

The Sterling Jet Brief

January 2026

A summary of the Sterling School Board Meeting

The Sterling Jet Brief is designed to provide our community with a clear and concise summary of the key discussions and decisions made at each Sterling School Board meeting. Our goal is to keep you informed about the progress of our schools and to foster an open dialogue between the board and the public.

Next Meeting

Date: February 16, 2026

Time: 7:00pm

Location: Sterling Public Schools Library

The Public is welcome to attend

Our Guiding Principles

Our Mission

Sterling Public Schools will educate students to excel, prepare to compete, inspire to serve, and challenge to learn.

Our Vision

All Sterling Public Schools Students will achieve their full potential.

Sterling Board of Education

Mark Horstman, President

Julie Saathoff, Vice President

Mackenzie Saathoff, Secretary

Russ Trauernicht, Treasurer

Rick Vollman, Board Member

Lauren Weyers, Board Member

Board Goals

Goal I: Organizational and Cultural Leadership

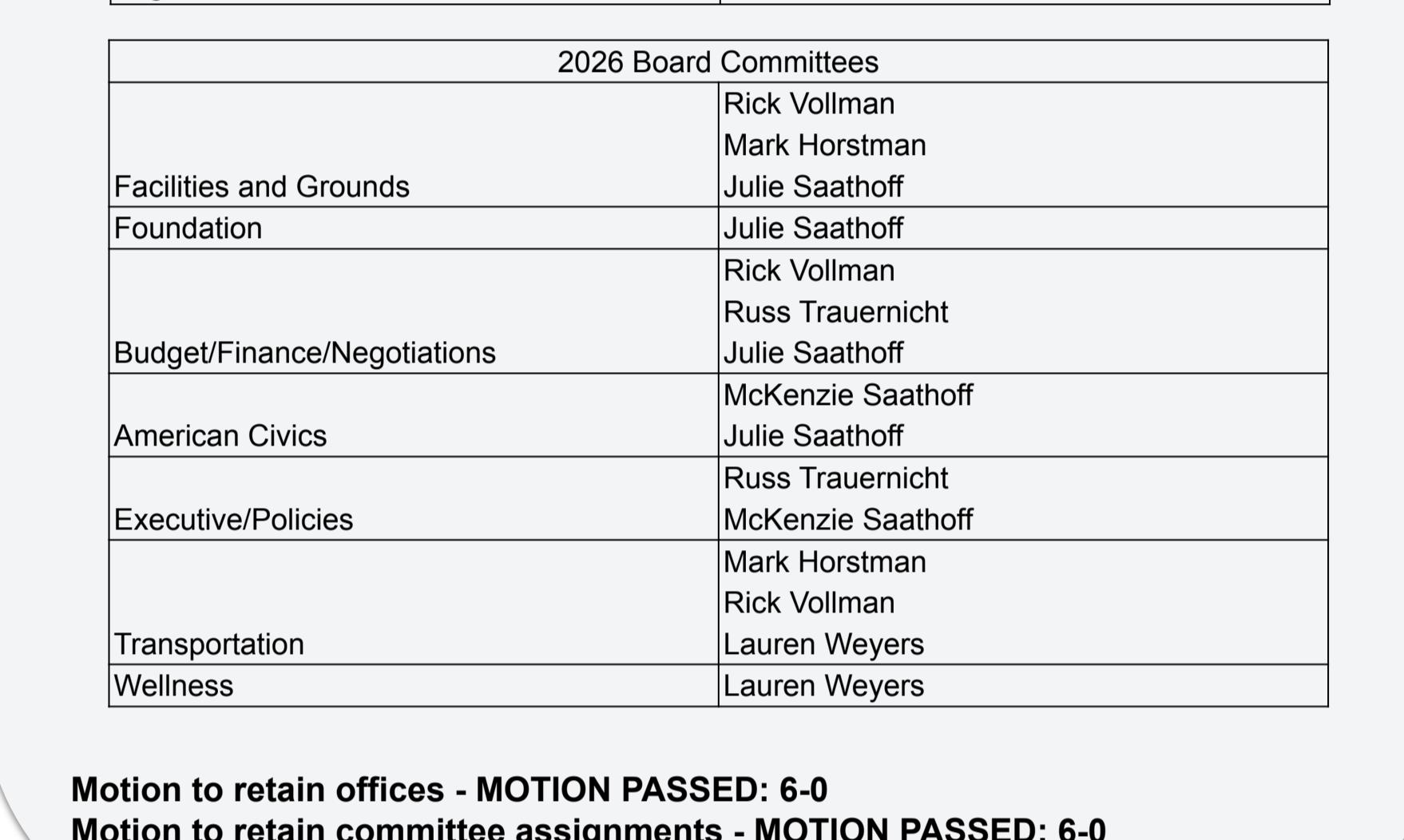
Objective: To foster a culture of academic excellence, opportunity, and innovation to support high-quality instruction, and staff development to ensure the success of all students.

Strategy I. Lead initiatives to enhance student success, staff development, and operational efficiency to support the long-term success of the district.

In This Issue

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- Organization of the Board
- Admin & Committee Reports
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A month in review at Sterling



Excellence Rally: The Excellence Rally, held on January 18, celebrated students for their outstanding performance on winter standardized assessments and for consistently demonstrating strong character throughout Quarter 2. The program opened by recognizing students for their character, with a focus on kindness and problem-solving skills. These focus areas align with our school-wide Social-Emotional-Behavioral Learning (SEBL) curriculum, *CharacterStrong*. Students who consistently demonstrated these traits during Quarter 2 received certificates and were recognized in front of the entire student body.

Academic awards followed, honoring both teachers and students for exceptional achievement and growth. Mrs. Hahn, Ms. Ebbes, Mr. Lempka, Mr. Pfeiffer, Mrs. Matkis, and Mrs. Saathoff were recognized for their classes' significant growth in either reading or mathematics between standardized testing sessions. While many students were acknowledged for high achievement in reading and math, the majority were recognized for the growth they demonstrated between assessments. This broad recognition of achievement and progress reflects the strong commitment and effort of both students and teachers.

The Excellence Rally was a fantastic celebration of success. Students were recognized for their accomplishments, enjoyed games and music, and came together as a school community in a positive and engaging environment.

Organization of the Board

Organization of the Board: Every January the school board elects officers, selects newspapers of record, time and place for the regular meeting, and selects committee assignments. During election years, newly elected board members take the oath of office and are officially sworn in as members of the Board of Education.

This year the board elected to retain current officer and committee positions without change.

| 2026 Board Officers | |
|---------------------|--|
| Board Office | Board Member |
| President | Mark Horstman |
| Vice President | Julie Saathoff |
| Secretary | McKenzie Saathoff |
| Treasurer | Russ Trauernicht |
| Regular Meetings | 3rd Monday of the Month @ 7:00pm |
| Paper of Record | Nemaha Valley Observer Voice News Lincoln Journal Star |
| Legal Counsel | KSB School Law |

| 2026 Board Committees | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Facilities and Grounds | Rick Vollman Mark Horstman Julie Saathoff |
| Foundation | Julie Saathoff |
| Budget/Finance/Negotiations | Rick Vollman Russ Trauernicht Julie Saathoff |
| American Civics | McKenzie Saathoff Julie Saathoff |
| Executive/Policies | Russ Trauernicht McKenzie Saathoff |
| Transportation | Mark Horstman Rick Vollman Lauren Weyers |
| Wellness | Lauren Weyers |

Motion to retain offices - MOTION PASSED: 6-0

Motion to retain committee assignments - MOTION PASSED: 6-0

Admin & Committee Reports

Superintendent's Report: The Board was informed of upcoming election deadlines, with the filing date for incumbents seeking placement on the primary ballot set for February 17, 2026, and the deadline for new candidates set for March 2, 2026. Legislative updates included LB 765, which would add a voter participation requirement to school bond elections, requiring at least 50.1% of qualified voters in the district to participate in addition to majority approval. Also discussed was LB 824, which would reduce the School Employees Retirement System "no work period" from 180 days to a strict 120 days, during which retirees could not work, volunteer, or substitute.

Maintenance and facilities updates were also provided. The office heat pump is now functional following internal repairs of the motor and capacitor, as well as, some follow-up work by Beatrice Mechanical. In relation to the upcoming building project, REGA and Terracon are scheduled to be on site Tuesday and Wednesday to complete construction site surveying and soil sampling.

Principal's Report: The principal's report focused on winter standardized assessment results, comparing fall and winter testing data. The results showed clear, school-wide growth in both math and reading. Mr. Davenport presented on potential school causes contributing to the substantial growth, including discussion of the high school universal intervention period (SOAR) as a possible factor. Teachers and students were also commended for their continued hard work in the classroom. Overall, the data was reported as a positive indicator for upcoming state standardized assessments at the end of the school year. The data reported can be found in the School Board Meeting agenda on the school website.

AD/Transportation Report: The transportation report included two primary updates. The new short bus was picked up on January 5 and placed into service the following day. The bus has been operating well and is a positive addition to the district's transportation fleet. An update on the diesel fuel tank was also noted.

An activities and athletics update was provided following the NSAA District #1 meeting on January 14. Several proposals passed the district, including a 180-day transfer rule, year-round open gym and practice times for all sports, simultaneous girls' and boys' JV track events, and NSAA assignment of certified officials as line judges for district volleyball finals. If approved by at least three of the six districts, these items will advance to the NSAA Representative Assembly for a vote on April 10.

Additional activities updates included upcoming Pioneer Conference high school basketball tournaments in early February. Lourdes and Sterling will be hosting the early rounds and Johnson-Brock will host the art show and finals. The junior high girls basketball season begins Thursday with a tournament at Freeman, there are 11 next year's district opponents. The HTRS schedule will be released on February 11, next year's Diller-Odell. A significant increase in the cost of football officials is also anticipated for next season.

Negotiations Committee: The negotiations committee shared with the board that they have reached an agreement with the Sterling Education Association. The board would take action on approving the agreement later in the meeting.

Building and Grounds: The board met with CMBA Architects on January 14 to review early planning concepts for the new elementary building. During the meeting, the mechanical engineer outlined potential HVAC discussions and identified key needs for the future. CMBA Architects also presented initial drawings of the lower level and reviewed preliminary classroom layout and flooring options for the remainder of the building.

American Civics Committee: The American Civics committee met to review the 6-12 Social Sciences curriculum. All current curriculum materials were available for review. Mr. Boldt highlighted projects, discussions, and activities used with the high school classes. Social studies is scheduled for an update under the seven-year curriculum rotation, reviews of potential replacement materials will begin this spring.

Action Items:

Surplus Equipment: The board voted to surplus the valve grinder machine from the school shop. Anyone interested in purchasing the valve grinder will need to submit a sealed bid to the school office by 4pm on February 1, 2026.

MOTION PASSED: 6-0

Negotiated Agreement 2026-2027: The SEA and Negotiations committee reached an agreement. Some of the primary changes to the previous agreement include:

- Base Salary - \$42,550 (Increase of \$1,000)
- Health Insurance Replacement Annuity - \$7,000 (Increase of \$1,000)
- Reduction in "Blackout Dates" in which leave can not be used

MOTION PASSED: 6-0

Legal Counsel: The board voted to retain KSB school law as the school's legal counsel.

MOTION PASSED: 6-0

Non-Discrimination Compliance Coordinator: The board retained Riley Armes as the non-discrimination compliance coordinator in the superintendent role.

MOTION PASSED: 6-0

Legal Newspaper & Method for Publicizing Meetings: The board approved the inclusion of the Nemaha Valley Observer, Voice News, and/or the Lincoln Journal Star as newspapers of general circulation for the publication of meeting notices. The existing publication, the Tecumseh Chieftain, with its current name, the Nemaha Valley Observer.

MOTION PASSED: 6-0

Approve 2024-2025 Audit: The board voted to approve the 2024-2025 audit as presented.

MOTION PASSED: 6-0

Consider Property Purchase: The possibility of purchasing the property adjacent to the school at 275 Lincoln Street was discussed. In order to make a more informed decision the board will await the results of a fair value market assessment on the property before taking action on the decision. The action has been tabled until more information will be available.

ACTION TABLED

Discussion Items

Policy Review: Policies 2001-2017 were reviewed this month. The 2000 series primarily includes policies related to how the board functions and conducts its business. These policies include but are not limited to Board authority, responsibilities, organization, conduct of meetings, agendas and procedures, ethics, conflict of interest, and code of conduct.

School Calendar Discussion: The school calendar discussion focused on simplifying days off, better aligning elementary and high school schedules, and expanding professional development opportunities. A key portion of the conversation addressed the Pre-K schedule, which currently includes frequent Wednesday off to meet state reporting requirements.

resulting in only six full weeks for Pre-K this school year. To reduce these inconsistencies, the option of moving Pre-K to a four-day, Monday-Thursday schedule was discussed.

Additionally, the proposal of replacing Wednesday's professional development days with early dismissals every Friday is being considered. The overall goal for next year's calendar is to improve PK-12 alignment and create a more consistent schedule.

Next Meeting

Next Meeting: The next scheduled board meeting will be the regular January meeting on February 16, 2026 at 7:00pm in the Sterling High School Library.

