

**REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD**

**Thursday, June 13, 2024 ~ 5:00 P.M.**

**Suffolk City Hall, 442 W. Washington Street, Suffolk, VA 23434**

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**Board Members Present:**

Karen Jenkins, *Chair*  
Heather Howell, *Vice Chair*  
Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham  
Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck  
Tyron Riddick  
Kimberly Slingluff

**Board Member Attending Virtually:**

Phyllis Byrum

**Administrative Staff Present:**

Dr. John B. Gordon III, *Superintendent*  
Wendell M. Waller, Esq., *School Board Attorney*  
Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*  
Keesha Johnson, *Deputy Clerk*

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**OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION**

➤ Call to Order:

Board Chair Jenkins called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m.

➤ Motion for Meeting Attendance Via Electronic Device (Phyllis Byrum)

Attorney Waller read the following motion:

A motion is needed pursuant to Virginia Code Section 2.2-3708.3, Subsection B.1. to allow Board Member Phyllis Brum to participate in tonight's public meeting of the School Board through electronic communication means from her residence due to a medical condition that prevents her physical attendance at tonight's meeting.

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Riddick seconded the motion to allow Board Member Phyllis Byrum to attend the meeting via Electronic Device as requested.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 6 to 0.

Due to technical difficulties, Board Member Byrum was delayed in joining the meeting.

➤ Safety Audit Committee Presentation

Mr. Dave LeFevre, Coordinator of Student Services, introduced Mr. Jonathan Rankin, Committee Chair, who presented information to the Board. He thanked the Board for their continued support while highlighting additional safety measures and community partners events that were implemented/held during the 2023-2024 school year. Mr. Rankin and the committee recommended the following initiatives for the 2024-2025 school year:

- Three (3) SROs to split among the elementary schools
- Buzzer system and cameras at the Transportation Department's building
- Speakers near playground at six (6) elementary schools

- Upgraded camera system on remaining high school football fields
- Additional radios for all schools
- Install “Zero Eyes” Technology
- Signage alerting visitors of visual/audio recordings
- Committee Meetings throughout the summer

The approximate cost for the recommendations totaled \$794,110.

Board Members thanked Mr. Rankin and his team for the committee’s report. There was a discussion regarding active shooter drills, external speakers, weaknesses within the schools, a security task force between SPS and the community, cameras, intercom system, and other security concerns.<sup>1</sup>

Board Members Dr. Brittingham and Mrs. Slingluff requested for all schools to be staffed with SROs.

➤ Climate and Culture Presentation

Dr. Gordon, Division Superintendent, and Mr. Shawn Dickerson, Coordinator of Data & Research, provided an explanation of the construction and perceptions of the survey, Division-wide employee perceptions, Division-wide instructional staff perceptions, Parent Perceptions, Student perceptions, and Feedback and Growth for the 2024-2025 School Year. They also highlighted areas of focus for each of the indicators. There was a discussion regarding measures in place for additional assistance in buildings, morale boosters for staff, feedback of staff feeling like they are being heard, survey construction discrepancies, disciplinary processes, and addressing areas of concern.

**MEETING RECESS**

- There being no further discussion, Board Chair Jenkins recessed the meeting at 6:42 p.m.

**RE-OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING**

➤ Meeting Called to Order:

Board Chair Jenkins called to order the regular public meeting at 7:08 p.m.

➤ Pledge of Allegiance:

The following students led all in the Pledge of Allegiance:

- Caleb and Cayden Dale – 1<sup>st</sup> grade students at HES

➤ The Mission of Suffolk Public Schools:

Vice Chair Howell read the mission of SPS.

➤ Moment of Silence:

A moment of silence was observed by all in attendance.

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<sup>1</sup> During the conversation, there was a pause in the meeting to again allow Board Member Byrum to join the meeting.

## **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

### ➤ Approval of Agenda:

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the agenda without Item #11 (Resolution #23/24-39: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of a Right of Way Agreement Between the Suffolk City School Board and Virginia Electric and Power Company, d/b/a Dominion Energy Virginia).

Discussion ensued between the Board and Attorney Waller who provided clarification to Board Member Riddick's concern that the addition of the resolution was in violation of SPS policy and possibly a FOIA violation.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 2 / Nay: 5 (Dr. Brooks-Buck, Byrum, Slingluff, Howell, Jenkins) / Abstain: 0. The motion Failed by vote of 5 to 2.

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Byrum seconded the motion to approve the agenda as presented.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 2 (Dr. Brittingham, Riddick) / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 5 to 2.

## **PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS**

### ➤ Citizen Comments on Agenda Items:

The Clerk read the statement of decorum for the speaker who signed up to address the Board.

Speaker Cole Morse felt that rezoning of elementary schools was not mandated by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and would lead to enhanced problems with transportation and over capacity of schools. He stated that rezoning was a band aide as new schools are needed in the division.

## **REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT**

### ➤ Good News Report:

Anthonette Dickens, Communications and Community Engagement Officer, shared highlights from the Good News Report. She recognized Talisha Anderson-Cheeks, FNP, Owner of First Choice Anderson, for her continued support of Suffolk Public Schools and the Suffolk community, and educators who completed the SPS STEM Lead Training Program, and the Core-Content educators who also attended training. These educators were presented certificates by Dr. Katelyn Leitner, Coordinator of Science Instruction.

### ➤ Calendar of Special Events:

Dr. Gordon presented special events for June/July. He also provided updates regarding the 2024 graduating class highlighting the 1007 total graduates (234-LHS, 374-KFHS, 399-NRHS), and the record number of scholarships received (totaling \$39.85 million). He also recognized Mrs. Forsman, Chief Financial Officer, Dr. Avery, Director of Human Resources, and Mrs. Sara Williford, Nursing Coordinator, for their work in retaining staff (96% contracted to return 2024-2025 SY). On June 20<sup>th</sup>, full-time employees will receive a \$950 retention bonus check and part-time employees a \$475 retention bonus check.

## CONSENT AGENDA

➤ Approval of the Consent Agenda:

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda with the removal of Bills and Payroll being added to New Business.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 7 to 0.

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

➤ Ordinance 23/24-77: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 2-2.1:1 entitled “Superintendent responsible for Day-to-Day school operations; site visits by School Board Members of PreK-12 schools allowed under certain conditions; site visits regarding non-instructional buildings; violation of policy” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - Second Reading

Board Member Byrum moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 23/24-77 as presented.

Discussion ensued between Board Members as Board Member Dr. Brittingham felt that the policy violated Virginia State Code and prevented Board Members from performing their duties, and Board Member Riddick felt that the policy did not capture his suggestions properly. At his request, the Clerk read his remarks that were captured in the minutes of a previous School Board Meeting. Attorney Waller provided clarification regarding Virginia State Codes indicating that language in the proposed policy did not violate the state code because there was nothing in the policy that prevented Board Members from visiting schools. The proposed policy only outlined “how” school visits were to be carried out by members of the School Board.

The Clerk restated the motion: Board Member Byrum moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 23/24-77.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 3 / Nay: 4 (Dr. Brittingham, Riddick, Slingluff, Howell) / Abstain: 0. The motion Failed by vote of 4 to 3.

## NEW BUSINESS

➤ Next Level Leadership Program (Information item, no vote required)

Dr. Stenette Byrd III, Chief of Schools and leader of School Leadership and Innovation, recognized 19 educators who aspired to be leaders within Suffolk Public Schools and completed the Next Level Leadership Program. These employees were presented with certificates: Katrina Almond, Nicole Blankenship, Rebecca Bradley, Samantha Burrells, Megan Eberhardt, James Gunter, Dawn Irwin, Natalie Karakla, Anne Mccoy, Treasa Myers, Joanne Pereira, Jeffrey Seneca, Jennifer Soriano, Leigh Speed, Kelly Szymborski, Dustin Tordoff, Patricia Waegerle, Kristin Wright, Erin Yunker.

During this time, Dr. Gordon introduced the following new administrators who were approved with the Consent Agenda, Dr. Kristal Taylor, Coordinator of Testing, Blythe Johnson-Jones, Coordinator of Special Education, and Linda Bates, Interim Coordinator of Purchasing.

➤ Elementary Re-Zoning Final

Attorney Waller provided historical perspectives about the division's desegregation efforts and the current desegregation order entered by the federal court. He also mentioned the Majority to Minority Program (M to M) at Southwestern Elementary School, and the goal of rezoning. He stated that the ultimate goal is to have the federal court to declare that Suffolk Public Schools has reached unitary status in the six (6) areas known by the US Supreme Court as "Green Factors". They include student assignments/administration of student discipline, faculty hiring, staff assignments, transportation, extracurricular activities, and facilities. He added that unitary status had been achieved by SPS in all areas except student assignments and with the rezoning of certain elementary schools, that last remaining area would be resolved. Additionally, according to correspondence from the Department of Justice (DOJ), they found no objections to the district's proposed elementary rezoning proposal. However, Attorney Waller stated that without the rezoning plan, there were no other plans in place to address the racial disparity that exists in certain elementary schools, and no plans in place to further the division's desegregation efforts as required by the current court order.

Dr. Byrd, provided an update from the nine (9) rezoning informational sessions held at the elementary schools that will be affected by rezoning, the historical overview/context, desegregation order, M to M program, current demographics and rationale for selecting the seven (7) elementary schools that will be rezoned, current zoning and proposed rezoning, and the demographic input. A total of 57 citizens attended the information sessions. Dr. Byrd restated the recommendation that the Board approve the proposed rezoning plan that impact seven (7) elementary schools beginning with the fall of the 2025-2026 school year.

Discussion between the Board, Dr. Gordon, and Attorney Waller ensued to address Board Member's concerns regarding the lack of additional options to be considered, and the need for additional collaborative discussions to explore other options to further desegregation.

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to table the elementary re-zoning decision until the August 8, 2024 School Board Meeting Work Session to allow staff and the Board opportunity to further investigate, explore and discuss additional options for desegregation.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham requested amending the motion to include at least one or more work sessions to discuss options.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 7 to 0.

➤ Professional Organizational Affiliation for the 2024-2025 School Year

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Byrum seconded the motion to approve professional organizational affiliation for the 2024-2025 school year.

Board Members discussed the verbiage in the current policy and felt that due to SPS's membership in the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA), membership in the Consortium of State School Boards Associations (COSSBA) would be necessary as VSBA severed ties with the National School Boards Association (NSBA) and partnered with COSSBA. However, some Members also felt that membership with other VDOE approved organizations should be an option and not be limited to VSBA, COSSBA, or NSBA.

Board Member Riddick moved to table the decision on national affiliation and for the Chair to appoint a committee to investigate the national organizations and discuss results (including pros and cons), with the Board in order to make an informed decision regarding national affiliation.

After additional conversation between the Board and Dr. Gordon, Board Member Riddick amended his motion and Vice Chair Howell seconded the motion to table the decision on national affiliation and for the Chair to appoint a committee to investigate and report back to the Board which of the two national organizations, whether COSSBA or NSBA that the Board would request membership to; and that no Board Member would seek training, at the expense of the school division, until an affiliation decision is made.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 7 to 0.

- Resolution 23/24-32: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Authorizing the Conveyance of Land Not Needed for School Purposes Located at 1507 Freeney Avenue Formerly Known as Suffolk Public Schools Facilities and Planning Department (Maintenance)

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Resolution 23/24-32: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Authorizing the Conveyance of Land Not Needed for School Purposes Located at 1507 Freeney Avenue Formerly Known as Suffolk Public Schools Facilities and Planning Department (Maintenance).

Board Member Riddick expressed his disappointment in the lack of support for the site to be used for affordable housing for SPS staff.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 1 (Riddick). The motion passed by vote of 6 to 0 to 1.

- Resolution 23/24-33: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Authorizing the Conveyance of Property to the City of Suffolk, Virginia for the Nansemond Parkway Bridge Replacement and Authorizing the Chair of the School Board to Execute a Deed of Gift and Donation to the City of Suffolk, Virginia for This Purpose

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Resolution 23/24-33: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Authorizing the Conveyance of Property to the City of Suffolk, Virginia for the Nansemond Parkway Bridge Replacement and Authorizing the Chair of the School Board to Execute a Deed of Gift and Donation to the City of Suffolk, Virginia for This Purpose.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 7 to 0.

- Resolution 23/24-34: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Promoting the Secure Storage of Firearms to Protect the Health and Safety of Children Enrolled in Suffolk Public Schools and Those Who Reside in the City of Suffolk, Virginia

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Resolution 23/24-34: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Promoting the Secure Storage of Firearms to Protect the Health and Safety of Children Enrolled in Suffolk Public Schools and Those Who Reside in the City of Suffolk, Virginia.

Discussion ensued between Board Members, Dr. Gordon and Attorney Waller as some Members felt that the resolution infringed on day-to-day operations and should not have been presented to the Board for a vote. Board Members also questioned the origination of the resolution. Board Members asked that there be conversations amongst Board Members before resolutions of this nature are presented to the full School Board.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 7 to 0.

- Resolution 23/24-35: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Expressing Its Support for A Recovery School for Students in Region 2 Who Are Addicted to Substances

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Resolution 23/24-35: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Expressing Its Support for A Recovery School for Students in Region 2 Who Are Addicted to Substances.

Discussion occurred between Board Members and Dr. Gordon regarding specific details about the program, the responsibilities that will be expected of SPS, and costs associated with participation in the program.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 7 to 0.

- Resolution 23/24-36: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Approving an Award to GC Commercial Inc. Pursuant to Written Invitation to Bid Issued by Suffolk Public Schools

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Resolution 23/24-36: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Approving an Award to GC Commercial Inc. Pursuant to Written Invitation to Bid Issued by Suffolk Public Schools.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 7 to 0.

- Resolution 23/24-37: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Approving an Award to RRMM Architects Pursuant to a Written Request for Proposals Issued by Suffolk Public Schools

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Resolution 23/24-37: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Approving an Award to RRMM Architects Pursuant to a Written Request for Proposals Issued by Suffolk Public Schools.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 7 to 0.

- Resolution 23/24-38: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Amending its Adopted Budget for Suffolk Public Schools for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 by the Sum of \$5,859,206 for a Total Adopted Amended Budget for Suffolk Public Schools for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 in the Sum of \$248,588,927

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Resolution 23/24-38: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Amending its Adopted Budget for Suffolk Public Schools for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 by the Sum of \$5,859,206 for a Total Adopted Amended Budget for Suffolk Public Schools for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 in the Sum of \$248,588,927.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 1 (Dr. Brittingham) / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 6 to 1.

- Resolution Number 23/24-39: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of a Right of Way Agreement Between the Suffolk City School Board and Virginia Electric and Power Company, d/b/a Dominion Energy Virginia

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Resolution Number 23/24-39: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of a Right of Way Agreement Between the Suffolk City School Board and Virginia Electric and Power Company, d/b/a Dominion Energy Virginia.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 7 to 0.

- Payment of Bills and Payroll May 2024

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Payment of Bills and Payroll for May 2024.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 2 (Dr. Brittingham, Slingluff) / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 5 to 2.

## **PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON NON-AGENDA TOPICS**

- Citizen Comments on Non-Agenda Items:  
No citizens signed up to address the Board.

## **BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS**

- Comments and Reports by School Board Members:
  - Attended, participated in and enjoyed various events throughout the division (including graduation).
  - Thanked the Board for great discussion and collaboration during the meeting.
  - Congratulated students on their graduation and accomplishments (including scholarships, extra-curricular activities, and musical talents).



- Recognized retirees, especially appreciative of Mr. Whitfield for his many years of service.
- Thanked Attorney Waller, Dr. Gordon, and his staff for their educational leadership, dedication, and all that they do.
- Congratulated Dr. Neighbours for the musical talent displayed and Dr. Whiting for amazing meals enjoyed at the Board meetings. Also congratulated the teachers highlighted in the Good News Report, the PLTW program for their national recognition, participants who completed the Next Level Leadership program, and the student who led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Congratulated employees, students, and parents for a successful year.
- Wished everyone a great and peaceful summer vacation.

### **INFORMATION ITEMS**

- Accident Report – May 2024
- Attendance Report – May 31, 2024
- Capital Projects Financial Statement
- Financial Report May 2024
- Citizens Advisory Committees Announcement
- SPS Condolence – Dorothy Stevenson

### **ADJOURNMENT**

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further business, Board Chair Jenkins adjourned the June 13, 2024 School Board Meeting at 10:30 p.m.

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Karen Jenkins, *School Board Chair*

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Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*