

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, December 14, 2023 ~ 5:00 P.M.

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

Board Members Present:

Tyron Riddick, *Chair*¹
Heather Howell, *Vice Chair*²
Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham
Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck
Phyllis Byrum
Karen Jenkins
Kimberly Slingsluff

Administrative Staff Present:

Dr. John B. Gordon III, *Superintendent*
Wendell M. Waller, *School Board Attorney*
Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*
Keesha Johnson, *Deputy Clerk*

OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION

➤ Call to Order:

Vice Chair Howell called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

➤ CTE Report

Andre Skinner, Director of Career and Technical Education, provided an overview of the Career and Technical Educational Advisory Council. He highlighted the function of the council, the committee's business membership, calendar of events, and student events including the Professional Student Conference for 9th graders, and the Career Expo for 12th graders. Mr. Skinner thanked AMADAS Industries, Starr Motors, and Hope for Suffolk for specifically selecting our students for internships and job opportunities. He provided information from the Virginia Department of Education's School Report Card Data highlighting the 100% Competency Attainment Rates for all students. He expressed his pride in the CTE Completer Testing Rates as he highlighted the great "Pass Rate" data. Mr. Skinner stated that LHS and NRHS had been recognized for their Project Lead The Way (PLTW) programs. Both schools were recognized for being Distinguished Schools for the 2022-2023 school year. He also highlighted the Wise Financial Literacy Certification Gold Star Teacher Award winner, Jason Bartholomew-NRHS for his accomplishment. Mr. Skinner provided information regarding the S.T.A.R. Program and encouraged students to sign up for the program.

Board Members asked questions, commended the teachers and for their great work, and expressed their appreciation for the report and work of Mr. Skinner.

➤ SEAC Annual Report

Towanda Shirley, Director of Special Education, introduced Kirstyn Oneill, SEAC Chair, for year 2022-2023. Mrs. Oneill provided an overview of the committee, its purpose, membership and functions. She highlighted the new officers and meeting dates for the 2023-2024 school year. Mrs. Oneill highlighted the committee's accomplishments for the past year and stated

¹ Board Chair Riddick arrived at the meeting at 6:51 p.m.

² Vice Chair Howell began the meeting in the absence of Chair Riddick.

that she looks forward to the committee's continued success as she also highlighted their goals for 2023-2024. Mrs. Oneill was thankful for the opportunity to serve in her current role and thanked the former chair of the committee for a job well done.

Board Members asked questions, made comments, and were appreciative of her report.

MEETING RECESS

- There being no additional business in the Work Session, Board Vice Chair Howell recessed the meeting.

PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING

- Meeting Called to Order:
Board Chair Riddick called to order the Public Budget Hearing.
- Public comments regarding the 2024-2025 Operating Budget:
There were no speakers registered to address the Board regarding the 2023-2025 operating budget.
- Adjournment of Public Budget Hearing:
There being no speakers for the 2024-2025 budget hearing, Board Chair Riddick adjourned the Public Budget Hearing at 7:01 p.m.

RE-OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING

- Meeting Called to Order:
Board Chair Riddick called to order the regular public meeting.
- Pledge of Allegiance:
The Nansemond River High School Chorus led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Moment of Silence:
A moment of silence was observed by all in attendance.
- Recital of SPS Mission:
Vice Chair Howell read the Mission Statement of Suffolk Public Schools.
- Musical Selection – Nansemond River High School Chorus – Directed by Karen Waddell:
Dr. Gordon introduced Mrs. Karen Waddell and the students from Nansemond River High School. However, due to technical difficulties, the performance was delayed. Therefore, the Board moved forward with the approval of the agenda.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- Approval of Agenda:
Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Vice Chair Howell seconded the motion to approve the agenda.

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

The meeting was recessed for five (5) minutes to allow additional technical assistance to the chorus.

Chair Riddick called the meeting back to order at 7:13 p.m. The choral students performed a melody of holiday music. Board Members were very appreciative of the students for their performance, and the teacher and parents for their support and commitment to the students.

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:

Melvin Bradshaw, Communications and Community Engagement Facilitator, highlighted information from the Good News Report. Dr. Gordon and Mr. Riddick presented certificates to Tanaya Thompson-LHS, Unique Chatmon-LHS, and Noah McDuffie-KFHS, for being selected to the American Choral Directors Association Honor Choir and to Directors, Tiffany Carr-LHS, Dante Copeland-KFHS and Jamilla Ford-JFKMS. Dr. Gordon reiterated the outstanding job that SPS students are doing as they are being recognized all over the state for their excellence. He also gave a shout-out the STEM Century Documentary event and the book.

➤ Calendar of Special Events:

Dr. Gordon highlighted the events listed on SPS website for December/January. He reminded all of the upcoming winter break.

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.

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 2 (Dr Brittingham/Slingluff) / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 5 to 2.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

➤ Ordinance 23/24-27 through Ordinance 23/24-36

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to consider Ordinance 23/24-27 through Ordinance 23/24-36 collectively.

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 7 to 0.

- Ordinance 23/24-27 through Ordinance 23/24-36
Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Slingluff and Byrum seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 23/24-27 through Ordinance 23/24-36.

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 7 to 0.

NEW BUSINESS

- Budget Adjustment #3 2023-2024 – Pending Approval at the City Council Meeting on 12/6/23
Dr. Gordon provided additional information regarding the Budget Adjustment #3.

Board Member Byrum moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Budget Adjustment #3 2023-2024 as presented.

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 7 to 0.

- Scheduling of 2024 School Board Organizational Meeting for 6 p.m., Thursday, January 4, 2024 at City Hall Council Chamber

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to schedule the 2024 School Board Organizational meeting at 6 p.m. on Thursday, January 4, 2024 at City Hall Council Chamber as presented.

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 7 to 0.

- Ordinance 23/24-15: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 1, Article 5, Section 1-5.9 entitled “Filing a Formal Complaint of Discrimination; Investigation; Action by Superintendent; Appeal” 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 23/24-15 as presented.

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 7 to 0.

- Ordinance 23/24-37: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 2-2.7:3 entitled “Committee authority; committee chair; roles and responsibilities of committee chair; notice of meetings; public access to committee meetings; rules of order” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading and Adoption

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Byrum seconded the motion to approve the Ordinance 23/24-37 as presented.

Discussion ensued between Board Members. Vice Chair Howell, Board Members Dr. Brittingham and Slingluff, did not agree with the statement in Item F (...and none of the formal Robert’s Rules of Order...). They felt that this statement negated Roberts Rules of Order and suggested striking out that verbiage. Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck explained why the informal rules were more appropriate for the Boards as they are a smaller group and Robert’s Rules was geared more towards larger groups of 12 or more.

Attorney Waller answered questions from the Board and provided additional clarification citing examples of some of the more formal rules found in Robert's Rules (i.e. Recognizing Members by their borough instead of their names, and members standing when speaking) and not following formal rules would have no bearing on the Board's ability to conduct business. He explained that the changes for more informal rules were to allow the Board the opportunity to conduct meetings with as little interruptions as possible.

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 2 (Dr. Brittingham, Slingluff) / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 5 to 2.

Due to an order misplacement, Board Chair Riddick mistakenly re-considered Ordinance 23/24-15 (An Ordinance Amending Chapter 1, Article 5, Section 1-5.9 entitled "Filing a Formal Complaint of Discrimination; Investigation; Action by Superintendent; Appeal" of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading and Adoption)

Board Member Dr. Brook-Buck moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 23/24-15 as presented.

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

➤ Ordinance 23/24-39 through Ordinance 23/24-69

These items are first reading only and requires no vote at this time. Board Members had no questions or concerns.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON NON-AGENDA TOPICS

➤ Citizen Comments on Non-Agenda Items:

The Clerk read the statement regarding decorum for those scheduled to speak.

Registered speakers shared their concern, disappointment and comments on a variety of topics including, their support for Suffolk Public Schools and student achievement, concerns with disparaging remarks made about SPS staff and students, safety concerns of students and the allegation of sexual harassment.

Speaker, Mr. Vergott, was asked to have a seat once his time expired however, he continued to be address the audience. Police escorted Mr. Vergott out of Council Chambers.

Registered speaker Michelle Ewell was not present to address the Board.

Board Chair Riddick provided a correction to the sexual harassment allegation mentioned by a speaker. He indicated that Suffolk Public Schools was made aware of the allegation which has been debunked.

Board Chair Riddick informed all of the ordinance in the agenda under New Business that was missed and not considered earlier in the meeting. The Board voted on the following ordinance:

➤ Ordinance 23/24-38: An Ordinance Adding Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 2-2.7:3.1 entitled "Rules of Order for meetings of School Board and Committees of the School Board; Governing Principles; Basic Principles; Basic Definitions; General Procedure for handling a

main motion; General Rules of Debate” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading and Adoption

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Jenkins and Byrum seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 23/24-38 as presented.

Discussion ensued between Board Members. Vice Chair Howell and Board Member Dr. Brittingham did not agree with the amendment. She requested to allow “Point of Order.” They felt that the amendment did not allow for other members to voice their concerns or ask questions regarding items being considered. Chair Riddick, and Attorney Waller explained that the “Point of Order” is not being correctly used. They explained that the “Point of Order” should only be made when you believe that the Body has strayed from its own rules of order, thereby asking the Chair to make a ruling as to whether or not they’re acting outside of the order that has been established. Attorney Waller further explained that including the “Point of Order” would set the Board back and open the door for chaos. Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck provided clarification stating that the rules are designed to allow each member to speak at least twice, and for as long as 10 minutes, on an issue thereby ensuring that all members have and will continue to have a voice to express their concerns, questions, and comments. Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck did not agree to amend her motion citing the object is to have a business meeting without confusion, as the ordinance would permit.

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

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

➤ Comments and Reports by School Board Members:

Board Members were each given three (3) minutes to speak and they highlighted the following:

- Congratulated teachers, speakers, the Fine Arts Department, NRHS Chorus for their hard work and great performance.
- Thankful for the benefits to teachers and staff from the SPS pharmacy.
- Expressed amazement of the hydroponic project at the Operations Center.
- Thanked the presenters for the information shared during the Board’s work session, and Police Officers for their support at the board meetings.
- Concerned that the data presented by the City and SPS did not match with the CIP during the Joint City Council and School Board Meeting. Requested reports with corrected data and projections.
- Corrected information expressed at the Joint meeting regarding false narratives, mass exodus of employees, and the disconnect between the city, city officials, school board and staff. Would like Joint meetings to be more productive with foolishness, egos, and dictatorships put aside.
- Suggested budget initiatives to include food and nutritional vender programs, early literature, dedicated SROs, funding of special education supplies, and middle school sports to include basketball.
- Encouraged parent’s involvement with child(ren) and school(s).
- Expressed pride with the security grant awarded to the division, and the top-notch talent displayed by students while attending events/performances at various schools.
- Enjoyed attending the VSBA Annual Convention as good information is always shared.
- Hoped for a new year of Board Meetings without nonsense and chaos causing disruptions.

- Thankful for the care, concern, and condolences shown to Board Member Jenkins regarding the passing of her mother.
- Wished all a wonderful Christmas holiday, a happy and safe New Year, and a restful/relaxing winter break.

INFORMATION ITEMS


- Accident Report – November 2023
- Capital Projects Financial Statement
- Financial Report November 2023
- Adult Education Report
- Composite Index 2024-2026
- Pupil Teacher Ratio
- SPS Condolences: Sherri Lilley, Terry Bright, Sharon Price

Chair Riddick added condolences to the family of Mr. Michael Hughes (KFHS).

ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

Board Chair Riddick adjourned the December 14, 2023 School Board Meeting at 9:00 p.m.



Tyron Riddick, School Board Chair
Karen Jenkins,



Tarshia L. Gardner, Board Clerk

