

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, October 23, 2025 ~ 6:00 P.M.

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

Board Members Present:

Heather Howell, *Chair*
Sean McGee, *Vice Chair*
Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham
Valerie Fields
Karen Jenkins
Tyron Riddick
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 Howell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.
- Pledge of Allegiance:
Board Member Jenkins 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:
Vice Chair McGee read the mission of SPS.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- Approval of Agenda:
Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the agenda by adding to New Business the Capital Improvement Plan for School Administrative Offices as an information/action item. Board Member Riddick requested to add to the agenda a discussion regarding Forensic Audit RFP as an information/action item. Attorney Waller clarified that both items were acceptable to be added to the agenda as they would not have an impact on staff or students.

Vice Chair McGee amended his motion and Board Member Jenkins seconded the amended motion to add the following two (2) items to the agenda under New Business as “Info/Action” items: 1) Capital Improvement Plan for School Administrative Offices, 2) Forensic Audit RFP Discussion.

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

REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

➤ Good News Report:

Melvin Bradshaw, Community Engagement Facilitator, shared good news happening within the division utilizing a PowerPoint presentation. Dr. Gordon, Division Superintendent, and Mrs. Howell, School Board Chair, recognized and congratulated Ms. Sarah Ghandil for CFCMS being named a 2024-2025 National BETA School, Mia Melendez and Kentara Watkins, for being crowned as one of Suffolk's 2025 Peanut Fest Princesses, Layla Criner for presenting on NASAs eClips, at the first city-wide science event, and being named National Institute of Aerospace Student Ambassador, and Michael Whittington for being named VIAAA State Athletic Director of the Year. The Superintendent and Board Chair were joined by Mr. Kevin Privott, Director of Transportation, who recognized bus drivers who had perfect attendance for the month of August and September.

➤ Calendar of Special Events:

Dr. Gordon, Division Superintendent, highlighted information from the calendar of special events.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS

➤ Citizen Comments on Agenda Items:

The Clerk read the statement of decorum for speakers who sign up to address the Board.

1. Janet McKinney – Re: FOIA Request. Ms. McKinney did not agree with the price charged for her FOIA request and felt that the process was antiquated.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

➤ Ordinance 25/26-32 through Ordinance 25/26-39

Board Members chose to consider ordinances collectively except for two items: Item 10- Ordinance 25/26-40 (removed at the request of Board Member Dr. Brittingham) and Item 11- Ordinance 25/26-41 (removed at the request of Board Member Riddick).

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 25/26-32 through Ordinance 25/26-39 collectively and to consider Ordinance 25/26-40 and Ordinance 25/26-41 separately for discussion.

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

➤ Ordinance 25/26-40: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 2-2.6:1 entitled “Aspirational Statements; School Board Norms; Protocols; and Consequences for Violations” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - Second Reading

Board Member Riddick asked if the ordinance could be returned to the Policy Review Committee (PRC) to add a provision in the event that the Chair and Vice Chair are both charged with violating School Board Norms and Protocols. The ordinance does not currently address this situation. Mr. Riddick referenced that the provision needed to be in place as this was something that almost happened during his tenure and should be in policy moving forward.

Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 25/26-40 as is, but send the policy back to the PRC for additional language as recommended by Board Member Riddick.

Discussion was had by board members and Attorney Waller regarding streamlining the policy regarding how complaints are received, processed, formal documentation/notification, implementation, and policy language. Board Member Riddick recommended that the policy be specific in language and process to avoid any doubt regarding what is meant by language in the policy. He also asked if the motion could be amended to approve the ordinance and refer it back to the PRC to address what occurs if both the chair and vice-chair are charged with a violation, and for guidelines to be created regarding violation management and submitting information to the full board. Additional conversation was had regarding the need to submit any suggested policy changes in writing to the PRC, and whether there should be guidelines for policy implementation versus revising language in the policy. There being no further discussion, board members voted on the following motion:

Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 25/26-40 as is, but send the policy back to the PRC for an additional statement as recommended by Board Member Riddick (to add a provision in the event that the Chair and Vice Chair are both charged with violating School Board Norms and Protocols.)

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 2 (Jenkins / Riddick) / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 5 to 2.

- Ordinance 25/26-41: An Ordinance Amending 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; Time Limit for Board Member Comments” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - Second Reading

Board Member Dr. Brittingham suggested that the board begin in January 2026, using Robert’s Rules of Order for Small Boards. She stated that the current informal rules that are being used lack many of the established parliamentary standards followed by other local and national governing bodies and that implementation of this change would promote consistency, transparency, fairness, and that all board actions are governed by balance and time-tested standards. Board Members and Attorney Waller engaged in conversation regarding the inception of the five (5) minute time limit for board members. Attorney Waller clarified that the request was made for board members to only speak for five minutes and concerns were raised that the request was not in policy. Therefore, policy was crafted and submitted to the Policy Review Committee. Additional conversation ensued regarding the reasons stated by Board Chair Howell for the time limit. There were also discussions regarding what is perceived as disparities in treatment. A question was also raised is to whether comments by board members will be included as an agenda line item because it is no longer a part of second school board meetings. Lastly, concerns were raised regarding the lack of consistency in policy implementation and the overall lack of clarity relative to this policy.

Board Member Riddick moved to deny Ordinance 25/26-41. After clarification of the motion from Board Chair Howell, Board Member Riddick revised his motion.

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to send Ordinance 25/26-41 back to the Policy Review Committee for further deliberation/discussion.

Additional conversation ensued regarding specificity of what the policy should look like, and the Chair’s discretion to structure, facilitate, and regulate proper decorum of school board meetings, and the board’s ability to reverse rulings of the chair. There being no further discussion, board members prepared to vote on the motion previously stated by Board

Member Riddick (Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to send Ordinance 25/26-41 back to the Policy Review Committee for further deliberation/discussion.)

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

NEW BUSINESS

➤ Payment of Bills and Payroll September 2025

Board Member Jenkins moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion to approve the Bills and Payroll for September 2025.

Vice Chair McGee requested clarification of the following items listed:

1. E3 Diagnostics, Inc. – Missing service description, what is it for?
2. Marine Chemist Service Inc. “Lead in Drinking Water Sampling at Various Locations” and Asbestos. Why is this service performed?
3. Taylor Enterprises – Two identical charges, what are they for?
4. RK Chevrolet, Inc. “2025 Chevrolet Express Cargo Van 2500” – vehicle purchase how determined and are contracts involved?
5. Yeng Collins Law, PLLC – Four charges for attorney’s fees. For what purpose?

Responses:

1. Information would be forthcoming, Mrs. Forsman was not available for assistance.
2. Routine testing, and testing due to remodeling at the Innovation Center.
3. Painting at two different schools, NRHS and LHS.
4. Vehicles are typically purchased through auction/surplus events and due to SPS sometimes having to wait for back-ordered vehicles, if a better deal is available, it is purchased and the back-ordered vehicle is cancelled.
5. Legal services for the administration relative to a teacher grievance hearing due to the Board’s request that Attorney Waller attend the closed meeting to advise the Board when the Board began discussing the hearing officer’s recommendation.

There being no further questions, board members prepared to vote.

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.

➤ Citizen Advisory Committee Members Update

Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to adopt the Citizen Advisory Committee Members Update as presented.

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

➤ Ordinance 25/26-42: 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 - First Reading

First reading only, no action required at this time nor was there any discussion.

➤ Capital Improvement Plan for School Administrative Offices (SAO)

Vice Chair McGee led the discussion by asking for historical context to the offer of relocating SAO to the Virginian Pilot building, who made the decision (or if it was a board decision) to reject the various offers, and if a study has been conducted which justifies the need for a larger facility as the current size of SAO is 28,000 versus VDOT at 39,000. Vice Chair McGee expressed his concern with facilities not being enough for future growth.

Dr. Gordon began by suggesting prior notice of, or a heads up to information needed by the board to allow time to research questions in order to provide an answer to questions asked at the meeting. He then shared that the conversation has been ongoing since 2021 and included more than just the Virginian Pilot building. Dr. Gordon highlighted the following:

- **Human Resource (HR) Building** – The City had appropriated \$53 million for a building that costs \$75 million to renovate. Additionally, \$6.5 million (from the city) plus \$15 million received from the VA Department of Education Construction Grant, had to be redirected from the HR building to finish the renovation project at JFKMS. Additional funding would have to be found to address current concerns that are caused by the ravine that is located by the property. The ravine is causing the parking lot to break away from the location, producing a deficit in parking space. (Building tours: March 29, 2021, January 27, 2023,
- **Wilroy Road Site** – The site on Wilroy Road presented water quality concerns. (Building tours: May 17, 2021,
- **Virginian Pilot Building** – The Virginian Pilot was in terrible condition that required hundreds of thousands of dollars for repairs to cover rooftop concerns, potential roof caving, HVAC concerns, and the lack of parking for staff and visitors. (Building tours: May 13, 2022,
- **VDOT Building** – The City Manager took the Superintendent and his team to tour VDOT building. Due to a serious leak in the facility, only parts of the building could be viewed. (Building tour: April 1, 2025,

Dr. Gordon added that the conversation regarding relocation and/or a new facility for the School Administration Offices has been an over four-year process and unfortunately, there are major concerns with each location offered. He added that the conversations are needed as the lease on the current location is due to expire on December 31, 2028 without a plan being in place. Dr. Gordon shared that once cost estimates are received, the city would actually make the decision as they are the entity who would allocate funds to rebuild. SPS does not have a choice in that matter. If a facility is agreed to, the design phase can begin. It is at that point that information would be presented to the Board for approval. He also shared information from a study done which revealed staff at various locations throughout the city that should be located at the SAO, and multiple people sharing office space at SAO as documented by the former City officials Al Moor, Kevin Hughes and Gerry Jones. Dr. Gordon added that the additional 12,000 sq. ft. at the VDOT building would probably still not be enough to house all of central office, specialists, and supports including occupational and physical therapists. These professionals being located at various schools increases the school's overcrowding, and the additional space at locations offered would allow for school board meetings to be held at our own location eliminating the problem of scheduling conflicts.

Additional discussion was had regarding the April 9th visit to the VDOT building and if SPS was informed or given the impression that the building would be a part of the larger project (Riverbend) presented by city officials to the board. Dr. Gordon shared that the focus of that visit was the VDOT building only.

Vice Chair McGee moved for the Board to direct the Superintendent to prepare and present a consolidated Administrative Staffing and Facility Utilization Report before our joint meeting with city council in December with the following report requirements: 1. Current Central Office Staffing. 2. List all current administrative positions based at the central office, including title, role, department, and reporting structure. 3. Identify how many positions are primarily office-based versus school-based or field-assigned. 3. A list of positions expected to occupy the proposed VDOT facility, including any new or reclassified positions. 4. Provide a 15 year historical overview of administrative-to-student ratios, and staffing and enrollment trends for SPS.

Additional dialogue ensued regarding Vice Chair McGee's request and justification of growth within the division. Dr. Gordon suggested addition conversation at the School Board Retreat to explain additional, detailed information. Vice Chair McGee amended his request to look at 10 years instead of 15 years of student growth.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham exclaimed that there was a motion on the floor. Board Chair Howell explained that the motion had not been seconded and that she had not been recognized to speak.

Additional conversation ensued between the board members. Vice Chair McGee amended his motion to the following:

Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion for the Board to direct the Superintendent to prepare and present a consolidated Administrative Staffing and Facility Utilization Report before our joint meeting with city council in December (December 3, 2025). Report requirements: 1. Current Central Office Staffing, including a list all current administrative positions based at the central office, including title, role, department, and reporting structure, and identify how many positions are primarily office-based versus school-based or field-assigned. 2. A list of positions expected to occupy the proposed VDOT facility, including any new or reclassified positions. 3. Provide a 10 year historical overview of administrative-to-student ratios, and staffing and enrollment trends for SPS.

Additional dialogue was had by board members and Dr. Gordon clarifying the motion and information being provided before the joint meeting, at least a week prior, and the impact that this report would have on staff regarding efficiency and time to prepare the report. Board Member Slingluff suggested that Vice Chair McGee to add the exact wording of the report being available a week before the joint meeting to his motion.

Vice Chair McGee amended his motion to read the following:

Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion for the Board to direct the Superintendent to prepare and present a consolidated Administrative Staffing and Facility Utilization Report a week before our joint meeting with city council on December 3, 2025 (due date will be the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, November 19, 2025). Report requirements: 1. Current Central Office Staffing, including a list all current administrative positions based at the central office, including title, role, department, and reporting structure, and identify how many positions are primarily office-based versus school-based or field-assigned. 2. A list of positions expected to occupy the proposed VDOT facility, including any new or reclassified positions. 3. Provide a 10 year historical overview of administrative-to-student ratios, and staffing and enrollment trends for SPS.

Additional conversation ensued regarding a timeframe for sharing the requested information. Dr. Gordon agreed to have information available to share at the November 13, 2025 school board meeting. There being no further discussion, board members prepared to vote.

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

➤ Forensic Audit RFP Discussion

Board Member Riddick led the discussion regarding this item by mentioning the 32 follow-up questions which were received by vendors for the audit RFP. According to a poll, it was agreed that the chair and vice chair would review and answer all questions received. However, it was recommended that the Finance Committee address all questions received regarding the RFP.

Board Member Riddick moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to allow all RFP audit questions and review (from vendors) to go through and be answered by the finance committee.

Board members engaged in discussion regarding the RFP deadline, and time constraints with providing feedback to vendors regarding their questions. Attorney Waller clarified the closing date for questions to be received from potential vendors (October 27, 2025), when answers would need to be provided to vendors (by the close of business on October 27, 2025), and the date for posing answers to said questions (October 28, 2025). This deadline date would give vendors seven days to consider and to questions and to submit their request to the RFP. If those benchmark dates are not met, the RFP would need to be pushed as the vendors will not have enough time to consider the Board's responses and provide an RFP. They also discussed the probability that the Finance Committee would not have adequate time to provide answers to the questions submitted. Board Chair Howell clarified that an appointment had already been scheduled with Ms. Linda Bates, Coordinator of Purchasing, for October 27, 2025 to provide answers to the vendors' questions by October 28, 2025. Mrs. Howell added that she did not mind the Finance Committee handling the questions however, there would not be enough time to legally announce a Finance Committee Meeting, to review questions with Ms. Bates and provide answers to vendors all before the deadline.

Board Member Riddick withdrew his motion due to the time constraints explained. It was agreed that the Board would receive answers to the questions submitted before they were published to vendors. There were no further questions or discussion.

INFORMATION ITEMS

Board Chair Howell directed attention the information items, and highlighted the WHRO Annual Impact Statement.

ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

Board Chair Howell adjourned the October 23, 2025 School Board Meeting at 7:53 p.m.