

**REGULAR MEETING OF THE  
SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD  
Thursday, October 8, 2020 (5:00 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  
Sherri Story

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

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

**5:00 P.M. – OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING**

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

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

Attorney Waller read the following motion for Member Mitnick to attend the 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 CLOSED MEETING AND OPEN MEETING OF THE SCHOOL BOARD THROUGH ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION MEANS FROM THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION BUILDING DUE TO A TEMPORARY MEDICAL CONDITION THAT PREVENTS HIS PHYSICAL ATTENDANCE AT TONIGHT’S MEETING.

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: 6 Nay: 0 Absent: 0 The motion Passed. 6 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 5:00 p.m. Mr. Mitnick participated in the closed meeting and public meeting remotely from the School Administrative Offices, 7<sup>th</sup> floor conference room.

## **MOTION TO GO INTO A CLOSED MEETING**

Attorney Waller read the following for going into a closed meeting:

A motion is needed to go into a Closed Meeting to discuss the following items and subjects pursuant to Section 2.2-3711 of the Code of Virginia (1950) as amended:

1. The discussion and/or consideration of the Personnel Report regarding prospective candidates for employment, assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, demotion, salaries, disciplining, or resignation of specific employees of the school board, and more specifically as it relates to the following:
  - A. The resignations of individuals employed in the following positions: Teachers, Teacher Assistants, School Nurse, Bus Mechanic, Bus Driver, Custodians, Dispatcher, and English Instructional Specialist;
  - B. The hiring of instructional personnel for the following subject areas: Math Teachers, 2nd Grade Teachers, and 1st Grade Teacher;
  - C. The hiring of non-instructional personnel for the following positions: Cafeteria Associate, Custodians, Head Custodians, SPED Teacher Assistants, and ECSE Teacher Assistant;
  - D. The hiring of a part-time individual employed as Cafeteria Associates, Custodians and Teacher Assistants;
  - E. The hiring of individuals employed as a substitute Bus Aide, Guidance Counselor, Cafeteria Associate, Teachers and Teacher Assistant;
  - F. The approval of a school employee to be paid a first stipend of \$150 for partial training as a Substitute Bus Driver Trainee;
  - G. The approval of two school employees to be paid a second stipend of \$150 for partial training as Substitute Bus Driver Trainees;
  - H. The approval for seven school employees to receive compensation for the 6th grade transition virtual presentation at King's Fork Middle School in August 2020 at the rate of \$26.40 per hour;
  - I. The approval for three school teachers to receive compensation for teaching Basic Computer Instruction classes to SPS Custodians, Food Nutritional Services workers and Bus Drivers/Aides from September 21, 2020 to October 31, 2020 and again in the Spring 2021 as needed at the rate of \$26.40 per hour;
  - J. The approval for compensation for an employee to serve as a Tutor for the Algebra Readiness Program at King's Fork High School for the 2020-2021 school year at the rate of \$26.40 per hour;
  - K. The approval for two employees to receive an annual stipend in the amount of \$5000 for the 2020-21 school year as a 504 Coordinator and a Lead Related Services Therapist;

- L. The approval for three employees to receive compensation for serving as tutors in the Suffolk Public Schools Algebra Readiness Program at Lakeland High, King's Fork Middle, and Nansemond River High Schools at the rate of \$26.40 per hour;
- M. The approval of eleven teachers to receive compensation for teaching ZBlock at King's Fork High, Lakeland High, and Nansemond River High School during the 2020-2021 school year at the rate of \$26.40 per hour;
- N. The approval of twenty employees to receive compensation for the 6th grade transition virtual presentation at Forest Glen Middle and John Yeates Middle Schools at the rate of \$26.40 per hour;
- O. The approval of an school employee to serve as a Curriculum Writer for John Yeates Middle School from August 3, 2020 to September 5, 2020 at the rate of \$26.40 per hour;
- P. The approval for twelve teachers to serve as homebound instructors for King's Fork High School for the 2020-2021 school year at the rate of \$27.40 per hour with forty hours being the maximum monthly hours for the teachers;
- Q. The approval of forty nine school employees to receive compensation for after-school tutoring and after-school detention at Lakeland High School and King's Fork High School for the 2020-2021 school year at a rate of \$26.40 per hour;
- R. The approval of ninety teachers to receive compensation for teaching extra section classes for the 2020-2021 school year at Lakeland High, Nansemond River High, King's Fork High and John F. Kennedy Middle Schools effective September 8, 2020 at a rate of 6% of their individual contracted pay;
- S. The approval for fifty nine teachers to serve as homebound instructors for King's Fork Middle School for the 2020-2021 school year at the rate of \$27.40 per hour with forty hours being the maximum monthly hours for the teachers;
- T. The approval of two employees to receive two partial stipends in the amount of \$300 for serving a trainee for substitute bus drivers;
- U. The approval of a request for a school employee to be removed from the substitute teacher list;
- V. The approval of a request for a school employee to receive a leave of absence.

All of which is authorized by Section 2.2-3711 A.1 of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended.

2. The discussion of the pupil personnel report relative to the following:

- A. Requests by 87 students enrolled in Suffolk Public Schools to attend school out of their designated school attendance zone; and
- B. Disciplinary actions involving 9 students assigned to Turlington Woods School for a period of time; One student being returned to the base school; One student assigned to the Tidewater Regional Alternative Education Program for the 2020-2021 school year; One student assigned to Virtual Learning through the first semester of the 2020-2021 school year; and One student assigned to the GED Program at Lakeland High School through the first semester of the 2020-2021 school year; where the discussion in an open meeting would involve the disclosure of information contained in the student's scholastic record.

All of which is authorized by Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711 A.2 of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended.

- 3. Consultation with legal counsel regarding a specific legal matter requiring the provision of legal advice by counsel and more specifically as it relates to Personnel Action Number 2021-1 a hostile work environment complaint filed against Board Member Sherri D. Story.

All of which is authorized by Section 2.2-3711 A.8 of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended.

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Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck moved, and Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve as read.

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

Member Story indicated the follow regarding her "No" vote:

"The late revision does not comply with the FOIA requirements regarding providing the public with sufficient advanced notice. So I object and I want that to be in the minutes."

**The School Board reconvened in the open meeting.**

#### **CERTIFICATION OF CLOSED MEETING**

Attorney Waller read the Certification of the Closed Meeting.

#### **A RESOLUTION OF CERTIFICATION OF THE CLOSED MEETING OF OCTOBER 8, 2020 PURSUANT TO SECTION 2.2-3712 OF THE CODE OF VIRGINIA (1950), AS AMENDED**

**WHEREAS**, the School Board of the City of Suffolk convened a closed meeting on this date pursuant to an affirmative recorded vote and in accordance with the provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act; and

**WHEREAS**, Section 2.2-3712 of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended, requires a certification by the School Board that such closed meeting was conducted in conformity with Virginia law.

**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the School Board of the City of Suffolk hereby certifies that, to the best of each member's knowledge, (i) only business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements by Virginia law were discussed in the closed meeting to which this resolution of certification applies, and (ii) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion convening the closed meeting were heard, discussed or considered by the School Board of the City of Suffolk.

Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck moved, and Member Riddick seconded the motion, to approve the Certification of Closed Meeting.

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

Mrs. Story indicated the follow regarding her "No" vote:

"The late revision does not comply with the FOIA requirements regarding providing the public with sufficient advanced notice. I object and want it to be recorded in the minutes."

The Board Chair adjourned the meeting to recess.

## **7:00 P.M. – RE-OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING**

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

Member Riddick led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

## **ACTION ON CLOSED MEETING ITEMS**

### -Personnel Report

Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck moved, and Member Riddick seconded the motion, to accept the Personnel Report as presented.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 Nay: 0 Absent: 0. The motion Passed. 7 to 0

### -Pupil Personnel Reports

Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck moved, and Member Mayo seconded the motion, to accept the Pupil Personnel Reports as presented.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 Nay: 0 Absent: 0. The motion Passed. 7 to 0

## **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Member Riddick moved, and Member Jenkins seconded the motion, to add to the agenda a discussion to rename Pioneer Elementary School.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 4 Nay: 3 (Mitnick, Story, Byrum) Abstain: 0 Absent: 0. The motion Passed. 4 to 3.

Member Riddick moved, and Member Mitnick seconded the motion, to change the Education and Innovate: Fall Reopening Plan from an “Info” item to an “Action” item.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 Nay: 0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 0. The motion Passed. 7 to 0.

Member Mayo moved, and Member Jenkins seconded the motion, to approve the Agenda with the additional items as presented.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 Nay: 0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 0. The motion Passed. 7 to 0.

### **PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS**

\*Due to the number of speakers signed up to speak, the Board Chair stated that each speaker would have two (2) minutes to speak and she hoped that each speaker would have written comments to share with board members.

1. Greg Kasmak – Covid-19 in Suffolk
2. Danyelle Saunders – Schools Reopening
3. Tabitha Sidwell – Virtual Learning: A Working Parent’s Perspective
4. Jonathan Rankin – Virtual Learning vs. In-Person Instruction
5. ~~Karen Cornett – Educate and Innovate Plan~~ NO SHOW, decided to email members
6. Amber Feliciano – Special Needs Children: The Need For Them To Be In School
7. Kirstyn Oneill – Special Education
8. Gretchen Jones – Kids Need to Be Back in School
9. ~~Gerald Vergott – Best Welfare of My Children~~ NO SHOW
10. April Thompson – Virtual Learning and My Concerns (Letter)
11. Amanda Goodwin – Last Minute Changes of the Proposal for Special Education (Letter)
12. Katie Morse – The Replacement of the Pupil Personnel Committee (Letter)
13. Renee Rawls – Concerns Regarding the Plans to Return/Non-Return to Face-To-Face Learning (Letter)
14. Kristi Theus Whitaker – Educate and Innovate Plan (Letter)
15. Amanda Plotner – Children to Return for Four (4) Full Days of School

### **REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT**

Good News Reports: Ms. Ward presented information from the Good News Report

- Alumni Recognition – James (Jimmy) Cox
- WAVY TV-10 – United Way Adopt a Teacher Program
- NRHS – Grammy Career Day Online
- CES Paraprofessional (Nicole Aponte) Participation in Hispanic Heritage Month

VSBA Academy Awards: Dr. Gordon presented awards to members

- Certificate of Recognition
- Award of Achievement

- Award of Excellence
- Award of Honor

SPS School Board Retreat Overview Presentation: Dr. Branch highlighted the following:

- Friday October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2-5 p.m. @ CCAP
- Will review the Strategic Plan Goals and 2019-2020 Performance Measures.
- Will also have interactive and engagement activities.
- All will work collaboratively as a school board, division leadership, and other members to discuss what's pertinent that will push us forward as a division.
- Will be working in teams and groups. All were asked to bring their electronic devices to access information to use as they will be working across the board and the entire division leadership.
- All departments will also be reporting at the retreat to report information as to where we are right now and where we're going.
- All members will be engaged as to what our action items are and where we will go next.

Calendar of Special Events: Dr. Gordon highlighted the events on the calendar

Educate and Innovate Update: Dr. Gordon highlighted the following:

- Proud to report that teachers, students, and instructional staff have done an amazing job adjusting to online learning.
- Although there's been challenges, resilient staff and determined students have persevered and are making the best of the new normal.
- We have seen conflict and protest in other school divisions; our goal was to make sure that conflict and disharmony did not occur in SPS.
- Thanked constituents who were patient, empathetic and understood that the Fall Learning Plan was going to be a new experience for all and that there were going to be tweaks to benefit the needs of students and staff.
- Those who want students back in school, we want that too but we will not make a hasty decision just because some voices are louder than others.
- Dr. Gordon admitted that those loud voices even got to him and he instructed Dr. Branch to send a message to the instructional staff to illuminate the use of the Big Blue Button in Canvas. However, teachers and staff gave the feedback needed to be flexible. He almost went against his request to staff in letting the negativity get to him.
- He was reminded that he and his team share the same optimistic view of SPS and we will always base decisions on data, logistics, and the overall safety of our staff and students.
- Made it clear to that even if face-to-face instruction was chosen, parents who chose virtual instruction would still have that option.

- Many mentioned that the Board spends too much time with infighting and not focused on the students and school division; can honestly say that the Board has the best interest in of SPS at heart.
- Our goal is to focus on topics that have the greatest impact on students and not any personal vendettas that may exist.
- The majority of the board members communicate with Dr. Gordon before coming to school board meetings. However, he wishes that we can always be in agreement or work out any differences of opinion before coming to the meeting however, after one year of being a part of SPS that is not the case.
- The Board is now tasked with one of the most difficult decisions they will ever have.
- There is no way to make a decision that will make everyone happy.
- The majority of the school board communicates with Dr. Gordon to address any concern they may have before school board meetings because they trust him and his staff to do what's right for the school division; they trust us to do the jobs we were hired to do.
- SPS has worked diligently to address each and every issue, but we will no longer take valuable time to address falsities and other misinformation that is nothing more than rumors that distract away from serving our students. We are going to keep the main thing, the main thing.
- The main thing right now is how can we improve virtual instruction and how can we prepare for a safe return to our building for our students, whenever that may be?
- Have asked for stronger partnership with our parents and or partners.
- Have asked city officials to improve broadband in the City of Suffolk.
- We have asked for our staff to closely follow the guidelines and precautions from the CDC to possibly mitigate the spread of Covid-19.
- Wish he could guarantee that every aspect of every plan will work to perfection, but realizes that adjustments may sometimes need to be made.
- We will continue to work as hard as we can to support our students and staff.
- It may bother some to hear that our students are our most prize possessions, still have some in the division and maybe even in leadership who believe that it is all about the adults, but over 95% of our 2200 employees do not look at it that way.
- Thanked the custodial, maintenance and facilities team who although they have been shorthanded, have worked hard every day.
- We have 1100 of some of the best teachers I have ever seen. We have asked these "Heroes" to become experts in the Google Suite, Canvass, and Zoom while still maintaining an engaging classroom in a virtual setting.
- We have asked our students to shift their mindset and learn how to become digital citizens even at a very early age.
- Our students are creative, are learning, and want to be back in school. They miss their friends and teachers, and we miss them.
- Coming later this even is a discussion regarding a transition to a hybrid model to begin November 16<sup>th</sup> for students in grades PreK-5 and November 30<sup>th</sup> grades 6-12.



- We will also discuss our recommendation for special education students in specialized programs to adjust their schedule to four (4) half days on November 16<sup>th</sup>.
- Within the recommendation is a reminder that our parents will have a choice.
  - To be clear, any plans that we make are fluid and things could change based on the health data for the city of Suffolk.
  - If there are spikes or an increase in cases, our recommendation will change to virtual.
  - The good news with making this recommendation announcement is that it gives us another month to make sure that all of our logistics are finalized and allows school administrators, staff, building administrators, teachers and students time to provide feedback and make suggestions on what would work well.
  - I'm asking the entire Suffolk Public Schools community to keep the kids first; asking you to not pass blame on parents, teachers, administrators, bus drivers, food and nutrition staff, or anyone. Asking you to work together for our students.
  - The students seem to be handling this situation a lot better than some of us.
  - Reminder, none of this is the students' fault. They should not have to listen to the adults take shots at each other, not working together as a team, not remembering that all they want to do is to go to school.
  - I feel for our kids, families, staff, school board. This is what empathy is all about.
  - As we transition to our next plan, remember to be patient, show empathy, be flexible, and be professional. This is the image we need to project for our students and is the culture we need in SPS and I am confident that we can do it.

Superintendent's Year in Review: Dr. Gordon highlighted information from the completion of his first year with SPS.

- Dr. Gordon officially began October 14, 2019.
- Worked with administrators, SAO staff, Community Engagement team and specialist with this review. Thank you to Mr. Charles Brabble, Community Engagement Specialist for putting together a short video which summarizes Dr. Gordon's first year serving as Superintendent of SPS.
- Dr. Gordon wished things were normal but was reminded that only had five months of normalcy but he believes that we have the staff, students, and the Boards leadership to move SPS forward.
- The Board Chair, Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck, Members Riddick, Jenkins, and Mayo thanked Dr. Gordon for his leadership, the great job he has done during his tenure with SPS.
- Mr. Riddick indicated that he would like to see Dr. Gordon's contract extended at the next meeting for the great job he has done with SPS and the improved culture within the district.

## CONSENT AGENDA

Member Mayo moved, and Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck seconded, the motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 Nay: 0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 0. The motion Passed. 7 to 0

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

### Item 1 - Special Education Specialized Programs Presentation:

- Dr. Branch presented data and teacher feedback and how students are progressing in the specialized programs (in the absence of Ms. Whitley). She indicated that she had result from 45 teachers and 31 of that group were in favor of increased days in school with students. Three teachers were invited to speak. Ms. Shanfelter, Wolfe, and Cameron.
- Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck had visited Ms. Shanfelter's class. She asked questions regarding the lack of wearing of masks and classroom space (the lack of 6ft. distance between) she asked what is the plan for students to be separated in the classroom with no space. Dr. Branch answered that they have worked with building administrators to identify alternative classrooms for specialized programs. Dr. Buck expressed additional concerns and Dr. Branch provided clarity of the plan.
- Member Riddick asked what's the long-term plan, he does not want to keep moving students from one classroom to another as the need for additional space increases. Dr. Branch stated that we are working with administrators regarding available space. She stated that general education classes will not be in the same location as the specialized programs. Our building administrators will be able to calculate who will go where once we have the numbers.
- Member Story stated that this only changes the time, going from two full to four half days. Is it correct that teaching time face-to-face has not increased? Dr. Branch indicated that is correct, instruction would be more consistent. Member Story stated that now we are asking parents to be home at noon every day and that we are now going to be stressing those working parents to the max which is very difficult. Pretty high percentage of parents want their kids in school more days per week. She stated that she wished that was an option on the table to go four (4) full days. Dr. Branch stated that the Board can determine the Fall Re-opening Plan and make recommendations as to how we can adjust the plan.
- Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck expressed concern about space and that we only have space now due to social distancing. She expressed her concerns about scheduling, air qualities and other things. Not for teachers to figure out what to do if we decide to send back. Dr. Gordon stated that the team have been exploring the questions brought up today and will analyze survey data. Building administrators have also identified additional classrooms. Not just one classroom but the additional classroom and the current classroom the teacher is using. Regarding air quality, outside air will be increased to help increase circulation and looking into purchasing air purifiers and filter. Many of the concerns brought forth are actively being addressed. November start date helps us to have time to address concerns from survey data. He believes we will have available open classrooms.
- Member Story stated that based on that information, she would like to make a motion. She moved "to bring students back for four (4) full days and that by this time frame, you would make those accommodations."

- Chairwoman Byrum asked if there was a second. There being no second, the motion failed.
- At this time, Dr. Branch and the invited teachers finished the presentation.
- Member Riddick indicated that he was not in favor of this plan and to leave it as is until consistent improvements are made.
- Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck had several concerns and stated that she could not support the plan.
- Member Mitnick indicated his support of four (4) half days in school, teaching in the morning face-to-face and virtual instruction in the afternoon.
- Member Mayo asked if all of the programs are arranged the same with face-to-face in the morning and virtual in the afternoons...how does that work? Dr. Gordon explained the logistics of the setup.
- Member Riddick asked how would increasing the days impact our transportation department? Dr. Rice indicated that it would have no impact. How would staggered schedule affect the cleaning schedule of the buses? Dr. Rice indicated that they would have to change back to the tiered schedule. Member Riddick asked several other questions regarding the survey. He asked are we giving our staff the same options we are giving our parents and students? Dr. Gordon answered that it was only the instructional staff that was surveyed this time.
- Member Story asked Dr. Gordon what he thought the kids needed to not get very behind and to be adjusted at home...in terms of a schedule? Dr. Gordon stated that's a double-edged sword. With the recommendation brought forth is his final decision and looking at it from multiple ways. Asked the three teachers to speak because always want to give the Board the teachers perspective. For Sp.Ed. Students, the most important thing for them is routine as it keeps kids engaged. He also said that some of the testimonials from last meeting really weighed heavily on him. He knows that this is challenging because each concern expressed by the board is legitimate and cannot be dismissed but just as a reminder, any family that does not want their children to come back have the option of virtual learning. We did the four (4) half day recommendation based on feedback and a compromise of the original recommendation. Member Story asked if we could bring back that small number of students back sooner by a week, get them started on the plan now? Dr. Gordon indicated that his concern is overall planning for the logistics. Would like to address concerns of members before bringing students back and need to get the final data on what the rest of the population wants to do as this will drive what we need to do with classrooms.
- Member Riddick said we increase the days, staff don't have a say and we are pretty much saying – without saying, report or quit. Also expressed concerns with the return schedule and was concerned about the holiday. Does not want to rush to soothe the cries of a group of parents.

(Member Riddick interrupted his comments to ask the Board Chair to inform Member Story to please refrain from making comments while he has the floor. He did not do this while she was speaking and would like the same courtesy. Chairwoman Byrum expressed her agreement and asked Mrs. Story to show the same courtesy. Mr. Riddick then continued with his comment.)

Based on his conversations with VSBA, SEAC, CHKD, VDH, and Dr. Gordon, Mr. Riddick asked if someone could please ease my mind and give me a better choice. Dr. Branch indicated that his concerns are valid and we have asked our staff about their preferences. Staff have been given time to provide documentation of their condition or concern. No one has been excluded. The 45 was based on the request from the

Board at last meeting to get that feedback from the teachers, but still no exclusions from the process.

- Member Mitnick asked if the custodians are working every day currently? Dr. Gordon indicated that all positions are working every day except the instructional staff.
- Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck called for the question.
- Member Story asked which one we're voting on.
- Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck stated that it was to increase to four (4) half days. She then asked the Clerk to read the motion.
- The Clerk indicated that the motion she had was from Member Story.
- Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck stated that the question was to "Increase access to face-to-face learning for students with disabilities in district-wide programs so that these students can attend school for four (4) half days per week to coincide with the PreK return to school recommendation." Do we want to increase to four (4) half days? She asked if she should put it in the form of a motion?
- Member Mayo asked if Dr. Branch finished her presentation.
- The Clerk asked if the motion was to accept the recommendation as presented?
- Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck said no, the motion was to "disapprove the recommendation."
- Member Riddick reiterated the motion for clarity and Vice-Chair provided clarity.
- The Board Chair asked the Clerk to read the motion again.
- The Board Clerk read "the motion is to disapprove the increased access to face-to-face learning for students with disabilities in district-wide program classes so that these students can attend school for four (4) half days per week to coincide with the PreK-5 return to school recommendation."
- Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck asked if there was a second (Member Jenkins seconded)

Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck moved, and Member Jenkins seconded, the motion to disapprove the recommendation as presented.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 Nay: 2 (Story, Mitnick) Abstain: 0 Absent: 0.  
The motion Passed. 5 to 2

**Item 2 - Ordinance 20/21-1 – Amending Chapter 4, Article 6, Section 4-6.1 Entitled “Statement of Policy, Contractual Authority of School Superintendent; Contracts not Requiring Sealed Bids or Competitive Negotiation” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board – Second Reading**

Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck moved, and Member Riddick seconded, the motion to approve Ordinance 20/21-1 as presented.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 Nay: 0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 0. The motion Passed. 7 to 0

**Item 3 - Ordinance 20/21-2 – Deleting Chapter 4, Article 6, Section 4-6.1:1, Entitled “Other Professional Services and Non-Transportation Related Construction Costs Exception” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board – Second Reading**

Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck moved, and Member Mayo seconded, the motion to approve Ordinance 20/21-2 as presented.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 Nay: 0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 0. The motion Passed. 7 to 0

**Item 4 - Ordinance 20/21-3 – Amending Chapter 2, Article 8, Section 2-8.1, Entitled “Early Appearances Defined: Five Minutes for Presentation; More than Six Speakers Equal Time Allotted” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board – Second Reading**

Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck moved, and Member Riddick seconded, the motion to table Ordinance 20/21-3.

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

Member Mitnick asked if the Policy Committee could look at the statement that that section has 30 minutes as this was an issue tonight. Limiting speakers to two minutes was not in the best interest of this meeting for the public.

Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck indicated that was not a part of the change in policy. Mr. Waller clarified that Mr. Mitnick is asking the policy committee look at the 30 minutes requirement to see if maybe that needs to be expanded or whatever adjustment can be made so people aren't cut off when they have comments to make before the board. Mr. Mitnick clarified that was correct.

**Item 5 - Ordinance 20/21-4 – Amending Chapter 2, Article 8, Section 2-8.2, Entitled “Late Appearances Defined; Notice Requirement” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board – Second Reading**

Member Mayo moved, and Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck seconded, the motion to table Ordinance 20/21-4.

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

\*Member Story indicated why she voted “No”. She indicated that the Board could've voted on it tonight or just vote down how it is and go back to the original. So to go back and forth I'm not sure why it was a necessity. That's why I'm voting no.”

**NEW BUSINESS**

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

Dr. Gordon invited Dr. Rice to provide an update to the board that goes along with some of the prior recommendations for our specialized programs students but also for the remaining PreK-12 students.

Dr. Rice began her presentation and gave an overview.

Chairwoman Byrum stated the Board would be taking a brief recess for about five (5) minutes. The Board Chair then called the meeting back to order after five minutes and Dr. Rice continued with her presentation.

There were several exchanges of questions and answers by Board Members and Dr. Gordon and his team.

Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck moved, and Member Riddick seconded, the motion to table the Educate and Innovate: Fall Reopening Plan Update until a special meeting on October 23, either before or after their work session.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 4 Nay: 3 (Mitnick, Story, Byrum) Abstain: 0 Absent: 0. The motion Passed. 4 to 3

## **Item 2 – Recommendations to Citizen Advisory Committees**

Member Story moved, and Member Mitnick seconded, the motion to accept the names from SEAC in good faith and the rest of the membership list for 20-21 Citizen Advisory Committee.

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

Member Riddick explained his reason for voting “No.” He stated this motion was in violation of our own policy. Letters of application were supposed to be submitted and from there the board would make their decision. We didn’t change the policy but we are going against it today so my vote is “No”.

## **Item 3 – Discussion Regarding Renaming Pioneer Elementary School**

- Member Riddick indicated that some of the residents feel that they were slighted in the renaming of PES
- Hopes to have a Town Hall to allow public to state whether they agree with or not agree with. Get the public to weigh in on the matter at hand.
- He stated that there are over 94 years of rich history in Southwestern.
- Attorney Waller clarified that there are two parts to the policy that must be done before you can rename a school. 1) Must seek public input (public hearing); 2) The appointment of a citizen committee (not required but discretionary). This is the requirement for public input and is mandatory.

Member Riddick moved, and Member Mayo seconded, the motion to set a date and hold a public hearing/public input session during the month of November to hear citizens’ views on renaming Pioneer to Southwestern Elementary.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 Nay: 2 (Byrum, Story) Abstain: 0 Absent: 0. The motion Passed. 5 to 2

**Item 4 – Ordinance 20/21-5: Amending 2, Article 2, Section 2-2.7, entitled “School Board Standing Committees; Foundations” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board – 1<sup>st</sup> Reading and Adoption**

Member Mitnick moved, and Member Jenkins seconded, the motion to adopt Ordinance 20/21-5 that eliminates the Pupil Personnel Committee.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 Nay: 2 (Riddick, Story) Abstain: 0 Absent: 0. The motion Passed. 5 to 2

Dr. Buck explained that Ordinance 20/21-5 and 20/21-6 go hand in hand and moved to vote on said ordinance at this time.

**Item 5 – Ordinance 20/21-6: Amending Chapter 9, Article 18, Section 9-18.8, entitled “Hearing before student services review committee; procedure to be followed; appeal before the School Board; superintendent to establish student services review committee” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board – 1<sup>st</sup> Reading and Adoption**

Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck moved, and Member Mitnick seconded, the motion to accept Ordinance 20/21-6 that student hearings will be conducted by a Student Services Committee

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 Nay: 0 Abstain: 0 Absent: 0. The motion Passed. 7 to 0

Member Story moved to hold the rest of the changes to the standing committees for a second reading for next month giving the community time to weigh in. There was no second to this motion therefore, the motion failed.

**Item 3 - Removal of the City Liaison Committee:**

Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck moved, and Member Jenkins seconded, the motion to approve the dissolution of the City Council Liaison Committee.

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

**Item 4 – Finance Committee:**

Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck moved, and Member Riddick seconded, the motion to approve the change in the delegated responsibilities of the Finance Committee.

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

This concluded the report from Dr. Buck with the Policy Committee.

## **PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON NON-AGENDA TOPICS**

1. Michelle Lewis – City of Suffolk Moderated Citizen’s panel discussions on Covid-19 impact to education. Feature speakers to represent 1) education, 2) health, and 3) workforce; and City-wide citizen repository to share best practices and solutions.
2. Stacey Taylor – (Letter)
3. Angela Kilgore – (Letter)
4. SEAC Committee – (Letter)
5. Kirstyn Oneill – Special Education

## **BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS**

Comments and reports were made by School Board Members

- Karen Jenkins – Thanked Dr. Gordon and staff for all they do. Understand the challenges that parents and students are having, in the homes of special needs families all the time. Just waiting for more numbers. If there is any way we can compensate employees, maybe a bonus, I am all for it. The board is here we just have to make sound decisions. Looking at data and it’s just not safe at this moment. We are looking out for the safety of the students and staff. Wished that the staff that talk to the board privately would come forward and speak publicly. Appreciate all very much
- Member Mitnick – Happy Anniversary to Dr. Gordon. Thank you for choosing SPS and I have enjoyed our conversations. Thank you for your leadership you’re providing. Thank you to all of the teachers and staff for the job their doing, work is not going unnoticed. If we have the money, I hope that bonuses can be given because they all deserve it. Thanked Dr. Rice and her team for putting together the plan and for the work that went into it.
- Member Mayo – Thanked Dr. Gordon and the SAO team and all who developed the Fall Learning Plan. Important that all are aware of the reopening plan and how it will be implemented. Diverse city with different needs and the education of our children is affected by where they live. Thank parents and students of Holy Neck Borough for their patience with connectivity issues. Grateful to all for their cooperation, and support. Health and safety of our staff members are important. Thank you to the teachers for your dedication and service. Children certainly deserve the best we can offer whether in person or virtually. We can rise to the challenge and be better than ever.
- Member Riddick – Toured several schools with Ms. Whitley and special education program. Hats off to staff who are going above and beyond. Thank all who are working together to move us in the right direction. Special thanks to the following four people: Delegate Jenkins, Mayor Johnson, Chair Byrum and Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck. They have been working hard to get funding for broadband in the City. This is a trying time for all, there is no way possible we can make a decision that will make everyone happy. Encourage all to come together as one Suffolk. Will need to mend those fences and come together as a mended City. Thanked Dr. Gordon for his great work.
- Member Story – Hope that we will hear report from Dr. Gordon at meeting on student achievement. Been worried about health safety but at the end of the day, I’m concerned about what have our students learned. One thing taken from VSBA – number one task the Board has is student achievement. Students are to be learning and the only way to know this is from measures. Whatever we can do to help lower the stress of teachers and students and parents we should do. If we are not progressing in student achievement we should look at these factors and be willing to change. Are students learning to read, progressing in math? I do not want this to be a wasted year. Presentation from Dr. Rice was



tremendous. Really appreciate that. We have to make sure students are achieving and learning.

- Vice-Chair Brooks-Buck – Have no problem with the plan, appreciate the work that’s been done. Understand parents are angry and want children in school but my job is to make sure students are safe going back to school. Therefore I am determined to look at safety and science before they go back to school. Wish things were different but I can do what I can do and I can say thank you for all that you do. Special thank you to Captain Cox. The Bronze Star Medal is a combat medal and its very special so congratulations to Captain Cox and I pray for his safety and for keeping us all safe. To the students, hang in there with us, we will be back as soon as we can.
- Chair Byrum – so many good comments about staff and teachers going above the call of duty, working countless hours and on weekends away from their families. Thank you so much. Have to commend all employees, teachers, administrators, staff, coordinator, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians, everyone is doing a great job. I know it’s a difficult time for everybody. Went to a forum last Saturday and want to thank the group who sponsored this event...Delegate Clint Jenkins and the Suffolk Ministerial Alliance for sponsoring this event. It was an excellent forum in trying to promote democracy and voting in our communities. Over the last 33 days been involved in a medical crisis with husband who was in intensive care for 33 days. He is now home recovering. Thank everyone for the cards and letters, text messages and comments sent. It’s been a difficult time, but God is good. Do appreciate all of your concerns.

#### **INFORMATIONAL ITEMS**

- Accident Report September 2020
- Financial Report: Capital Projects
- Financial Report September 2020

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further questions, the Board Chair adjourned the October 8, 2020 School Board Meeting at 12:13 a.m.

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Phyllis C. Byrum, *Board Chair*

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Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*