This legislation was introduced to reduce property taxes on watercraft. If enacted, an outboard motor would no longer require a separate title. The combined titling fee for both the boat and motor would be reduced to \$10.00, compared to the current \$20.00 fee. Additionally, the tax rate would decrease from 10.5% to 6%. She noted that approximately 70% of the revenue generated from this tax directly impacts school funding.

The Homestead Exemption is another bill currently under consideration in the Senate. The proposed legislation would increase the homestead exemption for owner-occupied properties for individuals age 65 and older from \$50,000 to \$100,000. The bill would also require a five-year residency for individuals relocating to the state to qualify.

While the measure would reduce local property tax revenue, the loss would be offset through state reimbursement. As a result, the school district would not experience a reduction in funding; however, the amount of local property tax revenue collected would decrease accordingly.

Chairman Upton inquired whether state reimbursement would continue to be managed by the County in the same manner.

Mrs. Binninger explained that the County Treasurer would submit a bill to the State for the amount impacted by the legislation, after which the State would reimburse the County. She noted that these reimbursements are generally received in April. The primary difference would be the timing of the funds, as most property tax revenues are typically received in December and January, whereas reimbursement from the State would be received later in the year.

C. Financial

1. Tax Collection YTD vs. Budget: Mrs. Binninger reported that all 5 Districts, Renaissance Academy and County Board are between 71% to 84% in collections of their local revenue as of January 31, 2026. Mrs. Binninger stated that there is a significant increase in collections. This amount has increased due to the property taxes being due by January 15, 2026, date to avoid penalties.

2. Assessment Totals: Mrs. Binninger reviewed the county-wide assessment totals through January 2026, noting a per mill value of \$1,181,345,288—a decrease of \$245 since December 2025. Mrs. Binninger presented a three-year comparison of the value of one mill for the month of January, reporting figures of \$1,044,453 in 2024, \$1,119,437 in 2025, and \$1,181,345 in 2026. Mrs. Binninger presented the approved school millage for the 2025-2026 school year. This is broken down for each school district. A millage comparison was also provided for personal property and owner-occupied homes in each school district.

3. Education Sales & Use Tax: Mrs. Binninger reported that \$3,391,495.02 in Education Sales & Use Tax was collected in January. Mrs. Binninger stated that this is a decrease of approximately \$110,000.00 from this time last year. Mrs. Binninger reminded everyone that 20% of these funds are posted to the sinking fund accounts of the districts to roll back debt service millage. The remaining 80% goes to capital projects.

4. Accounts Payable: Lastly, Mrs. Binninger presented the accounts payable showing the bills that have been paid from January 1, 2026, to January 31, 2026. Mr. C. Nakia Davis made a motion to approve. Dr. Vaughn Parfitt seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

Unfinished Business: None

New Business

A. 2026-2027 Anderson County Department of Education Budget: Mrs. Binninger presented the proposed budget for the Anderson County Department of Education, which was subsequently submitted to the Budget Committee for review. She noted that three adjustments were made within the personnel expenses category since the review of the committee. Specifically, the projected insurance allocation was reduced because the new hire, originally budgeted for family coverage, elected single coverage. The resulting savings were reallocated to increase the salaries of the Mental Health Counselors. This adjustment will also result in a corresponding increase in Medicare and Social Security (FICA) expenditures.

Mrs. Binninger is proposing a 9% increase in total revenue. The majority of the projected revenue increase is attributed to Ad Valorem taxes. Specifically, she recommends increasing the Ad Valorem tax revenue from the current budgeted amount of \$581,300 to \$663,000, which represents an approximate 14% increase.

Mrs. Binninger stated that investment earnings contributed to an increase in the fund balance. By transferring those funds to the Local Government Investment Pool, she will be able to place them in a high-yield savings account to generate additional interest revenue. As a result, projected interest income has increased accordingly.

Additionally, payments from school districts were increased by \$30,000 to reflect the amount paid by Renaissance Academy for fiscal services and benefits administration.

Mrs. Binninger presented the personnel budget, which accounts for 88.6% of the total budget. Proposed staff salary increases range from 5% to 9%, with the intent of bringing compensation more in line with comparable positions within the local school districts.

A new line item has been added for Fiscal Management and Benefits Administration services for the alternative school in the amount of \$30,000. This addition ensures transparency by clearly reflecting both the revenue received and the corresponding expenditure. No millage increase is proposed.

Mrs. Binninger reviewed the operating expenses with the Board members and is proposing a 4% increase in this category. She noted that cost savings have been realized by assigning counselors to remain at one school for the full day.

Mrs. Binninger is also recommending an increase in the Board travel allocation to ensure sufficient funding should Board members choose to attend conferences. Additionally, the School Food Services budget will be increased to \$2,000 to help offset Ms. Peles's travel expenses between schools in Districts 2 and 3, as well as her attendance at conferences.

Mr. Burgess inquired about the total amount of legal fees incurred thus far during the current fiscal year. Mrs. Binninger reported that approximately \$4,000 in legal fees have been expended to date.

Mr. Davis inquired whether staff services accounted for the significant increase in personnel expenditures. Mrs. Binninger confirmed that this was the case, noting that the increase includes the addition of a part-time position.

Mr. Balog made a motion for Mrs. Binninger to present the proposed budget to the Delegation by March 15, 2026. Mr. Blanding seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

Executive Session

A. Personnel Matter

A motion was made at 7:08 pm to move to Executive Session by Dr. Gary Burgess, seconded by Mr. David Blanding, and approved by all board members.

Dr. Vaughn Parfitt made a motion to exit Executive Session at 7:34 pm and was seconded by Dr. Gary Burgess. All board members approved.

No actions were taken during the Executive Session.

Action as Necessary from Executive Session: Dr. Gary Burgess made a motion to approve a one-time bonus for all Anderson County Department of Education employees in the amount of \$1,500 for full-time employees and \$750 for part-time employees hired prior to December 31, 2025. Mr. Greg Balog seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously.

Chairman Upton stated that he has consistently observed employees performing at a high caliber, regardless of their position or level within the organization.

Dr. Burgess commented that he has served on the Board since 2010 and noted that the Department of Education has consistently operated on one mill during that time. He further stated that the proposed budget will not require a millage increase.

Dr. Burgess made a motion for the Administrator to present the Administrator's contract at the next meeting, incorporating the revisions recommended by the Board of Education's attorney during consultation.

Announcements: Mrs. Binninger announced that the Statement of Economic Interests must be submitted to the Ethics Commission no later than March 30, 2026.

Meeting Date: The next Board meeting will be on Monday, March 16, 2026.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:41 p.m. by Chairman Mike Upton

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. C. Nakia Davis, Secretary of the Anderson County Board of Education.
This is a true and correct copy of notes taken at the meeting.