

SCHOOL BOARD RETREAT MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Wednesday, August 7, 2024 ~ 4:00 P.M.

The College and Career Academy at Pruden, 4169 Pruden Blvd, Suffolk, VA 23434

Board Members Present:

Karen Jenkins, *Chair*
Heather Howell, *Vice Chair*
Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck
Phyllis Byrum
Tyron Riddick¹

Board Members Absent:

Dr. Dawn Brittingham
Kimberly Slingluff

Administrative Staff Present:

Dr. John B. Gordon III, *Superintendent*
Wendell M. Waller, *School Board Attorney*
Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*
Wendy K. Forsman, *Chief Financial Officer*
Dr. Okema S. Branch, *Chief Academic Officer*
Dr. Rodney J. Brown, *Chief of Administrative Services*
Dr. Stenette Byrd III, *Chief of Schools*
John Littlefield, *Director of Technology*

OPENING OF MEETING

➤ Welcome / Icebreaker:

Board Chair Jenkins welcomed all to the retreat and opened with an icebreaker. Board Members and the Administrative Staff created “Storm Names” to describe themselves if they were the next named storm. They also had to explain their reason for choosing the name. Board members and administrators enjoyed sharing the various names selected and the reasons for the names chosen. Board Chair Jenkins explained that the activity gave a glimpse into how we view ourselves and how we balance each other.

COMMENTS / DISCUSSION

➤ Vision, Purpose, Relationship Between Members and the Community, What Can We Do Better?

Lead by Board Chair Jenkins, Board Members expressed their personal vision and purpose for Suffolk Public Schools. They also worked collaboratively by discussing and listing various areas that could improve or enhance the relationship between board members and the community both individually and as a team. Some of those areas included: showing trust, guidance, knowledge, openness, patience, being resourceful, and working together for student achievement and unity. Board Chair Jenkins ended her session stating that no one is perfect, but all should strive to put students first.

➤ A Discussion of Proposed Policy 2-2.1:1 Regarding School Visits by Board Members

School Board Attorney, Wendell Waller, shared information regarding school visits. He explained pertinent provisions of the Virginia Code and policies of the School Board

¹ Board Member Riddick arrived at 4:15 p.m.

regarding school visits as outlined in the Code of Virginia 22.1-79(2), School Board Policy 2-2.1(A)(11), and School Board Policy Section 10-1.3(C). Mr. Waller highlighted the duties of the Superintendent as listed in the Code of Virginia, School Board Policy, and Regulations of the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). Additionally, he explained that although the “Code” does allow for board members to visit schools, there is a balance that must be met to avoid conflict with the duties of the school board members and the duties of the Superintendent and his staff to manage schools and implement educational programs. In order to balance the two competing objectives, reasonable restrictions regarding visits by board members are required. He indicated three categories of reasonable restrictions: Time, Place, and Manner. Mr. Waller further explained Proposed Policy Section 2-2.1:1, and the collaboration needed between the Superintendent and the School Board when creating reasonable time, place and manner restrictions. Conversation ensued between Board Members, Attorney Waller, and the Superintendent/Staff.

After discussion, it was determined that school visits would take place via bus tour as was done in the past. However, during these visits, conversation by members must be general, no school business is to be discussed or transacted as this would create FOIA violations. Board Members agreed to dismiss the proposed policy (Ordinance 24/25-19) and work collaboratively at September’s School Board meeting work session to allow input from all members, to discuss and plan four (4) events which can be done as a Board including: bus tours, school visits for some of the “needier” buildings, possible reading nights that are publicized and open to the public, and/or other events that foster Board engagement.²

➤ Informal Rules Governing Meetings of the School Board

Attorney Waller presented information regarding informal rules and its governing principles which include basic principles, motions, and debate. He clarified and discussed with the Board the process that should take place during certain scenarios like amending motions, board members speaking twice - for 10 minutes during debate (the second time to speak occurs only after each member has had an opportunity to speak), informal discussion when no motion is on the floor, addressing questions and comments to the chair, reading from reports or quotations if an objection is made, and options available to members if he/she still have questions or not fully clear regarding the item presented for a vote. It was agreed that following the informal rules during school board meetings would create more cohesive, and smoother meetings.

➤ Recap

Dr. Gordon, Division Superintendent, provided a synopsis of the retreat. He highlighted the collaboration and successful discussions between board members regarding the divisions focus on academic achievement and unity; the purpose of trust and truth; guidance, knowledge, oversight, and flexibility; being open, patient, resourceful, professional, fair, and trustworthy. Dr. Gordon thanked Board Members for their support and looked forward to working with the board regarding Board engagement. He also asked the Board for support when communicating with parents regarding school issues like denied zone waivers, unitary status, and potential cell phone policy.

² Due to a previously scheduled event, Board Member Riddick left the Retreat after this discussion.

ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

Board Chair Jenkins thanked all for working together and participating to accomplish the goals of the retreat. There being no further business, the August 7, 2024 School Board Retreat was adjourned at 6:14 p.m.

Karen L. Jenkins, *Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*