



MINUTES
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Washington County School District
121 West Tabernacle, St. George, Utah
February 9, 2026
4:30 p.m.

Present: Board President David Stirland, Board Vice President LaRene Cox, Board Member Craig Seegmiller, Board Member Burke Staheli, Board Member Ron Wade, Board Member Craig Hammer, Board Member Heidi Gunn, Superintendent Richard Holmes, Business Administrator Brent Bills, Assistant Superintendent Nate Esplin, Assistant Superintendent Cheri Stevenson, Executive HR Director Darin Thomas, Executive Director Susan Harrah, Executive Director Steve Gregoire, Executive Director Rusty Taylor, Executive Director Wade Jensen, Technology Director Jeremy Cox, Communications Director Steven Dunham, Learning Director Brian Stevenson, and Student Services Director Brad Christensen.

Minutes: Executive Secretary Kajsia Boyer

Reverence by Board Member Hammer.

WORK SESSION

Visit CTE Parade of Homes

The Board toured the CTE built home that is part of the Southern Utah Parade of Homes.

Board Member Seegmiller presented a motion to go into a closed session at 1:14 p.m. Board Member Cox seconded the motion that passed unanimously.

CLOSED SESSION

Property and Personnel Items

Present: Board President David Stirland, Board Vice President LaRene Cox, Board Member Craig Seegmiller, Board Member Burke Staheli, Board Member Ron Wade, Board Member Craig Hammer, Board Member Heidi Gunn, Superintendent Richard Holmes, Business Administrator Brent Bills

Personnel Items

Present: Board President David Stirland, Board Vice President LaRene Cox, Board Member Craig Seegmiller, Board Member Burke Staheli, Board Member Ron Wade, Board Member Craig Hammer, Board Member Heidi Gunn, Superintendent Richard Holmes, Business Administrator Brent Bills, Assistant Superintendent Nate Esplin, Assistant Superintendent Cheri Stevenson, Executive HR Director Darin Thomas, Executive Director Steve Gregoire, Executive Director Rusty Taylor, Executive Director Wade Jensen, Technology Director Jeremy Cox, Communications Director Steven Dunham, Learning Director Brian Stevenson, and Student Services Director Brad Christensen, and Executive Secretary Kajsia Boyer

Personnel Items

Board Member Cox presented a motion to go out of the closed session at 3:16 p.m. Board Member Wade seconded the motion that passed unanimously.

FOLLOW UP FROM PREVIOUS BOARD MEETING

There were no follow up items from the previous board meeting.

WORK SESSION

Board PLC Training – Wade Jensen

Wade Jensen shared a video clip explaining what Amy Christiansen does in the District and her leadership over science, health, and PE. Amy balances strict Utah law compliance with practical classroom realities to ensure district-wide adherence in health and PE instruction. She is visible in and maintains trust-building support across schools, using deep data analysis to identify proficiency gaps and tailor professional development workshops. She collaborates with the Teaching and Innovation department to 3D print cost-effective manipulatives for enhancing hands-on learning for struggling students. Her involvement in state committees and writing for Rise and Aspire equips her with knowledge to help her train teachers and administrators on the Utah science standards. The District's growth scores surpass other Utah districts with similar demographics, showing clear positive impact from Amy's strategic efforts.

Insurance Renewal – Tammara Robinson

Tammara Robinson said GBS has recommended a 3% increase. She reviewed the proposed changes and said they are very minimal. Lincoln Financial, the Voya plans, and Health Equity saw no rate changes. There are marginal increases for mental health session fees and dental administration fees, with no premium hikes on dental this year. The vision plans have a small rate changes. The EMI Medical admin fees are increasing an additional \$1.15 per employee per month. The Insurance Committee has recommended no plan changes. The employee premiums will increase slightly for both of the plans. Utilization rates have declined recently, possibly due to fewer high-cost claims, but no single factor was identified.

Policy 4100 Graduation Requirements/School Credits – Rusty Taylor

Rusty Taylor shared the proposal for the graduation requirements for the graduating class of 2029 and beyond. Social Studies has increased by .5 as the American Constitutional Government and Civics course becomes 1.0 credit. Adding that extra .5 credit takes an elective away from students. After having conversations with principals and counselors it was determined that it would be best to add a .5 credit to electives making it 28 credits for the traditional Washington County diploma. The state currently requires 24 credits. This adjustment aligns with typical student loads of seven credits per year and supports students pursuing early graduation through concurrent enrollment or AP classes. Board discussion included creating a formal honors diploma based on a rigorous college-level curriculum certificate accepted by all state colleges, encouraging more AP and concurrent enrollment participation.

Elementary Curriculum Updates – Nate Esplin

Nate Esplin shared an update on the new curriculum. The new reading and math curricula are advancing well into their second and first years respectively, with strong teacher engagement despite increased prep time. Our grade level specialists support teachers by creating slide presentations that highlight key curriculum points, easing lesson preparation burdens. Collaborative team planning sessions facilitated by district staff help optimize math instruction and reinforce positive student engagement and vocabulary use. The District paused the adoption of the "Hope of America" social studies program due to timing, teacher workload, and logistical concerns, and the new literacy law that will most likely pass. The BTS elementary arts program currently serves 23 of 27 schools with a mix of music, visual art, and dance, providing arts access to nearly all students. The upcoming Spring Sing event on April 7-8 at Tuacahn will feature about 10 schools per evening over two days, showcasing student performances.

Email for Water Board – Jeremy Cox

Jeremy Cox he would like to get the water board emails off of our District system. He shared some of the possible domains that would be available. We currently own watercanyonwater.com. The Board selected wc-irrigation.com. Email hosting options considered include Google at \$7 per user per month versus cheaper alternatives like Zoho Mail offering sufficient storage for Water Board needs. The Board favored Zoho Mail due to its cost-effectiveness and adequate 5GB storage per user.

Medicare Bridge Program Change – Darin Thomas

Darin Thomas reviewed the Medicare Bridge program and shared a proposed change. The change updates the Medicare bridge eligibility to allow retirement at age 60 with 20 years of service or any age with 30 years of service, aligning more closely with URS guidelines. The revised plan maintains the health reimbursement account caps, ensuring consistent benefits regardless of age at retirement. He would like to get the information out first thing in the morning and give employees a week to decide. The District leadership expects there will be moderate impact on retirements but may help with staffing as enrollment declines.

School LAND Trust Program Timeline – Brent Bills

Brent Bills shared the proposed School LAND Trust Timeline and state requirements. Our policy does not align with the timeline of the state. He reviewed the proposed timeline for staffing and SLT and TSSA plans. With the proposed timeline the Board would approve the plans in the second meeting in April. The policy changes will be presented for 30-day review and submitted to the Board for approval next month.

Legislative Update – Superintendent Richard Holmes

Superintendent Richard Holmes shared a brief legislative update. HB241 introduces a clear state standard for grade-level reading at 80% proficiency and supports targeted early interventions. The bill provides \$15 million annually in funding for two years, aimed at paraprofessional support and intervention programs, though ongoing funding beyond that is uncertain. The bill also includes retention for third grade students not at proficiency. It will not go into full effect until 2030 if passed. He mentioned that there are over 800 legislative bills this year with 150 education bills. Brent Bills mentioned a newly introduced bill, HB524, that changes the business administrator's contract to at-will employment and reports directly to the superintendent, raising governance and control questions.

OPEN DISCUSSION OF THE BOARD

Board Committee Discussions

Burke Staheli mentioned he will be on the committee to hire the new UHSAA director. He briefly mentioned SB271.

Board Member Staheli presented a motion to go into a closed session at 4:18 p.m. Board Member Gunn seconded the motion that passed unanimously.

Present: Board President David Stirland, Board Vice President LaRene Cox, Board Member Craig Seegmiller, Board Member Burke Staheli, Board Member Ron Wade, Board Member Craig Hammer, Board Member Heidi Gunn, Superintendent Richard Holmes, Business Administrator Brent Bills, Assistant Superintendent Nate Esplin, Assistant Superintendent Cheri Stevenson, Executive HR Director Darin Thomas, Executive Director Rusty Taylor, Executive Director Wade Jensen, Technology Director Jeremy Cox, Communications Director Steven Dunham, Learning Director Brian Stevenson, and Student Services Director Brad Christensen, and Executive Secretary Kajsia Boyer

CLOSED SESSION

Personnel Items

Board Member Hammer presented a motion to go out of the closed session at 4:23 p.m. Board Member Cox seconded the motion that passed unanimously.

ITEMS FOR BOARD REVIEW

1. Enrollment
2. Safe Schools
3. GRAMA Requests
4. Department Reports

A regular meeting of the Board of Education of the Washington County School District was held after due, legal, and timely notice being given to all members and interested parties. Board President David Stirland called the meeting to order and welcomed all visitors. Board members present were Craig Seegmiller, LaRene Cox, Burke Staheli, Ron Wade, Craig Hammer, and Heidi Gunn. Staff members present were Superintendent Richard Holmes and Business Administrator Brent Bills.

OPEN MEETING – 4:30 p.m.

1. Reverence by Member Gunn
2. Welcome – Board President Stirland
3. Pledge of Allegiance by Member Staheli

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Minutes
 - a. January 12, 2026 Meeting of the Board of Education
 - b. January 26, 2026 Special Meeting of the Board of Education
2. Financial Report
3. Personnel and LEA Specific License Items
4. Bloomington Hills TSSA Plan Change
5. Water Canyon Elementary TSSA Plan Change
6. Hurricane High School TSSA Plan Change

Darin Thomas reviewed the changes to Administrative Letter A170 Medicare Bridge Program. The eligibility criteria are being expanded to include employees with 30 years in URS at any age or those age 60 or older with at least 20 years of service, broadening access to the Medicare Bridge program. The requirement for 10 consecutive years of employment with Washington County remains unchanged, ensuring continuous service as a basis for eligibility. The dollar amount, capped at \$37,500 annually, was not changed, maintaining financial consistency for retirees. This change is to better reflect actuarial realities under URS and provide additional support options for retiring employees.

Board Member Seegmiller presented a motion to approve the Consent Agenda items 1-6 including the Administrative Letter change discussed for the Medicare Bridge Program under the Personnel Items. Board Member Staheli seconded the motion that passed unanimously.

WHAT'S RIGHT IN WCSD SCHOOLS

Water Canyon Elementary – Principal Brad Jolley

Principal Brad Jolley said they have recently had some health issues affecting students. He works with a great staff and has a great community that is resilient. They just keep fighting and keep plugging along to come together for the benefit of students. He feels that the number one takeaway this year is that they are a resilient group at Water Canyon. The second take away is with their collective commitments. They really want to get more parent engagement with the school. For many parents this is their first association with public education. It is not always an easy task to get them into school, so their first focus is to let the parents know that they are a family and support their children. This year they decided to do a learning walk for parents to invite them into the school. They scheduled a couple of them and invite smaller groups of parents to come each time and explained the learning walk. They go into classrooms and let the parents see the good things that are happening. They talk about learning and let them see what the students are doing. It has been a very positive thing and gives an opportunity to review the collective commitments with parents. Having a family centered culture is what they are trying to build at Water Canyon. They currently have just under 200 students enrolled.

Pine View Middle School – Principal Mandie Luce

Principal Mandie Luce shared that their vision and mission are the same as the District's vision of Ensuring High Levels of Learning for every student. They are committed to success. They have spent quite a bit of time this year getting clear on what that means and what behaviors look like from our teachers to live up to that mission and vision. They spent a lot of time talking about their collective commitments and what they should see in their classrooms every single day. She shared what they call the Panther learning process. All of their professional learning has been centered around that to help the faculty understand what they do. They held a parent learning walk at their school which was a great way to share with their community what their education looks like. William Hinton, freshman at Pine View Middle School, shared his experience with the Air Force JROTC program. The program currently has 24 cadets. The average GPA of those students is 3.536. Those students have put in 575 community service hours this year helping with community events such as the St. George Marathon, Kokopelli Triathlon, car shows, and color guard services. There are 16 of the 24 cadets that also participate in other extracurricular activities which helps keep them connected with the school. There are 13 of the 24 cadets who participate in JROTC extracurricular activities before or after school. They also had one cadet who participated and with the Cyber Patriot Team who won first in state this year. There are six cadets who serve on the color guard team and present the colors at football games and learn how to wear the uniform and represent the Air Force. Some of the other cadets serve in groups such as Drill Marksmanship, J-Lab, Drones, Flight Academy, and the Planning Committee. This year their unit received a perfect score of 100 on their unit assessment putting them in the top 1% of units receiving a perfect score. One cadet in the program was also given the Top Performer Award which only four people in the entire program receive. He expressed appreciation to the Board for allowing them to have this opportunity to lead and develop their education through the program. Principal Mandie Luce recognized William as the student who received the Top Performer Award and recognized the 24 cadets at her school that are doing a great job. Superintendent Richard Holmes mentioned that the unit assessment accomplishment is really big thing and most do not understand what a significant accomplishment that is. The Pine View High and Pine View Middle JROTC have received this recognition twice.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON BOARD ACTION ITEMS

There were no public comments on Board Action Items.

BOARD ACTION ITEMS

Sunrise Ridge Intermediate Name Change and Rebranding – Principal Mike Winslow

Paula Haws requested the Board consider a school name change from Sunrise Ridge Intermediate to Desert Hills Intermediate. The name change aims to create a stronger bond among students and staff who often feel caught between elementary and secondary school identities. Teachers and students expressed feeling disconnected due to mixed grade levels and inconsistent team affiliations. The rebranding will be implemented immediately, signaling a clear new identity aligned with the broader cone site.

Principal Winslow emphasized the cultural importance of the change to enhance student belonging and school pride.

Board Member Cox presented a motion to approve the school's name change from Sunrise Ridge Intermediate School to Desert Hills Intermediate School effective immediately. Board Member Wade seconded the motion that passed unanimously.

School LAND Trust Program Timeline – Brent Bills

Brent Bills reviewed the proposed School LAND Trust timeline. The new timeline accelerates submission deadlines, with plans due to the district by February 27 and final revisions by April 10, ensuring timely state reporting. This update addresses misalignment where the previous board policy deadlines were too late to meet state requirements, risking loss of funds. Mr. Bills indicated the timeline approval precedes a formal policy update expected in the next two months to align board policy with these deadlines.

Board Member Hammer presented a motion to approve the timeline for the School LAND Trust Program. Board Member Seegmiller seconded the motion that passed unanimously.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Policy 4100 Graduation Requirements/School Credits – Rusty Taylor

Rusty Taylor shared a proposed increase is from 27 to 28 credits for high school graduation to incorporate a new 1-credit American Civics requirement mandated by the state. Adjustments will be made to maintain or increase elective credits, protecting elective teachers and student course variety.

The District also plans to introduce a significant honors diploma option highlighting rigorous college-level coursework, including AP and concurrent enrollment classes. Mr. Taylor noted the policy changes are in early stages, with a full proposal and detailed changes expected next month, followed by a public review period. The changes would not apply until the 2029 graduating class.

Policy 9710 School LAND Trust Program – Brent Bills

Brent Bills shared the proposed changes to Policy 9710 School LAND Trust Program. The update addresses a misalignment of the deadline dates to meet state requirements.

INFORMATION ITEMS

There were no information items.

REPORTS

Superintendent

Superintendent Richard Holmes and Brett Gifford recognized student, Cassandra Bailey, who was selected the Washington Area Chamber of Commerce Student of the Year, boasting a 4.0 GPA, 33.75 earned credits, and a 33 ACT composite score while actively participating in student council, the seminary council, and community service.

Superintendent Richard Holmes recognized Marvene Gubler of Three Falls Elementary who was honored as Teacher of the Year by the Hurricane Valley Chamber, marking over 40 years of impactful teaching.

Board

There were no reports from the Board.

Association

Annette Merchant, WCEA, recognized Kariann Christiansen, Water Canyon Elementary, with the WCEA Public Service Heroes Award for her versatile, hands-on leadership and dedication to student support and school culture.

PTA/PTO/Community Council

Liesel Clove, Dixie Council PTA president, shared that the Cedar City PTA Council has now joined our PTA region. She shared a couple of highlights from the Dixie Council schools. Heritage Elementary PTA held a student art contest this year to design the front of their school shirts. The second-place winner art will be put on the front cover of their yearbook. They have also continued with their Roadrunner Mileage Club and give students the opportunity to run laps during their lunch break. Sixteen of their students have already completed a full marathon in laps run and two have completed two marathons. They run the mileage club from October through April. Legacy Elementary PTA held a successful fundraiser and was able to purchase outdoor picnic tables, a nine square for their field, and a gaga ball pit. The students love having those things available to them at recess. Dixie Middle School is getting ready for their Reality Fair. Students are given a job, a family situation, and an income and go around to different booths to purchase insurance, a home, a car, etc. to help them get a better understanding of real life. The PTA helps provide volunteers to help with the booths at the event.

PUBLIC OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS THE BOARD – 3 minutes each

Jodi Jolley addressed the Board on changing to a four-day school week. She feels that early-out Friday is an issue and eliminating Friday will help with concerns of students loitering at local businesses after school is out. She feels it would help education to condense it into four days. She said her say that they are not doing anything on Friday and want to do other things. She mentioned that Iron County has it

already in the works. She said it is supported by parents and staff in Iron County and she feels there would be huge support for it here.

Board Member Cox presented a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:22 p.m. Board Member Gunn seconded the motion that passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT