

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, May 12, 2022 ~ 5:00 P.M.

King's Fork Middle School, 350 King's Fork Road, Suffolk, VA 23434

Board Members Present:

Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck, *Chair*

Phyllis Byrum, *Vice Chair*

Heather Howell

Karen Jenkins

Lorita Mayo

Tyron Riddick

Sherri Story

Administrative Staff Present:

Dr. John B. Gordon III, *Superintendent*

Wendell M. Waller, *School Board Attorney*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*

Keesha L. Hicks, *Deputy Clerk*

• **OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION**

○ **Call to Order:**

Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck called the meeting to order.

○ **Student Discipline Report**

Dr. Brown presented information to the Board and highlighted the following:

- Discipline Data Comparison, Student Discipline Data by School, Discipline Data by Location, Discipline Data School Level, Top Five Incidents, Student Discipline Initiatives.
- According to the data, the month of March had the largest number of referrals. The administrative team will look at the data to proactively create strategies to mitigate disciplinary behaviors that lead to the high number of student referrals.
- Overall, disciplinary referrals are on a downward trend with the largest schools reporting the larger number of referrals.
- Schools are doing a great job curbing behavior (e.g. administrative visibility in the buildings, hallway/special areas monitoring, and initiatives at each school level).
- New initiatives for the remainder of the year, include: Western Tidewater School Based Mental Health Grant (Cognitive Behavior Intervention for Trauma in Schools, Group Sessions focused on managing symptoms using CBI, Individual/Parent/Group Sessions), Tele-mental Health Services Grant (Behavior and Mental Health), Additional Safety Monitors, Hall Monitors for select schools, Dean Support one day per week, VDOE School Based Mental Health Grant (School Psychologist/School Counselor Grant Positions).
- Members agreed that the administrative team is working hard to address student's needs while additional work is still needed.

Board Members asked questions and suggested that student discipline should be a community effort, rewarding students for positive behavior, and to continue educating students, teachers, and parents as this will reinforce positivity in the division.

- **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 item and subject pursuant to Section 2.2-3711 of the Code of Virginia (1950) as amended:

The discussion and/or consideration of the Student Appeal Number 21/22-3 where the discussion in an open meeting would involve the disclosure of information contained in a student's scholastic record.

Which is authorized by Section 2.2-3711 A.2 of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended.

Vice-Chair Byrum moved and Member Howell seconded the motion to approve the motion as read by Attorney Waller.

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

- **RECONVENE IN OPEN MEETING**

Board Chair, Dr. Brooks-Buck reconvened the public meeting.

- **CERTIFICATION OF CLOSED MEETING**

Attorney Waller read the following motion:

A RESOLUTION OF CERTIFICATION OF THE CLOSED MEETING OF MAY
12, 2022 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.

Vice-Chair Byrum moved and Member Riddick seconded the motion to approve the motion as read by Attorney Waller.

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

Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck recessed the meeting for a 20 minutes.

- **RECONVENE IN OPEN MEETING**

Board Chair, Dr. Brooks-Buck reconvened the public meeting and thanked all for their patience regarding the delay in the meeting.

- **PRESENTATION OF KING’S FORK HIGH SCHOOL HONOR GRADUATES**

Mr. Derrick Bryant, Principal and Ms. Cassandra Requizo, Guidance Director, presented each honor graduate and stated their plans for the future.

Board Members expressed their pride in the 149 honor graduates and their accomplishments and the more than \$5.5 million in scholarship money. Members also congratulated teachers, parents, and the family members who played a role in the student’s success. The students were reminded that they can achieve everything they are determined to do. Working together with their support teams and staying focused and steadfast, never letting anything get in the way will lead to success. All Members look forward to hearing the great things these students will accomplish in the future.

- **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:**

Member Story led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

- **ITEMS REQUESTED FROM BOARD MEMBERS TO BE ADDED TO THE AGENDA FOR JUNE 9, 2022 SCHOOL BOARD MEETING:**

- Member Riddick asked that three items he requested be added to the agenda for June’s meeting be removed. (e.g. Report on the Training of Administrators on Police MOU, Information on the implementation of policy 7-16.1:1., and Improve community stakeholder KFMS...All Middle Schools)
- Member Story moved and Member Howell seconded the motion to have a report on the Adult Education Program at CCAP, last year’s completed report (2021) and the report for 2022 upon its completion, and a report given annually to the Board thereafter.

Members asked if this report is already given and for clarification as to the request. Member Story clarified that according to her understanding of the regulations, a separate Adult Education report was to be given to the Board each year. Attorney Waller provided further clarification as to the policy which requires an annual report on Adult Education be given to the Board. However, he indicated that the policy refers to individuals over the age of 18 who are not enrolled as SPS students but may be receiving some educational services at CCAP. According to the policy, the annual report would cover July 1 through July 30th of each year. Therefore, the request for the report for 2021 is in compliance with policy and should be available.

Additional conversation ensued. Member Story clarified that she was asking for a “report of the 2021 Adult Education Program as required by the regulation in the State Code for Suffolk Public Schools.”

Attorney Waller clarified that the report given by Mr. Skinner does not reference adults over the age of 18 enrolled in programs at CCAP. His report pertains to students enrolled in SPS who are also taking classes at CCAP.

Upon a roll-call vote, the vote was: Aye: 3 (Story, Howell, Riddick) / Nay: 4 (Jenkins, Mayo, Byrum, Brooks-Buck) / Abstain: 0. The motion Failed. 4 to 3.

- Member Story asked for a report on the Saturday Academy Program held on April 2, 2022. She explained that this information could possibly be used to assist the Board while working on the Strategic Plan Smart Goals, and to ascertain the program's effectiveness.

Member Story moved and Member Howell seconded the motion to have a report on the Saturday Academy Program.

Members asked questions and suggested that if the program's effectiveness was to be reviewed, the report should cover the entire program and not just a particular date. However, Dr. Gordon indicated that a report on the program will be presented to the Board in July along with the end of the year reports on all SPS programs. He added that information about the program will be included in a visioning presentation which will be given to the Board in June.

Member Story withdrew her motion and her request for the report based on Dr. Gordon's comments.

- Member Story withdrew her request for a Report/Update on the Critical Shortage of Teachers and Administrators by Subject as that information was shared with Members during the meeting.
- Member Story moved and Member Howell seconded the motion to have a report given in July (possibly included with Dr. Gordon's report), the number of classrooms that had long-term substitutes the past year.

Member Story stated that her request could help with the development of Strategic Plan/Smart Goals to possibly reduce the number of substitutes needed in classrooms.

Members asked questions for clarification as to the timeframe of the report being requested. Dr. Gordon asked for clarification as to how the number of classrooms with long-term substitutes will be used as an indicator for the Strategic Plan. Member Story stated that a Smart Goal could be to improve staffing in the classrooms with certified teachers. This goal could be stated as having a percentage less each year of long-term substitutes.

Member Story restated her motion and the second for a report of the number of classrooms this year with long-term subs by June 9th and called for the question. However, there was an additional question regarding the motion. The Clerk read the following motion for clarification, "To have a report at the beginning of July of the long-term substitutes; for the number of classrooms with long-term substitutes for the past school year." Member Story agreed to the motion read. However, the motion was edited to add the date of July 14th for the report to be given as there is no Board meeting at the beginning of July. Member Story agreed.

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

- Member Story withdrew her request for a Closed Meeting to Discuss the Leadership Team at Lakeland High School.

- **ACTION ON CLOSED MEETING ITEM (Student Appeal #21/22-3)**

Vice-Chair Byrum moved and Member Mayo seconded the motion to accept the recommendation of the Student Service Committee in Student Appeal 21/22-3.

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

- **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Vice-Chair Byrum moved and Member Mayo seconded the motion to approve the agenda as presented.

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

- **PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS**

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

- Linda Johnson – Re: Book List for Middle School Courses – Mrs. Johnson did not agree with the Board voting on or removing books from a curriculum. She felt that this action puts the Board on a slippery slope.
- Dr. Deborah Wahlstrom – Re: Discipline, Policy, Purchase Cards – **No Show**
- Deborah Kliche’ – Re: Teacher Hires for 2022-2023 – Mrs. Kliche’ suggested an investigation on the number of teachers that are leaving SPS and (a follow-up plan) and steps taken to replace qualified, licensed teachers.

- **REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT**

Good News Report: Ms. Ward, Community Engagement Officer, highlighted the following good news/events that happened throughout the division;

- SPS Alumni: Maurice Fofana, NRHS
- Dr. Joleen Neighbours – Honors Society Induction
- UVA Cohort Members Receive Nominations and Scholarship
- 2022 School Lunch Hero – Angela Knight - NSES
- NRHS Students Accepted into the PLTW BLAST Program
- 2022 VSBA Tidewater Spring Regional Forum Art Contest
- Bus Driver Recognized for Doing Math Problems During Routes – Joy Dorr
- SPS Springs Into the Zoo
- Growing Up Suffolk
- Grants and Awards
- April Teacher Spotlight
- Appreciation Week

Dr. Gordon presented certificates and the pictures to each of the winners/participants of the VSBA Art Contest. He also recognized Ms. Knight who expressed her gratitude for being able to be a positive part in the lives of the students she serves.

Calendar of Special Events: Dr. Gordon spotlighted the events on the calendar.

- **CONSENT AGENDA**

- **Approval of the Consent Agenda**

As Vice-Chair Byrum was stating her motion, Member Story interjected to request the removal of the following items from the Consent Agenda and be added to New Business:

Item #4 – Budget Transfer #1 Fiscal 2021-2022

Item #7 – School Board Minutes: April 7, 2022 – Monthly School Board Meeting

Vice Chair Byrum moved and Member Riddick seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda with items 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 (Mayo, Howell, Jenkins, Riddick, Story) / Nay: 2 (Byrum, Brooks-Buck) / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed. 5 to 2

At this time, Dr. Gordon introduced the new administrators for the 2022-2023 school year.

- Dr. Shalise Taylor – New Principal at FBES
- Lori White – New Principal at Lakeland High School
- Dr. Andrea Wilkins – New Principal at NSES
- Dr. Stenette Byrd – New Chief of Schools.

They all thanked the Board for the opportunity and for entrusting them with SPS' most prized possessions, and thanked their families for their support.

- **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

2022-2023 Book List for Middle School Courses

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Mayo seconded the motion to approve the 2022-2023 Book List for Middle School Courses.

Member Riddick clarified that he did not ban any books at the April 7th meeting, he indicated that he wanted the opportunity to read the book himself before voting.

Member Story appreciated the book list and indicated she reviewed them. She requested to see the new middle school History course and the books. Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck indicated that unless you are going to read all of the books for all of the courses, it is time that we allow the staff who were hired and are highly qualified to do their jobs to review the books and stop this discussion. She highlighted the fact that the Board was in error at a previous meeting when the Board refused to approve books recommended by staff and other textbook committee members. She felt that moving in this direction is a slippery slope and questioned if the Board is qualified to review the books.

Member Story reiterated her request for a list of books to be used in the History class before approving them and the list of books for the curriculum. Member Riddick restated his position of not trying to ban books but he is obligated to know the content of the books and give constituents the opportunity to communicate their concern. How the literature can be used versus a book being a best seller, the heritage of the author/main character, but to give details about the literature.

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

- **NEW BUSINESS**

- **Set the Date of May 25, 2022, 6 p.m. for a Special School Board Meeting at Col. Fred Cherry Middle School for the Adoption of the 2022-2023 Approved Budget (Pending State Budget Approval)**

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Howell seconded the motion to Set the Date of May 25, 2022, 6 p.m. for a Special School Board Meeting at Col. Fred Cherry for the Adoption of the 2022-2023 Approved Budget (Pending State Budget Approval)

Dr. Gordon indicated that if the State has not approved its budget by May 23rd, he will contact the Board Chair and recommend that the Special School Board Meeting be cancelled. Member Story reminded everyone that a work session for the Strategic Plan should be a part of the special meeting which was according to the minutes from April's meeting. Vice-Chair Byrum amended her motion.

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Story seconded the motion to Set the Date of May 25, 2022, 6 p.m. for a Special School Board Meeting at Col. Fred Cherry for the Adoption of the 2022-2023 Approved Budget (Pending State Budget Approval) and Strategic Plan Work.

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

- **Use of Facility – The Mount**

Vice Chair Byrum moved and Member Mayo seconded the motion to approve the Use of Facility for The Mount and Reverend Wilkins at KFHS.

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

- **VDOE Authorization of Signature in the Absence of the Division Superintendent Extension**

Vice Chair Byrum moved and Member Mayo seconded the motion authorizing Dr. Okema S. Branch, Chief Academic Officer, and Dr. Rodney J. Brown, Chief of Administrative Services, to sign documents submitted to VDOE in the absence of the Division Superintendent.

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

- **VSBA Excellence in Workforce Readiness Award**

Vice-Chair Byrum moved, and Member Riddick seconded the motion to accept the VSBA Excellence in Workforce Readiness Award along with the program with AMADAS.

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

- **Resolution Number 21/22-22: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Approving an Award to GC Commercial Inc. for Limited Interior Corridor Renovation at Lakeland High School for the Performing Arts Center**

Vice-Chair Byrum moved and Member Riddick seconded the motion to approve Resolution 21/22-22 as presented.

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

- **Ordinances 21/22-39 through 21/22-43**

These ordinances were first reading only and did not require a vote. Board Members had no questions regarding the ordinances.

- **Budget Transfer #1 Fiscal 2021-2022**

Member Story questioned why money was being moved from instruction to fix sinkholes and inquired how and why the holes occurred with the newer buildings. Member Howell also did not agree with money being moved from instruction to cover sinkholes. However, Dr. Gordon and Mrs. Forsman explained the causes of the sinkholes, their locations, and the risks in waiting for money to fix the issues which would cause an increase in the amount needed for the repairs. Dr. Gordon also stated that funds from the operating budget could be transferred for school operations and sink holes pose a severe safety hazard. Member Story stated that whoever is responsible for not using the proper materials, not performing the proper inspections or whatever caused these sinkholes to appear, must be held accountable. She also asked if federal funds received could be used to make the necessary repairs. Mrs. Forsman reminded all of the restricted uses of the federal funds and CARES Act monies.

Vice-Chair Byrum moved and Member Riddick seconded the motion to approve the Budget Transfer #1 Fiscal 2021-2022.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 1 (Story). The motion Passed. 7 to 0 to 1

- **School Board Minutes: April 7, 2022**

Vice-Chair Byrum moved and Member Mayo seconded the motion to School Board Minutes: April 7, 2022 as submitted.

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

- **PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON NON-AGENDA TOPICS**

- The Clerk read the statement regarding decorum for those scheduled to speak. The speakers shared the following:
 - Matthew Carr – Re: Athletics Eligibility at All Suffolk Public High Schools – **No Show**

- **BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS**

Members shared the following:

- Thanked Dr. Gordon and his team for a job well done, constituents for entrusting them to serve, faculty and staff for all they do to ensure the success of Suffolk Public Schools, and the honor graduates for their accomplishments as they were impressed with the \$5.5 million awarded in scholarships. Honor graduates were encouraged to continue to soar and reach for their dreams.
- Thanked the students who participated in the VSBA Regional Art Contest and recognized the great talent of these art students. They also recognized the jazz band from LHS who provided music for the contest.
- Congratulated the Rookie and Teachers of the Year and welcomed all the new administrators who will begin their new role with SPS for the 2022-2023 school year.
- One Member questioned the relevance of the Legislative Committee and was disappointed with the lack of participation of the Student Health Advisory Board and the Safety Audit Committee, and looked forward to the Strategic Planning Session.
- Appreciated the open, honest, and transparent dialog held during the meeting and indicated that those conversations are important for all constituents to gain additional information which will aid in understanding the thought process behind a member's vote.
- Thanked Dr. Gordon and the SPS family for an amazing time at the Norfolk Zoo and for providing this opportunity for all faculty, staff and their families.
- Looking forward to graduation.
- A Legislative Committee Member provided history of the Legislative Committee, its functions during Covid, dates and times when reports were given to the Board, and how the committee will continue fulfilling its responsibilities.
- Stated that Suffolk Public Schools may not have all that they want but they do the best with what they have.
- Stated that SPS is the best and anyone who says anything different is not looking at the data.

- **INFORMATION ITEMS**

- Financial Report March 2022
- Financial Report April 2022
- Financial Report: Capital Projects
- Accident Report April 2022

- **ADJOURNMENT**

- There being no further business or questions Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Vice Chair Byrum moved and Member Howell seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 2 (Riddick, Story). The motion Passed. 5 to 0.

Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck adjourned the May 12, 2022 School Board Meeting at 10:54 p.m.

Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck, *Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*