

SCHOOL BOARD RETREAT MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Monday, June 9, 2025 ~ 3:00 P.M.

Hillpoint Elementary School, 1101 Hillpoint Road, Suffolk, VA 23434

Board Members Present:

Heather Howell, *Chair*

Sean McGee, *Vice Chair*

Dr. Dawn Brittingham¹

Valerie Fields

Karen Jenkins

Tyron Riddick

Kimberly Slingluff

Administrative Staff Present:

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*

OPENING OF MEETING

➤ Welcome / Icebreaker:

Board Chair Howell opened the retreat and yielded the floor to Dr. Janette Williams, I-MBA, Ph.D. Using PowerPoint presentation, Dr. Williams gave an overview of the agenda and opened the conversation by explaining the importance of psychological safety (the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes), and how it supports and/or encourages organizational health. The board members engaged in a discussion regarding a time when they felt psychologically safe, and identified various areas/things that erode feeling psychologically safe. Dr. Williams highlighted the work “*The Love Lab*” by John Gottman who studied relationships and what makes them successful. Dr. Williams explained that Dr. Gottman’s concept of turning towards, turning away, and turning against. Board members worked together to identify how they can “turn towards” each other and the Superintendent versus turning away and turning against. Dr. Williams also helped the board to understand the importance of organizational health which refers to how effective leaders run an organization, make decisions, allocate resources, operate day-to-day, and how they lead schools with the goal of delivering high performance. Additional discussion ensued as the board learned how to support each other and the Superintendent, and how to harmonize to create an ecosystem of health which can be done by crafting good policies and procedures which provides staff with the things they need to perform their duties and to ensure that our students are getting the best out of it for today and for the future.

Board Members recommended the following: (1) an SPS citizen academy that will explain operations/governance of a school division; (2) a new member onboarding in November; (3) mid-year evaluation of the Superintendent; (3) quarterly or mid-year academic standard updates based on data available data; (4) programs to help parents to help their child; (5) structuring of town halls; and (6) an internal controls/processing audit.

BREAK

➤ Dinner Break

The retreat was recessed at 5:44 p.m. for dinner.

¹ Dr. Brittingham arrived at 3:15 p.m.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

➤ Strategic Planning

Dr. Williams explained the Mission (what you exist to do (usually one sentence)), the Vision (what you will collectively do/accomplish over time), and Value (how you behave). She stated that Strategic Initiatives are set by the Board and are based on the mission, vision and values and these initiatives show the direction of the organization. Dr. Williams added that the Superintendent would then create goals and objectives to execute the Board's Strategic Plan. Board Members worked collaboratively and agreed on the following:

- Mission – To produce 21st century learners that will become productive citizens in society.
- Vision – To be the regional leader in technology, innovative programs, and staff and student recruitment.
- Values – Transparency (show me how we got here/explain/stand behind each other/make things assessable), accountability (did you do what you said you would do/follow through/measurable goals), honesty (accurate with messaging), commitment (to the mission and vision), respect (time, resources, and staff), focus (on facts not feelings).

Board Members continued working together to explore goals and objectives based on their strategic initiatives including, but not limited to expanding technology programs, partnering with businesses, better technology for reports/stats, AI in lesson plans, business & leadership centers, solar grant/programs (pre-apprentice programs), daily living skills/life skills, monthly community events, commercials, radio ads, and new borough engagement positions (three (3)).

COMMENTS / DISCUSSION

- ### **➤**
- Board Members were asked to share one-word expressions to describe the retreat. They indicated the following:
- Hopeful
 - Directional
 - Collaborative
 - Revived
 - Forward thinking
 - Positive
 - Encouraged

They agreed to be supportive, work towards each other, and to work with the Superintendent in building a successful school division.

CLOSING / NEXT STEPS

- ### **➤**
- Board Members looked forward to the following next steps:
- Staying strategic and having fun
 - Board Member Orientation (for the new members)
 - Turning towards one another and the Superintendent for best outcomes
 - Demonstrating and sharing with the Superintendent the values created and explaining what they mean
 - Aligning with one another (not agreeing, but finding alternatives)
 - Separating performance conversations from strategic.

ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

Board Chair Howell thanked all for working together and for their participation to accomplish the goals of the retreat. There being no further business, the June 9, 2025 School Board Retreat was adjourned at 8:12 p.m.

Heather S. Howell, *Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*