

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, October 10, 2024 ~ 5:00 P.M.

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

Board Members Present:

Karen Jenkins, *Chair*
Heather Howell, *Vice Chair*
Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham
Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck
Phyllis Byrum
Tyron Riddick
Kimberly Slingluff

Administrative Staff Present:

Dr. John B. Gordon III, *Superintendent*
Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*
Keesha Johnson, *Deputy Clerk*

Administrative Staff Absent:

Wendell M. Waller, Esq., *School Board Attorney*

OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION

➤ Call to Order:

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

➤ SPS Facilities Update by RRMM

Dr. Gordon, Division Superintendent, introduced Mr. Jeff Harris, Partner with RRMM who shared information regarding remodeling versus building new buildings in reference to Driver Elementary School (DES). He highlighted the following issues with remodeling: higher costs, updating building codes, unforeseen issues like Asbestos, lead paint, foundation settling, etc., and functionality (e.g., changing a school to function as office space). Mr. Harris stated that the issues cited would increase the cost for renovations. He also shared that any old building can be renovated, but the question is whether or not the money is being well spent due to costly renovations. The Board discussed repurposing possibilities for the DES that included the following: (1) use of building for SECEP; (2) use of building for Pre-K; (3) costs associated with demolishing the building but retaining the land and allowing sports teams to pay for use of the land for practices/games; (4) whether spaces in the building can be salvaged; (5) partial vs. full renovation and the timeline for renovations/demolition; and (6) returning the building back to the City of Suffolk. It was suggested for the Board to consider all options and information available, and to think long and hard about the matter before voting to give the property back to the city. It was also brought out that when a building is no longer being used for educational purposes, the city must give approval for alternative building usage, due to codes and zoning.

MOTION TO GO INTO A CLOSED MEETING

➤ Vice Chair Howell 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 Freedom of Information Act found at Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711:

1. Record Review 24/25-5 RR regarding the assignment of a student to Turlington Woods School, where the discussion in an open meeting would involve disclosure of information contained in the student's scholastic record.
2. Record Review 24/25-6 RR regarding the assignment of a student to Turlington Woods School, 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 Byrum moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to go into the closed meeting as read by Vice Chair Howell.

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

Board Chair Jenkins reminded Boards Members to turn in all non-SPS issued electronic devices to the Deputy Clerk, Keesha Johnson, as they are not permitted in the closed meeting area.

RECONVENE IN PUBLIC MEETING

- Meeting Called to Order:
Board Chair Jenkins reconvened the public meeting.

CERTIFICATION OF CLOSED MEETING

- Vice Chair Howell read the following certification:
A Resolution of Certification of the First Closed Meeting of October 10, 2024, 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 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 Byrum moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve the Certification of the Closed Meeting as read by Vice Chair Howell.

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

MEETING RECESS

- Board Chair Jenkins recessed the meeting at 6:26 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENTS REGARDING EXECUTIVE ORDER 33: CELL PHONE-FREE EDUCATION

- Board Chair Jenkins opened the meeting at 7:00 PM and invited speakers to offer public comments regarding Executive Order 33: Cell Phone-Free Education. Speakers were asked to fill out the form and turn it in to the Clerk to be recognized to address the Board regarding Executive Order 33.
- There being no speakers wishing to address the Board, Board Chair Jenkins adjourned the public comments meeting regarding Executive Order 33: Cell Phone-Free Education, at 7:02 p.m.

RE-OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING

- Meeting Called to Order:
Board Chair Jenkins called to order the regular public meeting at 7:02 p.m.
- Pledge of Allegiance:
Board Member Slingluff 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 Record Review Number 24/25-5 RR and Number 24/25-6 RR
Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Riddick seconded the motion to collectively uphold the decision of the committee for Student Record Review #24/25-5 RR and #24/25-6 RR.

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

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- Approval of Agenda:
Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck 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.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS

➤ Citizen Comments on Agenda Items:

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

Dr. Deborah Wahlstrom (Purchase Cards, Cell Phones). Dr. Wahlstrom highlighted differences regarding cell phone policy in the current handbooks for schools throughout the division.

REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

➤ Good News Report:

Anthonette Dickens, Communications and Community Engagement Officer, shared information from the Good News Report.

Dr. Gordon highlighted the Tidewater Educational Consortium Grant. The \$8.9 million grant will address teacher shortages and leadership capacity within the rural and high-need school districts of Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Suffolk. Isle of Wight Public Schools will be the fiscal agent of the grant while Portsmouth and Suffolk will receive appropriations of approximately \$3 million each. The program grant was awarded to develop teacher and leadership capacity through partnerships with Norfolk State University and the University of Maryland College Park. The grant objectives are to improve teaching and leadership quality, address teacher shortages, provide professional development/mentorship and coaching, enhance leadership and instructional skills, and to promote equity. Dr. Gordon stated that SPS will also focus on expanding the mentoring and coaching program, tuition reimbursement, and potentially develop a doctoral candidate program through the University of Maryland College Park with a significantly reduced rate for tuition. He thanked Dr. Okema Branch, Chief Academic Officer, for being an integral part of this grant being awarded to Suffolk Public Schools.

➤ Calendar of Special Events:

Dr. Gordon highlighted information from the calendar of special events. He thanked employees at the School Administrative Offices who participated in the “Pink Out Day” walk and all who wore pink in support of breast cancer awareness.

CONSENT AGENDA

➤ Approval of the Consent Agenda:

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

Board Member Dr. Brittingham requested removing the Bills and Payroll, and adding it to New Business. Board Member Slingluff requested removing the minutes of September 12, 2024 for a minor change.

Dr. Brooks-Buck amended her motion and Board Member Byrum seconded the motion to accept the Consent Agenda with the removal of Item 2 (Bills and Payroll) and Item 19 (School Board Monthly Meeting Minutes (September 12, 2024)) from the Consent Agenda and adding these items to New Business for corrections/questions.

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

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- School Board Self-Evaluation Committee Report (Information Item Only)
Board Member Riddick indicated that additional information was needed before the committee's report could be given. They are still waiting to receive feedback from various school divisions to aide the committee with compiling their report. The School Board Self-Evaluation Committee will meet again on Tuesday, October 22, 2024, 5 p.m. at Elephant's Fork Elementary School (Conference Room).
- Citizen Advisory Committees Board Appointees and Membership 2024-2025
Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Howell seconded the motion to approve appointments to Citizen Advisory Committees as presented.

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

- Ordinance 2024/25-25: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 4, Article 6, Section 4-6.1 entitled "Statement of Policy; contractual authority of school superintendent; contracts not requiring sealed bids or competitive negotiation" of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - Second Reading.

Board Member Byrum moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 2024/25-25 as presented.

Discussion ensued between board members as several members did not agree with the policy. It was suggested that the ordinance be returned to the Policy Review Committee to include additional language. Board Member Slingluff stated that she did not receive a report requested during last month's meeting therefore, she is not in agreement with the ordinance. Additional conversation ensued between board members. Dr. Gordon and his staff provided clarification relative to questions received from board members.

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

Board Member Slingluff requested a Point of Privilege and expressed her disapproval of the vote, lack of communication/information being provided to the Board, and her disdain for how the Board chose to operate regarding this agenda item.

NEW BUSINESS

- VDOE Authorization of Signature in Absence of Division Superintendent (through June 30, 2025)
Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve the VDOE Authorization of Signature in the Absence of Division Superintendent (through June 30, 2025), as presented.

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

- Resolution 2024/25-9: A Resolution For The City of Suffolk, Virginia Authorizing The Granting Of An Easement To The City Of Norfolk, Virginia For The Relocation Of Water Mains On The Property of Nansemond Parkway Elementary School
Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Resolution 2024/25-9, as submitted.

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

- Ordinance 2024/25-48: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 5, Article 5, Section 5-5.2 entitled “Adequate nutrition program required; free breakfast and lunch programs; after school meal program; donations accepted to offset any meal debt; amendments to policy” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading and Adoption
Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 2024/25-48, as submitted.

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

- Ordinance 2024/25-49: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 8, Article 18, Section 8-18.5 entitled “Parent notification of dual enrollment courses, etc.” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading and Adoption
Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Byrum seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 2024/25-49, as submitted.

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

- Ordinance 2024/25-50: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 9, Article 15, Section 9-15.4 entitled “Reasonable suspicion requirements; same sex requirement” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading and Adoption
Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 2024/25-50, as submitted.

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

- Payment of Bills and Payroll (August 2024)
Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Payment of Bills and Payroll (August 2024).

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.

- Payment of Bills and Payroll September 2024
Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Payment of Bills and Payroll September 2024.

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: September 12, 2024 – School Board Monthly Meeting
Board Member Slingluff requested an amendment to the minutes. She requested that the last sentence in the first paragraph on page 6 to read: "...denoting any purchases that were delayed due to this policy." Instead of "...denoting any purchases that were delayed during its current year."

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to amend the minutes of September 12, 2024, page 6, to read as suggested.

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

- Ordinances 2024/25-51 through 2024/25-61, Ordinances 2024/25-63 through 2024/25-66, and Ordinances 2024/25-68 through 2024/25-75 were first read items only. No vote was required at this time.

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.

1. Travis McKinney (Address Remarks Made from Previous Board Meeting) Mr. McKinney expressed concern with the Superintendent's remarks regarding the School Board Candidates Forum. He felt that the Superintendent's remarks targeted candidates who are seeking transparency from the division and was more about power. He also suggested looking into the allegations on social media regarding Lakeland High Schools' athletics.
2. Angela Kilgore (Policy Revisions, Athletic Department Audit, Request for New School Board Attorney). **No Show.**
3. Jamar Carter (School Zone Speed Limits). **No Show**
4. Dr. Nathan Moore (Renaming John Yeates Middle School). **No Show**

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

- Comments and Reports by School Board Members:

Board Members congratulated the King's Fork High and Nansemond River High Schools marching bands and the Fine and Performing Arts students for their stellar, award-winning performances at various events. Board Members were thankful for presentations, and information received during the meeting, for speakers who shared their thoughts with the Board, and for the Board and the productive dialogue that was had. They also congratulated Mr. Derrick Bryant (Principal/KFHS) and Ms. Megan Farabaugh (Teacher/HES) for being named "Best Principal" and "Best Teacher" by the Suffolk News-Herald 2024 Locals Choice Awards and Dr. Katelyn Leitner on her new position as the Director of Curriculum and Instruction.

Board Members thanked constituents for their support and donations of school supplies that were shared with students in the division. They also thanked City Council Members for recognizing Dr. Brooks-Buck and Mrs. Byrum at the Joint Meeting and for their continued support and relationship with Suffolk Public Schools. Additionally, they thanked Dr. Gordon and his team, for all of their hard work and for helping Board Members to navigate through their roles successfully. They also thanked and appreciated the visiting students from Virginia

State University’s College of Education as these students could potentially return to SPS as teachers in our division.

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck corrected misinformation regarding programs at the College and Career Academy and certifications awarded to students. Board Members Riddick and Slingluff requested that Ordinance 2024/25-25 go back to the Policy Review Committee — with advice from Attorney Waller — to determine whether language could be inserted in policy that would give a preference to local businesses who are interested in providing goods and services for Suffolk Public Schools because this will directly stimulate the local economy, and to address any difference in policy wording when compared with the VA Code. Vice Chair Howell apologized to Board Member Slingluff and explained her earlier conversation and vote regarding Ordinance 2024/25-25. She also suggested that Dr. Gordon remain in communication with the Board regarding information requested at the previous meeting relative to this Ordinance.

Board Members wished all a wonderful, restful, safe, and healthy evening and weekend.

INFORMATION ITEMS

- Accident Report – September 2024
- Attendance Report – September 30, 2024
- Draft Cell Phone Policy
- Financial Report Capital Projects
- Financial Report September 2024
- Region II Recovery School
- 2023-2024 WHRO Annual Impact Statement
- SPS Condolences (Jasper Waters, Andrea Saunders)

ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further business, Board Chair Jenkins adjourned the October 10, 2024 School Board Meeting at 8:50 p.m.

Karen Jenkins, *School Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*