

# SCHOOL BOARD RETREAT MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, August 10, 2023 ~ 9:00 A.M.

John F. Kennedy Middle School, 2325 E. Washington Street, Suffolk, VA 23434

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## **Board Members Present:**

Tyron Riddick, *Chair*  
Heather Howell, *Vice Chair*  
Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham  
Kimberly Slingluff

## **Board Members Absent:**

Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck  
Phyllis Byrum  
Karen Jenkins

## **Administrative Staff Present:**

Dr. John B. Gordon III, *Superintendent*  
Wendell M. Waller, *School Board Attorney*  
Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*  
Dr. Okema Branch, *Chief Academic Officer*  
Dr. Stenette Byrd III, *Chief of Schools*  
Andre Skinner, *Director of Career & Technical Education*  
Catherine Pichon, *Director of Elementary Leadership*  
Dr. Ronald Leigh, *Director of Secondary Leadership*  
Towanda Shirley, *Director of Special Education*  
John Littlefield, *Director of Technology*  
Sara Williford, *Coordinator of Health Services*  
Dr. Angela King, *Coordinator of School Counseling Services*  
Cynthia Devers, *Coordinator of Social Emotional Support Services*  
Randolph Boone, *Coordinator of Student Services*  
David LeFevre, *Coordinator of Student Services*  
Melvin Bradshaw, *Communications & Community Engagement Facilitator*

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## **OPENING OF MEETING**

### ➤ Call to Order:

Chair Riddick called the retreat to order at 9:10 a.m. and welcomed all in attendance. He provided an overview of the day's events and reminded all of the housekeeping details. Mr. Riddick introduced the Board Members and Dr. Gordon, Division Superintendent.

### ➤ 2023 Opening of Schools Schedule

Dr. Gordon shared the following information:

- The leadership team worked closely to develop the comprehensive orientation schedule which included schedules for elementary and secondary schools. The schedules were created to give parents with multiple students the flexibility needed so that they can participate in orientation at both the elementary and secondary levels.
- The orientation schedule and important dates for the 2023-2024 school year.

A Board Member asked if it would be feasible for board members to rotate through various schools for open-house. Dr. Gordon and Mr. Riddick explained how a visit might impact the staff and could potentially lessen the time available for parents to visit with teachers and staff. Mr. Riddick stated that members were not banned from attending orientation, but they should be mindful of their conduct and the amount of time spent engaging teachers and the

administrative staff during the open-house event. He added that the Board must work to re-establish the bridge for positive engagement with staff and administrators due to previous interactions by Board Members compromised trust and created an environment of uneasiness between the Board and staff.

## **DATA REPORTS**

### ➤ Communication and Community Engagement Analytics:

Melvin Bradshaw, Communications and Community Engagement Facilitator, provided an overview of analytics that will be covered during the 2023-2024 school year. He highlighted how the division continually communicates with constituents, schools and the community via social media using Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and the SPS StarCAST PodCAST. He pointed out that many parents remain engaged by use of these tools as many events were advertised on the social media platforms. In addition to social media, Mr. Bradshaw stated that valuable information is shared with parents, students, staff, and the community through the SPS new website, PeachJar, and the Flipping Book (a division-wide newsletter). Everyone can stay informed with the Google/Apple Division Mobile App, Division/School Website, Mass Notification Systems, Paraphrase (Division Translation Software), JustFOIA System, and S'More Newsletter Software for All Schools.

Mr. Bradshaw also highlighted Suffolk Public Schools' Community Sponsors:

- TowneBank
- United Way of South Hampton Roads
- KLM Scholarship Foundation
- Sentara Obici STEM Camp
- Amadas Industries
- University Instructors

Additionally, he indicated that the "Parents as Partners" Community Event brought out vendors which boosted the bond between the division's partners, parents, community, faculty and staff.

Board Members asked questions regarding PeachJar and the Flip-Book and inquired about the plan to grow communications and engagement with parents, partners, and the community. These questions prompted additional dialog between the Board, Dr. Gordon and his staff. Board Chair Riddick suggested contacting Amadas Coach as an additional resource.

### ➤ School Safety and Security:

Mr. Dave LeFevre highlighted the following School-Based Safety Staffing:

- Crisis Management Team (CMT)
- Behavior Intervention Support Staff
- Teacher Assistants
- Safety, Security, and Support (S3)
- School Safety Officers (SSOs)
- School Resource Officers (SRO)
- School Administrative Office

Securing Schools with Technology

- Access Control Systems (ACS)
- Weapons detectors in all schools
- Visitor Management Systems (Raptor)
- Interior and Exterior digital surveillance

## Safe and Secure Learning Environment

- Mandatory emergency preparedness training for all staff
- Emergency drills
- Partnering with outside agencies
- Student and family support through administrative services and counseling services
- Social and family support through administrative services and counseling services.

Board members asked questions regarding behavior intervention specialists for all schools and what is in place to prevent behavioral infractions. Dr. Gordon stated that is a staffing shortfall and the specialists are currently in schools with the greater need and that additional methods are being used to keep our students and staff safe. Additional conversation ensued regarding the safety of students and staff.

## ➤ SPS Instructional Overview:

Dr. Branch and Dr. Byrd presented information on the following topics:

- 2023-2024 Instructional Overview
- 2023 Summer Series
- Comprehensive Division Literacy Plan
- Continuous Learning for Continuous Improvement
- Tiered T&L Support
- Long-Term Sub Instructional Training and Support
- Paraprofessional Instructional Training and Support
- Targeted Instructional Support for Students Success (Summer Program)
- 2023-2024 Instructional Overview – SPED
- 2023-2024 Instructional Leadership
- SPS Summer Series Overview
- Summer Series Programming
- Elementary Summer Academy
- Program Overall Achievement Data
- Achievement Data by Grade
- SPS Community Partners
- Elementary Summer Enrichment
- YMCA Water Safety Sessions
- Middle School Summer School and Academy
- High School Summer School
- K-8 and High School Summer Bridge
- Extended School Year (ESY)
- SPS Explore

Board Members asked questions and Drs. Branch, Byrd, and Dr. Gordon provided additional information based on the Board's feedback.

Board Chair Riddick recessed the meeting for five minutes.

The School Board Retreat was called to order by Chair Riddick and reminded all about attendance decorum and that furniture should not be moved by non SPS employees as this presented a liability to the division. He reminded citizens that they were able to record the meeting however, they cannot place or use recording equipment in such a way that disrupts the meeting. He asked all to be mindful of where they are placing recording equipment.

➤ Parent Pick-up and Drop-off Procedures:

Dr. Byrd and Mrs. Pichon, highlighted the following Parent pick-up and drop-off procedures:

- School specific procedures
- General division procedures
- Traffic Patterns
- Car tags
- Bus tagging procedures
- PikmyKid Pilot / Dashboard

Dr. Gordon emphasized that students should not be picked up each day before 3:30 p.m. as this causes traffic issues and loss of instruction for those students. Board Members suggested additional police and possibly communicating with store owners located close to the schools for assistance during heavy traffic times.

## **COMMENTS / DISCUSSION**

➤ Community Engagement from a Board Member's Perspective:

Board Chair Riddick presented information regarding board members and community engagement. He stated that Board Members are not exempt from community engagement and that members should communicate with all constituents to mend fences as none of the members received 100% of the vote from their borough. He further explained the difference between involvement (doing it for) and engagement (doing it with). Chair Riddick suggested that board members partner with the schools for various events, hold town halls, forums, and after school tutoring to get to know your constituents, and hold Facebook events. Board Chair Riddick encouraged all members to get out and meet and get to know the citizens in their boroughs.

He asked members the following questions:

- How can you create a positive message that resonates with your stakeholders about Suffolk Public Schools?
- How do you consistently communicate this message to our stakeholders?

Board Members shared how they can promote/share positive information with their constituents regarding SPS, various avenues they can use to present information to the community, and discussed the process for handling school-related issues.

- How do you relay a message when you're on the dissenting vote? How do you take back a negative message to your community?

Board Chair Riddick emphasized that members must be very careful with their responses to citizens as they are responsible for 100% of the impact resulting from their words. He reminded members of the importance of setting aside their personal feelings when engaging in discussions regarding Suffolk Public Schools because the bottom line is and should always be what is in the best interest of the students, not personal agendas. He added that members must bring the same level of enthusiasm and involvement they had with their constituents during their candidacy to the position once elected to serve on the school board. He also reminded members that the Board must model the behavior they would like to see others display.

Member Riddick asked each member to use their "Member Comment" section during regular meetings to advertise borough engagement activities that will positively impact SPS. He also asked members to consider creating a scholarship for a graduating senior which will be discussed at a future meeting work session.

**ADJOURNMENT**

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

Board Chair Riddick adjourned the August 10, 2023 School Board Retreat at 12:45 p.m.

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Tyron Riddick, *Board Chair*

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Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*