

**SPECIAL MEETING OF THE  
SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD  
Friday, October 23, 2020 (2:00 PM)**

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**Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting was held at City Hall and electronically while practicing social distancing.**

Upon roll being taken, the following persons were present:

Phyllis Byrum, *Chair*  
Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck, *Vice Chair*  
Karen Jenkins  
Lorita Mayo  
Tyron Riddick

Absent: Sherri Story

Also Present: Dr. John B. Gordon III, *Superintendent*  
Wendell M. Waller, *School Board Attorney*  
Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*

Attendance Via Electronic Device: (upon Board approval):<sup>1</sup>  
David Mitnick

**2:00 P.M. – OPENING OF SPECIAL MEETING**

The School Board Meeting was called to order by Board Chair, Mrs. Byrum.

**Meeting Attendance Via Electronic Device (David Mitnick):<sup>1</sup>**

Attorney Waller read the following motion for Member Mitnick to attend the special meeting by electronic device:

A MOTION IS NEEDED PURSUANT TO VIRGINIA CODE SECTION 2.2-3708.2. TO ALLOW BOARD MEMBER DAVID MITNICK TO PARTICIPATE IN TONIGHT’S SPECIAL SCHOOL BOARD MEETING AND RETREAT OF THE SCHOOL BOARD THROUGH ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION MEANS FROM HIS RESIDENCE DUE TO A TEMPORARY MEDICAL CONDITION THAT PREVENTS HIS PHYSICAL ATTENDANCE AT TONIGHT’S EVENTS.

Vice-Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck moved, and Member Mayo seconded the motion, to approve the attendance by means of electronic device for Member David Mitnick for medical reasons.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 Nay: 0 Absent: 1 (Story) The motion Passed. 5 to 0.

*\*There was a pause in the meeting to allow Member Mitnick to join the meeting.*

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<sup>1</sup> According to Virginia Code Section 2.2-3708.2(A)(2) requires approval by the public body before a member can participate in a meeting through electronic communication means. The School Board voted to allow Board Member Mitnick to participate via electronic communication means due to a medical condition at the opening of the public meeting at 2:00 p.m. Mr. Mitnick participated in the special school board meeting remotely from his residence.

**November 3, 2020 Election Day Holiday:**

Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck moved, and Member Jenkins seconded, the motion to approve the adjustment in calendar.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 Nay: 0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 1 (Story). The motion Passed. 6 to 0

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

**Item 1 – Educate and Innovate: Fall Reopening Plan Update**

- Dr. Rice presented information via PowerPoint presentation
- Guest speaker Dr. Wagoner from the Virginia Department of Health provided data on cases in Suffolk:
  - Cases in Suffolk are on a downward trend and remain relatively stable
  - 2.4 million tests been done with over 5% positive results for the state of VA
  - 8.9% of positive cases in western tidewater but remain relatively stable
  - Ages 0-19 are on a downward trend in the number of cases per week
  - CDC changed guidance; 6ft for 15 minutes revised to contact within 6 ft with 15 minutes over a 24-hour period
  - Effective today VDH posting outbreaks in schools/school settings (Outbreak defined as cases greater than two (2) to be an outbreak
  - This disease is about time, distance and shielding
  - Slight increase in number of cases for the 50-59 age group
  - 60-80 have the most severe outcomes
  - There are lots of a-symptomatic carries in all age groups
  - Based on numbers and mitigation strategies in place, Dr. Wagoner is confident that reopening schools will work. He is comfortable with in-person instruction (phased in) or a Hybrid model to minimize the number of staff on campus.

Members asked questions and answers were given by Dr. Rice and her team.

Member Mitnick moved, and Member Mayo seconded, the motion to adopt the Educate and Innovate plan as outlined today.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 3 Nay: 3 (Jenkins, Riddick, Brooks-Buck) Abstain: 0 Absent: 1. The motion Failed. 3 to 3 – Due to Tie Vote

Member Riddick stated why he voted “Nay.” He stated that the majority of votes from Facebook posts and that most agreed to start after the holiday season. They preferred a January start date. Member Riddick also asked if the Board would bring back the appeal for students with disabilities before January, to give parents an answer before second semester.

Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck stated that her decision is always based on safety and science. She indicated that she looked at all the data available before verbalizing her decision. She looked at Suffolk who is in the 72% danger zone. The positivity rate in Suffolk was always higher, and going up. The high death rate and positivity rate caused her to pause.

Member Jenkins stated that her concern was the start date. She feels we need to wait due to health and life. People are dying, young and old and there are too many uncertainties so she is sticking to her gut feeling.

Member Mayo indicated that she thinks it is an excellent plan however, her constituents have certain needs. Others boroughs may have great access to the internet but she promised her constituents that she would address their internet issues. She understands and is sensitive to the health concerns as well. Ms. Mayo stated that she believes in working together and that they will work in unity with the decision that has been made and we will do our very best to implement whatever plan that will come up in the future.

Member Mitnick stated he is concerned with students attending CCAP and if there is any way possible that the Board could entertain the option of just sending back CCAP students.

Member Riddick stated it would be a double standard to allow CCAP students to resume school but not allow other students attend classes for face-to-face instruction. This would bring more issues than to resolve if we do this.

Dr. Gordon indicated that they looked at several options for the CCAP situation. He is in conversations with VDOE regarding a waiver of some of the clock hours needed for the hands-on experience with CCAP students. Ms. Burgess and Mr. Skinner reached out to local businesses regarding internships for students to get clock hours for hands-on experience however, businesses are facing some of the same limitations as Suffolk Public Schools. Dr. Gordon said he is not comfortable with bringing any additional groups of students back as it will open pandora's box of inconsistencies. He is reluctant to give a start date of January because of the transition time of coming back; he indicated that it would be easier with a natural break in grading for the routine of the kids and teachers. He prefers to look at the situation each nine-weeks at a time which will allow time to compare and contrast the virtual learning models versus the hybrid learning models. Dr. Gordon stated he will discuss this again in December at the earliest but more than likely he and his team will prepare to have this conversation again in January. They will bring discussion/recommendations about mid-terms and final exams at the November/December meetings. He doesn't want this information to be lost with the plans for any return or any other adjustments that need to be made instructionally.

Board Chair Byrum stated why she voted yes. She indicated that she supports Dr. Gordon, his plan, and his staff. She feels that you must have a plan to move forward and that hers and Member Mayo's borough are unique. They both have a large number of students having difficulty with internet access. She talked about her own internet issues stating that she most times can only access the internet between 12:30 and 2:30 in the morning. Mrs. Byrum said that she had to consider the needs of all of her constituents and many of the students in her borough are suffering because of the lack of internet connection. She indicated that the technology department has done as much as possible to help but there are things still that they are not capable of doing and for that reason she voted yes.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further questions, the Board Chair adjourned the October 23, 2020 Special School Board Meeting at 3:55 p.m.