

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, August 11, 2022 ~ 5:00 P.M.

Col. Fred Cherry Middle School, 7401 Burbage Drive, Suffolk, VA 23435

Board Members Present:

Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck, *Chair*

Heather Howell

Karen Jenkins

Lorita Mayo

Tyron Riddick¹

Sherri Story

Board Members Absent:

Phyllis Byrum, *Vice Chair*

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:

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

Instructional Overview Presentation:

- Dr. Branch and Dr. Byrd provided an Instructional Overview to explain how SPS will begin the 2022-2023 school year. The following information was highlighted:
 - SPS Online: 184 (elementary=66, middle=70, high=57) students enrolled K-12, taught by VA endorsed Virtual VA staff, 90-95% of courses offered will have synchronous instruction (live instruction for students), program begins on August 24th.
 - Addressing Teacher Shortages: Increased pay/stipends, compensation for extra duties, in-classroom instructional support at schools with high numbers of long-term substitutes, additional support for students, and a strategic approach to staffing.

Board Members asked questions relating to the Instructional Overview and shared their concerns, and/or comments.

SPS Strategic Plan (Climate and Culture / Human and Fiscal Resources)

- Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck directed the Board to move to the work tables and explained that the Board was to work together to create one (1) SMART Goal for Climate and Culture and one (1) SMART Goal for Human and Fiscal Resources.
- Dr. Branch, Mrs. Forsman, Mrs. Avery, and Dr. Byrd assisted Board Members as needed.
- Board Member Riddick arrived during this time and joined the work session.

Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck thanked the Board Members for their participation in the work session and the staff for their assistance with the project.

¹ Board Member Riddick arrived at 5:49 p.m.

- **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 CTE, Gifted Education, the Local Advisory Committee for special Education, Parent Advisory Council, Safety Audit, and School Health Advisory Board.

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

Member Jenkins moved and Member Mayo seconded the motion to approve the motion as read by Attorney Waller.

During the vote, Member Story attempted to explain her “No” vote. Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck indicated that it was not the appropriate time as the vote had already begun. Both Members deferred to Attorney Waller for clarification. Mr. Waller explained that once the vote is called for, there is no more discussion. The time to explain a member’s unreadiness to vote or to explain his/her “No” vote is before the actual vote. Member Story stated that there was no call for a discussion. The Clerk continued with the roll-call vote.

Upon a roll-call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 1 (Story) / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 1 (Byrum). The motion Passed. 5 to 1

Members turned in their electronic devices and moved into closed session.

- **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 August 11, 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.

Member Mayo moved and Member Jenkins seconded the motion to accept the motion as read by Attorney Waller.

Before the vote, Board Member Story indicated the following reasons for her “No” vote: (1) closed meetings are not required by FOIA; (2) holding a closed meeting to discuss citizens to serve on advisory committees is not in the spirit of openness; (3) this discussion should have been part of an open meeting.

Upon a roll-call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 1 (Story) / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 1 (Byrum). The motion Passed. 5 to 1

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

- **RECONVENE IN OPEN MEETING**

➤ Board Chair, Dr. Brooks-Buck reconvened the public meeting and welcomed all in attendance.

Pledge of Allegiance

➤ Member Mayo led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

- **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

➤ Member Mayo moved and Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the agenda as presented.

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

- **PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS**

➤ There were no speakers on agenda topics

- **REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT**

➤ Good News Report: Mrs. Dickens, Community Engagement Officer, highlighted the following good news/events that happened throughout the division:

- PLTW 2022-2023 Outstanding Teachers - Sarah McDonald, Dawn Rountree
- John F. Kennedy Middle School Summer STEM Camp
- Grants & Awards
- Turlington Woods

Dr. Gordon and Board Members spotlighted the success of a student who completed 19 credits in 15 months. This was because Mr. Bynum and his staff have built an outstanding support system, and created an amazing culture and climate with the students, and parents at Turlington Woods. Dr. Gordon stated that some of the students did not want to leave Turlington Woods once their

time was completed. Mr. Bynum, his staff, and the resource officers were thanked for their commitment, positive energy, not giving up and having a heart for the students. They were also thanked for working together as a team and for being part of the solution that makes a difference with the students they serve. They empower their students with skills that will guide them to be productive citizens and leaders in the community.

Dr. Gordon highlighted events, activities that he and SPS administrators participated in:

- The “All District Reads” event,
- SPS administrators will read the book *Playground Millionaire* by Cleo Edison Oliver,
- He and administrators attended the VA Infrastructure Academy at Camp Community College and are excited to continue the partnership with CCC as this program/college is changing the lives of many students.

➤ Calendar of Special Events: Dr. Gordon spotlighted the events that are listed on SPS website for the upcoming month.

- **CONSENT AGENDA**

- **Approval of the Consent Agenda**

Member Mayo moved and Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

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

- **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

- There was no unfinished business

- **NEW BUSINESS**

- Recommendations to the Citizen Advisory Committees:

Member Mayo moved, and Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the appointments to the Citizen Advisory Committees.

Attorney Waller requested that names to be read aloud so that the public will know names that were being voted on. The Clerk read the names of each member appointed to the committees.

Member Story explained her “No” vote citing that enough had not been done to attract applicants to fill the committees. She wanted additional time to recruit citizens for these committees.

Upon a roll-call vote, the vote was: Aye: 3 / Nay: 2 (Riddick/Story) / Abstain: 1 (Howell) / Absent: 1 (Byrum). The motion Passed. 3 to 2

- SPS Summer Series Recap (Info Item Only):

Dr. Branch and Dr. Byrd presented an update about the SPS Summer Series Recap. The following information was highlighted:

- Summer Series Overview: The program ran from July 5th – August 4th, 2022 (19 days) and served almost 2,000 students over the summer (elementary=420, middle=378, high=1,119, ESY=48).

- Summer Series Programming: Programming included three instructional tiers, Summer School, Summer Academy, Summer Bridge K-8 and 9-12. The series also included K-8 Enrichment, and SPS Explore.
 - Community Partners: Students were exposed to community partners and shared great, engaging experiences with those partners. A few of those partners include BARKS Reading Dogs, Identikid, Girl Scouts of America, Suffolk Mobile Library, WTKR Channel 3's Myles Henderson, Planet Fitness, Suffolk Fire Department, Suffolk Sherriff's Department, and the YMCA.
 - Summer Graduation: The summer school graduation rate was 83% which 48 out of 58 students graduated (KFHS=13, LHS=22, NRHS=13).
- Resolution 22/23-3: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of a Deed of Gift and Donation Between the City of Suffolk School Board and the City of Suffolk, Virginia: Member Jenkins moved, and Member Mayo seconded the motion to approve Resolution 22/23-3 as presented.

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

- Resolution 22/23-4: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of a Deed of Easement Between the School Board of the City of Suffolk and Verizon Virginia LLC: Member Mayo moved, and Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Resolution 22/23-4 as presented.

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

- Resolution 22/23-5: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of a Right of Way Agreement Between the School Board of the City of Suffolk and Virginia Electric and Power Company D/B/A Dominion Energy Virginia: Member Mayo moved, and Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Resolution 22/23-5 as presented.

Upon a roll-call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 1 (Byrum). The motion Passed. 6 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:
- Travis McKinney (Re: Leadership, Crisis Management and FOIA) – Mr. McKinney felt that there is a failure of leadership which contributes to the teacher shortage, and that more should be done to hire teachers and to reduce the number of long-term substitutes.

● **BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS**

- Members shared the following:
- Encouraged citizens to be engaged with the division by joining their school's PTA, attending School Board Meetings, and communicating with Members.
 - Encouraged parents to keep their children reading no matter the level, whether the children are in elementary or high school. It is important to keep them reading.

- Explained the vote for the Citizen Advisory Committees indicating that her “Abstain” vote was due to the lack of participation from the community and implored citizens to find a way to get involved, step up and reach out.
- Looking forward to parent and community involvement in SPS as parent participation is crucial.
- Congratulated summer school graduates and commended them for their perseverance.
- Encouraged parents to look at social media for back to school giveaways, especially those needing assistance.
- Make sure kids get a good night’s rest, parents must do their part to ensure the success of their child.
- Thanked Dr. Gordon, his staff, and all involved with SPS.
- Congratulated those featured in the Good News Report especially Sarah McDonald, Dawn Rountree, and Mr. Kinsey Bynum. Their educational leadership, and the impact they are having help to ensure the success of SPS students as was witnessed during the summer school graduation.
- Congratulated everyone involved with the success of the 2022 summer programs.
- Looking forward to the 2022-2023 school year, and what is in store for the students as everyone works together Building the Best SPS.
- Thanked citizens for allowing representatives to serve their borough.
- Enjoyed National Night Out as SPS was highly represented.
- Asked to evaluate the 2021-2022 school year parent advisory committees for effectiveness and to create an evaluation form or process to ensure committees are functioning at the highest level possible.
- Requested the board to request a plan of action from the superintendent that addresses Suffolk Public Schools’ plan to deal with the safety issues faced during school year 2021 and 2022 regarding student pick-up and student drop-off.
- Invited residents of the Suffolk Borough to attend a back to school, Jump Out the Building event, on Sunday, August 28, 2022 from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
- Concerned that Finance Department does not report funds received from certain activities. City Council needs to perform better audits, and requested that full audits be posted on the website.
- Urged the Board to evaluate professional development, vote to have a representative to participate on the City Council’s Education Committee, and to hold a vote for participation in VSBA.
- Requested a presentation on PALS scores and to see the goals that have been met as per the Superintendent. A question was also asked regarding School Board Retreats and why they are not being held and why this was not voted on.
- The following misinformation was corrected:
 - Parents of online students chose to remain online. Online instruction remains a parental choice option. SPS is not requiring online instruction when in-person instruction is fully available for all students;
 - PALS is not an indicator of student achievement nor is it the purpose of the assessment;
 - Each year the Board votes on whether or not to pay dues, join, and participate in the Virginia School Board Association (VSBA);
 - The Board voted on April 7, 2022 (5-2) not be a part of the city’s Education Committee;
 - The last board retreat was destroyed and ended up in court;
 - Read the court’s ruling vindicating Board Chair Dr. Brook-Buck, citing that she did not willfully or knowingly violate Virginia FOIA, is not incompetent, did not neglect her duties, nor did she misuse her office.

- Informed all that it is a Class 5 felony, subject to 10 years in prison to sign a petition with false information.
- Funds are not being hidden and are online as a part of the budget.
- Recognized the absence of Board Vice-Chair Byrum and asked for prayers and/or a moment of silence for her husband.
- Expressed pride in the 2022 graduates, their teachers, and parents for their success.

- **INFORMATION ITEMS**

- Accident Report – July 2022
- Concussion Management Team
- Financial Report: Capital Projects
- Financial Report – July 2022

- **ADJOURNMENT**

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

Member Jenkins moved and Member Mayo seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting.

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

- Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck adjourned the August 11, 2022 School Board Meeting at 9:15 p.m.

Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck, *Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*