

**SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD**  
**Wednesday, March 22, 2023 ~ 6:00 P.M.**  
**Suffolk City Hall, 442 W. Washington Street, Suffolk, VA 23434**

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**Board Members Present:**  
Tyron Riddick, *Chair*  
Heather Howell, *Vice Chair*  
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*

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**OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION**

- Call to Order:  
Board Chair Riddick called the meeting to order.
  
- Pledge of Allegiance:  
Board Member Jenkins led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.
  
- Mission of SPS:  
Board Member Dr. Brittingham read the Mission of Suffolk Public Schools.

**SCHOOL BOARD WORK SESSION**

- Budget Discussion (Information item only)  
Board Chair Riddick opened the work session reminding all that the proposed budget was received a month ago and sufficient time has passed for questions to have been presented to Dr. Gordon and his staff for response. He added that 41 inquiries were received from Board Members and the public, however, three of the 41 questions came directly from citizens.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham expressed her concerns that funding had decreased for the Virginia Preschool and Early Reading Initiatives, and for the At-Risk Add On which she pointed out on page 19 of the budget book. She felt that the additional funds that were added to travel and training, purchased services, and dues and subscriptions should not have been increased but placed in areas to increase student achievement which should be top priority. She then asked how the division was going to offset the funding loss for early intervention programs for those identified learners?

Mrs. Forsman provided clarification regarding Member Dr. Brittingham's concerns. She explained the following:

- Page 19 is "revenue" from the State and Suffolk Public Schools does not control how the state allocates money, including the category funds are placed in.

- The decrease in early intervention funding was done by the state department as they obviously moved funds from early reading intervention programs to basic aide in order to supply SPS with reading specialists.
- The additions to the budget will offset the change in state funding so SPS can continue its early reading intervention initiatives. These additions include 11 Reading Specialist (from Title I to the operating funds), five literacy coaches (remaining in Title I), and 10 additional teacher assistants. Items may not be listed on a line in the budget as “Early Reading Initiatives” as there is no program bearing that name. These additions are in the “General Education” line because the State mandated this specific coding.
- The overall budget for Pre-K increased 2.16% (slightly less than the budget’s overall increase).
- The process for filling the 442 Pre-K slots available each year through SPS, which includes students on the “waiting list”. This process ensures that all students have the opportunity of being served throughout the year. Suffolk Public Schools generally does not have any children that are not served.
- Of the 442 slots available in the division, only 332 are funded by the State leaving the additional 110 slots to be paid from local funds. Therefore, Suffolk Public Schools goes above and beyond the State’s requirements which shows that student achievement is a top priority for Suffolk Public Schools.

Mrs. Forsman also explained that the differences in teacher salary lines are due to teachers retiring at a higher salary versus teachers being hired with little to no experience. She also explained that the budget is created each year using real payroll information as placeholders with all vacant positions considered and included in the budget for the coming school year.

Dr. Gordon explained how SPS continually focuses on the Virginia Preschool Initiatives and Early Reading Intervention as they work to increase available seats to children each year. He also explained that the increase in dues and subscriptions were due to inflation affecting those items, and an increase in staff signing up for conferences, and joining more organizations. Employees attending the various conferences bring back and share with their colleagues the information they received thereby increasing professional development across the division which helps Suffolk Public Schools to continue working on becoming the premier school division in the country.

There being no additional questions from Board Members, Board Chair Riddick closed the budget discussion.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

- Field Trip: NRHS FBLA Students / FBLA State Leadership Conference / Reston, VA / March 31 – April 2, 2023:

Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the field trip (NRHS FBLA Students / FBLA State Leadership Conference / Reston, VA / March 31 – April 2, 2023) as submitted.

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

- Resolution 2022-23-14: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk Approving the Budget for Suffolk Public Schools for Fiscal Year 2023-2024 and Requesting that Suffolk City Council Fund the Budget by Appropriating City Funds totaling \$71,332,201.

Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Member Byrum seconded the motion to approve Resolution 2022-23-14 as submitted.

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

### INFORMATION ITEM

- School Construction Assistance Program:

Mrs. Forsman explained that the School Construction Assistance Program application was submitted to the City of Suffolk. The grant can potentially bring \$15.1 million to Suffolk Public Schools. The grant is need based, graded at the state level, and all school divisions can apply. The state department requires a 65-point scale before you can apply, and SPS was able to score 67 points and therefore completed/submitted the application. There is no additional information from the State regarding the grant. For example, at this time there is no information available regarding when grants will be awarded, when school divisions will be notified of the award, or any reporting requirements should there be an award.

Dr. Gordon added that the grant is based on the level of economic development and support from the Local Composite Index and the support received from the City. The State will award those divisions that have a higher economic need. Although the amount of the grant is \$15 million, Suffolk Public Schools will certainly not receive that total, and may not receive anything at all. The hope is that the grant will be awarded before July 1<sup>st</sup> as construction rules will change after that date for school construction. Communication is ongoing between the City and school division regarding this application and if funds are awarded, it may be applied to the requests from the School Board on their current CIP.

### ADJOURNMENT

- Adjournment of Meeting:

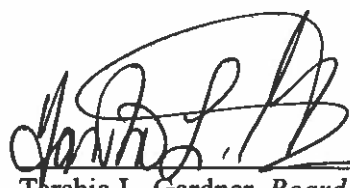
There being no further business or questions, Board Chair Riddick asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Member Dr. Brooks-Buck moved and Member Byrum seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting.

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

- Board Chair Riddick adjourned the March 23, 2023 Special School Board Meeting at 6:20 p.m.

  
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Tyron Riddick, Board Chair  
Heather Howell, Board Vice-Chair

  
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Tarshia L. Gardner, Board Clerk

