Plan for the Merger of Catawba County Schools,
Hickory City Schools, and Newton-Conover City Schools

Pursuant to NCGS §115C-68.1, the Catawba County Board of Commissioners ("the BOC") adopts and submits to the North Carolina State Board of Education this Plan for the Merger of Catawba County Schools, Hickory City Schools, and Newton-Conover City Schools units ("Merger Plan").

Section 1. Name of the Merged School Unit.

The administrative unit resulting from the merger of Catawba County Schools, Hickory City Schools, and Newton-Conover City Schools ("the Boards") shall be known as the Catawba Valley School District ("CVSD"). The governing body of the merged school unit (the "Merged Board") shall be known as the Catawba Valley Board of Education ("CVBOE").

Section 2. Effective Date of the Merger.

The merger shall take effect on July 1, 2028 ("Effective Date").

Section 3. Establishment and Maintenance of Catawba Valley Board of Education.

Transition Period. There shall be a transition period beginning with approval of this Merger Plan by the State Board of Education and ending with the Effective Date of merger. The purpose of this transition period is to plan for and execute the transition from three (3) school systems to a merged system in a smooth and planful manner.

On the first Tuesday following approval of the Merger Plan by the State Board, the BOC shall meet to designate members of the CVBOE. Following this appointment, the first organizational meeting of the CVBOE will be held on the first Monday of the month and on each succeeding first Monday of each month, or more often as determined by the CVBOE. The period of time between approval of this Merger Plan and July 1, 2028, hereinafter referred to as the "Interim," shall be for the purposes of planning and preparing.

A. Interim Board of Education Members. Upon approval of this Merger Plan by the State Board of Education, the Catawba County Board of Commissioners shall appoint the CVBOE, to consist of nine (9) members as follows: (a) two (2) members of the existing Catawba County Board of Education; (b) two (2) members of the existing Hickory City Board of Education; (c) two (2) members of the existing Newton-Conover City Board of Education; and (d) three (3) at-large members who shall be residents of Catawba County ("the Interim Members"). If any member of any existing Board of Education is offered an appointment by the BOC for a dedicated seat and declines to serve, then the BOC may appoint any resident of Catawba County who lives within the district for which the appointment was declined. The Interim Members shall be appointed as follows:

    Seat 1: Catawba County Schools Seat A
    Seat 2: Hickory City Schools Seat A
    Seat 3: Newton-Conover City Schools Seat A

Seat 4: Catawba County Schools Seat B
Seat 5: Hickory City Schools Seat B
Seat 6: Newton-Conover City Schools Seat B
Seat 7: At-Large A
Seat 8: At-Large B
Seat 9: At Large C

B. The term of office of the Interim Members of the CVBOE shall extend beyond the Effective Date of the merger and shall continue until successors have been duly elected, qualified and sworn in as provided below.

C. Procedure for filling a vacancy on the CVBOE. If a vacancy occurs in the membership of the CVBOE prior to the merger on July 1, 2028, the remaining members of the CVBOE shall fill the vacancy by majority vote of the members remaining, present, and voting. The replacement board member shall serve the CVBOE until the vacancy is filled by election.

D. Planning Period.
    1. The CVBOE will hire an attorney to advise the CVBOE on establishing policies, practices, hiring and consolidating staff, and acting as general counsel for the CVBOE during the Planning Period.
    2. The CVBOE will establish policies, review staffing structures of existing school districts and create an organizational and classification system to place current school district employees in positions for the CVBOE beginning July 1, 2028.
    3. The CVBOE will hire a Superintendent, who will be in place no later than July 1, 2028.

E. Catawba Valley Board of Education – Board Composition.
    1. On July 1, 2028, the Catawba County Board of Education, Hickory City Board of Education, and Newton-Conover City Board of Education shall cease to exist, and any members' unexpired terms shall expire at that time.
    2. The CVBOE shall consist of nine (9) members elected for staggered terms in partisan plurality elections. The initial districts shall be constructed, to the extent practical considering electoral boundaries, so that one (1) member shall be elected from each of the seven (7) county-wide high school attendance districts. Two (2) at-large members shall be residents of Catawba County. All members shall be elected on a county-wide basis. The seats shall be drawn as follows:

        Seat 1: Fred T. Foard High School Attendance District
        Seat 2: Hickory High School Attendance District
        Seat 3: St. Stephens High School Attendance District
        Seat 4: Bunker Hill High School Attendance District
        Seat 5: Newton-Conover High School Attendance District
        Seat 6: Bandys High School Attendance District

Seat 7: Maiden High School Attendance District
Seat 8: At-Large
Seat 9: At Large

3. The first election for the CVBOE will occur in November 2030, at the same time as the general election for state and county offices. The members elected at that time shall take office on the first Monday in December following the election, or as soon thereafter as practical.
4. Elected members shall be elected to four-year terms. To establish the staggering of board member terms, members appointed in 2026 shall serve staggered terms as provided below beyond the Effective Date of the merger.
    i. In November 2030, seats 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 of the CVBOE shall be up for election.
    ii. In November 2032, seats 2, 4, 6, and 8 of the CVBOE shall be up for election.

F. Compensation: Members of the CVBOE shall receive compensation and reimbursement of expenses pursuant to NCGS §115C-38.

G. To the extent that the method conflicts with NCGS §115C-35, NCGS §115C-37, or with any local act concerning any of the units being merged and consolidated, the Merger Plan and consolidation shall prevail.

Section 4. Authority, Powers, and Duties.

A. On the Effective Date of the merger, the CVBOE shall assume authority for administering and operating all public schools in Catawba County.

B. On the Effective Date of the merger, the CVBOE shall exercise all statutory powers granted and delegated to county and city boards of education including all powers, rights, privileges, and immunities conferred by the North Carolina Constitution and General Statutes, except as expressly modified by this Merger Plan.

C. The CVBOE shall meet, organize, and elect a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson in accordance with NCGS §115C-41.

D. All vacancies in membership of the CVBOE shall be filled by appointment by the remaining members of the CVBOE. The appointed person must reside in the high school attendance district represented by the seat and will serve until the next election of members of the board of education, at which time the remaining unexpired term of the office in which the vacancy occurs shall be filled by election. Section 3 above addresses the process for filling vacancies that occur prior to the first election of school board members.

Section 5. Transfer of Personnel, Assets, and Liabilities

Upon merger, all employees of the existing county and city school units shall become employees of the CVBOE, subject to the same contracts and terms of employment, and shall continue to perform the same functions until reassigned.

Upon the Effective Date of the merger, all facilities, properties, structures, funds, contracts, deeds, titles, and other obligations, assets, and liabilities of the existing Catawba County, Hickory City, and Newton-Conover City boards of education shall be transferred to the CVBOE.

Section 6. Supplemental Tax.

Upon the Effective Date of the merger, there shall be no supplemental school tax dedicated to any local school administrative unit located within the County. As required by NCGS § 115C-68.1(a), the Catawba County Board of Commissioners shall provide local funding per average daily membership to the CVBOE at a rate at least equivalent to the highest level of any of the three (3) units in the previous five (5) years.

Section 7. Public Hearing.

As required by NCGS §115C-67.6, a public hearing on the proposed merger plan occurred on April 20, 2026. The public hearing was announced at least ten (10) days prior to the hearing.

Section 8. No Referendum.

Pursuant to NCGS §115C-68.1(c), this Merger Plan will not be submitted to a referendum of the voters.

Section 9. Policies and Other Conditions.

A. Student Assignment. It is the intent of this Merger Plan that students in overpopulated school facilities may be shifted to facilities with capacity within the merged unit. When considering any student assignment change, the CVBOE should give priority to students currently enrolled in high school remaining at their then-assigned high school, so they may graduate from that high school if they choose. Secondary priority should be given to siblings of students currently enrolled in high school, with the express objective of easing the impacts of attendance transitions on families.

B. Quality and Content of Instructional and Specialized Programs. It is the express intent of this Merger Plan that all students in the merged school system be afforded the highest quality education possible. Accordingly, it is intended that, following merger, the quality and content of each school's offerings be equal to or better than the instructional program offered at that school prior to merger. It is also the intent of this Merger Plan that, for the first two academic years following merger, these specific instructional and specialized programs in the schools be maintained in a manner substantially consistent with these programs as currently offered: Hickory City Schools Orchestra, Hickory City Schools Advanced Placement Academy, Hickory City Schools Career & Arts Magnet, Newton-Conover City Schools Discovery High School, Newton-Conover City Schools Conover

School, Catawba County Schools Agricultural Education, and Catawba County Schools Challenger High School.

C. Staffing. There will be no reduction in staffing as a result of this Merger Plan for two (2) years following the Effective Date of the merger. Employees may be reassigned to positions to maximize the assets of the merged district.

D. Contracts. Upon approval of this Merger Plan by the State Board of Education, none of the three existing boards of education shall have the authority to enter into or extend the term of any contract, including but not limited to any central office or administrative employee, beyond the effective date of the Merger Plan without the concurrence of CVBOE. Additionally, any unrestricted fund balances in the Local Current Expense funds of any of the existing boards may not be appropriated by the existing boards without the express approval of the CVBOE. No capital improvements in excess of $100,000.00 may be made by the existing boards without the express approval of the CVBOE.

The various provisions of this Merger Plan shall be severable. If any section of this Merger Plan is held invalid or unenforceable, such decision shall not affect the remainder of the plan or of the merger.