

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

**Thursday, September 8, 2022 ~ 5:00 P.M.**

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

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**Board Members Present:**

Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck, *Chair*

Heather Howell

Karen Jenkins

Lorita Mayo

Tyron Riddick

Sherri Story<sup>1</sup>

**Attendance via Electronic Device (Upon Board Approval):**

Phyllis Byrum, *Vice Chair*

**Administrative Staff Present:**

Dr. John B. Gordon III, *Superintendent*

Wendell M. Waller, *School Board Attorney*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*

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**OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION**

➤ Call to Order:

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

➤ Motion for Meeting Attendance Via Electronic Device (Phyllis Byrum):

Attorney Waller read the following motion:

A motion is needed pursuant to Virginia Code Section 2.2-3708.3, Subsection B.2. To allow Board Member Phyllis Byrum to participate in tonight's public meeting of the School Board through electronic communication means from the Residence Inn Marriott, Durham, NC due to a medical condition of a family member that requires Board Member Byrum to provide care which prevents her physical attendance at tonight's meeting.

Member Riddick moved and Member Mayo seconded the motion to approve virtual attendance for Mrs. Byrum as read by Mr. Waller.

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

➤ SPS Strategic Plan Draft Goals (Community Engagement & Communication):

Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck and Dr. Branch shared information and directions with Members regarding drafting goals for Community Engagement & Communications. The following potential goals were shared by Member Mayo:

- Suffolk Public Schools will increase engagement opportunities for families, the school community, and business partnerships through annual outreach activities and events.
- Suffolk Public Schools will develop methods of communication with families to include in-person and virtual events as well as incentives to community members for engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> Board Member Story arrived at 7:00 p.m.

- Suffolk Public Schools will maintain the ability to engage the community through social media, website development, and direct messages in order to promote consistent community messages.

Member Howell provided the final sample draft goal, “Coordinate a comprehensive community, family engagement and communication plan that increases stakeholder engagement and participation.

Member Riddick suggested the goal, “To foster a culture of community engagement, promoting community partnerships that enrich teaching, learning, research and creative activities, address critical societal issues, and contribute to the public good.”

After a brief discussion, Board members agreed with the statement: “Suffolk Public Schools will increase engagement opportunities for families, the school community, and business partnerships through annual outreach activities and events.”

Members agreed to move forward with providing indicators for the goal statement via email to the Board Chair and Clerk and information will be compiled into one single document.

➤ CIP Discussion:

Mrs. Forsman provided information regarding projects and their order of priority which was approved by the School Board compared to what City Council approved in their 10-year CIP. Mr. Napier provided information regarding NSES classroom additions and explained the renovations that will be done to the Human Services building. Dr. Gordon stated that the lease for the current SAO location expires December 2023 and may require negotiations to adjust the move-out date. He also stated that renovations for the new SAO location are listed in the City’s CIP only and not Suffolk Public Schools’ CIP because this is a City project. Board Members asked questions regarding the new location for SAO and if it would have adequate space for growth and parking. Questions were also raised regarding the current lease expiration and move-in date. Questions were also raised regarding possible solar options for NSES addition, and possible increased capacity at JFKMS. Mrs. Forsman provided (via handout) the most current and up-to-date information in the CIP to Board Members.

Members Story and Riddick were given the opportunity to discuss changes they wanted to see in the CIP. Member Story declined and offered no comments.

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

**RECONVENE IN PUBLIC MEETING**

➤ Meeting Call to Order:

Board Chair, Dr. Brooks-Buck called the meeting to order and welcomed all in attendance.

➤ Pledge of Allegiance:

Member Howell led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**REQUEST FROM BOARD MEMBER(S) TO ADD ITEM(S) TO THE AGENDA**

- T. Riddick – Request to add to the agenda a plan of action from superintendent that addresses the SPS plan to deal with safety issues faced during SY 21-22 regarding student drop-off and pick-up.

Member Howell moved and Member Riddick seconded the motion to add a request for a plan of action from the Superintendent to the agenda under New Business, item #5.

Member Riddick expressed a concern regarding why this request was brought forward in this manner. He was only interested in knowing if there was a plan of action currently in place. He indicated that he was not requesting the Superintendent to create a new plan.

Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck explained that the matter was brought to the Board per his request to add the item to the agenda, and she called for the vote.

Upon a roll-call vote, the vote was: Aye: 4 / Nay: 3 (Mayo, Byrum, Brooks-Buck) / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 4 to 3.

- T. Riddick – Request to add to the agenda that the Board evaluate our Parent Advisory Committees for SY 21-22 and create an evaluation form (during the work session) for the 2022-2023 school year.

Member Riddick moved and Member Howell seconded the motion to evaluate the Parent Advisory Committees for SY 21-22 and to create an evaluation form (during the work session) for the 2022-2023 school year.

Member Riddick asked if there was a process and/or matrix for evaluating the Citizen Advisory Committees. Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck clarified that the Board has never evaluated volunteers who agreed to assist the Board. Mr. Riddick then clarified his reason for requesting an evaluation. He indicated his belief that in order to assess whether or not a committee is fulfilling its obligations and being productive, an evaluation was needed.

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

## **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

- Approval of Agenda:

Member Mayo moved and Member Howell seconded the motion to approve the agenda as presented with the addition of Item 1 (from Mr. Riddick's requests) to Item 5 under "New Business".

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

## **PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS**

- Citizen Comments on Agenda Items:

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 occurred throughout the division:

- 2023 Virginia Region II Teacher of the Year – Jason Bartholomew, Teacher at NRHS
- SPS Alumni: Where Are They Now? – Talisha Anderson-Cheeks, Graduate of LHS
- 2022 Community Bus Tours
- Back-To-School-Community Donations
- SPS In The News: Suffolk Public Schools Focused on Emotional Well-Being of Students

Mrs. Dickens highlighted that in August, the College Board awarded 62,000 students across the country with academic scholars for excelling in their classrooms and on College Board assessments. The following Suffolk Public Schools' students received this recognition:

- Raven Cooper – LHS
- Amira Palmer – KFHS
- Ashley Martin – KFHS
- Jalen Downing – KFHS
- Noel Ingram – KFHS
- Pryde K-Mutia – KFHS
- Cindy Barnes – KFHS

Dr. Gordon made a special presentation to Dawn Rountree and Sarah McDonald who last month were highlighted in the Good News Report. These educators were two of only 59 teachers across the country who were recognized by the Project Lead The Way Programs, as “Outstanding Teachers.” These teachers were presented with a token of appreciation and thanked for their excellent work with the Engineering and Biomedical programs.

➤ Calendar of Special Events:

Dr. Gordon spotlighted the events that are listed on SPS website for the upcoming month.

Dr. Gordon provided a brief report of the first few days of school. He stated that SPS had a good opening, and that the staff and students were full of energy and excitement. He thanked the entire team of 2,380 SPS employees for their hard work, as many of them pitched in and assisted in school from answering phones in the front office to teaching classes. He stated that those things were done to ensure the daily operations of the schools were as smooth as possible.

Dr. Gordon asked parents to follow all safety procedures outlined at the schools, especially with regard to student pick-up and drop-off (not lining up more than 30 minutes before the actual dismissal time), asked all to be sympathetic with transportation as their goal is to make sure every day is better than the previous day. He also stated that additional drivers are being added to the staff as quickly as possible.

Dr. Gordon provided information regarding active shooter training, and highlighted the training received from the Suffolk Police occurred at all schools over the summer. Suffolk Public Schools administrators also received the training which included the opportunity to observe specifically what it looks like to be involved in an active shooter situation. He also encouraged parents and the community to secure their firearms to prevent firearms from being handled by any unintended individuals. He also stated that SPS will not always advertise safety and security measures in place because to do so would give an active shooter the opportunity to inspect what is done and find weaknesses or holes in SPS' plans. Suffolk Public Schools would never deliberately withhold information from anyone. Dr. Gordon stated that Suffolk Public Schools will continue working diligently to ensure that safety is always first and any information circulating that is contrary to this statement is simply not true.

## CONSENT AGENDA

➤ Approval of the Consent Agenda:

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

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

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

➤ There was no unfinished business

## NEW BUSINESS

➤ Budget Calendar Fiscal 2023-2024:

Member Mayo moved, and Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the budget calendar for fiscal year 2023-2024.

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

➤ Capital Improvement Plan Submission of Priorities:

Member Howell moved, and Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the Capital Improvement Plan Submission of Priorities.

Board Members Story and Riddick were given the opportunity to discuss the changes they submitted for the CIP. Member Story chose not to speak to her changes. Member Riddick explained that he made changes because he felt that the division should focus more on building new schools instead of making additions to schools. However, he stated that since funds will be available for the Northern Shores project, he does not want to do anything that will hinder that building addition.

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

➤ 2022-2023 Citizen Advisory Committees Membership Recommendations:

Member Mayo moved, and Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the recommendations as presented.

Member Riddick and Mrs. Story were concerned that marketing strategies and additional time had been not given to Board Members to solicit individuals to serve on the Citizen Advisory Committees. Dr. Gordon and Board Chair Dr. Brook-Buck explained how the individuals presented for approval were selected and the Board's role in making appointments to the committees. Additional discussion ensued between Board Members.

Member Jenkins called for the question.

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

- Resolution 22/23-6: A Resolution of the School Board for the City Of Suffolk, Virginia Approving an Award to RRMM Architects to Provide Architectural and Engineering Services for the Design of a New Middle School Pursuant to a Request for Proposals Issued by Suffolk Public Schools:

Member Jenkins moved, and Member Mayo seconded the motion to approve Resolution 22/23-6 as presented.

Member Story questioned if an RFP was issued. She also questioned the awarding of this contract and past contracts to RRMM Architects. She inferred that possible kickbacks are being received for making the award. Anthony Hinds, Purchasing Manager, explained the RFP process. He also stated that Mosley Architects and Timmons Group have been used on a number of recent projects. All awards have been pursuant to the Virginia Public Procurement Act. Additional conversation ensued by Members and staff.

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

- T. Riddick – Request plan of action from superintendent that addresses the SPS plan to deal with safety issues faced during SY 21-22 regarding student drop-off and pick-up:

Member Riddick moved, and Member Story seconded the motion to receive the report via email.

After Mr. Riddick’s clarification, the motion was amended as follows:

Member Riddick moved, and Member Story seconded the motion to receive the plan of action for the 21-22 report and the changes that the Superintendent’s staff have implemented for this year via email.

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

## **PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON NON-AGENDA TOPICS<sup>2</sup>**

- Citizen Comments on Non-Agenda Items:

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

- Alicia Saringer – (Re: Continuing discriminatory and unprofessional behavior of the staff, bullying, bus issues and not getting information.) – **NO SHOW**
- Angela Kilgore – (Re: Security of our schools, Disrespect and reverse racism that has been put on display and shown towards concern “white conservative” parents by selective members of our school board and the new administrative staff they are putting in place, frivolous spending that is doing nothing to better educate our children or decrease the demands that continue to be placed on our teachers.) Mrs. Kilgore felt that the schools are in decline and are not safe, the Board is not effective, the approval of Ordinance 21/22-39 affords too much power to the Superintendent, and that the division participates in frivolous spending.

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<sup>2</sup> Mistakenly Alicia Saringer was left on the agenda after requesting to be removed, and Angela Kilgore was omitted from the agenda after requesting to be listed as a speaker. Once the error was recognized, the “Business by Board Members” portion of the meeting was interrupted to allow Mrs. Kilgore to address the Board.

## **BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS<sup>3</sup>**

### ➤ Comments and Reports by School Board Members:

Members shared the following:

- Welcomed SPS employees to the 2022-2023 school year which will be an amazing school year.
- Grace period for tardiness during the first week of school and for parents to contact the building administrators and copy Dr. Ronald Leigh, if their child(ren) were marked tardy for being late to school but the delay was due to waiting in the drop-off line.
- Delighted with bus tours added back in SPS, excitement with the beginning of school week, encouraged parents to join the PTA and to be involved with their child's education by participating in various opportunities at the school level.
- Thanked the teachers, Dr. Gordon, and staff for their hard work providing students with the education and the care they deserve.
- Welcomed and enjoyed the back to school functions honoring new and returning teachers, enjoyed visiting the high school's football team's practices and seeing the new turf at the schools.
- Thanked Dr. Gordon for answering questions from Members and working to provide updates to the pick-up/drop-off ongoing situations at various schools experiencing this difficulty.
- Thanked the parents, school community, and stakeholders for their support, interest, and concern for our students.
- Congratulated Mr. Bartholomew, the Region II Teacher of the Year.
- Expressed pride in the new Center for Performing Arts at LHS.
- Stated that the students educational needs, safety, and social-emotional well-being are first and foremost and will always be taken into consideration as the Board continues to put students first in all they do.
- Expressed pride in being a member of the Board and in Project Lead The Way (PLTW), the Center for Performing Arts programs and looking forward to additional programs like those being added to the SPS curriculum.
- Board Member Byrum thanked School Board Members, the Clerk, Dr. Gordon and the SPS Family for their concern, prayers, and thoughts during the difficult health journey that she and her husband are experiencing.
- Thanked citizens for the opportunity to serve and work collaboratively for what's best for the borough and city.
- Encouraged the Board to operate in a manner which produces the most good with the resources available.
- Expressed frustration/concern with the way Board Member requests were handled, and the lack of marketing used to promote and address complaints regarding the Citizen Advisory Committees.
- Corrected misinformation about the Board and schools indicating the following:
  - Suffolk City School Board is an independently elected from the City Council and each entity does not answer to or for each other, but work as cooperative bodies.
  - Suffolk Public Schools does not have segregated schools, none are being built, and John F. Kennedy Middle School is not a segregated school.
- Thanked all SPS staff for a great start to the 2022-2023 school year.

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<sup>3</sup> At some point during Board Member comments, Member Story left the meeting.

## INFORMATION ITEMS

- Accident Report August 2022
- Financial Report August 2022
- Financial Report June 30, 2022

## ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

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

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

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 6 to 0.

- Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck adjourned the September 8, 2022 School Board Meeting at 8:57 p.m.

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Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck, *Board Chair*

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Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*