

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, October 12, 2023 ~ 5:00 P.M.

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

Board Members Present:

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

Administrative Staff Present:

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

OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION

➤ Call to Order:

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

➤ SPS All-In VA Programming

Dr. Branch, Chief Academic Officer, provided background information regarding the Virginia Department of Education All-In programming and requirements, SPS All-In approaches based on three areas of targeted focus which include Tutoring, Literacy, and Attendance. She also mentioned the 95% accreditation rate for the division (18 out of 19 schools are accredited), SPS ranked 5th with the highest growth in Virginia. The VDOE's All-In VA Programming is the state's approach to assist and accelerate students beyond pre-pandemic scores, and that the program is called "All-In" as it will take EVERYONE working together to ensure the success of all students.

Dr. Brown, Chief of Administrative Services, provided information regarding SPS All-In Attendance. He highlighted information from the SPS Multi-Tiered Approach to Support Student Absenteeism (#AttendtoAchieve). The plan is designed to assist the "whole child" and shifts away from punitive measures and is not based on punishing students and families for not coming to school but to support families centered on best practices. He also stated that the program is data driven which will be used to determine what supports/types of needs that will be provided to families. The plan will work in harmony with student's needs, as the intensity and the need of the students increase, so does the plan. Dr. Brown explained the following tiers:

- Tier 1: targeted group-all students, level of support-school level
- Tier 2: targeted group-students absent 10-19% (moderate chronic absence), level of support-school and division level
- Tier 3: targeted group-students absent greater than 20% (severe chronic absence), level of support-division level

Dr. Brown also stated that incentives will be awarded for good attendance. The plan is designed to connect with families to provide needed supports to keep children coming to school.

Dr. Byrd III, Chief of Schools, provided information regarding the new Suffolk Public Schools Leadership Dashboard. He explained that the dashboard will be used to identify, diagnose, and take action quickly to support students. The new dashboard is designed to provide differentiation, where an adjusted approach or method is required to meet the needs of individual students or groups of students with the focus on personalized learning. He explained that the process will assist leaders to identify students with a history of low academic performance (grade-wise and/or SOL testing) and provide early intervention to assist with student success. The dashboard will also diagnose common assessments to provide immediate support to students, teachers and schools after assessment have been taken, and to quickly identify students with attendance concerns. Attendance and/or behavioral thresholds are set to recognize students when they have reached 8% and 10% in those areas. Dr. Byrd stated that the new dashboard is designed to meet diverse needs, personalize learning, ensure instructional access to all, foster critical thinking, prevent disengagement and drop-out, meet curriculum standards, and ensure student engagement.

Board Members were happy with the plan for the All-In Program.

MOTION TO GO INTO A CLOSED MEETING

- Attorney Waller read the following motion:

A motion is needed to go into a Closed Meeting to discuss the following items and subjects pursuant to Section 2.2-3711 of the Code of Virginia (1950) as amended:

1. The discussion and consideration of Employee Appeal Number 23/24-3 as it relates to the job performance of a specific employee of the public body.

Which is authorized by Section 2.2-3711 A.1 of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended.

Board Member Byrum moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve the motion to go into a closed meeting as read by Mr. Waller.

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

RECONVENE IN PUBLIC MEETING

- Meeting Called to Order:
Board Chair Riddick reconvened the public meeting.

CERTIFICATION OF CLOSED MEETING

- Attorney Waller read the following certification:

A Resolution of Certification of the Closed Meeting of October 12, 2023, 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 Byrum moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve the Certification of Closed Meeting as read by Mr. Waller.

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

RE-OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING

- Meeting Called to Order:
Board Chair Riddick called to order the regular public meeting.
- Pledge of Allegiance:
The King's Fork High School Chorus led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Recital of SPS Mission:
Vice-Chair Howell read the Mission Statement of Suffolk Public Schools.
- Musical Selection – King's Fork High School Chorus – Directed by Dante Copeland:
The King's Fork High School Chorus performed musical selections.

ACTION ON CLOSED MEETING ITEM (Appeal No 23/24-3)¹

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- Approval of Agenda:
Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Byrum seconded the motion to approve the agenda.

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

¹ Board Chair Riddick delayed "Action on Closed Meeting Items" to later in the agenda.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS

➤ Citizen Comments on Agenda Items:

Due to the number of speakers registered to speak, Board Chair Riddick adjusted the time from five (5) minutes to three (3) minutes for each speaker.

The Clerk read the statement regarding decorum for registered speakers. However, before speakers were called to the podium, Board Chair Riddick provided clarification to the 45 minutes time limit required by Suffolk Public Schools policy for the “Public Speakers on Agenda Topics” section.

Registered speakers shared comments regarding their support and/or non-support of the proposed transgender policy (Ordinance 23/24-14) and the “Trusted Adult” policy. Citizens expressed their frustrations with the Governor’s policy versus SPS proposed policy as they felt that the proposed policy may violate parental and/or students’ rights, FERPA, current state codes, and that the non-acceptance of Governor Younkin’s mandate is politically motivated. Board members were urged to vote no to the adoption of the policy. A student also shared their frustration stating that adults are not concerned with and/or refuse to recognize the thoughts and opinions of students. It was stated that adults are creating problems where one doesn’t exist and are distracting others from real issues which include a lack of certified teachers for classrooms, severely overcrowded schools, lack of available course offerings due to teacher resignations, bullying, and students’ fear of mass shootings.

REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

➤ Good News Report:

Anthonette Dickens, Communications and Community Engagement Officer, highlighted the information contained in the Good News Report. Bus drivers were congratulated and presented certificates for Perfect Attendance for the month of September including Mr. Whitfield who has been a bus driver for 69 years.

➤ Calendar of Special Events:

Dr. Gordon highlighted the events listed on SPS website for October/November.

Board Chair Riddick and Board Members voiced their support in recognizing bus drivers as they are the ones who set the tone for the start of the day for our students.

CONSENT AGENDA

➤ Approval of the Consent Agenda:

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Byrum seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda.

Board Member Slingluff requested to remove the Payment of Bills and Payroll for September, 2023 and place the item in New Business.

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Byrum seconded the amended motion to approve the Consent Agenda with the removal of Payment of Bills and Payroll for September, 2023 and place the item under New Business.

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

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- Ordinance 23/24-14 – An Ordinance Amending Chapter 1, Article 6, Section 1-6.2:1 Entitled: "Definitions; Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Prohibited; Student Privacy and Confidentiality Required; Use of Name and Gender Pronouns; Legal Name and Sex at Birth Required on School Records; Dress and Grooming Codes; Segregating Students Prohibited; Access to Restrooms, Locker Rooms and Changing Facilities; Professional Development and Training; Superintendent to Develop Guidelines" (Transgender Policy) of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck made a motion to approve Ordinance 23/24-14.

Board Member Jenkins made a motion to table Ordinance 23/24-14 until November to have further conversations and to allow for additional comments from students and parents.

In that a second to the motion made by Dr. Brooks-Buck had not been offered before the motion was made by Board Member Jenkins, Board Chair Riddick, asked if there was a second to the motion made by Dr. Brooks-Buck. The motion was seconded by Board Member Byrum.

Board Chair Riddick recognized Board Member Jenkins motion and comments to table the motion to approve Ordinance 23/24-14. Additional comment were also made by Board Members Brittingham, Howell and Slingluff in support of tabling the ordinance and possibly holding a town hall and/or a school board work session to receive additional comments from the public and further discussion by the School Board. Additional comments were also made in support of voting on the policy by Board Members Dr. Brooks-Buck and Byrum because the Board has received over several months public comments.

During this time, the meeting was disrupted by someone in the audience. Board Chair Riddick called for a 10-minute recess to regain order of the meeting.

Board Chair Riddick called the meeting back to order and reminded all that each person has First Amendment Rights and that those rights cannot be infringed upon by the Chair. However, the Chair does have the right to protect the decorum of the meeting. He asked all to put aside personal pettiness and move forward in the best interest of the children and conduct the business of Suffolk Public Schools.

Board Chair Riddick reminded all of the information that was being considered before the recess and explained the process going forward according to Robert's Rules as there were two motions on the floor.

Board Member Jenkins moved and Vice-Chair Howell seconded the amended motion to table Ordinance 23/24-14 for additional conversation and evaluation.

Additional comments were being made by Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck until Board Member Dr. Brittingham called for the question.

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 2 (Brooks-Buck/Byrum) / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 5 to 2.

Board Chair Riddick reminded the audience about meeting decorum and that additional disruption of the meeting would result in removal from the meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

- Scheduling of Joint Meeting with City Council: 3 p.m., December 6, 2023 at City Council Chambers

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Byrum seconded the motion to approve a Joint Meeting with City Council at 3 p.m. on December 6, 2023 at City Council Chamber as presented.

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

- Resolution 23/24-14 – A Resolution of the School Board of the City of Suffolk, Virginia Establishing a Moment of Silence at the Opening of Public Meetings of the School Board to Solemnize its Proceedings

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Resolution 23/24-14 as presented.

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

- Resolution 23/24-15: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Agreeing to Appoint a Member of the School Board to Serve on the Education Committee for the City of Suffolk, Virginia

The Clerk read the following resolution:

A RESOLUTION OF THE SCHOOL BOARD FOR THE CITY OF SUFFOLK, VIRGINIA AGREEING TO APPOINT A MEMBER OF THE SCHOOL BOARD TO SERVE ON THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE FOR THE CITY OF SUFFOLK, VIRGINIA

WHEREAS, the Suffolk City Council ("City Council") has established a standing committee known as the "Education Committee"; and

WHEREAS, City Code Section 2-461 provides that the stated purpose of the Education Committee is "to serve as a formal channel of communication regarding issues of shared concern between the city government and city school system. The committee will strive to strengthen the relationship between the city and schools by discussing non-instructional issues including, but not limited to, budget, capital improvements, operational savings, safety, and joint uses"; and

WHEREAS, the Suffolk City School Board ("School Board") is of the opinion that the stated purpose for this Committee - to create a formal channel of communication and to strengthen the relationship between the city and schools - are laudable goals and should be pursued; and

WHEREAS, by Resolution Number 2122-20 adopted by the School Board on April 7, 2022, the School Board was of the opinion that "strengthening the relationship between the city and schools can best be achieved not by holding meetings of the Education Committee - that will only involve a few select members from both public bodies - but joint public meetings at least two times a year that will involve all members from both City Council and School Board"; and

WHEREAS, the School Board is now of the opinion that strengthening the relationship between the city and schools can be achieved by having members of the School Board serve on city's Education Committee.

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that the School Board accepts the city's offer to appoint a member of the School Board to serve on the Education Committee for the City of Suffolk.

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Resolution 23/24-15 as presented.

Board Members engaged in discussion regarding their support/non-support of the resolution.

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 3 / Nay: 4 (Brooks-Buck, Byrum, Jenkins, Riddick) / Abstain: 0. The motion failed by vote of 4 to 3.

➤ Citizen Advisory Committee Members Update

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the update to the Citizen Advisory Committee Members as presented. [Title I Parent Advisory Committee: Toy Parrish, Nikkiah Smith, Rakeitta Wooden; School Health Advisory Board: Hermionne Johnson]

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

➤ Payment of Bills and Payroll

Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to permanently remove the Payment of Bills and Payroll from the Consent Agenda and list it as a "New Business" agenda item to be voted on at each monthly meeting of the School Board.

Board Members expressed their concern, support/non-support of paying the bills and contractual obligations, and moving this item from the Consent Agenda to a separate action item under "New Business" in the agenda. Board Chair Riddick and Mr. Waller provided additional clarification. Dr. Gordon explained that during numerous meetings with Board Member Slingluff all of her questions and concerns were addressed and detail explanations were provided. Board Member Slingluff responded by stating her discomfort with approving bills and payroll according to the current process and her level of understanding.

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 3 / Nay: 4 (Brooks-Buck, Byrum, Jenkins, Riddick). The motion failed by vote of 4 to 3.

➤ Payment of Bills and Payroll

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the Payment of Bills and Payroll as presented.

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 1 (Slingluff). The motion passed by vote of 6 to 1.

➤ Ordinances 23/24-15 through Ordinance 23/24-25

These items are information only and no Board Member had any questions or concerns.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON NON-AGENDA TOPICS

➤ Citizen Comments on Non-Agenda Items:

The Clerk read the statement regarding decorum for those scheduled to speak.

Registered speakers shared their concerns and comments on a variety of topics including, the policy for public speakers, behavior of school board members and bullying by board members against each other and the public, the lack of core values of the School Board, the transgender policy, and the inequality of school's athletic budgets. A speaker also discussed communication with the Superintendent regarding American Sign Language courses. Speakers asked the board to lay aside their partisan politics, and to work together as a team.

A speaker was removed from the chamber as he began playing music during his comments to the Board.

Registered speaker Dr. Bradley-Gray did not attend the meeting.

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

➤ Comments and Reports by School Board Members:

Board Members were each given four (4) minutes to speak. They highlighted the following:

- Board Member Slingluff thanked the citizens for attending and sharing their comments, highlighted her attendance at various VSBA trainings and her participation in the WHRO Foundation Board meeting. She also shared additional information regarding her inability to support the Payment of Bills and Payroll.
- Board Member Byrum congratulated teachers, bus drivers, Mr. Privott, Director of Transportation, and his entire department. She also asked all to remember and demonstrate integrity, compassion, understanding, patience, and tolerance.
- Board Member Jenkins recognized former Board Member Lorita Mayo, thanked Dr. Gordon, his staff and all who are a part of Suffolk Public Schools. She asked all to pray for those affected by the events happening in Israel, and to perform a self-reflection and show respect and compassion to/for each other. She also stated that all must work together for the good of the children so they will know they are safe, heard, and feel that everyone wants the best for them.
- Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck stated that misinformation and hate speech is at the root of the events happening abroad and if those factors had been removed, maybe the outcome would have been different. She thanked a student speaker for being brave and honest in addressing the Board, highlighted receiving the VSBA Award of Distinction, and addressed certain public comments made regarding her patriotism, false assertions that she does not honor the flag, and her Christianity.

Board Member comments were interrupted by outbursts by a citizen in the audience. Board Chair Riddick asked officers to safely escort the citizen from the room to prevent tripping or falling. Board Member Dr. Brittingham called for a Point of Order and yelled that Board Chair Riddick's comments were uncalled for. Board Chair Riddick asked her if she understood the purpose of his comments and Board Member Dr. Brittingham continued yelling that the comments were out of order. Board Chair Riddick hit the gavel stating that Board Member Dr. Brittingham was out of order and asked her to exemplify the conduct she was asking of the Chair. Board Chair Riddick provided context to his comments indicating that Board Members, including himself, citizens, and others visiting the building have slipped and fallen on the floors in the building. Additionally he indicated that Board Member Dr. Brittingham's assumption of his comments shows where her heart is. While he was still speaking, Board

Member Dr. Brittingham again yelled Point of Order. At this point, Board Chair Riddick stated that additional outbursts from Board Member Dr. Brittingham could result in a motion for her removal from the meeting. Additional dialog/comments ensued between Board Chair Riddick and Board Member Dr. Brittingham.

- Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck was allowed to resume/finish her comments.
- Board Member Dr. Brittingham stated that the Board does not make student achievement, and graduation on grade-level a priority, that politically driven narratives and egos are the focus of education, and that crafted policy does not reflect the foundational initiatives of public education. She felt that academic excellence has been replaced with indoctrination, narrative-driven ideologies, and political charged schemas and that making progress is important, but mastery of content is where students should be. She advocated for greater allocation of resources for students who need it the most and for the return to common-sense, straightforward, research-based educational practices. She recited from her favorite song asking for the Lord's grace and blessings to be upon all.
- Vice-Chair Howell highlighted her participation in various meetings of SPS and VSBA and expressed her thankfulness to the bus drivers. She shared words from a song which asked all to conduct themselves and whatever they do or say to do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus giving thanks through him to God the Father.
- Board Chair Riddick shared his frustration with those throwing rocks then hiding behind the Bible. Board Members are knowingly passing out false information after being given correct information multiple times with the intent to wreak havoc. He also stated his frustration with people using what the civil rights movement did to try to make their issues more relevant. He stated that we are all here for the kids but there is a planned effort to undermine public education. He highlighted the difference between federal and state law with regards to the transgender policy, talked about First Amendment Rights, partisan politics, and members who after receiving training and assistance operate with foolishness by staging demonstrations for the media. He stated that if a member cared so much about public education to enroll their children/grandchildren in public schools. He asked those who were critical of SPS to volunteer or drive a bus and make a difference. He also stated that members should not try to change the system to accommodate his or her inability to attend a meeting(s), alternates were chosen for that reason. He asked all to work and do what's in the best interest of all students, staff and the division.

MOTION TO GO INTO A CLOSED MEETING

- Attorney Waller read the following motion:

A motion is needed to go into a Second Closed Meeting to discuss the following items and subjects pursuant to Section 2.2-3711 of the Code of Virginia:

1. The discussion and consideration of employee appeal number 23/24-3 as it relates to the job performance of a specific employee of the public body; and
2. Consultation with legal counsel regarding a specific legal matter requiring the provision of legal advice by Council and more specifically as it relates to a demand letter received from Founding Freedoms relative to Angela Kilgore.

Which is authorized by Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711 A.1 and A.8 of the Code of Virginia.

Vice Chair Howell/Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Members Dr. Brittingham and Byrum seconded the motion to approve the motion to go into a second closed meeting as read by Mr. Waller.

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

RECONVENE IN PUBLIC MEETING

- Meeting Called to Order:
Board Chair Riddick reconvened the public meeting.

CERTIFICATION OF SECOND CLOSED MEETING

- Attorney Waller read the following certification:

A Resolution of Certification of the Closed Meeting of October 12, 2023, Pursuant to Section 2.2-3712 of the Code of Virginia

WHEREAS, the School Board of the City of Suffolk convened a second 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, requires a certification by the School Board that such closed meeting was conducted in conformity with Virginia law.

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 Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Vice Chair Howell seconded the motion to approve the Certification of Second Closed Meeting as read by Mr. Waller.

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

ACTION ON SECOND CLOSED MEETING ITEMS

- Employee Appeal No: 23/24-3:
Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Vice Chair Howell seconded the motion that Personnel Action Number 23/24-3 be denied and the recommendation of the school superintendent be affirmed.

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

INFORMATION ITEMS

- Accident Review Report – September 2023
- Financial Report September 30, 2023
- Facilities and Maintenance Move to Bright Lane
- 2022-2023 WHRO Annual Impact Statement

ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

Board Chair Riddick adjourned the October 12, 2023 School Board Meeting at 11:29 p.m.

Tyron Riddick, *Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*