

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, March 14, 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 Riddick
Kimberly Slingluff

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 5:07¹ p.m.

➤ Recognition of Honor Graduates – Lakeland High School

Dr. Gordon introduced Mrs. Lori White, School Principal. Mrs. White stated that not only are the students excelling academically, they also excel in character. She introduced Sheila Williams, Counseling Director who introduced the honor graduates. Each graduate came to the podium and introduced themselves, their parents, and stated their plans for the future. There were 81 honor graduates from Lakeland High School. Dr. Gordon highlighted the student's accomplishments and thanked the parents for their support. Board Chair Jenkins and the Board Members thanked the students, parents, Mrs. White and her administrators and team for a job well done.

➤ SPS Equity Update

Dr. Gordon introduced Dr. Lawson-Davenport. Dr. Lawson-Davenport gave a snapshot of the work that has been done thus far that ensures equity for all. She also provided an overview of the equity policy and its updates, SPS Equity Leads, and the next steps. She shared that the equity plan which included the following areas of focus: professional learning that focused on culturally relevant instruction, the elimination of implicit bias, anti-racism, diversity, and inclusion in our schools and programs. Dr. Lawson-Davenport also gave a breakdown of information from an analysis of demographics data related to student achievement, specialty program participation, gifted and advanced courses and student behavior data. She also shared information regarding the development of the Suffolk Public Schools Equity Committee which is inclusive of stakeholders (SPS employees, parents, students, and community members) that will annually review metrics related to the equity policy. Dr. Lawson-Davenport shared information about the equity audit tool, SPS Equity Leads roles and responsibilities, and the next steps. These steps include the following: Equity Leads coaching training (March/April), Year-end Equity Audits with school/department leadership teams for

¹ The meeting did not begin until 5:07 p.m. due to the large crowd in attendance and the lack of parking available for board members.

planning 2024-2025 school year, and an annual review of data that will occur in the summer of 2024.

Board Chair Jenkins inquired about the process to be followed when the data shows information that needs to be addressed. Dr. Lawson-Davenport explained that as soon as a problem is identified, it is handled immediately. Additional conversation ensued as Board Members asked questions that were answered by Dr. Gordon and Dr. Lawson-Davenport.

➤ Elementary Re-Zoning Presentation

Dr. Byrd, Chief of Schools, gave an overview of desegregation efforts in Suffolk, VA. He provided historical context stating that in the past, Suffolk had been extremely entrenched in segregation practices. Although significant progress has been made, there are still schools with demographic representation that are not aligned with the demographic breakdown of our city.

Mr. Wendell Waller, School Board Attorney, gave historical data indicating that on May 27, 1970 the United States filed a lawsuit against the Nansemond County School Board and its school superintendent which alleged that the school board maintained a dual system of public schools. Eight (8) schools were traditionally maintained for white students and staffed by white teachers and ten (10) schools were traditionally maintained for black students and staffed by black teachers. On October 18, 1971, the Federal District Court entered an order approving the School Board's School Desegregation Plan which addressed student, faculty and staff assignments, transportation and other aspects of school operations. Attorney Waller provided additional historic information which culminated with the courts entering a consent order that modified the school board's student assignment plan to account for the new Southwestern School that went into effect for the 2014-2015 school year. That plan is known today as the Majority to Minority (M to M) Program. The program allowed black students who attended schools with a high percentage of black students to attend schools with a high percentage of white students and vice-versa. The program began with the 2014-2015 school year and is expected to remain in effect through the 2024-2025 school year. He also shared that the number of students attending Southwestern Elementary under the M to M Program has continued to increase each year from 78 students in 2014-2015, to currently 116 students. Attorney Waller also highlighted the enormous burden the program has placed on the transportation department. This program will eventually result in the overcrowding of Southwestern Elementary School. He stated that the only viable option to addressing the racial disparity in certain schools is to consider rezoning at the elementary level. Additionally, he shared that the end result is to have the Federal Court declare that Suffolk Public Schools has achieved unitary status and has eliminated vestiges of a prior dual system of racial segregation. To date, Suffolk Public School has achieved unitary status in five of the six areas identified by the US Supreme Court known as the "green factors" for this determination. Those factors include student assignment, faculty hiring, staff assignments, extracurricular activities, transportation, and facilities. According to an order entered by the Federal District Court in March of 2017, the only area that remains unresolved before unitary status can be achieved is student assignments. However, the rezoning of the elementary schools will address the remaining area.

Dr. Byrd explained the key considerations that must be taken into account to ensure an equitable and effective process. These include population distribution, capacity and utilization, geographic boundaries, demographic diversity, transportation, impact on the community, educational equity, long-term planning, and legal and regulatory compliance. As a result of those key factors, the rezoning of seven (7) elementary schools was recommended.

However, in order to resolve the items highlighted by Attorney Waller, along with other factors like school capacity, geographic features impact, and the impact on transportation, it requires modification of the recommendation.

John Littlefield, Director of Technology, provided a visual representation of the zoning recommendation along with the impact it will have on the school division. He highlighted the following:

- No changes to Northern Shores, Creekside, Florence Bowser, and Oakland Elementary Schools (zones and student attendance will remain the same).
- Natural boundaries will be respected (railway tracks, not dividing neighborhoods).
- Biggest changes will effect Booker T. Washington, Elephant's Fork, and Hillpoint. However, seven schools will be effected by rezoning: BTWES, EFES, HES, KSES, MBES, NPES, and SWES.
- Compliance by looking at capacity, and ethnic differences.
- K-3 students, and new kindergarten and first grade students will be affected by rezoning.

Dr. Byrd stated that the next steps to rezoning would be to hold community information sessions and get community feedback, present information to the School Board for a vote, plan for the change, and finally, if approved, implement rezoning in the 2025-2026 school year.

Dr. Gordon indicated that the rezoning process is an ongoing effort which includes input from Mr. Privott, Director of Transportation. He explained that these changes will potentially reduce transportation routes by 10 to 15 minutes and eliminate passing existing schools to get to other proposed schools. He also explained that rezoning will not change the need for our Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) as this plan is based on the condition of our schools and not the capacity. He encouraged the school communities to be very collegial and collaborative regarding rezoning and to be considerate of their words when talking about individual students as well as neighborhoods. He also ensured that all feedback will be taken into consideration and shared with the Board as they will make a decision based on that feedback and recommendations from staff.

Board Chair Jenkins thanked Dr. Gordon and his team for their detailed information and insight. She encouraged all parents to be sure to attend the information sessions that will be held at each school to voice their concerns and opinions regarding rezoning as their input is important to the Board's decision.

Additional dialogue ensued between Board Members, Attorney Waller, and Dr. Gordon and his team as Board Members were provided answers to their question. Some of the questions included:

- Was consideration given to rezoning the entire division versus doing only what is necessary to satisfy the Department of Justice?
- Was all approved pipeline development from the city of Suffolk considered when looking at rezoning?
- Will larger/better maps with detailed streets be provided?
- Is there a timeline for when rezoning has to be completed according to the DOJ?
- What will be done to fix transportation issues?
- If the Board is expected to make a decision, when will they have access to data in real time?
- Is there a possibility that the data can be placed in a daily or weekly report?

There being no additional business in the Work Session, Board Chair Jenkins recessed the meeting.

MOTION TO GO INTO A CLOSED MEETING

- A closed meeting was not held as Employee Appeal #23/24-4 was rescinded moments before the board meeting began.

PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING ON THE 2024-2025 OPERATING BUDGET

- Board Chair Jenkins called the Public Budget Hearing to order.
- Only one speaker signed up to address the Board, Katia Grillo. Ms. Grillo, teacher at KFHS, encouraged the Board to look critically at improvements that can be done and to focus on the positive things happening within the division. She expressed her pride in working with Suffolk Public Schools as she compared it to her home country of Brazil where children are not afforded the many opportunities that our students have. She appreciates working together with other teachers as they are all fighting for the success of the students and schools.
- There being no additional speakers, the Public Budget Hearing on the 2024-2025 Operating Budget was adjourned at 7:23 p.m.

RE-OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING

- Meeting Called to Order:
Board Chair Jenkins called to order the regular public meeting at 7:24 p.m.
- Pledge of Allegiance:
The DECA Club students from Nansmond River High School 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 Slingluff read the mission of SPS.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- Approval of Agenda:
Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the agenda with the addition of two items added to New Business: (1) School Board employee evaluation instruments and the process of evaluation, (2) an annual climate survey.

Attorney Waller explained that Board Member Slingluff's items, although not specifically outlined, were already included in the agenda under New Business, and at that time, she would indicate exactly what she wanted to have considered. He stated that her motion, at this point in the meeting, was out of order. He provided further clarification as to how her items would be added to the next agenda.

Board Member Slingluff did not agree with Attorney Waller's comments and provided information from Virginia Code section 2.2-3710 B. She questioned her items being added to a subsequent agenda versus the current meeting's agenda.

Attorney Waller indicated that policy clarification was issued to Board Member Slingluff via a five-page opinion on March 4th.

Additional conversation ensued between Board Members and Attorney Waller. Board Chair Jenkins clarified and stood by her decision to add Board Member's Slingluff's requests to the agenda to be voted on and if approved, the items would be added to the agenda for discussion at the April School Board meeting.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham did not agree with the information and continued expressing her concerns until Board Chair Jenkins brought the meeting back to order via gavel.

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Byrum seconded the motion to approve the agenda.

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 4 / Nay: 2 (Dr. Brittingham, Slingluff) / Abstain: 1 (Riddick). The motion Passed by vote of 4 to 2 to 1.

Board Member Riddick explained that he abstained from the vote due to being unsure of possible policy violation with the handling of this item.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS

> Citizen Comments on Agenda Items:

The Clerk read the statement of decorum for those signed up to address the Board.

Speakers Dr. Adriane Bradley-Gray, Cathy Cross, and Claudette Pierre addressed the Board regarding Ordinance 23/24-70: Ordinance Amending Chapter 2. They did not agree with board members making unannounced visits. They felt that those visits would be disruptive, distracting, and intrusive. They felt that the focus should be on finding and retaining qualified teachers, offering additional help to teachers for breaks, and additional professional learning. They suggested Board Members schedule times to visit classrooms and not just to pop in, but to come in and read a book or assist the teacher in the classroom.

Dahomy Dockery also addressed the Board regarding Ordinance 23/24-70: Ordinance Amending Chapter 2. She supported Board Members making unannounced visits if the intent was to give members the opportunity to be visible within the schools under their purview. She suggested that a meaningful approach with fewer disruptions to instruction would be necessary and would aid in the success of these visits.

REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

> Good News Report:

Anthonette Dickens, Communications and Community Engagement Officer, highlighted information from the Good News Report. DECA Club students from Nansemond River High School were recognized for the achievements earned at the Virginia DECA State Leadership Conference. DECA Advisors, Ms. Candice Credo (silver award winner), and Dr. Karen Perry 2024 DECA District Advisor), were also recognize for their outstanding accomplishments.

➤ Calendar of Special Events:

Dr. Gordon congratulated Dr. Andre Skinner for receiving his Doctorate in Educational Leadership from Liberty University. He also congratulated School Board Attorney, Wendell Waller on his 36th anniversary as the Pastor of Christian Home Baptist Church. Attorney Waller has served in a dual role as the School Board Attorney and Pastor of Christian Home Baptist for 36 years and is a great public servant to the community. Dr. Gordon also thanked the school community who participated in his Facebook live session by asking budget questions. There were about 18 budget questions that were asked. He stated that the next Facebook live would probably be around graduation time.

Dr. Gordon highlighted the events listed on SPS website for March/April.

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 to New Business.

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

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

➤ Calendar Committee Presentation

Dr. Gordon shared that Board Members held town hall meetings to gather information from their constituents before voting on the calendar. Mrs. Jenkins had 38 in attendance, Dr. Brittingham had 19, Mr. Riddick had 18 (he also had students in attendance), and Mrs. Slingluff and Howell had 13 who attended, for a total of 88 stakeholders. He indicated that 5,517 individuals participated in the SPS survey and explained that the calendar option would bring Suffolk Public Schools into alignment with the rest of the region. Additionally, he stated that if the calendar option for a pre-Labor Day start passed, SPS would work with those families that had already planned vacation for that last week in August. He also acknowledged the option the Board has to remain with the current post Labor Day calendar as well as the pre-Labor Day start during the 2025-2026 school year. Finally, he reminded the Board of the staff's recommendation for a pre-Labor Day start beginning in the 2024-2025 school year.

Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Byrum seconded the motion to approve the recommendation of the staff for a pre-Labor Day start of school.

Board Member Riddick felt that a pre-Labor Day start would not have an impact on academics, the change in calendar would negatively impact special education (i.e. IEPs, 504s updates) possibly causing compliance issues, and that the additional work associated with this calendar change would further burden an already strained guidance staff.

Dr. Gordon did not agree. While he agreed that Mr. Riddick's points were valid, they had already prepared and discussed those points as a part of their implementation plan.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham stated that feedback from her town halls indicated that the majority of families were not prepared for an August start to the 2024-2025 school year, and that this early start would affect high school students with summer jobs. She also stated that

some in her borough did not think it made much sense starting school just four days earlier and an earlier start would not have a positive impact on student achievement.

Board Chair Jenkins agreed that some of those same concerns were mentioned at her town hall meeting. However, teachers in attendance agreed with the earlier start while others preferred an earlier start for the 2025-2026 school year, and others felt that it really did not matter the date. Mrs. Jenkins stated that all of the concerns raised at the meeting were valid and that coupled with the feedback from the survey will be helpful in deciding.

Additional concerns and dialogue ensued between school board members. Board Member Riddick suggested that future school calendar be presented for two consecutive school years at a time, as it was done in previous years.

The Clerk re-read the motion. Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Byrum seconded the motion to approve the recommendation of the staff for a pre-Labor Day start of school.

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

NEW BUSINESS

➤ Budget Adjustment #4 Fiscal 2023-2024

Dr. Gordon explained that the budget adjustment was carryover grant funding money, the leftover CARES Act funds that had to be re-appropriated by City Council totaling \$8.3 million. He provided a breakdown on how these funds will be used and explained the process for requesting the re-appropriation of funds from City Council.

Board Member Byrum moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve Budget Adjustment #4 as submitted.

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

➤ Superintendent's Proposed Budget Discussion by Board Members

Board Member Riddick suggested that the Board consider adding an additional layer of legal support to Attorney Waller and his department, whether part or full time.

Dr. Gordon agreed to work with Mrs. Forsman, and get input from Attorney Waller to provide Board Members with a cost analysis for additional legal support for the legal department at the next board meeting.

Board Member Riddick clarified his request for Board feedback before any legwork for costs begins as his request may not be the will of the Board. He was asking the Board for a discussion regarding his suggestion.

Board Members Dr. Brittingham and Howell agreed with Mr. Riddick's suggestion and would like to see figures as to what that help would look like.

Board Members Dr. Brooks-Buck, Byrum, and Jenkins did not agree. They felt that if additional support was required, it would be requested by Attorney Waller. Board Chair Jenkins asked Attorney Waller for his opinion on the matter.

Attorney Waller stated that if the concern is making sure that legal services are available when a need arises, a better way to handle that matter would be to put money in the budget under contracted services. This would make available a pool of money to draw from in order to acquire help when needed. He felt that additional daily, full-time, or part-time support was not necessary.

Board Member Riddick appreciated Attorney Waller's input and asked for a projected cost analysis on the option to place additional funds into contracted services and for hiring an attorney. He requested the information to be provided at the March 25th Special School Board Meeting.

- Set the Date of Monday, March 25, 2024, 6 p.m. at Suffolk City Council Chamber, 442 W. Washington Street, Suffolk 23434, for a Special School Board Meeting for a Budget Work Session/Discussion and Approval of the Superintendent's Proposed Budget 2024-2025

Board Chair Jenkins shared that due to the VSBA Business Honor Roll and the Workforce Readiness awards deadlines approaching before the next regular school board meeting, she asked that those two be added to the motion to setting the date for the Special School Board Meeting on March 25, 2024.

Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the date of March 25, 2024, 6 p.m. at City Council Chamber to discuss and approve the Superintendent's Proposed Budget.

Conversation/clarification ensued between Board Members and Attorney Waller.

Board Member Slingluff amended her motion and Board Members Dr. Brooks-Buck and Howell seconded the motion to approve the meeting on March 25, 2024 at 6 p.m. at Suffolk City Council Chamber. Not only to discuss and approve the Superintendent's budget but to also add the VSBA applications for board recognition.

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

- Resolution 23/24-22: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Certifying that the Day-to-Day Operations of Suffolk Public Schools Fall Under the School Superintendent

Board Member Riddick requested information for the policy change from a member of the Policy Review Committee.

Board Chair Jenkins mistakenly spoke about the next item at this time. Once realized, she referred to the members of the Policy Review Committee for a response to Mr. Riddick's concern.

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck shared that the item was not a policy but a resolution and that the policy is consistent with the directions to allow the superintendent to handle day-to-day operations and the Board to hand governance. The resolution solidifies the fact that the Superintendent was hired to do his work and the Board does their work. It would prevent boundaries from being crossed.

Attorney Waller read the motion.

Board Member Riddick felt that the resolution was an attempt to silence Board Members who have differing opinions. He also felt that the roles of the Superintendent and Board Members are not clearly defined and requested clarity regarding day-to-day.

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck explained that Board governance included hiring the Superintendent to do the administrative job like supervising staff. She added that the Board does not need to do that because the Superintendent was hired to carry out those tasks.

Vice Chair Howell shared her understanding of day-to-day operations versus governance and that she has no plans to interfere in the tasks of the Superintendent. However, she shares some of the same concerns as Mr. Riddick regarding the resolution but she also felt that adding resolutions and documents and paperwork to ensure people behave accordingly is ineffective and useless.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham also expressed her reservations with the resolution. She said that it is difficult to engage with a community when you cannot access that community and that engagement and good governance should be organic in order to be truly effective and to build relationships. She stated that the resolution was not necessary and seems to be fear-driven.

Board Chair Jenkins shared the protocol for visiting schools. She stated that simple courtesy should be shown by letting Dr. Gordon know that you are going into a school. There are no scare tactics with the resolution. She highlighted the difference in governing the building (board governance) versus the people inside the building (superintendent's day-to-day).

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to deny Resolution 23/24-22.

Dr. Gordon clarified that three policies were being referred to and are also a part of the Norms and Protocols that are also in the policy. He reminded the Board that at February's meeting when Mr. Riddick's motion was passed, Dr. Gordon mentioned policies and regulations that may have to be changed and asked what this new policy would look like and the answer was not given. All this resolution does is provides answers, it does not restrict members access to schools. It's just a level of courtesy. He added that the resolution reinforces information that was sent on February 9th, addresses the concerns that were brought up during the discussion at the February 8th board meeting, and reinforces policies that were already in place.

Additional conversation ensued between Board Members.

The clerk re-read the motion:

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to deny Resolution 23/24-22 A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Certifying that the Day-to-Day Operations of Suffolk Public Schools Fall Under the School Superintendent.

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 3 / Nay: 3 (Dr. Brooks-Buck, Byrum, Jenkins) / Abstain: 1 (Howell). The motion failed by a tie vote of 3 to 3 to 1.

Attorney Waller added that since the motion failed, the Chair can ask if there's another motion to be made.

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Byrum seconded the motion to approve Resolution 23/24-22 as presented.

Additional conversation ensued between Board Members for which Attorney Waller provided clarification.

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Byrum seconded the motion to approve Resolution 23/24-22 as presented.

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 3 / Nay: 4 (Dr. Brittingham, Riddick, Slingluff, Howell) / Abstain: 0. The motion failed by vote of 4 to 3.

- Resolution 23/24-23: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Appointing a Student Representative to Serve on the Suffolk City School Board as Provided for by Virginia Code Section 22.1-86.1 and School Board Policy Section 2-2.8

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion not to approve Resolution 23/24-23 as presented.

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

- Resolution 23/24-24: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Suspending the Implementation of Action Taken at the February 8, 2024 Meeting of the School Board and Referring the Matter to the Policy Review Committee for its Consideration

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to deny Resolution 23/24-24.

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck expressed her concern with the motion to deny the resolution. She felt that it would be a mistake to act against the advice from legal counsel Attorney Waller.

Board Member Riddick stated that no one is trying to interfere with the day-to-day operations of the Superintendent. He reiterated that his original request was for a walk-through of the facility and being visible for staff to see.

Vice-Chair Howell pointed out that the resolution offers a temporary suspension and refers the policy back to the Policy Committee for specificity regarding which week out of the quarter, clarify walk-through with no interactions in the classroom, etc. She added that in order for the policy to be implemented in the way it was intended, more details should be included. She concluded by stating that she will vote in favor of temporarily suspending the resolution and sending it to the Policy Review Committee for the addition of details.

Board Member Slingluff asked if it was necessary to suspend the resolution versus sending the resolution to the Policy Review Committee to be altered, the Committee to provide feedback, and return the policy to the Board with revisions?

After additional conversation between Board Members, Dr. Gordon and Attorney Waller, Mr. Riddick amended his motion.

Board Member Riddick amended his motion and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to refer Resolution 23/24-24 to the Policy Review Committee for positive guidelines to be established in the spirit in which the request was originally made.

Additional conversation ensued.

The Clerk re-read Board Member Riddick's amended motion: Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to refer Resolution 23/24-24 back to the Policy Review Committee for guidelines to be established in the spirit in which the request was originally made (for visitation of school facilities by Board Members).

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

- Ordinance 23/24-70 through Ordinance 23/24-76
These ordinances were information items only. There were no questions or discussions by Board Members.
- Board Member Slingluff Request for Multiple Items to be Added to the April 11, 2024 School Board Meeting Agenda
 1. Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to add (to the agenda) School Board employee (Superintendent, Attorney, and Clerk) evaluation instrument and the process of evaluation to the Work Session for the April 11, 2024 meeting followed by an action item (in New Business) in the 7 p.m. meeting.

Conversation ensued between Board Members and Dr. Gordon.

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

2. Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to add a discussion on the topic of the Annual Climate Survey to the April 11, 2024 meeting agenda for discussion and potential action.

Conversation ensued between Board Members and Dr. Gordon.

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 4 / Nay: 3 (Dr. Brooks-Buck, Byrum, Jenkins) / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 4 to 3.

3. Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion for the Department of Education's report be placed on the April 11, 2024 school board meeting agenda for discussion and action.

Conversation ensued between Board Members and Dr. Gordon.

After discussion by Board Members and the Superintendent, Board Member Slingluff retracted her motion.

4. Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to add a quarterly update report on the April 11, 2024 agenda for discussion and action.

Conversation ensued between Board Members and Dr. Gordon.

The Clerk re-read the motion: Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to add a quarterly update report on the April 11, 2024 agenda for discussion and action.

Board Member Slingluff stated that the motion was not accurate. She said she was requesting a discussion and not a directive for a report.

The Clerk edited and re-read the motion for accuracy: Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to add to the April 11th agenda a discussion for a quarterly update report. The Clerk read the motion a second time for clarity.

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 4 / Nay: 3 (Dr. Brooks-Buck, Byrum, Jenkins) / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 4 to 3.

REPORTS BY SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

> Legislative Committee

Board Member Riddick shared information from the Legislative Committee meeting held on February 20, 2024. The Committee recommended the Board to take the following action on bills:

- That the Board support House Bills 355, 498, and 154
- No position was taken on House Bill 1,317, and 443.
- That the Board oppose Senate Bill 235
- The Board support Senate Bill 379, and 624.

The Committee meeting as attended by the following committee members:

- Tyron Riddick, Chair
- Dr. Dawn Brittingham
- Kimberly Slingluff

Attorney Waller and Dr. Gordon were also in attendance.

Due to overlooking the Bills and Payroll item on the agenda, Board Member Jenkins revisited New Business to considered that item.

NEW BUSINESS

> Bills & Payroll

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck seconded the motion to approve the Bills and Payroll as submitted.

Upon electronic vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 1 (Dr. Brittingham) / Abstain: 0. The motion passed by vote of 6 to 1.²

REPORTS BY SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

> VSBA Capital Conference / NSBA Advocacy Institute

² After the vote, Board Member Slingluff indicated that she mistakenly voted in favor of the motion instead of voting "Nay" not to the approval of Bills and Payroll.

Board Member Dr. Brooks-Buck shared the following highlights from the NSBA Advocacy Institute and the VSBA Capital Conference:

- Dr. Brooks-Buck and Mrs. Jenkins attended the NSBA Advocacy Institute.
- Participants were from all of the United States.
- Virginia School Board Members met with representatives from Senator Tim Kane's and Senator Mark Warner's office, and met with Congressman Bobby Scott.
- Learned about Best Practices for Advocacy (training precedes all meetings)
- Learned about the Legislative Priorities for the (NSBA)

VSBA Capital Conference:

- Dr. Brooks-Buck, Mrs. Jenkins, Mrs. Howell, and Mrs. Byrum (attended virtually) the VSBA Capital Conference.
- Senator Mark Warner was a guest speaker.
- Saw an excellent presentation on vaping.
- Met with Legislators (Senator Emily Jordan, Senator Mamie Locke, Senator L. Louise Lucas, and Speaker of the House Don Scott)
- Learned about the Legislative priorities which included: local control, labor relations, school safety funding & budget, school infrastructure & modernization, employee shortages, charter schools, school choice.
- Shared specific needs of Suffolk schools with lawmakers. They included funding reimbursement for special education / underfunded special education services, teacher shortages, nutrition infrastructure, and purposeful spread of misinformation. It is important to make lawmakers aware of needs before bills are passed.
- Learned that educational and statistical jargon can lead to poor political decisions.
- Learned that Virginia's graduation rate is 92.1% while America's graduation rate is 88%.

The attendees enjoyed the conferences. Board Member Byrum and Board Chair Jenkins thanked Dr. Brooks-Buck for her detailed report and indicated that reports like hers is what should be shared upon return from a conference.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON NON-AGENDA TOPICS

➤ Citizen Comments on Non-Agenda Items:

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

Kevin Hudgins – (Return to School Date for 2024-2025) Mr. Hudgins did not agree with starting school pre-Labor Day the 2024-2025 school year. He felt that the decision was rushed and preferred a 2025-2026 pre-Labor Day start.

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

➤ Comments and Reports by School Board Members:

- Thanked the speakers for their comments, endurance and support of Suffolk Public Schools.
- Thanked Dr. Gordon, his team and the staff for all that they do.
- Honored to be on the Board and serve the students and parents of the Chuckatuck borough.
- Looking forward to and welcome receiving invitations to schools.
- Shout out to Mrs. Mounie for SWES 90%+ attendance accolades. Also congratulated JYMS for their attendance.
- Congratulated the teachers in the Teacher Spotlight, especially Amy Blyth.
- Congratulated Dr. Andre Skinner on his Doctoral degree.

- Congratulated the 81 honor graduates of LHS. Thanked the parents, teachers and staff for helping the students achieve this goal. Also congratulated all 2024 graduates of SPS and their families.
- Thanked stakeholders for supporting the town halls.
- Reiterated support for School Board Employees.
- Dispelled misinformation and established common ground with members of the Virginia Education Association.
- Will always support having Board discussions whether in favor of the topic or not.
- Will be a proactive School Board Member who will be overly engaged in the community.
- Thanked Board Members for rigorous discussions. Sometimes uncomfortable but members must be willing to engage in productive conversations.
- Suffolk Concerned Citizens group handed out flyers to white constituents only in the Nansemond borough displaying unacceptable behavior.
- False/misinformation that only 37% of SPS students passed SOL tests. Stop the spread of false information.
- Congratulated JYMS charger family for attendance and volleyball.
- Congratulated DECA Club students from NRHS on their accomplishments.
- Thanked staff who presented to the Board and for still going strong in the late hour.
- Thanked the sororities and fraternities for supporting SPS and for their input.
- Wished everyone a good night/good morning and a safe drive home.

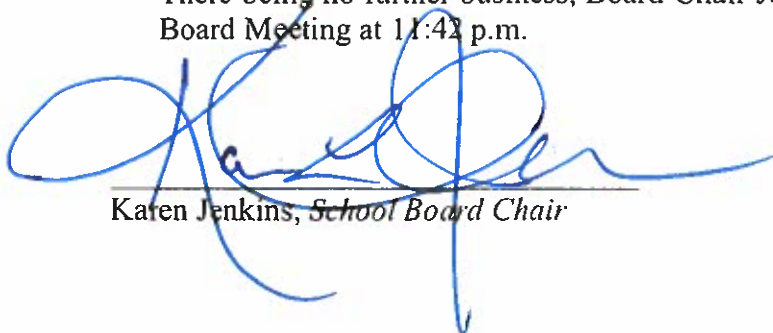
INFORMATION ITEMS

- Accident Report – February 2024
- Capital Projects Financial Statement
- Financial Report February 29, 2024
- Change in Primary Benefit Provider from NTA to Pierce Group.

ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further business, Board Chair Jenkins adjourned the March 14, 2024 School Board Meeting at 11:42 p.m.



Karen Jenkins, *School Board Chair*



Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*