

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

**Thursday, February 13, 2025 ~ 5:00 P.M.**

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

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**Board Members Present:**

Heather Howell, *Chair*

Sean McGee, *Vice Chair*

Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham

Valerie Fields

Karen Jenkins

Tyron Riddick<sup>1</sup>

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*

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**OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION**

➤ Call to Order:

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

There were no topics listed to be discussed during the work, therefore, 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 Code Section 2.2-3711:

Student Appeal 2024-25-9SA regarding the suspension of a student, 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).

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

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

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<sup>1</sup> Board Member Riddick arrived to the meeting at 6:14 p.m.

## **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 February 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 Jenkins moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the Certification of the Closed Meeting as read by Attorney Waller.

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

Before recessing the meeting, Board Chair Howell recognized VSBA School Board Clerk Appreciation. She and Vice Chair McGee thanked Tarshia Gardner (Clerk) and Keesha Hicks (Deputy Clerk) for their service to the Board and division and presented them with flowers and gifts.

## **MEETING RECESS**

- Board Chair Howell recessed the meeting at 6:13 p.m.

## **RE-OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING**

- Meeting Called to Order:  
Board Chair Howell called to order the regular public business meeting at 7:00 p.m.
- Pledge of Allegiance:  
Board Member Fields 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 SPS.

## **ACTION ON CLOSED MEETING ITEMS**

- Student Appeal Number 2024/25-9SA  
Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion that the decision involving Student Appeal 24/25-9SA be revised and that the student receive at-home education services for the remainder of the third nine-weeks grading period; and at the beginning of the fourth nine-weeks grading period, the Office of Student Services will be allowed to consider allowing the student to receive educational services at Turlington Woods School provided: (1) During the current 3<sup>rd</sup> nine-weeks grading period, the parent would have enrolled and began receiving intensive in-home counseling services, and (2) Upon enrollment at Turlington Woods School, the family and student agreed to receive therapeutic day services.

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.

## **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

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

Board Member Riddick requested to add the Legislative Committee Report to the agenda as Info/Action under “New Business.”

Vice Chair McGee amended his motion and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the amended motion to approve the agenda with adding the Legislative Committee Report for Info/Action to “New Business.”

Vice Chair McGee expressed concern regarding the Legislative Committee Report not being posted with enough time for constituents to review the Bills listed before the vote. Board Member Riddick explained that due to time constraints with the Virginia General Assembly, delayed presentation to the Board was not feasible. Additional conversation was had and Attorney Waller provided clarification to questions asked.

Board Chair Howell restated the motion (Vice Chair McGee amended his motion and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the amended motion to approve the agenda adding Legislative Committee Report for Info/Action to “New Business”) and called for the vote.

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

## **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. Deborah Wahlstrom – Re: Resolution for Board Members to Attend City Council’s Education Committee. Dr. Wahlstrom was pleased that the Board will participate in

the City Council's Education Committee but did not agree with how the policy was written.

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

➤ Approval of the Consent Agenda:

Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda with the removal of Bills and Payroll and the Personnel Report and adding both reports 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**

There was no unfinished business.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

- Ordinance 2024/25-81: An Ordinance Adding Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 2-2.7.01 entitled "Special Committee created to make certain recommendations; duties listed; written report required" of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading and Adoption  
Board Member Slingluff moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 2024/25-81.

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 appointed Board Members Riddick, Dr. Brittingham, and Jenkins to this committee. She also appointed Board Member Jenkins as Chair of the special committee.

- Ordinance 2024/25-82: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 9, Article 11, Section 9-11.6 entitled "General Statement of Policy; Superintendent to develop regulations; notice requirement" of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading and Adoption  
Board Member Slingluff moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 2024/25-82.

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

- Resolution 24/25-15 through Resolution 24/25-18 (Items 3-6 on the agenda)

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Resolutions 24/25-15 through Resolution 24/25-18 collectively.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham requested to consider Resolution 24/25-15 (item 3) separately.

Board Member Riddick amended his motion to approve Resolutions 24/25-15. He also moved to approve, separately, 24/25-16 through Resolution 24/25-18. Board Chair Howell asked Mr. Riddick if it would be ok if the board considered item #3 first (Resolution 24/25-15: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of an Agreement to Provide Policy Services

for Suffolk City Schools Between the Suffolk City School Board and the Virginia School Boards Association), then allow Board Member Riddick to make the motion to consider the other resolutions collectively. Board Member Riddick agreed.

- Resolution 24/25-15: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of an Agreement to Provide Policy Services for Suffolk City Schools Between the Suffolk City School Board and the Virginia School Boards Association

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Resolution 24/25-15.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham did not agree with policy services going through the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) citing that the cost benefit associated with the policy was not in the favor of the Board to continue with the services. Additional conversation ensued between Board Members, Attorney Waller and Dr. Gordon. Attorney Waller clarified that the cost for policy services was \$3,750, not \$12,500. He also highlighted the benefits of having policy services support from the VSBA and the enormous detrimental impact it would have on his department if those services were not continued.

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

- Resolution 24/25-16 through Resolution 24/25-19 (Items 4-7)

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Resolutions 24/25-16 through Resolution 24/25-19 (Items 4-7) collectively.

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

- Discussion of Audit Committee

Board Member Dr. Brittingham recommended that the Board appoint an audit committee, comprised of three board members who would be dedicated to research auditing firms that conduct thorough, deep and exhaustive financial audits and for that committee to report its finding, including three or more recommendations, back to the board for consideration. She added that as a part of industry best practice, all organizations go through a deep dive every five years and she would like to see the same performed with Suffolk Public Schools.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion for the Board to appoint an audit committee, comprised of three board members to research auditing firms that conduct thorough, deep, and exhaustive financial audits.

Board Member Riddick expressed concerns with creating a new committee to do the work that the Finance Committee is already tasked to do. He recommended the Board to decline the motion, and allow the Finance Committee to execute the directive and report back to the Board its findings, suggestions and recommendations. Additional conversation ensued between Board Members, Dr. Gordon and Mrs. Forsman regarding audits and the dept of information that is shared with the Finance Committee.

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

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Riddick seconded the motion for the Board to direct the Finance Committee to research auditing firms that conduct thorough, deep and exhaustive financial audits.

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

➤ Finance Committee Meeting Report (Info Item Only)

Board Member Riddick gave a report using the minutes of the meeting held on February 2, 2025. He stated that the committee received an in-depth report from Mrs. Forsman, Chief Financial Officer, and Dr. Gordon, regarding the operations of finances and an overview of the audit process of the funds (Activities and Day-to-Day). Mr. Riddick also stated that the auditing process is conducted and based on state code. He explained how a review/comparison of random samples from internal and external agencies (i.e., Bank of America, Finance Department) help to ensure compliance with the Virginia Procurement Act and that all reports dealing with finances are balanced. Mr. Riddick also provided an explanation on how the multiple layers of internal and external system controls assist the division in obtaining clean audits with no comments. He shared that the Finance Committee agreed to meet quarterly, or at least three times per year, February, May, and August.

On behalf of the Finance Committee, Board Member Riddick recommended for the School Board to include in a Board Meeting Work Session, the opportunity for Mrs. Forsman and her team to present to the full board information regarding the auditing process and answer questions from board members. Mr. Riddick stated that the presentation during a work session may be beneficial to the public's understanding of SPS' finances.

➤ Legislative Committee Report

Board Member Riddick presented a report of the Legislative Committee using the minutes of the meeting held on February 6, 2025. He stated that the meeting consisted of committee members reading, discussing, and asking questions about each bill being considered in the General Assembly. The Legislative Committee supported the following House and Senate Bills, and recommended that the full board support the same: HB1674, HB1788, HB1805, HB1806 (already passed House & Senate), HB1824, HB1910, HB2103, HB2158, HB2196, HB2226, HB2237, HB2278, HB2341, HB2360, HB2454 (already passed House & Senate), HB2455, HB2460, HB2471, HB2538, HB2590, HB2601, HB2606, HB2637, HB2640, HB2679, HB2686, HB2718, HB2720, HB2765, HB2774, HB2777, SB1104, SB1124, SB1146, SB1244. The following Senate Bills were supported by the Legislative Committee and have already passed Senate: SB1320, SB1377, SB1413, SB1486, SB1491. The Legislative Committee opposed the following Bills, and recommended the same of the full board: HB2195, SB7038, SB1030, SB1032, SB1473 (already passed Senate).

The Legislative Committee recommended that the Board adopt its position supporting and opposing the legislation as listed and that a letter be sent from the Board to Delegate Nadarius E. Clark, Delegate Baxter Ennis, and Senator Emily M. Jordan asking for their support of the School Board's legislative positions.

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion for the Board to carry out the request of the Legislative Committee and send the positions indicated to Representatives Delegate Clark, Delegate Ennis, and Senator Jordan for action.

Vice Chair McGee, Board Members Slingluff, and Dr. Brittingham were thankful for the report. However, they expressed concern with supporting the bills presented without them being reviewed by the full board and constituents. Additional conversation ensued between board members resulting in Board Member Slingluff requesting removal of HB1824, and all bills opposed by the Legislative Committee before voting. She clarified that her request consisted of a total of three separate votes; one for the bills supported, one for HB 1824, and one for the bills opposed. Board Member Mr. Riddick did not agree with Board Member's Slingluff's suggestion however, he agreed to amend his motion.

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve and carry out the Legislative Committee's report for House Bills that have passed, excluding HB 1824, and Senate Bills that have passed.

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.

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion to approve House Bill 1824 which "Requires the Board of Education to permit any student to substitute an African American History course or the advance placement African American Studies course for the Virginia and US History course in order to satisfy the History and Social Studies credit requirement for high school graduation."

Attorney Waller read the following new language proposed in the Bill: "That any student can substitute the African-American history course or the advanced placement African-American studies course for the Virginia and US History course for the purpose of satisfying the history and social studies credit requirements provided that enrollment in such an African-American history course or advanced placement African-American studies course is available to the student."

Board Members Slingluff, Dr. Brittingham, and Vice Chair McGee agreed with having African-American History courses and Advanced Placement African-American courses available to students, however, they felt that those courses should not take the place of Virginia History or US History. Additional conversation ensued between board members as Mr. Riddick and Dr. Gordon clarified that students are and will continue to be taught VA and US History and that the bill was not a mandate that an African-American History course must be taken, but can be used as a substitute course for a VA & US History course, if the student chose the course as a part of their graduation requirement.

Board Chair Howell reminded all of the motion on the floor before calling for the vote, (Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion to approve House Bill 1824: "Requires the Board of Education to permit any student to substitute an African American History course or the advance placement African American Studies course for the Virginia and US History course in order to satisfy the History and Social Studies credit requirement for high school graduation.")

Vice Chair corrected his reference of African History to African-American History and indicated that African-American History is US History, there is no separation.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 3 / Nay: 3 (Slingluff, Brittingham, McGee) / Abstain: 1 (Howell). The motion Tied by vote of 3 to 3 to 1.

Board Member Riddick moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion that the Suffolk City School Board submit to our state delegates and legislators the House and Senate Bills that were opposed via the recommendations of the Legislative Committee.

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

➤ Payment of Bills and Payroll January 2025

Board Member Jenkins moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to approve Payment of Bills and Payroll for January 2025.

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.

➤ Personnel Report

Board Member Slingluff questioned the process for approving new hires. She stated that the process was confusing because a new hire was introduced to the board one month, then listed again on the next month's report as a new hire. She recommended sending the policy regarding approving new hires to the Policy Review Committee for review for clear information of the process. Additional conversation ensued between the Board and Dr. Gordon. He provided clarification regarding the approval process, new hires listed on the Personnel Report, and the mix up with the introduction of a new hire before approval of the report.

Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the Personnel Report for February 2025.

Additional conversation ensued between the Board and Dr. Gordon.

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

## **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.

- Dawn Matthews – Re: Transportation Issues – Ms. Matthews expressed concerns regarding the buses that her children ride at Southwestern Elementary School are continually late.
- Christopher Dove – Re: City Violation of Adequate Facilities law – Mr. Dove expressed concern with the City's disregard of compliance with the Unified Development Ordinance which would ensure that adequate public facilities, specifically for schools, are available concurrently with the impact of proposed developments.
- Janet McKinney – Re: Policies of the Suffolk Public School Board – Mrs. McKinney suggested an in-depth review of the policy manual to ensure manageability of policies and to remove policies that are not in compliance with the Federal government; and violations of citizen's right to speak.



## **REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT**

### ➤ Good News Report:

Dr. Gordon recognized the Board for School Board Appreciation and thanked the staff for signing the large cards displayed in Council Chamber supporting the Board. He also thanked Dr. Whiting and his team for providing a special meal in recognition of the Board.

Anthonette Dickens, Communications and Community Engagement Officer, shared good news happening within the division utilizing PowerPoint presentation.

### ➤ Calendar of Special Events:

Dr. Gordon pointed out information from the calendar of special events. Dr. Gordon also highlighted and thanked his peers for his appointment as the new Chair for Region II for the Virginia Association of School Superintendents which includes bi-weekly meetings with the State Superintendent and other colleagues.

## **BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS**

### ➤ Comments and Reports by School Board Members:

Board Members expressed their appreciation to faculty, staff, and bus drivers for their continued support of students and the Board. They congratulated students for their achievements and commended Board Members for a productive meeting. They highlighted various meetings and club ceremonies they attended, and they encouraged all members to join the PTA. Board Members were thankful for budget presentation and welcomed communication from faculty, staff, and constituents. They also expressed concern/disappointment with conversation relative to a student's choice to substitute an African American course for a VA/US History course. The Board was urged to prioritize inclusivity to ensure that all students have access to the full extent of knowledge that reflects the diversity of history.

Board Member Jenkins thanks everyone for their support during the passing of her family member.

Board Member Slingluff asked the Policy Review Committee to look at the policy regarding hiring staff; and for the Attorney to notate on policies to be considered, whether the policy is dictated by Virginia Code or VSBA recommended. Board Member Riddick suggested showcasing students' talent again at school board meetings.

Board Chair Howell encouraged board members to review the Informational Items listed below and to contact the Superintendent with any questions.

## **INFORMATION ITEMS**

- Accident Report – January 2025
- Attendance Report – January 2025
- Financial Report January 31, 2025
- First Semester Discipline Update
- Financial Report: Capital Projects
- Innovative Center Needs and Research
- Staffing Update

## **ADJOURNMENT**

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further business, Board Chair Howell adjourned the February 13, 2025 School Board Meeting at 10:30 p.m.

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Heather Howell, *School Board Chair*

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Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*