

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

**Tuesday, January 7, 2025 ~ 6:00 P.M.**

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

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**Board Members Present:**

Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham  
Valerie Fields  
Heather Howell  
Karen Jenkins  
Sean McGee  
Tyron Riddick  
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**

➤ Call to Order:

Dr. John Gordon III, Division Superintendent, called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

➤ Pledge of Allegiance:

Board Member Jenkins led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

➤ Oath of Office:

Clerk of the Circuit Court, W. Randolph Carter Jr., performed the Oath of Office for new members Valerie Fields, Sean McGee, and re-elected member Heather Howell. Dr. Gordon pinned each member with a School Board Member pin.

Moment of Silence:

A moment of silence was observed by all in attendance.

➤ The Mission of Suffolk Public Schools:

Board Member Riddick read the mission of SPS.

Dr. Gordon highlighted "Informational Items" that will be discussed at a future school board meeting.

**ELECTION OF CHAIR, VICE-CHAIR, CLERK AND DEPUTY CLERK**

➤ Nomination and Vote for Chairperson

Board Member Jenkins nominated Board Member Howell and Board Member Riddick nominated Board Member McGee for the position of School Board Chairperson.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was:

- Heather Howell received five (5) votes (Fields, Howell, Jenkins, McGee, Slingluff)
- Sean McGee received two (2) votes (Dr. Brittingham, Riddick)

Board Member Heather Howell was elected as School Board Chair by a vote of 5 to 2.

Dr. Gordon congratulated and passed the gavel to Board Chair Howell to preside over the rest of the meeting.

➤ Nomination and Vote for Vice-Chair

Board Member Dr. Brittingham nominated Board Member McGee and Board Member Fields nominated Board Member Jenkins for the position of School Board Vice-Chair.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was:

- Sean McGee received four (4) votes (Dr. Brittingham, McGee, Riddick, Slingluff)
- Karen Jenkins received three (3) votes (Fields, Howell, Jenkins)

Board Member Sean McGee was elected as School Board Chair by a vote of 4 to 3.

➤ Appointment of Clerk and Deputy Clerk through December 31, 2025

Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to appoint Tarshia Gardner as Board Clerk and Keesha Johnson as Deputy Clerk through December 31, 2025.

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

## **SETTING OF SALARIES**

➤ Setting of School Board Members and Chair Salaries

Board Chair Howell explained the current salaries for board members, \$10,000 with an additional \$1,400 for Chair and Vice Chair.

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to increase board members' salaries by \$5,000 to support members with travel and fuel expenses while performing board responsibilities, and to keep the stipend for the Board Chair and Vice-Chair position at \$1,400.

School Board Attorney Waller provided clarification regarding salary increases indicating that any change in the salary of school board members will not take effect until July 1<sup>st</sup> of the next election cycle. Therefore, the increase would not take effect until July 1<sup>st</sup> 2026.

Dr. Gordon clarified that the \$1,400 stipend is for the Chair only but the motion was for the Chair and Vice Chair.

Board Member Riddick amended his motion. He moved to increase board members' salaries by \$5,000 and to provide a stipend of \$1,400 to the Board Chair only. The motion was seconded by Board Member Jenkins.

Additional conversation ensued as the Clerk clarified that the motion was to increase the salaries of school board members by \$5,000, bringing the total salary to \$15,000 per school board member and the \$1,400 stipend for the Board Chair.

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

## **SETTING OF SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS**

### ➤ Setting of School Board Meeting for the 2025 Calendar Year

Board Chair Howell discussed keeping the tradition of holding meetings on the second Thursday of each month for the business meeting and work session.

Board Member Riddick recommended having more than one meeting per month due to the length of current meetings held. He suggested holding a meeting designated for board business and other items, and a second meeting to address other items. He added that if the second meeting was not needed, the board had the option to cancel the meeting. Discussion ensued between members, Attorney Waller, and Dr. Gordon regarding the recommendation, dates and times of two monthly meetings.

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to adopt the concept of meeting twice per month beginning March 2025, and at the next school board meeting the board will discuss and identify the date, time and location of the additional meeting that is not already scheduled. Additional conversation ensued.

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 recessed the meeting at 6:34 p.m. to collaborate with Vice Chair McGee to appoint board members to standing committees and foundation boards. The meeting was called to order by Board Chair Howell at 6:58 p.m.

## **COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS OF SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS**

### ➤ Approval of Board Member Appointments

The Clerk read the following recommendations:

#### **Standing Committees:**

Policy Review Committee

Members – Kimberly Slingluff, Karen Jenkins, Sean McGee

Alternate – Heather Howell

Finance Committee

Members – Heather Howell, Dr. Dawn Brittingham, Tyron Riddick

Alternate – Sean McGee

Legislative Committee

Members – Valerie Fields, Tyron Riddick, Kimberly Slingluff

Alternate – Karen Jenkins

#### **Foundation Boards:**

ACCESS College Foundation Board of Directors

Member – Kimberly Slingluff

Alternate – Heather Howell

Governor’s School for the Arts

Member – Karen Jenkins

Alternate – Valerie Fields

SECEP Board

Member – Dr. Dawn Brittingham

Alternate – Sean McGee

Suffolk Education Foundation  
Member – Sean McGee  
Alternate – Tyron Riddick  
Virginia School Board Association (VSBA)  
Members – Heather Howell, Sean McGee  
WHRO/HRETA Educational Advisory Board  
Member – Heather Howell  
Alternate – Kimberly Slingluff

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the recommendations for all of the committees.

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

### **SUPERINTENDENT’S DESIGNEES**

- Superintendent’s Designees to Execute Documents/Appear at Meeting in the Absence of the Superintendent

Board Member Jenkins moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Dr. Okema Branch, Chief Academic Officer and Dr. Rodney Brown, Chief of Administrative Services, to serve at the Superintendent’s Designee as presented.

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 encouraged all members to review the Informational Items on the agenda that were mentioned by Dr. Gordon earlier in the meeting. She also encouraged members to get in the habit of reading the New Business “information items only” each month because this will facilitate questions/discussions a full month in advance of the vote.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

- Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further discussion or questions, Board Chair Howell adjourned the January 7, 2025 School Board Organizational Meeting at 7:02 p.m.

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Heather Howell, *School Board Chair*

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Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*