

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, August 10, 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 Jenkins¹
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 5:05 p.m.²

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/or consideration of applications submitted by citizens for appointment to serve on citizen advisory committees that include the CTE (Career & Technical Education) Advisory Committee, Gifted Education Advisory Committee, Local Advisory Committee for Special Education, Parent Advisory Council, Safety Audit Committee, and the School Health Advisory Board.

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

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham 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.

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

² The meeting was delayed to allow a Board Member time to arrive.

CERTIFICATION OF CLOSED MEETING

- Attorney Waller read the following certification:

A Resolution of Certification of the Closed Meeting of August 10, 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 Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Byrum 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.

MEETING RECESS

- Board Chair Riddick recessed the meeting.

RE-OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING

- Meeting Called to Order:
Board Chair Riddick called to order the regular public meeting.
- Pledge of Allegiance:
Vice-Chair Howell led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Recital of SPS Mission:
Board Member Dr. Brittingham read the Mission Statement of Suffolk Public Schools.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- Approval of Agenda:
Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck 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.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS

➤ Citizen Comments on Agenda Items:

The Clerk read the statement regarding decorum for those scheduled to speak. The following speakers shared their comments:

- Chris Dove (Capital Improvement Plan Order of Priority) – Mr. Dove encouraged the Board to ask the city for full funding, schools are overcrowded resulting from actions taken by City Council and this must be fixed.
- Dr. Deborah Wahlstrom (Ordinance 23/24-2 Superintendent’s Evaluation / Payment of Bills and Payroll) – Dr. Wahlstrom does not agree with the evaluation process. Suggested that the Board send Ordinance 23/24-2 back to the Policy Committee for further discussion, she felt that it lacked transparency.

REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

➤ Good News Report:

Anthonette Dickens, Communications and Community Engagement Officer, highlighted the following good news/events that occurred throughout the division:

- Alumni Highlight: Where Are They Now? – Parker Doleman, 2019 NRHS Graduate
- Corporate Community Sponsors: Kroger – Silver-Level Community Sponsor (\$10,000). Kroger representative Donte High was recognized and presented with a gift of appreciation.
- ODU Virginia Modeling, Analysis and Simulation Center STEM Immersive Open House/STEM Century “It Takes a Village to Raise a 21st Century Graduate: Suffolk Public Schools Edition” Book Launch – Amazon #1 Bestseller in Educational Professional Development, Computers & Technology Education, Science & Technology Teaching Materials, Science for Kids
- Suffolk Public Schools Earn 2023 EVERFI Empowered District Seal – Awarded to 10% of school districts across North America that have demonstrated an exemplary commitment to comprehensive education strategies on topics as financial literacy, health, and careers
- PEPSI Scholarship Contest for Seniors – Sophia Martinez, 1st place; Ahmira Palmer, 2nd place; Leighann Dillard, 3rd place; Ava Penn, Runner up

➤ Calendar of Special Events:

Dr. Gordon highlighted the events listed on SPS website for August/September.

CONSENT AGENDA

➤ Approval of the Consent Agenda:

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

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 2 (Dr. Brittingham, Slingluff) / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 5 to 2.

Dr. Gordon introduced Dr. Shabazz (former SPS employee), new Coordinator of English Instruction. Dr. Shabazz was thankful for this new opportunity, her return to SPS, and was grateful for their trust.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- Approval of Ordinance 22/24-11 through Ordinance 22/24-13:

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Byrum seconded the motion consider Ordinance 22/24-11 through Ordinance 22/24-13 collectively.

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

Vice-Chair Howell moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 22/24-11 through Ordinance 22/24-13 as submitted.

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

NEW BUSINESS

- Approval of Budget Adjustment #1 2023-2024 – Buses Reappropriated Funding

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Budget Adjustment #1 2023-2024 – Buses Reappropriated Funding as presented.

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

- Approval of 2024-2025 Budget Development Calendar

Board Member Byrum moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve the 2024-2025 Budget Development Calendar as presented.

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

- Capital Improvement Plan – Order of Priority (Information Item Only)

Dr. Gordon explained the CIP process, and recommended a Joint Meeting with City Council in November. He also recommended that the Board not make any adjustments to their current CIP and the order in which projects are listed. This will avoid potential confusion/distractions.

Board Chair Riddick explained that the Northern Shores Elementary School expansion is not being delayed. The misinformation that was circulating about the project was not true. The project is on the School Board's CIP and the city's plan.

- Recommendations to the Citizen Advisory Committee

The Board Clerk read the list of appointments:

- Gifted Education Advisory Committee – Russ Terrillion, Cenora Hollis, Ryan Karle
- School Health Advisory Board – Regina Tindal, Dagny Aldrich, Mavis Penn
- School Safety Audit Committee – Jonathan Rankin, Jewell Hoffler, J.T. McKinney, Corey Donker, Brandon Randlemon
- Parent Advisory Council – Dr. Elizabeth Green, Joan Jones
- Local Advisory Committee for Special Education – Kirstyn O'Neill, Christy Cole, Sierra Chavis
- Career and Technical Education Advisory Council – Michael Goodman, Rita Deitrick

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the recommendations to the Citizen Advisory Committees with the caveat that individuals appointed are contingently approved pending proper borough verification.

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

- Resolution 23/24-7: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of a Right of Way Agreement Between the Suffolk City School Board and Virginia Electric And Power Company, d/b/a Dominion Energy
Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Resolution 23/24-7, as presented.

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

- Resolution 23/24-8: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of a Right of Way Agreement Between the Suffolk City School Board and Virginia Electric And Power Company, d/b/a Dominion Energy
Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Byrum seconded the motion to approve Resolution 23/24-8, as presented.

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

- Resolution 23/24-9: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of a Stormwater Management Facilities Maintenance Agreement Between the Suffolk City School Board and the City of Suffolk
Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Resolution 23/24-9, as presented.

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

- Resolution 23/24-10: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of a Deed of Easement Between the Suffolk City School Board and the City of Suffolk
Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Resolution 23/24-10, as presented.

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

- Resolution 23/24-11: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of a Memorandum of Understanding Between Suffolk City School Board and Suffolk Police Department
Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Resolution 23/24-11, as presented.

Upon electronic, 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 regarding decorum for those scheduled to speak. The following speakers shared their comments:

1. Chris Dove (Parental Rights and the Role of Public Schools on Social Issues) – Mr. Dove felt that schools have gone too far by actively promoting alternative lifestyles and does not agree with opposite gender restrooms.
2. Jennifer Herget (Informed Consent) – Ms. Herget felt that the COVID vaccine is unsafe and causes injury, and death. She also disagrees with mandated COVID vaccines for athletes.
3. Travis McKinney (Time to Choose) – Mr. McKinney does not agree with the trusted adult program and personal interviews without parental notification.
4. Dr. Deborah Wahlstrom (Policy Committee Meeting, PALS) – Dr. Wahlstrom does not agree with the process of the policy committee and some of the policies. She also, felt that SPS separates students from their parents.
5. Matthew Hintlian (Transgender Policy) – Mr. Hintlian does not agree with the transgender policy. He said the policy is divisive and that parents should be informed.
6. Janet McKinney (Parents Rights) – Mrs. McKinney does not agree with the transgender policy and Dr. Gordon's recommendations. She suggested that the division use the model policy from VDOE.
7. Deborah Kliche (Superintendent Evaluation, FOIA Comment by Chair Riddick, Transgender Policy, Chair Riddick's Editorial in the Suffolk News Herald, Lack of Response by the Transportation Department Regarding a Bus Driver Violating Rules of the Road) – Ms. Kliche felt that Board Chair lacks respect for FOIA laws, disagreed with the Board Chair rejecting Board Members evaluation of the Superintendent. She also did not agree with the transgender policy.
8. Jason Runner (Transgender Policy, Public Hearing on the Transgender Policy) – Mr. Runner does not agree with the transgender policy and recommended that SPS hold a public hearing on the policy.
9. Susan Franz (Student Health) – Ms. Franz does not agree with the COVID vaccine, it should not be mandated by schools, and there should be informed parental consent.
10. Dacia Smith (Model Policy of the Virginia Department of Education and Dr. Gordon's Proposed Recommendations) – Ms. Smith felt that the transgender policy undermined parents' authority and does not support the proposed policy. She felt that Dr. Gordon's recommendations go against constitutional rights.
11. Angela Kilgore (Policy Review Meetings, Transparency and Accountability) – Ms. Kilgore felt that SPS shuts down all voices of its constituents, and that board members are being mistreated. She suggested SPS and parents to work together and asked all to pray with her.

Board Chair Riddick asked Ms. Kilgore to remain on topic.

Ms. Kilgore invited anyone who wanted to, join her in the hallway to pray.

Dialogue ensued between Board Chair Riddick and Ms. Kilgore. He stated that he did not object to prayer but that during the meeting was not the place, per the law. He then asked Mr. Waller for input however, before Mr. Waller could respond, Dacia Smith led the crowd in reciting the Lord's prayer. Mr. Riddick recessed the meeting for five minutes in order to regain order.

Board Chair Riddick called the meeting back to order.

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

- Comments and Reports by School Board Members:
 - Congratulated the 37 summer school graduates.
 - Encouraged parents to stay involved with their child/children school, offered tips for involvement, and to listen to their children.
 - Congratulated Dr. Gordon's staff and teachers for the summer series.
 - Thanked Board Chair Riddick for his comments regarding rights for all people.
 - Thanked all for attending and speaking.
 - Encouraged all to stay focused and always keep the students first.
 - Congratulated the alumni basketball team of JYHS.
 - Enjoyed the National Night out event at Lakeland High School.
 - Highlighted membership in the School Board Member Alliance organization.
 - Corrected misinformation regarding the case in Loudoun County, and silencing constituents' voices.
 - Focused on students, their success, and the successful operations of Suffolk Public Schools.
 - Expressed pride in the STEM book launch event.
 - Encouraged civic leaders to invite Board Members to their meetings/events.
 - Asked constituents to reach out to Board Members for accurate information before spreading misinformation.
 - Excited about preliminary data showing all school being fully accredited.

INFORMATION ITEMS

- Accident Review Report – July 2023
- Capital Projects Financial Statement
- Financial Report July 2023

ADJOURNMENT

- Adjournment of Meeting:

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting.

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

- Board Chair Riddick adjourned the August 10, 2023 School Board Meeting at 9:13 p.m.

Tyron Riddick, *Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*