

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, January 16, 2025 ~ 5:00 P.M.

King's Fork Middle School, 350 King's Fork Road, 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.

➤ WHRO Educational Services Presentation

Utilizing a video presentation, Bert Schmidt, President and CEO of WHRO, provided a summary of the services provided by WHRO that are available to teachers as a resource that they can use in their classrooms. He explained that WHRO provides valuable resources and supports to parents, caregivers, and children. Mr. Schmidt also highlighted information from the impact statement regarding the division's 91% return on investment. He expressed pride in WHRO's partnership with local school divisions and the Virginia Department of Education which work together to shape the future of education, one student at a time.

A Board Member asked a question and Board Chair Howell thanked Mr. Schmidt for presenting information to the Board.

➤ Young Ink Writing Challenge Presentation

Utilizing PowerPoint presentation, Mrs. Sierrah Chavis of the United Way of Southampton Roads, recognized three outstanding students that participated in the young writer's challenge. The Young Ink Challenge serves to inspire, empower, and celebrate the voices of young writers by providing them with opportunities to develop their craft, share their stories, and connect with a supportive writing community. She recognized the following winners and presented them with certificates:

Aleena Carmouche – 9th grader at KFHS

Category: Poem

Title: *Moving On*

¹ Board Member Riddick arrived to the meeting at 5:16 p.m.

De'Avyonne Simmons – 11th grader at KFHS
Category: Creative Writing (Fictional Short Story)
Title: *The Visit*

David Davenport – 12th Grader at NRHS
Category: Poem
Title: *Epilogue To Me*

Board Chair Howell and Dr. Gordon also presented the students with gifts for their accomplishments.

Board Members congratulated the students for their success and encouraged them to continue to soar and explore anything that comes to their mind.

➤ Discussion Regarding the Efficacy of the School Board Citizen Advisory Committees and Possibly a Temporary School Board Committee to Review Necessary Changes

Board Members discussed various challenges being experienced by the Citizen Advisory Committees. Some of those challenges include, but are not limited to: committee caps, compliance with bylaws (if a national organization), appointees not attending meetings, committees reporting/communicating with the Board, and committees not being allowed to hold various meetings.

Board Chair Howell summarized the concerns/suggestions provided by the Board which included:

- Improving the reporting, marketing and advertising of meetings
- The process for selecting appointees
- Background checks for committee members, especially those who are frequently in schools
- Surveying committee members for input
- Liaison/point of contact to committees (that person not having any extra say so in the business of the committees, they are only a contact point to receive minutes and for questions to be filtered to the Board)
- Training appointees
- Grievance process/procedure

Board Chair Howell emphasized that the goal of the information being shared is to have an impactful, fruitful, and unified team. Mrs. Howell polled board members to see who was able and willing to serve on a temporary committee. The majority of the board members were willing and available to serve on a temporary committee.

Additional conversation ensued. Attorney Waller clarified that the policy does reference reporting dates for the Citizen Advisory Committees, but committees may not have been adhering to those dates.

There being no further comments, the work session was closed.

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 Freedom of Information Act found at Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711:

1. Record Review 2024/25-8 RR regarding the assignment of a student to Turlington Woods School, where the discussion in an open meeting would involve disclosure of information contained in the student's scholastic record.

Which is authorized by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, found at Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711 (A)(2).

Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham 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 Boards 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 January 16, 2025 Pursuant to Section 2.2-3712 of the Code of Virginia

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, 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 6:46 p.m.

RE-OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING

- Meeting Called to Order:
Board Chair Howell called to order the regular public meeting at 7:15 p.m.
- Pledge of Allegiance:
Board Member Jenkins 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 Slingsluff read the mission of SPS.

ACTION ON CLOSED MEETING ITEMS

- Student Record Review number 2024-25-8RR
Board Member McGee moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to uphold the discipline committee's decision.

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

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- Approval of Agenda:
Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member McGee seconded the motion to approve the agenda.

Board Member Fields did not agree with moving the Good News Report near the end of the agenda and suggested that the Board place the report back in its original position on the agenda. Additional conversation ensued between the Board and Attorney Waller who provided clarification regarding Board Member Fields' concerns.

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

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS

- Citizen Comments on Agenda Items:
There were no speakers registered to address the board.

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 and adding it to New Business.

Board Member Slingluff questioned the recognition of newly hired staff without the Board actually approving personnel. Board Chair Howell and Attorney Waller provided clarification indicating that the approval of the personnel report in the Consent Agenda is the approval of staff.

Dr. Gordon introduced Timeka Whitehead, new Coordinator of Science for Suffolk Public Schools.

Board Member Brittingham suggested receiving the information sheet for new hires when receiving the Personnel Report and Board Member Riddick suggested approving the Consent Agenda before the introduction of new staff.

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 2024/25-46: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 9, Article 26, Section 9-26.1 entitled “Statement of Policy; limited use of physical restraint” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board – Second Reading

Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 2024/25-46 as presented.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham questioned who will be designated and qualified as trained personnel. Attorney Waller indicated that the language was included by SEAC committee. Dr. Gordon added that trained personnel would be anyone involved in the instructional day-to-day bell schedule. Additional conversation/clarification ensued between Board Members, Attorney Waller, and Dr. Gordon.

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

➤ Ordinance 2024/25-62 - An Ordinance Amending Chapter 8, Article 13, Section 8-13.1 entitled “Free Appropriate Public Education; Individualized Education Program Required; Credit Accommodations; Faculty Member serving as Liaison; Appropriate Procedural Safeguards Required; Child Find Program Required” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board – Second Reading

Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 2024/25-62 as presented.

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

- Ordinance 2024/25-67: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 9, Article 23, Section 9-23.2 entitled “Definitions” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board – Second Reading
Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 2024/25-67 as presented.

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

- Ordinance 2024/25-69: An Ordinance Deleting Chapter 9, Article 23, Section 9-23.5 Entitled “Annual Notification Requirement; retains records for seven years” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board – Second Reading
Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Riddick seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 2024/25-69 as presented.

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

NEW BUSINESS

- Approval of a Special Meeting of the School Board on February 27, 2025 at 5 p.m. at King’s Fork Middle School to receive the Superintendent’s 2025-2026 Proposed Budget Presentation
Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve a special meeting of the School Board on February 27, 2025 at 5 p.m. at King’s Fork Middle School to receive the Superintendent’s 2025-2026 Proposed Budget.

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

- 2025-2026 Calendar Presentation
Dr. Okema Branch, Chief Academic Officer, utilizing a PowerPoint, presented information regarding the 2025-2026. She highlighted information from the 2024-2025 SPS Calendar Committee, the processes and timeline, and calendar options for the 2025-2026 school year.

Discussion ensued between Board Members, Dr. Gordon and Dr. Branch regarding banked days, inclement weather days, seat hours, holidays included in the calendar, and virtual teacher work days.

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Option 1 as recommended by the calendar committee.

Additional conversation ensued.

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

- SPS Teacher Pathways
Dr. Jessica Avery, Director of Human Resources, utilizing PowerPoint presentation, gave an overview of teacher pathways, the iTeach program, the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) Grant, Tuition Reimbursement, and the Associate Teacher program. She highlighted eligibility requirements, expectations, benefits, salary scale, and job description for the Associate Teacher program.

Conversation ensued between Board Members, Dr. Gordon, Dr. Avery, and Dr. Branch as questions were asked regarding lesson plans, salary comparison to other districts, the Tidewater Consortium Education Grant, and partnering with other divisions regarding this program were answered.

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve the SPS Associate Teacher program as presented.

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

➤ Discussion Regarding the Efficacy of the School Board Citizen Advisory Committees and Possibly a Temporary School Board Committee to Review Necessary Changes

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to approve a temporary school board committee for the purpose of working through issues of the Citizen Advisory Committees.

Conversation ensued between Board Members and Attorney Waller regarding surveying all committee members and a suggested timeline to initiate this committee.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham amended her motion and Board Member Jenkins seconded the amended motion to approve a temporary school board committee to review necessary changes to the current Citizen Advisory Committees, and that the Policy Review Committee draft an appropriate policy to guide the temporary committee.

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

➤ Items for Consideration in the Budget Planning and Approval Process

Board Member Slingluff suggested to receive various items when receiving the Superintendent's Proposed Budget.

Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion for the Board to receive a report from the Superintendent containing all actual itemized expenditures of the Administrative School Board's Operating Costs subdivided into the categories of Purchased Services, Travel & Training, Dues & Subscriptions, Materials & Supplies, and Food for meetings for both the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 fiscal school years. This report of all actual itemized expenditures shall include the following details as applicable: Date, Item Purchased or Reimbursed, Vendor Name, Description, Purpose, Purchase Amount, and Board Member's Name. This report should be in an Excel Spreadsheet and is to be received no later than February 27, 2025 when the board receives a copy of the Superintendent's Proposed Budget.

Conversation ensued between Board Members regarding details of the information requested.

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

Additionally, Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham second the motion for the Board to receive an Administrative Survey Report containing the Name, Job

Title, Work Location, Supervisor's Name, Salary, and Contract End Date for each Administrative Employee within Suffolk Public Schools including all non-clerical employees in the School Administrative Office as well as all Administrators in our 21 schools. This report should be in an Excel Spreadsheet and is to be received no later than February 27, 2025 when the Board receives a copy of the Superintendent's Proposed Budget.

Conversation ensued between Board Members, Dr. Gordon and staff, regarding salary increases made to all salaries, budget, coding for the state.

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

➤ Planning for Innovation Center

Although this item was an info item only, Dr. Gordon explained information and presented a rough-scale map of what would be considered the Innovation Center at CCAP. Dr. Gordon recommended converting the early childhood space at CCAP into the Innovation Center to house teachers because the division is running out of space for our teachers.

Conversation ensued between Board Members, Dr. Gordon and his staff regarding bids, funding, and the estimate for the Innovation Center project. Board Members expressed concerns with this project and suggested the exploration of other options, including mobile units and available buildings within the downtown core of the city.

➤ Discussion/Set Date for Second School Board Monthly Meeting

Board Chair Howell provided information/additional fees associated with a second meeting of the month.

Conversation ensued between Board Members, Dr. Gordon, and Attorney Waller regarding the need for an additional meeting, options for scaling back on food at meetings to save money, the meeting agenda for first and second meetings (business and work sessions), and potential dates for second meetings.

Board Member Riddick moved that the School Board adopt meeting on the 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month from 6-8 p.m. with the meeting location being on property of SPS.

Additional conversation/clarification ensued between Board Members and Attorney Waller regarding dates and location of meetings. The original motion died for lack of a second.

Board Member Riddick moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion for the second school board meeting to be held on the 4th Thursday of each month from 6-8 p.m., to be held at a property or facility owned or managed by Suffolk City Public Schools and/or at the discretion of the School Board Chair.

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 December 2024
Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Payment of Bills and Payroll for December 2024.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 4 / Nay: 3 (Slingluff, Dr. Brittingham, 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 the speaker who signed up to address the Board. Travis McKinney – Re: Policies, Procedures and Everything Else. Mr. McKinney expressed his concerns regarding volunteers not attending the Safety Audit Committee meetings, the sexual harassment policy, the need for a whistle-blower policy, the Superintendent’s request to pull board member’s emails, FOIA requests received, responses, and processes. He also expressed concern regarding control of information, and he agreed with the Good News Report being moved to the end of the agenda.

REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

- Good News Report:
Anthonette Dickens, Communications and Community Engagement Officer, shared good news happening within the division utilizing PowerPoint presentation.
- Calendar of Special Events:
Dr. Gordon highlighted information from the calendar of special events. He recognized the 21 principals, 21 bookkeepers, and the entire budget and finance team for another perfect audit with no comments for Suffolk Public Schools. He also shared that he will be recognized in April by the Virginia Tech School of Education for the Distinguished Educator Award in the inaugural class for 2025. Dr. Gordon shared a special shout-out to and asked all to pray for the family of Aaron Cuffee and Ryan Dickerson who both passed on the same day. They were his friends and former basketball teammates. Dr. Gordon encouraged men to pay attention to and take care of their health.

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

- Comments and Reports by School Board Members:
Board Members shared their appreciation and thanks to principals, teachers, staff, students, Board Members, volunteers on the Citizen Advisory Committees, constituents and stakeholders. They congratulated students for their athletic achievements and Board Members for fruitful discussions. They were also excited about the Associate Teacher Program, attending various committee meetings and conferences and looked forward to a great new year of collaboration and advocating for teachers, students and staff. They shared their goals and objectives for their service, and highlighted various PTA events happening throughout the division, and the Virginia PTA Capital Day. A Board Member also shared his desire to create and offer employees services at their own SPS Employee Credit Union. They wished all a good night.

INFORMATION ITEMS

- Accident Report – December 2024
- Attendance Report – December, 2024
- Capital Projects Financial Statement
- Financial Report December 2024
- HES Contract As Executed

ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further business, Board Chair Howell adjourned the January 16, 2025 School Board Meeting at 10:48 p.m.

Heather Howell, *School Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*