REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD Thursday, March 13, 2025 ~ 5:00 P.M.

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

Board Members Present:

Heather Howell, *Chair*Sean McGee, *Vice Chair*Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham
Valerie Fields
Karen Jenkins
Tyron Riddick¹
Kimberly Slingluff

Administrative Staff Present:

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

OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION

Call to Order:

Board Chair Howell called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

➤ Communities in Schools

Hope Sinclair, Executive Director with Communities in Schools of Hampton Roads (CISofHR), shared information regarding the successes of the collaboration between CISofHR and Suffolk Public Schools. She talked about various challenges faced by our students and the effects of those challenges, and the positive impact of CISofHR in our schools helping to mitigate those challenges. Dr. Sinclair highlighted the following:

- At the culmination of the 2023-2024 school year, 4,415 SPS students benefited from whole school supports and 353 students received individualized case-management supports,
- 87% of case-managed students improved their attendance,
- 94% of case-managed students improved their behavior,
- 86% of case-managed students improved their course performance,
- 86% of case-managed K-11 students were promoted,
- 100% of case-managed Seniors graduated.

Dr. Sinclair also discussed CISofHR's financials, community investment, the return on investment, and their commitment of continued collaboration with Suffolk Public Schools for the 2024-2025 school year.

Board Members and Dr. Sinclair discussed the possibility of expanding the program to other schools and the decline in scores reported. Board Members thanked Dr. Sinclair for her presentation and for CISofHR's continued support of students.

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¹ Board Member Riddick arrived to the meeting at 5:06 p.m.

Budget Development Presentation

Wendy Forsman, Chief Financial Officer, presented information regarding budget development. She explained the preliminary audit and the formal audit process (from both the City of Suffolk and VRS which included grants, the operating fund, and food and nutritional services.) Board Members and Mrs. Forsman discussed the number of federal audits that SPS participates in within a given year, the length of the audit process, and the process for use of purchase cards for purchases that are under \$5,000. They also discussed the multiple levels (checks and balances) and the multiple signatures needed before finalizing a review, and the role the of the City's Treasurer's Office when it comes to serving as fiscal agent for SPS funds. Mrs. Forsman also shared that the School Activity fund is a separate account but the auditors look at the same information using the same process for that account as with other accounts.

Board Members thanked Mrs. Forsman and her team for all of their hard work.

MOTION TO GO INTO A CLOSED MEETING

> Attorney Wendell Waller read the following motion:

A motion is needed to go into a closed meeting to discuss the following items and subjects pursuant to the Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711 of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act:

The discussion and/or consideration of a discipline matter regarding School Board Member Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham because it has been alleged that Board Member Brittingham violated School Board Norm 2-2.6:1(A)(3) requiring that members of the School Board "be respectful of the different roles and responsibilities throughout the school division and maintain focus on policy and governance"; School Board Norm 2-2.6:1(A)(5) requiring that members of the School Board be focused on work as a School Board Member and not interfere with the day to day operations of Suffolk Public Schools, which is the delegated responsibility of the school superintendent;" and School Board Protocol 2-2.6:1(B)(5) providing that "individual School Board Members are not to communicate directly with subordinate administrators without first discussing with the School Superintendent."

Which is authorized by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, found at Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711 (A)(1).

Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to go into the closed meeting as read by Attorney Waller.

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

Board Chair Howell reminded Board Members that personal devices are not allowed in closed session, but SPS issued laptops are permitted in the closed meeting area.

RECONVENE IN PUBLIC MEETING

➤ Meeting Called to Order:

Board Chair Howell reconvened the public meeting.

CERTIFICATION OF CLOSED MEETING

Attorney Wendell Waller read the following certification:
A Resolution of Certification of the Closed Meeting of March 13, 2025 Pursuant to Section 2.2-3712 of the Code of Virginia (1950), As Amended

WHEREAS, the School Board of the City of Suffolk convened a closed meeting on this date pursuant to an affirmative recorded vote and in accordance with the provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act; and

WHEREAS, Section 2.2-3712 of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended, requires a certification by the School Board that such closed meeting was conducted in conformity with Virginia law.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the School Board of the City of Suffolk hereby certifies that, to the best of each member's knowledge, (i) only business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements by Virginia law were discussed in the closed meeting to which this resolution of certification applies, and (ii) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion convening the closed meeting were heard, discussed or considered by the School Board of the City of Suffolk.

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the Certification of the Closed Meeting as read by Attorney Waller.

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

MEETING RECESS

➤ Board Chair Howell recessed the meeting at 7:41 p.m. for five minutes.

PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING

- ➤ Call to Order Public Hearing on the 2025-2026 Operating Budget Board Chair Howell called the Public Budget Hearing to order at 7:47 p.m.
- ➤ Public Comments Regarding the 2025-2026 Operating Budget
 - 1. Dr. Anita Lewis Dr. Lewis spoke on behalf of the Nansemond-Suffolk NAACP. She spoke in support of SPS 2025-2026 Superintendent's proposed budget. She felt that the proposed budget was reasonable and indicated that we must ensure that the budget could absorb potential cuts at the federal level. She commended board members on their well-deserved raise and encouraged them to vote in favor of the budget as it would give raises to employees and would meet the needs of students and staff.

There being no additional speakers, the Public Budget Hearing on the 2025-2026 Operating Budget was adjourned at 7:52 p.m.

RE-OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING

➤ Meeting Called to Order:

Board Chair Howell called to order the regular public business meeting at 7:52 p.m.

➤ <u>Pledge of Allegiance</u>:

Board Member Slingluff led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

➤ Moment of Silence:

A moment of silence was observed by all in attendance.

➤ The Mission of Suffolk Public Schools:

Board Member Riddick read the mission of SPS.

ACTION ON CLOSED MEETING ITEMS

- Discipline Matter Regarding School Board Member Dr. Dawn Brittingham
 - 1. Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion that Board Member Dr. Brittingham violated School Board Norm 2-2.6:1(A)(3) by not being respectful to the different roles and responsibilities throughout the school division and maintaining her focus on policy and governance.

The Clerk began the roll call vote but was stopped by Board Chair Howell to allow Attorney Waller the opportunity to clarify that Dr. Brittingham could not participate in the vote as she would be directly impacted by any vote taken and that only the six board members who participated in the discussion during the closed meeting would vote. The Clerk resumed with the roll call vote.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 3 (Fields, Jenkins, Riddick) / Nay: 3 (Slingluff, McGee, Howell) / Abstain: 0. The motion Tied by vote of 3 to 3 and the motion failed.

2. Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion that Board Member Dr. Brittingham violated School Board Norm 2-2.6:1(A)(5) by not focusing on the work as a School Board Member and interfering with the day-to-day operations of Suffolk Public Schools which is the delegated responsibility of the school superintendent.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 2 (Fields, Howell) / Nay: 2 (Slingluff, McGee) / Abstain: 2 (Jenkins, Riddick). The motion Tied by vote of 2 to 2 to 2 and the motion failed.

3. Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion that Board Member Dr. Brittingham violated School Board Protocol 2-2.6:1(B)(5) by communicating directly with subordinate administrators without first discussing it with the superintendent.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 3 (Fields, Jenkins, Howell) / Nay: 2 (Slingluff, McGee) / Abstain: 1 (Riddick). The motion Passed by vote of 3 to 2 to 1.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

➤ Approval of Agenda:

Board Member Riddick moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to approve the agenda with Item 10 under New Business (Ordinance 2024/25-85) moved and considered before Public Speakers on Agenda Topics.

Board Chair Howell confirmed with Attorney Waller that the request could be considered. Conversation ensued as Board Member Riddick provided context regarding the request and explained the reason for his earlier abstention.

Board Chair Howell restated the motion (Board Member Riddick moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to approve the agenda with Item 10 under New Business (Ordinance 2024/25-85) moved and considered before Public Speakers on Agenda Topics.)

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

NEW BUSINESS

Ordinance 2024/25-85: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 2-2.7:3.1 entitled "Rules of Order for meetings of School Board And Committees of the School Board; Governing Principles; Basic Principles; Basic Definitions; General Procedure for handling a main motion; General Rules of Debate" of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading and Adoption

Board Member Riddick moved and Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 2024/25-85.

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

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.

1. Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck – Re: School Board Agenda and Minutes. Dr. Brooks-Buck expressed her concern regarding the following: (1) the Board's debate over the History credit for the African-American History course; (2) board training received by a member and their vote in opposition to the entity which provided the training; (3) donations received by board members that are not listed on their Statement of Economic Interest; and (4) members participating in right-wing conferences by organizations that do not support public education. She also did not agree with a deep dive audit, and the lack of student and staff recognition at meetings.

CONSENT AGENDA

Approval of the Consent Agenda:

Board Member Jenkins moved and Board Member Dr. Riddick seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda.

Board Member Slingluff requested an amendment to the motion to remove Bills and Payroll and add it to New Business.

Board Member Jenkins amended her motion to approve the Consent Agenda with the removal of Bills and Payroll and adding it to New Business, however, Board Member Riddick did not agree and would not second the motion. The motion was seconded by Board Member Dr. Brittingham.

Vice Chair McGee suggested moving Bills and Payroll to New Business permanently for future meetings and Board Chair Howell will follow-up with Attorney Waller regarding his request.

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

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Budget Transfer #1 2024-2025

Dr. Gordon explained that after the board approved the renovation, Mrs. Forsman has identified salaries and benefit lines that she will pull from in order to fund the project and move the project forward with a possible completion date by the start of next school year.

Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Budget Transfer #1 2024-2025.

Conversation took place as Board Members expressed their hesitation with the funding source for this project and asked questions.

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

NEW BUSINESS (cont.)

➤ Legislative Committee Report (Information Item Only)

Board Chair Howell asked for clarification regarding the Legislative Committee Report and the accompanied attachment as the item changed from last month's tabling. Board Member Riddick explained that the resolution that was added by the Legislative Committee was recommended for the Board's approval to send to our congressional members and state representatives so that they could fight for public schools at the national level.

Resolution Number 24/25-22 A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Expressing Its Support for the U.S. Department of Education Attorney Waller read the following resolution:

A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia expressing its support for the U.S. Department of Education

WHEREAS, the original Department of Education (hereinafter "Department") was created in 1867 to collect information on schools and teaching that would help the States establish effective school systems: and

WHEREAS, in 1890, with the passage of the Second Morrill Act, in 1917, with the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act, and in 1946, with the passage of the George-Barden Act, the Department was responsible for administering support for the original system of landgrant colleges and universities, vocational education, and began focusing on home economics training for high school students; and

WHEREAS, with the passage of anti-poverty and civil rights laws in the 1960s and 1970s - specifically with the passage of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 - the Department ensures equal access to public education and prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, and disability and made civil rights enforcement a fundamental and long-lasting focus of the Department: and

WHEREAS, in 1965, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which provided a comprehensive set of programs, including Title I program of Federal Aid to disadvantaged children to address the problems of poor urban and rural areas, and that same year Congress passed the Higher Education Act, which authorized assistance for postsecondary education, including financial aid programs for needy college students; and

WHEREAS, in 1980, Congress established the Department as Cabinet level agency in the Executive Branch; and

WHEREAS, the Department plays an important role in the ongoing national dialogue over how to improve the results of our education system for all students by raising national and community awareness of the educational challenges confronting the Nation, and disseminating the latest discoveries on what works in teaching and learning, and helping communities work out solutions to difficult educational issues; and

WHEREAS, the Department is also responsible for administering programs for children with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) by: (1) providing federal funding to states; (2) monitoring state compliance; (3) issuing guidance regulations; (4) handling disputes and enforcement; and (5) collecting and analyzing data on special education; and

WHEREAS, although public education is primarily a State and local responsibility and federal contribution to elementary and secondary education is about 8 percent, the Department administers grant funding programs to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness, to foster educational excellence, and to ensure equal access; and

WHEREAS, for the 2024-2025 fiscal year, Suffolk Public Schools received federal Impact Aid, Medicaid, JROTC and other federal funds (e.g., Title I, II, 111, IV and 68) from the Department in the total sum of \$1,092,000.

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia expresses its support for the U.S. Department of Education; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a true copy of this resolution be sent to Senator Tim Kaine, Senator Mark Warner, and Congresswomen Jen Kiggans.

Board Member Riddick moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to approve Resolution Number 24/25-22.

Conversation ensued with Board Members speaking in favor of and against the resolution. They also asked questions regarding continued funding by the Department is written into law. Attorney Waller stated that it is, but with the Executive Branch exercising authority to impound funds authorized by Congress for the Department of Education what happens going forward is uncertain.

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

Discussion Regarding Staffing Report (Info Item Only. The Board did take any action on this item.

Board Members, Dr. Gordon, and Dr. Jessica Avery, Director of Human Resources, discussed long-term substitute information highlighted in the staffing report. They conversed about the number of long-term substitutes in the division and at each school, the progress, possibilities, and pathways available to long-term substitutes to assist them in becoming full-time, highly qualified educators, and sign-on bonuses for hard to fill positions. Additional conversation was had regarding the possibility of partnering with local universities to attract students majoring in education, offering transportation assistance to students hired, assisting with college tuition, and housing assistance.

➤ <u>Discussion Regarding the 1st Semester Discipline Update (Info Item Only)</u>

Dr. Brittingham lead this discussion by expressing her concerns with the increased numbers of disciplinary issues. Board Members, Dr. Gordon and Dr. Rodney Brown, Chief of Administrative Services, discussed measures in place that will support teachers with disciplinary issues, reasons for the increase in discipline matters, and strategies to be used that will reduce disciplinary areas of concern, especially at schools with specific challenges. Board Members were thankful for the thorough report.

➤ Bus Driver Applicants VDSS Acknowledgement Form

Board Chair Howell lead the discussion regarding the VDSS Acknowledgment Form. She referenced her attendance at a Bus Driver's Association meeting and their concerns with losing employees due to the long wait to receive background search results. Board Members, Dr. Gordon, Dr. Brown, and Attorney Waller explained and clarified the difference between the background searches done by Suffolk Public Schools, including the Criminal Background Search (via fingerprinting) and the CPS search which takes longer to receive the results. They also discussed liabilities and/or the risks associated with employing individuals without all search results being received.

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion to table the Bus Driver Applicants VDSS Acknowledgment Form to the March 25, 2025 School Board Meeting.

Additional discussion ensued.

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

Scheduling of Joint Meeting with City Council: 5 p.m., April 9, 2025 at City Council Chambers

Board Chair Howell indicated that the joint meeting date was based on conversations and proposed dates discussed between her and Mayor Duman. She specified that the date selected would have less of an impact on everyone's calendar based on various meetings already scheduled versus other dates proposed. Conversation ensued between board members.

Board Member Jenkins moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to approve the Joint Meeting with City Council at 5 p.m. on April 9, 2025 at City Council Chambers.

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

Cancellation of November 27, 2025 Second School Board Meeting

Board Chair Howell explained that the cancellation request was due to the Thanksgiving holiday and the conflict in schedule with VSBA's Annual Convention. She added that in case of an emergency, a special called meeting will be held.

Board Member Riddick moved and Board member Jenkins seconded the motion to cancel the November 27, 2025 Second School Board Meeting.

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

Ordinance 2024/25-83: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 2-2.6:1 entitled "School Board norms; protocols; violations" of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board" of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading and Adoption Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 2024/25-83 with the request that the policy be returned to the Policy Review Committee for further revisions by taking a closer look at the section dedicated to board member discipline for appropriate revisions.

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

Ordinance 2024/25-84: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 2, Article 12, Section 2-2.7:2 entitled "Appointment to Standing Committees and foundation boards; appointment to Citizen Advisory Committees; reports by committees; number of committee members" of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading and Adoption
Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 2024/25-84 as presented.

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 February 28, 2025

Board Member Jenkins moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion to approve the Payment of Bills and Payroll for February 28, 2025.

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

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON NON-AGENDA TOPICS

➤ Citizen Comments on Non-Agenda Items:

The Clerk read the statement of decorum for speakers who sign up to address the Board.

• Terrence Parks – Re: RE: HB1824-The Substitute Optional African American History Course for Satisfying Graduation Requirements Recently Passed by the General Assembly and Awaiting Action from the Governor. Mr. Parks was disheartened with the results of the vote regarding the African American History optional course. He stated that the vote gave him a feeling of spite, nevertheless, he was happy that the measure passed in both chambers of the General Assembly and is waiting on action from the Governor.

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

Comments and Reports by School Board Members:

Board Members were excited about the school tour/visits, lunch at CCAP, and appreciated the principals and ambassadors who assisted with those activities. They expressed pride in representing and serving the constituents in their respective boroughs. They thanked Dr. Gordon and his team, students, and teachers for their seriousness and dedication to education. Board Members congratulated KFHS's Debate Team, LHS JV Baseball Team for their accomplishments. Board Members were disheartened by other members' lack of support of the Department of Education as that organization provides our students with many programs and funding. They were also disappointed in the African American History vote at a previous school board meeting indicating that the contributions of African Americans should not be negated. Board Members encouraged all to work together and not against each other and to remain steadfast in making commonsense decisions.

MOTION TO GO INTO A SECOND CLOSED MEETING

Attorney Wendell Waller read the following motion:

A motion is needed to go into a closed meeting to discuss the following items and subjects pursuant to the Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711 of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act:

For the purpose of disciplining Board Member Dawn Marie Brittingham and issuing her an oral reprimand for having violated School Board Protocol 2-6.6:1(B)(5)

Which is authorized by Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711 (A)(1).

Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to go into a second closed meeting as read by Attorney Waller.

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

Board Chair Howell reminded Board Members to leave their personal devices at the podium for this brief meeting.

RECONVENE IN PUBLIC MEETING

➤ Meeting Called to Order:

Board Chair Howell reconvened the public meeting.

CERTIFICATION OF THE SECOND CLOSED MEETING

Attorney Wendell Waller read the following certification:

A Resolution of Certification of the Closed Meeting of March 13, 2025 Pursuant to Section 2.2-3712 of the Code of Virginia (1950), As Amended

WHEREAS, the School Board of the City of Suffolk convened a closed meeting on this date pursuant to an affirmative recorded vote and in accordance with the provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act; and

WHEREAS, Section 2.2-3712 of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended, requires a certification by the School Board that such closed meeting was conducted in conformity with Virginia law.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the School Board of the City of Suffolk hereby certifies that, to the best of each member's knowledge, (i) only business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements by Virginia law were discussed in the closed meeting to which this resolution of certification applies, and (ii) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion convening the closed meeting were heard, discussed or considered by the School Board of the City of Suffolk.

Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion to approve the Certification of the Second Closed Meeting as read by Attorney Waller.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 1 (Riddick²). The motion Passed by vote of 6 to 1.

ACTION ON SECOND CLOSED MEETING ITEMS

Discipline Matter Regarding School Board Member Dr. Dawn Brittingham

Board Chair Howell indicated that the action on the second closed meeting was the issuance of a verbal warning. No motion for this action was needed, as clarified by Attorney Waller.

INFORMATION ITEMS

➤ Board Chair Howell encouraged all to review the informational items listed on the agenda.

ADJOURNMENT

Adjournment of Meeting:
There being no further business, Board Chair Howell adjourned the March 13, 2025 School Board Meeting at 11:02 p.m.

Heather Howell, School Board Chair

Tarshia L. Gardner, Board Clerk

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² Mr. Riddick exited the meeting at 11 p.m.