

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, May 9, 2024 ~ 5:00¹ P.M.

King's Fork High School, 350 King's Fork Road, Suffolk, VA 23434

Board Members Present:

Karen Jenkins, *Chair*
Heather Howell, *Vice Chair*
Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham
Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck
Tyron Riddick²
Kimberly Slingluff

Board Members Absent:

Phyllis Byrum

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 5:02 p.m.

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

Board Member Byrum indicated that she was unable to attend the meeting due to a medical condition after the agenda was published. *No action was needed.*

During this time, Board Chair Jenkins announced a shift in the agenda to allow more honor graduates to arrive at the meeting. At that time, there were only 26 of the 220 students in attendance.

➤ Suffolk Public Schools (SPS) Division Literacy Plan (DLP) (VDOE)

Dr. Branch, Chief Academic Officer, gave an overview of the Division Literacy Plan (DLP). She indicated that the plan will continue to evolve as information is still being received from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). She also shared that the plan does not require a vote from the board but must be shared with the public. She explained that literacy must be the focus of the plan and that all decisions will continue to be data driven to meet Suffolk Public Schools' evolving needs. Dr. Branch stated that SPS' Division Literacy Plan started in 2020.

Dr. Lawson-Davenport, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, defined High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM), to include core materials, supplemental materials, and intervention materials. She indicated that SPS was already in the process of acquiring high quality instructional materials that were already approved by the State Department. Dr. Lawson-Davenport also outlined Evidence Based Literacy Training, which includes LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling), VLP (Virginia Literacy

¹ Due to traffic issues that prevented a quorum, the meeting was delayed.

² Mr. Riddick arrived at 5:33 p.m.

Partnership) Modules, VLP (Virginia Literacy Partnership) Literacy Institutes, and HQIM Professional Development.

Dr. Shabazz, Coordinator of English Instruction, explained the literacy model (Explicit Instruction Model) that will be used in the division. She also talked about student assessment and progress. She explained that the required assessments include the Virginia Language and Literacy Screener (VALLS) for PreK-3 students (formerly PALS), Individualized Student Reading Plans (All Identified High-Risk Students). Dr. Shabazz shared additional screeners and progress monitoring tools included LETRS Screener (grades 3-5), Oral Reading Fluency Assessment (grades 4-5), VDOE Growth Assessments (grades 3-5), I-Ready Screener & Diagnostic Assessment (grades K-5), Classroom Formative Assessments (K-5), District Common Assessments (2-5). She also highlighted the next steps in the SPS Division Literacy Plan.

Board Members asked several questions, including whether or not plans are being made to train additional staff in LETRS, who would perform the training on supplemental materials, and when/if the Division Literacy Plan would evolve into a Literacy Improvement Plan? Additional dialogue ensued between Board Members and Dr. Branch and her team.

Board Chair Jenkins thanked Dr. Branch and her team for their presentation. She commended them for taking care of the students and their needs from the very beginning.

There being no further discussion/questions, Board Chair Jenkins took a 10 minutes break to allow additional honor graduates to arrive. Only 45 of the 220 students were present at this point in the meeting.

➤ Recognition of Honor Graduates – Nansemond River High School

Dr. Shawn Green, Principal, Kim Warholak, Assistant Principal, and Kim Reid, Guidance Director congratulated and expressed pride in the NRHS honor graduates. Unfortunately, due to traffic issues and athletic events, only 45 of the 220 honor graduates were able to attend the meeting. The honor students introduced themselves, their parents, and indicated plans after graduation.

School Board Members congratulated the students, their parents, community, and faculty/staff for helping the students to achieve this accomplishment as this honor was the result of “team effort.” Students were told to enjoy and celebrate each moment and every victory, and to commit themselves to success. Board Members looked forward to celebrating with the students at the graduation ceremony at Chartway Arena and to future reports of the student’s careers and successes.

MOTION TO GO INTO A CLOSED MEETING

The employee involved in Employee Appeal #23/24-5 resigned after the agenda was published. Therefore, there was no Closed Session, Certification of Closed Meeting, and Action on Closed Meeting Item (Employee Appeal #23/24-5). *No action was needed.*

MEETING RECESS

- There being no further business or discussion, Board Chair Jenkins recessed the meeting at 5:59 p.m.

RE-OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING

- Meeting Called to Order:
Board Chair Jenkins called to order the regular public meeting at 7:00 p.m.

- Presentation of Colors – LHS JROTC Cadets
JROTC Cadets from Lakeland High School, commanded by Cadet Major Holloman, presented colors at the meeting.

- Pledge of Allegiance:
The following students led all in the Pledge of Allegiance:
 - Camellia Raspberry – 2nd grade at HES
 - Bryson Small-Williams – 4th grader at KSESThe National Anthem was performed by Jamie Hockaday.

- Moment of Silence:
A moment of silence was observed by all in attendance.

- The Mission of Suffolk Public Schools:
Vice Chair Howell read the mission of SPS.

- Musical Selection – Combined Choirs of Creekside & Northern Shores Elementary School – Directed by Mrs. Jamie Hockaday (CES) and Mr. Christopher Stadler (NSES):
Dr. Gordon provided background information regarding Mrs. Hockaday and Mr. Stadler while highlighting the various performances of the combined choir.

The choir performed a variety of music for everyone in attendance.

Board Chair Jenkins thanked the students and the directors for a fantastic performance. She also thanked the parents for supporting the children by attending the performance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

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

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS

- Citizen Comments on Agenda Items:
No speakers signed up to address the Board.

REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

- Good News Report:
Anthonette Dickens, Communications and Community Engagement Officer, shared highlights from the Good News Report. She recognized the following individuals:

- Students from KFHS, LHS, NRHS received certificates for their contribution of art work for the Portraits of Victims for Gun Violence Awareness Power March. Mr. Trey Burch was also recognized for his work with the students and for empowering them to work with the Gun Violence Awareness Power March.
 - The Suffolk Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc, was recognized for their dedication and support of Suffolk Public Schools.
 - Students Noah Wells, Kelsey Kellish, and Nicholas Convoy, were recognized and presented with certificates for their work with Project Lead The Way Engineering Capstone.
 - The United Way of South Hampton Roads, STARR Motors, and BELK of Suffolk were recognized by the Virginia School Board Association (VSBA) Business Honor Roll for their support of Suffolk Public Schools.
- All District Reads
Dr. Gordon introduced Mr. Gary Anderson, Executive Director of All District Reads. Mr. Anderson stated that Suffolk Public Schools is leading the way in reading by using this program. To date, 7,800 elementary students and their families have completed four books which also promotes literacy not only in school but also in their homes. He stated that other neighboring school divisions were excited to join in on the fun based on results from SPS. He thanked Dr. Gordon and the Board for their partnership with All District Reads program.
- Calendar of Special Events:
Dr. Gordon highlighted the events listed on the calendar of special events.

CONSENT AGENDA

- Approval of the Consent Agenda:
Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda with the removal of Bills and Payroll for March and April 2024 being added to New Business.

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

With the approval of the Personnel Report, Dr. Gordon introduced several new administrators that will either be joining SPS' team or will be moving into a new role for the 2024-2025 school year. Dr. Gordon introduced the following new administrators:

- Dr. Shaka Miller, Principal - HES
- Dr. Sabrina Lee, Principal - KSES
- Mrs. Kimberly Warholack, Coordinator of Special Education
- Dr. Johnetta Vaughan, Principal, College and Career Academy at Pruden
- Dr. Cassandra McNair, Director of Special Education
- Mr. Judd Wilson, School Safety Specialist

Board Chair Jenkins congratulated everyone on their new roles with Suffolk Public Schools.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- Ordinance 23/24-77: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 2-2.1:1 entitled "Superintendent responsible for Day-to-Day school operations; site visits by School Board

Members of PreK-12 schools allowed under certain conditions; site visits regarding non-instructional buildings; violation of policy” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board
Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 23/24-77.

Board Members Dr. Brittingham, Riddick and Slingluff expressed their concerns with the policy citing the following:

- Extension of a previously failed policy.
- Policy hinders members access to schools.
- Submitting written requests 24 hours prior to school visit.
- Accusatory and negative language.
- Administrator escort for visit.

Board Member Riddick suggested that the language regarding written requests needs to be more specific.

Dr. Gordon expressed his concerns regarding Board Members statements regarding refusal of access to buildings, recommended level of communication with the Superintendent regarding visiting schools, inspection of property, and Board Members policy recommendations/feedback from policy committee.

Vice Chair Howell suggested verbiage edits to the policy to provide specificity.

Attorney Waller agreed with discussion of the policy however, he recommended that policy edits to should go through the Policy Review Committee. He expressed that it was not a good idea to amend or modify policy during the Board meeting.

Additional conversation ensued between Board Members.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 3 / Nay: 3 (Dr. Brittingham, Riddick, Slingluff) / Abstain: 0. The motion tied by vote of 3 to 3.

Attorney Waller clarified that the ordinance does not fail with a tie vote due to the absence of a Board Member. Therefore, the item will again be considered at the next School Board meeting on June 13, 2024.

- Ordinance 23/24-78: An Ordinance Adding Chapter 2, Article, 2, Section 2-2.1:2 entitled “Statement of Purpose; School Activities; Report by Chair” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board.

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 23/24-78.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham felt that the policy was an overreach and micromanages Board Members.

Vice Chair Howell clarified that the policy was revised based on the suggestions from Board Member Riddick to provide “teeth” to reflect what Board engagement should look like.

Additional dialogue ensued between Board Members.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 1 (Dr. Brittingham) / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 5 to 1.

- Ordinance 23/24-79: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 2-2.7 entitled “School Board Standing Committees; Foundations; Special Committees; Failure to attend Committee meetings of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board.
Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 23/24-79.

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

NEW BUSINESS

- Set the Date of Wednesday, May 29, 2024, 5 p.m. at Suffolk City Council Chamber, 442W. Washington Street, Suffolk, VA 23434, for a Special School Board Meeting to Adopt the Annual Budget of Suffolk City Public Schools for Fiscal Year Beginning July 1, 2024 and Ending on June 30, 2025.

Dr. Gordon provided additional/background information regarding the budget, contracts and the General Assembly which supported the special meeting.

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Vice Chair Howell seconded the motion to approve the date of Wednesday, May 29, 2024 at 5 p.m. for a Special School Board Meeting at Suffolk City Council Chamber to adopt the Annual SPS Budget.

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

- Bonus for Employees Signing their 2024-2025 Contract or Assignment by June 10, 2024
Dr. Gordon provided additional information regarding the suggested bonus which would be in-line with bonus requirements from Governor Younkin.

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Riddick seconded the motion to approve bonuses for employees signing their 2024-2025 contract or assignment by June 10, 2024.

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

- SPS Division Literacy Plan (DLP) (VDOE)
Dr. Gordon shared that additional information from the Virginia Department of Education was received after the agenda was released which indicated that the DLP did not require a Board’s vote. Therefore, this item was changed to information only and required no action from the Board.

- Transfer Freeney Avenue Property from Suffolk Public Schools to City of Suffolk
Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to Transfer the Freeney Avenue Property from Suffolk Public Schools to the City of Suffolk.

Board Member Riddick felt that the transfer of the Freeney Avenue property was out of compliance with Opinion 23/24-10 previously issued by Attorney Waller which states that a resolution and a town hall and/or a public hearing was required before transferring the property. He also stated that the Board had not discussed the property to deem it as surplus.

Attorney Waller clarified that if the Board approved the transfer of property back to the City of Suffolk, he would prepare a resolution declaring the property as surplus, and the Board would then vote to approve or deny the resolution. He also stated that there was no requirement to hold a public hearing when conveying property back to the City. A public hearing and approval from City Council would only be required if the property was being sold to a third party.

Dr. Gordon provided historical information regarding initial discussions to transfer the Freeney Avenue property and the Bright Lane property. Dr. Gordon expressed several reasons why the building should be deemed surplus including, asbestos, building condition, etc.

Additional conversation ensued between Board Members.

Attorney Waller suggested that the motion should read: That the School Board explore transferring the Freeney Avenue property back to the City of Suffolk.

Vice Chair Howell amended her motion.

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the amended motion for the Board to explore the transfer of the Freeney Avenue property as surplus property from Suffolk Public Schools to the City of Suffolk.

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

➤ Transfer of Long-Term Project Funds from SECEP for the New SECEP Building – JFKMS Reconstruction Project

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Vice Chair Howell seconded the motion to approve the transfer of Long-term project funds from SECEP for the New SECEP Building.

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

➤ Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) Authorization of Signature in Absence of Division Superintendent Extension

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve the VDOE Authorization of Signatures in Absence of Division Superintendent as submitted.

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

➤ Resolution 23/24-30: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Granting the School Superintendent the Authority to Obligate by Encumbrance any Remaining Appropriated Funds Before the End of the Current Fiscal Year (June 30, 2024) for Certain Designated Repairs and/or Purchasing Needs of Suffolk Public School

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Vice Chair Howell seconded the motion to approve Resolution 23/24-30 as submitted.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham inquired of the sum to be encumbered and how items are added to the list.

Mrs. Forsman indicated that up to 100 % of SPS revenue is encumbered. Also, items that are encumbered are on a replacement cycle. These items are not included in the budget.

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 23/24-30 as presented.

The Clerk stated that there was already motion on the floor and Vice Chair Howell indicated that she was merely restating the motion. The Clerk clarified that the motion was made by Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck and seconded by Vice Chair Howell.

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

➤ Payment of Bills and Payroll – March 31, 2024.

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve the Payment of Bills and Payroll for March 31, 2024 as submitted.

Board Member Slingluff recommended that the Bills and Roll be permanently moved to New Business.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 4 / Nay: 2 (Dr. Brittingham, Slingluff) / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 4 to 2.

➤ Payment of Bills and Payroll – April 30, 2024.

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Vice-Chair Howell seconded the motion to approve the Payment of Bills and Payroll for April 30, 2024 as submitted.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 4 / Nay: 2 (Dr. Brittingham, Slingluff) / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 4 to 2.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON NON-AGENDA TOPICS

➤ Citizen Comments on Non-Agenda Items:

The Clerk read the statement of decorum for all speakers.

Rakeitta Wooden – Re: Rezoning High Schools Based on Proximity. Ms. Wooden suggested the rezoning of all of the schools, not just elementary. According to Ms. Wooden, her children live within walking distance to Nansemond River High School and is bused to King’s Fork High School.

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

➤ Comments and Reports by School Board Members:

- Congratulated honor graduates of NRHS and all 2024 graduates of SPS, Teachers/Rookie Teachers of the Year, Administrators of the Year, and students in the joint chorus of CES and NSES for a wonderful performance.
- Thanked the Board, Dr. Gordon and Dr. Whiting and their teams, citizens who attended the various rezoning Town Hall meetings, parents, families, employees, and the member of Delta Sigma Theta Inc. (Suffolk Alumni Chapter) for working closely with and supporting SPS.

- Attended School Board training, ACCESS Community College Commitment Day, Gang Violence Awareness event, Solarbration event, Purple Star Celebration at FBES, softball/baseball games, and band competition at NRHS.
- Highlighted students: Miss Booker from NSES (Top Tumbling Champion for the Commonwealth of VA (9-year-old category), Employees: Ms. Nettles, Ms. Fowler, Mr. Boggs (HES), Ms. Capri Jones and Ms. Rita.
- Welcomed new employees.
- Wished all a good night.

INFORMATION ITEMS

- Accident Report – April 2024
- Attendance Report – April 30, 2024
- Capital Projects Financial Statement – April 2024
- Financial Report – March 31, 2024
- Financial Report – April 30, 2024
- Superintendent’s Contract Extension Discussion Announcement
- SPS Condolences

ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further business, Board Chair Jenkins adjourned the May 9, 2024 School Board Meeting at 9:41 p.m.

Karen Jenkins, *School Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*