MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Washington County School District
Springdale Elementary School
898 Zion Park Blvd.
Springdale, Utah 84767
July 13, 2026
9:00 a.m.

Present: Board President David Stirland, Board Vice President LaRene Cox, Board Member Craig Seegmiller, 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 Susan Harrah, Executive Director Rusty Taylor, Executive Director Wade Jensen, Technology Director Jeremy Cox, Teaching and Learning Director Brian Stevenson, Student Services Director Brad Christensen, and Facilities Director Bryan Dyer.

Excused: Board Member Burke Staheli

Minutes: Executive Secretary Kajsia Boyer

Reverence by Member Wade.

A. WORK SESSION

1. Water Board Presentation – Board President David Stirland

Board President David Stirland reported on the Water Board and mentioned that Terry Hutchinson and Todd Gardner have been brought on board to help. The board is committed to upgrading the Water Canyon Irrigation system to secure reliable water for the schools and community, with a $1.5 million project budget aiming for completion by winter. The project includes pipeline replacement, diversion dam modifications, and pond dredging. Cost savings were achieved by reusing existing infrastructure and omitting a sluice structure. The budget is well below the approved $3 million, excluding contingencies and engineering fees. The new system will improve water pressure to the elementary school and install master meters for usage tracking. The project aims to eliminate illegal water connections downstream of the high school by installing a new pipeline bypass. The pond feeding the irrigation system is currently only about 10% full, risking water shortages. The upgrade will enable metering and control of water use, preventing unauthorized tapping and waste. The district currently uses roughly 10-20% of the water, but unmetered illegal users pose a risk to supply. Without this system, the district must rely on costly city culinary water to irrigate sports fields. Engineering plans were submitted to Hildale city with expected 2-4 week review. Bidding is planned for next month, aiming for construction during the winter season. Easement negotiations with private landowners and the city are ongoing but may delay progress. Legal counsel is actively addressing permitting and water rights issues with the BLM and state adjudication. The district purchased water rights from the UEP, but must confirm assignment of BLM easements. There is ongoing adjudication with some claims disputing the water rights, but legal counsel sees low risk of losing rights. Continued coordination with the city and BLM is planned to avoid lengthy permitting hurdles. The district intends to maintain control of the water asset and carefully evaluate any partnership proposals. Terry Hutchinson feels that we should hold the public hearings in the community this winter. LaRene Cox said the city attorney feels that we won't be able to get the easements this year.

The Board discussed the agreement from Culver's by Hurricane High School. They are asking to connect to our water line.

2. Board Discussion Items

a. Policy Review

Cheri Stevenson said there has been a request to update the dress code policy and remove the words "tank tops." Principals are having confusion as the illustration shows a shirt that is considered a tank top. The principals want to enforce the policy in the way it is intended. The dress code will specify that tank tops are not permitted, supported by a clear diagram illustrating shoulder coverage. Removing the term helps administrators enforce the policy consistently without confusion over ambiguous clothing definitions. The change aims to reduce unnecessary student-teacher confrontations and handle violations discreetly through administration. Staff want to avoid burdening teachers with enforcement and prefer principals handle issues privately. The existing diagram provides a visual standard that supports the policy and eliminates subjective interpretations. Concerns exist that removing the term "tank top" might let spaghetti straps be worn, so referencing the diagram as policy helps maintain clarity. By referencing a separate dress guidelines document in policy, updates can be made without full policy revision delays. This approach mirrors other district policies where procedures are updated independently yet have policy weight. The board supported this flexible approach to maintain enforceability and adapt to evolving fashion norms.

b. UHSAA Updates

Rusty Taylor said he needs direction from the board on Lacrosse. The two year trial-period is ending. He said there are no other sports on the horizon that will be added. Key unresolved issues include insufficient certified referees, limited field availability, and transportation coordination. The board emphasized student safety as paramount, citing games played with fewer than the required officials as unacceptable. Tracking metrics on games with inadequate officials and scheduling disruptions will guide future evaluations. Only a few schools have enough players for JV teams, which would require additional field time and officials. The board noted increased game scheduling conflicts and the need to avoid overlapping with other sports practices like track. Continuing varsity-only play allows the district to manage resources and safety more effectively while addressing issues. The board will monitor progress on referee availability, transportation capacity, and facility scheduling over the next year. Schools are encouraged to manage internal scheduling and coaching to mitigate conflicts. The board decided to continue lacrosse's probationary status for another year, limiting play to varsity only until issues with officiating, transportation, and facilities are resolved. Probation signals a need for proactive problem solving before full program endorsement.

c. Interim Legislative Update

Superintendent Richard Holmes reported on legislation updates. He reviewed legislative developments emphasizing concerns over funding formulas, potential education endowments, and declining enrollment impacts. The WPU funding formula is under review due to statewide enrollment declines. Legislators are considering removing "hold harmless" provisions that currently buffer districts against drops in average daily membership. Changes could reduce district funding, reallocating more money to charter schools, which have more stable enrollments. The district is preparing to engage legislators proactively to influence funding outcomes. Senator Neil Walters is advocating for an endowment funded by economic stabilization money to provide sustainable education funding. The fund aims to generate around $400 million annually through interest, supporting public education long term. The board is supportive and ready to help with legislative efforts for the endowment.

d. Inland Port Update

Brent Bills shared an update on the inland port in Washington City. He said that districts have lost funding through these tax free areas. Washington City approved an inland port tax incentive area without consulting the district, reducing the district's property tax share from 60% to 25%. The port is projected to divert approximately $3.5 million over 25 years from the district's revenues. Funds are intended for road infrastructure not directly benefiting the district's schools. The district will attend public hearings and meet with the city mayor to express frustration and seek remedies. Board members view the inland port law as harmful to school funding and plan to lobby legislators for repeal or reform. The district sees this as a precedent-setting issue that threatens stable education funding in the region. The board expressed strong opposition to the creation of an inland port in Washington City, which diverts significant property tax revenue away from the district without local input.

e. Enrollment

Nate Esplin shared the projected enrollment numbers for 2028-2029 looking at building capacity. The numbers are for the current students moving up. The District tries to keep enrollment at 75% capacity. The elementary school capacities are generally stable with some growth areas. Desert Canyons operates at 120% capacity and Horizon at 106%, driven by new housing developments. Most schools aim to operate at or above 75% capacity, with Water Canyon and Enterprise as lower outliers. Superintendent Richard Holmes said if full-day kindergarten numbers were included the majority of our schools would be at least 70%. There is no urgent need for school closures or new buildings. The district prefers boundary adjustments and shifting students over building new elementary schools to manage capacity. Property acquisition continues as a prudent long-term strategy for potential future school sites. Economic factors such as high mortgage interest rates are currently limiting population growth and enrollment increases.
The district is monitoring enrollment trends and building capacities, with no immediate need for new schools but notable growth pressures in select areas. Schools with enrollment below 250 students typically trigger closure considerations in comparable districts. Portables are used to supplement capacity but are not included in official capacity calculations.

3. Legislative Requirements from State – Brent Bills

Brent Bills shared the trainings required for the school board members at training.auditor.utah.gov. All the training are included on the site. Certificates should be sent to Brent Bills when completed for the auditor. The auditors will be coming around to meet on fraud.

Principal Glen Andersen shared information about Springdale Elementary. They have great community support. Having the school here helps to build the community. Superintendent Richard Holmes said there is a school connected to every national park and it does help build the community.

4. Department Goals and Updates – Executive Staff

Superintendent Richard Holmes reported on “Riding for the Brand.” Riding for the Brand is people committed to the team, family, ownership and pride. He shared how Riding for the Brand works in his family. He shared about meeting with administrators on core leadership values. The WCSD brand is a W with an arrow pointing northeast. We are always pointing northeast and look to make sure we are moving that direction. He reported on the Principals’ Academy in June. The message he shared with the administrators at Principals’ Academy is that the brand means nothing if we are not engaged. We are the ones who make the brand come alive. He also shared an AI song written for WCSD. Nate Esplin reported on visiting with teachers about what they liked and feel we should do different. He and Cheri Stevenson also gathered information from Pine View and Desert Hills cone site administrators what they feel are Washington County School District values. Cheri Stevenson shared the main four values that came from the responses. These four values are our four pillars. She shared that we have such a tie with the School Board. Superintendent Richard Holmes said the common core values were shared by every group.

Cheri Stevenson reported on department goals from last year and shared her department goals that include a district wide median growth of 65%, 3% increase in proficiency of school teams, all secondary teams at or above 50%, develop leaders at every level, and driving results together.

Jeremy Cox shared four goals for technology that included strengthening team connection and capacity including onboarding, standardize systems and support practices, strengthening security and compliance, explore practical and secure uses of AI.

Darin Thomas reported on progress with policies and the search engine. HR is working to make sure that policies are up to date. His team is working to have a kinder, gentler team and works well with employees. They deal with a lot of employees and it is not always easy.

Bryan Dyer said they are tracking the DFCM. They are moving to a facilities assessment to develop a long term plan. They are also tracking water usage. Bryan Dyer explained the upcoming process with the DFCM legislation. This is for any project over $300,000, HVAC, infrastructure or plumbing. It is adding extra layers of work. He is hoping to have more information later this year.

Brad Christensen said they are feeling good about the responsiveness from his department. He said there are five schools that need to replace their guardians. This year they will be working to be more proactive and are working a place where schools can see answers to common questions. They will also be doing training for principals. The biggest concern is attendance and are working on ways to reduce truency by 10%.

Nate Esplin shared information on the math program implementation from last year. Teachers have appreciated the collaboration happening. Our math scores have improved. Nate Esplin shared about SB241. We already have the structure in place so the roll out should be easier for us. It does require a literacy team. It does come with extra funding that will be used.

Brian Stevenson shared data information. ELA/Reading data showed an increase in every grade level except 10th grade. Several grades had the highest proficiency in 4 years. Math Rise data showed increases in several years. Most of the grades showed the highest proficiency in four years. All of the grades are about the state proficiency level. Science rise data shows increases in all grades except 8th grade. All but 8th was the highest proficiency in 4 years. All were above the state. He shared the Acadience reading scores. We are already at 75% for 3rd grade which will be required to be at 80% in the next few years. The scores are showing increases. With Acadience math the grades did not make their score goals but all reached their growth goals. The scores also show increases. Brian Stevenson shared the goals for his department. One of the shared commitments is to put simple, usable data into the hands of the schools to be able to make informed decisions. They identify areas of strength and focus, provide support, strengthen struggling teams, and be responsive and proactive.

5. Policy 5120 Maintenance and Operation of Physical Facilities – Rusty Taylor

Rusty Taylor shared proposed changes to Policy 5120. It introduces a formal process requiring principal requests for alterations to be approved before execution and distinguishes essential from non-essential projects. Essential projects cover safety, code compliance, and health mandates and are handled by the district. Non-essential projects, such as fundraising-driven improvements, must be contracted through a hired vendor to avoid burdening maintenance staff. The policy aims to prevent unauthorized changes and reduce operational disruptions, with training planned for principals before full implementation.

6. Policy 2920 Boundary Waiver – Rusty Taylor

Rusty Taylor reviewed the proposed changes to the Boundary Waiver policy. The enrollment boundary waiver process will move decision-making from individual school principals to a district-level enrollment committee comprising elementary and secondary staff. This committee reviews applications, verifies information, consults principals, and makes transfer decisions to reduce school-level pressure and increase consistency. The policy includes penalties for providing false information, with plans to add signature acknowledgments on application forms to reinforce honesty.

B. CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS

1. Financial Report
2. Personnel Items

Board Member Cox presented a motion to approve the Consent Agenda items. Board Member Hammer seconded the motion that passed unanimously.

Board Member Hammer presented a motion to go into a closed session at 1:39 p.m. Board Member Wade seconded the motion.

Board Member Wade voted Yea
Board Member Seegmiller voted Yea
Board Member Hammer voted Yea
Board Member Gunn voted Yea
Board Member Cox voted Yea
Board Member Stirland voted Yea

C. CLOSED SESSION

1. Personnel, Legal, and Property Items

Personnel and legal

Board Member Seegmiller presented a motion to go out of the closed session at 2:09 p.m. Board Member Wade seconded the motion that passed unanimously.

David Stirland mentioned there will be board members out of town on Sept 14. The September 14th meeting will be canceled and the regular meeting will be held on September 28th at 12:00 noon.

Board Member Hammer presented a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:14 p.m. Board Member Wade seconded the motion that passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT