



**VSBA**

**Virginia School Boards Association**

Leadership • Advocacy • Support

## VSBA Advocate for Education Award Nomination Form

Judith Brooks-Buck, Ph.D.

Nominee Name

Suffolk City Public Schools

School Division

100 N. Main Street, Suffolk, VA 23434

School Division Mailing Address

757-925-6752

Phone Number

757-925-2421

Fax Number

Judith Brooks-Buck, Ph.D.

School Board Chair

Dr. John B. Gordon III

Superintendent

**In 1000 words or less, describe how the nominee demonstrated significant and outstanding leadership, commitment, and contribution to public education that had an impact on their region and the Commonwealth. Further, describe how the nominee illustrated their involvement in local, state, and federal advocacy on behalf of their division, VSBA, and public education.**

Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck has been a public school advocate for the past 50 years. Initially trained as a special education teacher, Judith was a fierce advocate for children with disabilities prior to the enactment of the 1975 federal legislation. Her work continued as a central office administrator, a principal, an educational consultant and later as a college professor. With a full career spanning almost half a century in four states, West Germany, and six African Nations, Dr. Brooks-Buck took on the mantle of service in the one area of public education within which she had no practical experience. As an advocate in her natural element, public education, Judith accepted the challenge of running for public office as a School Board Member.

After some initial research, she adopted a platform which stressed teaching the public about what was actually going on in the school division and *Rewriting the Public Discourse* about

Suffolk Public Schools, its students, and staff. Having an earned Ph.D. from the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, the social science researcher began this new endeavor by (1) assessing governance challenges in Suffolk Public Schools; and (2) Taking advantage of advocacy training opportunities offered through and by the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) and the National School Boards Association (NSBA); (3) meeting with local, state and federal legislators to advocate for public education, solicit funding, and share information about Suffolk City Public Schools and its programs; (4) partnering with parents, clergy, businesses and other professionals to raise awareness about public schools; (5) using her skills as a writer to publish articles in the local newspapers, explaining controversial issues to both internal and external publics interested in the schools; and (6) holding a Town Hall before the pandemic.

Prior to her first election, Judith attended school board meetings, and talked with some probable constituents and local legislators about concerns regarding Suffolk Public Schools. She examined test scores, graduation rates, discipline data, demographic data, and any other material she could find on the district. With published works on the topic, Judith re-examined information on Suffolk's continued desegregation case

Effective advocacy requires training. Judith believed that as a Board Member, advocacy for Suffolk Public Schools should be her primary function. During the first year of her first term, she took advantage of a VSBA Legislative Advocacy Conference and began to visit state and local legislators to share facts about Suffolk Schools and to support public school related legislation. In her meetings, she made it a point to share both strengths and challenges that existed within the school division. When

presenting challenges, she also made it a point to present suggested options, specific needs and possible opportunities to leverage other resources.

By year three of her first term and with more knowledge, Brooks-Buck knew that she needed additional training. She had attended a National Schools Boards Association Conference in 2014 in Nashville, Tennessee, and met fellow board members from across America who were enthusiastic and believed as she did in the fight for public schools. At the conference, Actor, Motivator, and former Naval Officer, Montel Williams was the keynote speaker, and he managed to push all who attended to do more for the 90 percent of American students who are educated in the public schools.

During networking sessions with others at the 2014 Conference, Brooks-Buck had learned about the NSBA

Advocacy Institutes. She made arrangements to attend each year after that. From that time until the present, Dr. Brooks-Buck has attended the training and met with state and federal legislators. Three issues have been critical to Brooks-Buck as she advocates for Suffolk City Public Schools. The issues include (1) pushing for full funding of Special Education~ what was promised in 1975 is still an unfulfilled federal promise 46 years later. This means millions in lost revenue each year for Suffolk schools.

Secondly, federal support for rebuilding American Schools has been a major concern for which Brooks-Buck has advocated. Suffolk has many older schools and like most small American cities, local real estate tax revenue is not sufficient to fund the needed building projects. Suffolk's own 3<sup>rd</sup> District Congressman, Robert "Bobby" Scott, has heard Brooks-Buck and the chorus of other American educators on this and the other

issues. Congressman Scott is leading the Committee on Education and Labor and pushing the *Reopen and Rebuild American Schools Act of 2021*. The legislation includes opportunities for local school divisions to get grant funds for rebuilding outdated school buildings across America.

Lastly, E-rate support for rural and underserved populations was highlighted as one of the major challenges to public education during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Brooks-Buck and other advocates for rural schools have consistently brought the issue to the attention of local, state, and federal legislators. This year, federal and state legislators have worked with the school division to begin to resolve this problem as well. These needed supports have begun to be realized with new legislators on the state and federal level.

In addition, Brooks-Buck has met with local clergy, been a speaker at local churches, and worked with community partners, businesses and other professionals to bring awareness about the triumphs and challenges in Suffolk schools. She has been determined to *Change the Conversation about Suffolk Public Schools* and has discussed specifics related to Suffolk students' academic achievements, advanced study programs, programs for children with special needs and pushed for educational supports and programs for children aged three years to 21. Judith has demonstrated her willingness to give of herself for the Suffolk school system by using her own skills and abilities to teach reading to second graders in her neighborhood school as well.

Dr. Brooks-Buck currently serves as Chair of the Suffolk School Board, the Policy Review Committee Representative, two cooperative program boards for children with special needs and



instructional television. She represents Suffolk City Public Schools and the Tidewater Region on the VSBA Legislative Positions Committee.

We are proud to recommend Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck for the VSBA Advocate for Education Award.



**VSBA**

**Virginia School Boards Association**

Leadership · Advocacy · Support

**Acknowledgement and Disclaimer**

I certify that this nomination is being made with the knowledge and approval of the school board.

All nomination materials become the property of the Virginia School Boards Association and cannot be returned. The Virginia School Boards Association has the right to reprint/republish these materials at any time in any format and in any media.

Submitted by:

---

Name and Title

---

School Division

---

Email Address

---

Phone Number