

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, February 29, 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
Kimberly Slingluff

Board Member Attending Virtually:

Tyron Riddick

Administrative Staff Present:

Dr. John B. Gordon III, *Superintendent*
Wendell M. Waller, Esq., *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.

- Motion for Meeting Attendance Via Electronic Device (Tyron Riddick):
Attorney Waller read the following motion:

A motion is needed pursuant to Virginia Code Section 2.2-3708.3, Subsection B.1. To allow Board Member Tyron Riddick to participate in tonight's special meeting of the School Board through electronic communication means from his residence, Suffolk, Virginia, 23434, due to a temporary medical condition that prevents Board Member Riddick's physical attendance at tonight's meeting.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Members Dr. Brooks-Buck and Vice-Chair Howell seconded the motion to allow Board Member Riddick to join the meeting via Zoom.

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

There was a pause in the meeting to allow Mr. Riddick time to join via electronic device.

- 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.

NEW BUSINESS

➤ Finance Committee Meeting Report

Board Chair Jenkins delivered a report from the Finance Committee meeting held on January 31, 2024. She shared the following highlights:

- Wendy Forsman, Chief Financial Officer provided an overview and discussion of the audit process for the Activity Fund and all other funds, the items required to submit to the external auditors, and the description of federal, state, and compliance audits that happens annually, in addition to the external audit. She clarified that the auditors are hired by the City of Suffolk, not SPS.
- Mrs. Forsman shared the results of the Fiscal Year 2023 which revealed a “No Comment” audit for both the school activity, the Operating, Grants, and Food and Nutritional Services funds. School bookkeepers and the Finance staff were commended for their hard work ensuring that all items were in compliance and properly authorized.
- Mrs. Forsman explained the published City of Suffolk Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) ending June 30, 2023.
- A discussion was held regarding reserves for health benefits and retiree claims. Mrs. Forsman explained the 74% overfunding in retiree claims and highlighted the need to draw it down by \$2 Million in order to avoid increasing the rates for current staff to pay for retiree claims.
- There were questions and comments of committee members in attendance. Dr. Gordon and the Committee Members praised the efforts of the staff, and agreed that the Other Post-Employment Benefit (OPEB) fund should be addressed.

➤ Superintendent’s Proposed Budget for the 2024-2025 School Year:

Dr. Gordon, Division Superintendent, and Wendy Forsman, Chief Financial Officer, presented the proposed budget for 2024-2025. The following information was shared:

- The budget process and timeline. Dr. Gordon stated that he looked for common themes when reviewing incoming data from all stakeholders.
- Proposed budget challenges with the C.A.R.E.S. ACT III / ESSER III which ends September 30, 2024. Those challenges include re-benchmarking, composite index change, and inflation.
- Items that are moving from the C.A.R.E.S. Act and being added to the Operating Budget, the State All-in Fund, and possible Grant/additional funding sources.
- Clarification of the C.A.R.E.S. Act timeline/process in reference to re-appropriation of monies. He explained that this process must take place when funds are being spent over multiple years.
- Common themes and focused investments of the proposed budget with Safety of Students and Staff, Student Growth and Literacy, Pay-Raises, and Early Childhood were top priorities.
- The difference between the Governor’s Budget (includes a 1% bonus), the current House and Senate proposals (includes a 3% - 3.38% raise), and the Superintendent’s Proposed Budget (includes step raises between 1% - 1.75%). Employees at the top of the scale will receive a 1% bonus, and the teachers/professional salary scale will increase making SPS more competitive with other divisions. Teachers who have been with SPS the longest will receive the highest raise of 1.75%, those in the middle 1.5%, and those who are relatively new to SPS will receive a 1% raise. Bus Drivers starting salary will increase to \$18.36 per hour, and employees will receive a step raise of 1%. Support and administration will receive a step raise of 1% - 1.5%, and SPS minimum wage will increase to \$15.41 per hour. If the House or Senate proposal passes with a 3% raise, employees will receive a “Step” plus a 2% cost of living increase.

- Increased early childhood allotment by adding a new Pre-K classroom at BTWES (a long-term goal is to open a Preschool center).
- The Return on Investment (ROI) includes a decrease in discipline referrals, additional teachers, additional ISS monitors, annual increase in staff salaries, increased Early Childhood Education, 95% division accreditation (5th in the state for growth), \$33.9 million in scholarships for the class of 2023, Grow Your Own: Educators Rising, iTeach program.
- 2024-2025 funding request to the City of Suffolk is \$3 million to cover Safety, Security, Support. This amount covers raises and the entire plan, and \$1 million to cover sinkhole repairs. In an effort to be equitable, if SPS does not receive the \$3 million, funding will have to be deducted from each area previously discussed.

Mrs. Forsman, Chief Financial officer, presented the following information:

- Detailed breakdown of the Operating, Grants, and Food Services Funds, highlighting previous years funding, and the 2024-2025 proposed request totaling \$242,729,721.
- Highlights of the 2024-2025 State funding to include 1% salary retention bonus, basic Aid had a net change, sales tax and regional tuition reduction, SOQ's increased with re-benchmarking.
- The 2024-2025 total budget, including an increase in funding from the State, the requested increase in City funding, less a one-time re-appropriation of buses and a reduction of other revenues. Therefore, the actual increase to the budget is \$8,152,162.
- The breakdown of each operating fund (City Appropriation \$75,332, 201 (38.01%), State Revenue \$121,167,086 (61.14%), Federal Revenue (\$1,092,000 (.55%), and Other funds \$576,880 (.29%). Mrs. Forsman explained the breakdown of all funds including major classification increases/decreases, compensation and benefits, additional 39.4 proposed positions, personnel investments totaling \$4,596,816 and operational investments totaling \$3,555,346. Those investments together total \$8,152,162 increase in the budget.

Board Members thanked Mrs. Forsman and Dr. Gordon for the thorough presentation and for highlighting specific areas of interest in the budget. It was expressed that money is not being wasted but is needed to ensure the success of all students. Board Members asked questions regarding the budget. Dr. Gordon suggested that additional questions be submitted to him via email by the close of business (4 p.m.) on March 8th, so that questions can be answered at the Public Budget Hearing on March 14, 2024.

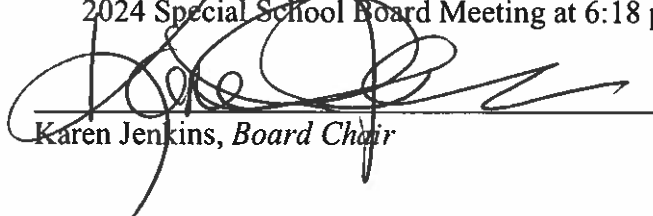
Board Members announced the following Town Hall meetings:

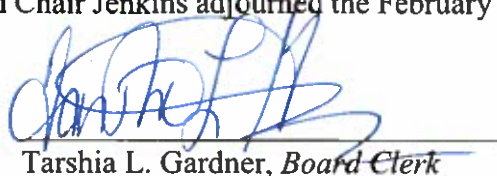
- March 5, 2024 @ 6:30-8:00 p.m. – Nansemond River HS (Karen Jenkins)
- March 6, 2024 @ 5:30-7:00 p.m. – Holland's Fire Station (Dr. Dawn Brittingham)
- March 7, 2024 @ 6:00-7:30 p.m. – Renee's Restaurant and Lounge (Tyron Riddick)
- March 12, 2024 @ 6:30-8:00 p.m. – Chuckatuck Volunteer Fire Department (Kimberly Slingluff/Heather Howell)

ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further business or questions, Board Chair Jenkins adjourned the February 29, 2024 Special School Board Meeting at 6:18 p.m.


Karen Jenkins, Board Chair


Tarshia L. Gardner, Board Clerk

