

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, December 12, 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 Riddick¹
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*

OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION

➤ Call to Order:

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

➤ Career and Technical Education Annual Report

Utilizing a PowerPoint presentation, Dr. Andre Skinner, Director of Career and Technical Education, provided a summary of information regarding Career and Technical Education (CTE) from the 2023-2024 school year. He provided information regarding CTE's Advisory Council and its membership, and student events including the Student Career Expo. Dr. Skinner also provided information from the Virginia Department of Education's (VDOE) School Report Card Data, the Competency Attainment Rates, CTE Completer Testing Rates, and CTE's Good News Report regarding its various programs. John Yeates Middle School Students Juan Vasquez (8th grade) and Camille Josie (7th grade), shared their experience using the CTE's GOTECH equipment with Board Members.

Board Members were impressed and appreciative of Dr. Skinner for his thorough report and the students for sharing their success with the CTE middle school program. Board Members also asked questions and provided comments regarding CTE programs.

➤ Local Advisory Committee for Special Education (SEAC) Annual Report

Dr. Casaundra McNair, Director of Special Education, provided information regarding ongoing supports which will assist with the needs of students. She also highlighted her role in supporting and serving as consultant to the Local Advisory Committee for Special Education (known as SEAC) committee. Dr. McNair introduced Mrs. Kirstyn O'Neill, Chair of the SEAC Committee. Using a PowerPoint presentation, Mrs. O'Neill summarized information regarding SEAC's purpose, membership, meetings, organization, and SEAC updates from the 23/24 school year. She also provided information for the 2024-2025 school year which included identified needs impacting students and families, goals, and upcoming meeting dates.

¹ Board Member Riddick arrived to the meeting during the Advanced Instruction Update presentation at 5:30 p.m.

Board Members thanked Mrs. O'Neill and Dr. McNair for a thorough report. Questions and conversation ensued between the Board, Mrs. O'Neill, and staff regarding existing barriers, the committee's leadership staying in place beyond July and considered "interim", advertising plan for announcing meetings. Mrs. O'Neill was asked to follow-up with an email to the Board with advertising suggestions.

There being no further comments, the meeting was recessed.

MEETING RECESS

- Board Chair Jenkins recessed the meeting at 6:40 p.m.

RE-OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING

- Meeting Called to Order:
Board Chair Jenkins called to order the regular public meeting at 7:08 p.m.
- Pledge of Allegiance:
Board Member Byrum 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. Brooks-Buck read the mission of SPS.

HOLIDAY PRESENTATION

- Fine Arts Holiday Performance
Lakeland High School's Vocal Ensemble, directed by Ms. Tiffany Carr performed holiday melodies for all. In recognition of Board Members Phyllis Byrum and Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck, soloist Tanaya Thompson (11th grade), performed the song *The Greatest Love of All*.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- Approval of Agenda:
Board Member Byrum 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:
There were no speakers registered to address the board.

REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

➤ Good News Report:

Anthonette Dickens, Communications and Community Engagement Officer, shared information from the Good News Report. Wendy Forsman, Chief Financial Officer, shared information from the S.T.A.R. Leadership Program and presented certificates to employees who completed the program. The Nansemond River High School Warriors Girls Field Hockey Team was recognized for winning the Class 5 VHSL State Championship. Additional recognition included Aniya Woods (named the 2024 Class 5 Player of the Year) and Coach Alison Dize (named 2024 Class 5 Coach of the Year).

➤ School Board Members Recognition

Retiring School Board Members Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck and Mrs. Phyllis Byrum were recognized for their many years of service to the students, staff and community of Suffolk Public Schools – a combined total of 28 years. Dr. Brooks-Buck and Mrs. Byrum were recognized by Senator L. Louise Lucas, and Congressman Bobby Scott who sent letters of recognition. Additionally, an email was read from Mr. Derrick Bryant, Principal of King’s Fork High School, for Mrs. Byrum as he and several current employees (who were in attendance) were taught by Mrs. Byrum during her tenure as a high school teacher. Board Members Byrum and Dr. Brooks-Buck were presented with a Resolution that was read by the Superintendent, Dr. Gordon who also expressed his gratitude to both members. They were also presented with plaques, flowers, and gifts.

Board Members thanked Mrs. Byrum and Dr. Brooks-Buck for the impact they have had on students and board members alike. They were also very appreciative of the years of service and the collaboration of Mrs. Byrum and Dr. Brooks-Buck who worked tirelessly for the advancement of all students. Mrs. Byrum and Dr. Brooks-Buck were thanked for their time and energy, wisdom, history, and willingness to serve.

➤ Calendar of Special Events:

Dr. Gordon highlighted information from the calendar of special events.

CONSENT AGENDA

➤ Approval of the Consent Agenda:

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda with the removal of Bills and Payroll and adding it to New Business.

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

Dr. Gordon introduced Mr. Tyrone Carr, who was approved as the new Coordinator II of Finance. Mr. Carr was thankful for the opportunity to continue working with SPS in this capacity. Mr. Carr has been with SPS for over 30 years.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- Ordinance 2024/25-51: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 2-2.7 entitled “School Board Standing Committees; Foundations; Special Committees” 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 2024/25-51 as presented.

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

- Ordinance 2024/25-52 - An Ordinance Amending Chapter 2, Article 3, Section 2-3.2 entitled “Regular Meetings; Special Meetings; Quorum” 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 2024/25-52 as presented.

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

- Ordinance 2024/25-77: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 2-2.7:2 entitled “Appointment to Standing Committees and foundation boards; appointment to Citizen Advisory Committees; reports by committees; number of committee members” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - Second Reading and Adoption.
Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 2024/25-77 as presented.

Board Member Riddick recommended heavy marketing to attract citizens to serve on the committees. Vice Chair Howell recommended – and will submit this request in writing to the Board Chair – to have added to the January 2025 Board Work Session to discuss, determine, and possibly take action on, the process for appointing committees, including but not limited to the application, selection, and voting process.

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

- Ordinance 2024/25-78: An Ordinance Deleting Chapter 9, Article 11, Section 9-11.6 Entitled “Portable Communication Devices Permitted; Use in Classroom; Superintendent to Develop Regulations” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board and Adopting a New Section 9-11.6 Entitled “General Statement of Policy; Superintendent to Develop Regulations; Notice Requirement” (Cell Phone Policy) - Second Reading and Adoption.
Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 2024/25-78 as presented.

Board Members Slingluff and Dr. Brittingham expressed concerns with the policy including vagueness, lack of specifics regarding regulations to ensure alignment with the Governor’s mandate. Board Member Slingluff requested that the Board receive a final draft of regulations from the Superintendent. Additional conversation ensued between board members.

Vice Chair Howell amended her motion and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 2024-25-78 with the understanding that the Board will send the policy back to the Policy Review Committee at the first available meeting in 2025 to

update/add language to include detail requirements that must be set forth in regulations issued by the Superintendent.

Dr. Gordon provided additional information regarding regulations effective January 6, 2025.

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

NEW BUSINESS

➤ Payment of Bills and Payroll November 30 2024

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Payment of Bills and Payroll November 30 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.

➤ Ordinance 2024/25-46, Ordinance 2024/25-62, Ordinance 2024/25-67, and Ordinance 2024/25-69 (Info items only. No action required at this time.)

Vice Chair Howell recommended that Board Members read the ordinances in advance of the January meeting and be prepared to ask questions and have discussion versus approaching them as if they were newly received ordinances. She suggested for members to get in the practice of reviewing “Info Items” (first reading policies) in advance of the meeting and be prepared to discuss policies when presented for First Reading.

Board Member Slingluff discussed Ordinance 24/25-62: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 8, Article 13, Section 8-13.1 entitled “Free Appropriate Public Education; Individualized Education Program Required; Credit Accommodations; Faculty Member serving as Liaison; Appropriate Procedural Safeguards Required; Child Find Program Required” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board. She asked if the safeguards referenced in Section E of the policy could also be listed on our website. Attorney Waller stated that paper copies are provided because it is required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Additional conversation ensued. Dr. Gordon agreed to add a link to the Virginia Department of Education regarding the safeguards.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON NON-AGENDA TOPICS

➤ Citizen Comments on Non-Agenda Items:

There were no speakers registered to address the board.

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

➤ Comments and Reports by School Board Members:

Board Members highlighted town halls, trainings, conferences, and winter concerts attended. They were thankful for being able to serve their communities/constituents, for the presentations, holiday/special performances by the LHS Vocal Ensemble students, the Safety Grant awarded to the school division, Dr. Gordon and his staff, students, parents, and community. They encouraged parents to join the PTA as this is a direct correlation with students’ success. They wished Board Members Byrum and Dr. Brooks-Buck well and encouraged them to take the time to enjoy life. They are looking forward to continued support of the school division and to great things in the new school year.

Board Members Mrs. Byrum and Dr. Brooks-Buck thanked everyone for their kind and meaningful remarks and mementos. They were especially thankful to have dedicated their lives to public education and Suffolk Public Schools as it was an honor to serve the constituents over the many years. They also thanked the City of Suffolk for working with SPS for funding and City Police Officers for providing safety at meetings and during critical times. They expressed pride in the successes of SPS, the state/country-wide recognition being received by the division, and for the opportunity to influence children’s futures. They wished wisdom and courage to current and new board members as they work to make tough decisions that will affect students. They encouraged everyone to focus on the most important agenda which are the students and the many accomplishments children make each day. They both vowed to continue to be advocates and cheerleaders for Suffolk Public Schools and public Education.

They wished a Merry Christmas to all.

INFORMATION ITEMS

- Accident Report – November 2024
- Capital Projects Financial Statement
- Financial Report November 30, 2024
- Adult Education Report
- Pupil Teacher Ratio
- Attendance Report – November, 2024

ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further business, Board Chair Jenkins adjourned the December 12, 2024 School Board Meeting at 9:33 p.m.

Karen Jenkins, *School Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*