

SECOND MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, May 22, 2025 ~ 6:00 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 Riddick
Kimberly Slingluff

Administrative Staff Present:

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

OPENING OF MEETING

- Call to Order:
Board Chair Howell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.
- Pledge of Allegiance:
Vice Chair McGee 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 Dr. Brittingham read the mission of Suffolk Public Schools.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- Approval of Agenda:
Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve the agenda.

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

PRESENTATION

- Recognition of Honor Graduates – Lakeland High School
Rickey Eley, Acting Principal and Sheila Williams, School Counselor, presented 224 honor graduates who have earned over \$9.5 million in scholarships. The honor students introduced themselves, their parents, and stated their future plans. Board Members congratulated and commended the honor graduates for their accomplishments.

There was a pause in the meeting to allow the graduates and their families the opportunity to exit the auditorium. Board Chair Howell resumed the public meeting.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS

➤ Citizen Comments on Agenda Items:

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

1. Travis McKinney – Re: School Board Members Remarks. He began by saying there was a mix-up with his title listing on the agenda. Mr. McKinney talked about FOIA process, requests, and who is required to process requests. He shared communication between he and the FOIA Council. He stated that Suffolk Public Schools was in violation of FOIA.
2. Valerie Boykin – Re: Proposed Revised Transgender Policy. Ms. Boykin felt that the revised transgender policy was exclusionary, out of step with what's best for all students, and ideologically driven.

REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

➤ Good News Report:

Anthonette Dickens, Communication and Community Engagement Officer, shared good news happening within the division utilizing a PowerPoint presentation. Emily Monument was recognized for her 1st Place Win in the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) Art Show. She was presented with a certificate and gift of appreciation.

➤ Calendar of Special Events:

Dr. Gordon, Division Superintendent, summarized information from the calendar of special events. He also clarified that the location of the second school board meeting would be at King's Fork Middle School and not King's Fork High, as it was listed incorrectly in the Calendar of Special Events.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

➤ Approval of Fiscal Year End 2025 Priorities for School Board, Pending Year End Funding Amounts

Board Chair Howell led the discussion by providing background information regarding the Board's budget priorities. Discussion was had by the Board, Dr. Gordon, Mrs. Forsman, and Mr. Littlefield regarding the items listed, reasons why new furniture was not budgeted for JFKMS, sinkholes, and the possibility of shifting funds from the Innovation Center to cover the cost of new furniture for JFKMS. They also discussed the need to converse with and lobby City Council members for sinkhole repairs, and Dr. Gordon provided brief details regarding funding that was provided from the City of Suffolk for the rebuilding of JFKMS.

Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the following school board priorities rank order:

1. Teacher/staff bonuses
2. Funding for JFKMS furniture
3. Replacement of security cameras
4. Fixing water at Oakland
5. Roof painting at LHS and NRHS

Additional conversation ensued between board members, Dr. Gordon and his staff.

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

- Resolution 24/25-27: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Granting the School Superintendent the Authority to Obligate by Encumbrance Any Remaining Appropriated Funds Before the End of the Current Fiscal Year [June 30, 2025] for Certain Designated Repairs and/or Purchasing Needs of Suffolk Public Schools as Approved by the School Board

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Resolution 24/25-27.

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

- Ordinance 24/25-86 - Transgender Policy - An Ordinance Amending Chapter 1, Article 6, Section 1-6.2:1 (Effective July 1, 2025) entitled "Purpose Stated; Definitions; Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Prohibited; Counseling Services; Use of Name and Gender Pronouns; Access to Student Records; Dress and Grooming Codes; Extracurricular Activities & Overnight Travel; Student Participation in Activities Determined by Sex; Access to Restrooms & Locker Rooms" of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - Second Reading

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve Resolution 24/25-86.

Board Members discussed removal of the directive to have the superintendent to create regulations regarding this policy. Attorney Waller clarified that because the administration no longer has to exercise discretion in its implementation of the policy, there is no need for the administration to develop regulations. Discussion was also had regarding the deletion of annual training for all school mental health professionals on topics relating to LGBTQ+ students, safety and support, and health and mental wellness support for all students. Attorney Waller stated that this information was removed from the policy under consideration because this language was not in the model policy from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and the committee wanted to mirror the model policy. Conversation continued with board members expressing concern with the lack of training that will be provided to staff who are charged with protecting and supporting all students.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 4 / Nay: 3 (Fields, Jenkins, Riddick) / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 4 to 3.

NEW BUSINESS

- Payment of Bills and Payroll April 2025

Board Member Riddick moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to approve the Bills and Payroll for April 2025.

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.

- School Board Meeting Minutes: 1. April 9, 2025 - Joint School Board & City Council Meeting 2. April 10, 2025 - School Board Monthly Meeting 3. April 24, 2025 - School Board Monthly Meeting

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the minutes of April 9, 10, and 24, 2025.

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

- SUBJECT TO CITY COUNCIL APPROVAL: DRAFT Resolution 24/25-31: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Accepting An Additional Appropriation from the City of Suffolk, Virginia in the Sum of \$3,495,151; Thus, Making the School Board's Total Operating Budget \$246,908,924 for Fiscal Year 2025-2026
Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve Resolution 24/25-31 as presented.

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

- Ordinances 24/25-88 through 24/25-91 (Informational Items Only)
Ordinances 24/25-88 through 24/25-91 were not discussed nor were there any questions from Board Members. Board Chair Howell encouraged all to read the information. No action was required at this time.
- Discussion Relating to Converting June 6, 2025 To A Student Holiday and Staff Work Day
Vice Chair McGee led the discussion regarding converting June 6, 2025 to a student holiday and staff work day. Dr. Gordon explained that he could not support the recommendation because it would (1) affect seat hours required by the state; (2) potentially exacerbate chronic absenteeism by driving up the absentee numbers which would in turn, affect school's accreditation; and (3) possibly cause difficulty to parents with child care needs and work schedule changes. The Board decided not to act on this item.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON NON-AGENDA TOPICS

- Citizen Comments on Non-Agenda Items:

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

1. Travis McKinney – Re: Why SPS Is Already in Violation of FOIA. Mr. McKinney talked about the fraternity being denied working with students in schools, FOIA requests not yet fulfilled, remarks made by board members. He felt that the current institution of education is the reason for failing schools.
2. Elizabeth Morningstar – Re: Audit. Ms. Morningstar supported a forensic audit, concern with how funds are spent, lack of oversight with purchase cards, mismanagement of money, embezzlement by LHS' retired athletic director.
3. Sandra Wright – Bonuses for Essential Support Personnel. Ms. Wright recommended that the Board approve bonuses for bus drivers and aides, increase their hourly wages, offer \$500 for CDL drivers, \$500 for each year of service to SPS, equip busses with air conditioning, and to provide aides for all busses.
4. Reginald Darden Sr. – Re: Bonuses for Essential Support Personnel. Mr. Darden was unable to stay for the meeting due to an illness however, Ms. Wright again highlighted some of the concerns she mentioned earlier.
5. Dr. Adriane Bradley-Gray – Re: Bonuses for Essential Support Personnel. Dr. Bradley-Gray emphasized that support staff are critical to, are the backbone, and lifeline of the division, and that giving bonuses to the support staff was a way to recognize their hard work and commitment to the division.
6. Ladashia Robinson – Re: Bonuses for Essential Support Personnel. **No Show**

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

➤ Comments and Report by School Board Members:

Board Members shared their concerns and highlights from their participation in various events within the school division and from various meetings. They congratulated the 2025 graduates and looked forward to graduation ceremonies. They thanked teachers, staff and administrators for helping student to achieve success, and recognized Dr. Neighbours for the Best Communities for Music Education award, Anthonette Dickens and her team for the Excellence in Communications award, the Project Lead The Way program, and Dr. Gordon for an award received from Virginia Tech. They encouraged dialogue with City Council Members regarding sinkhole repairs to try to ease the weight of the cost to the school division, suggested that all members stand by their words and to do what's right for all students. They recommended adding staff training to the transgender policy to support the needs of transgender students, and to recognized SROs and security personnel at the July or August board meeting. Board Members wished all an enjoyable Friday and Monday break. Board Chair Howell reminded members to check their emails regarding date preferences for a June retreat.

INFORMATION ITEMS

➤ Financial Report – April 2025

There were not questions or comments regarding this item.

ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further business, Board Chair Howell adjourned the Second School Board Monthly Meeting of May 22, 2025 at 9:05 p.m.

Heather Howell, *School Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*