

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, July 10, 2025 ~ 5:00 P.M.

Suffolk City Hall, 442 W. Washington Street, Suffolk, VA 23434

Board Members Present:

Heather Howell, *Chair*
Sean McGee, *Vice Chair*
Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham
Valerie Fields¹
Karen Jenkins
Kimberly Slingluff

Virtual Attendance:

Tyron Riddick²

Administrative Staff Present:

Dr. John B. Gordon III, *Superintendent*
Wendell M. Waller, *Esquire, School Board Attorney*
Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*
Keesha Johnson, *Deputy Clerk*

OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION

➤ Call to Order:

Board Chair Howell called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

➤ SPS Vision 2025

Using PowerPoint presentation, Dr. Gordon shared information regarding Instructional Leadership, which included the Virginia Literacy Act (Middle School Implementation), Implementation of the new History Standards Resources, LEAD SPS (Leadership Framework Expansion), SPS Facilities and Maintenance Overview, and TEAM SUFFOLK. Dr. Gordon shared pictures of the new John F. Kennedy Middle School (JFKMS) and explained that the school is about 70% complete. He highlighted a ruler that displayed 1.69 inches and explained that the picture was in reference to accreditation scores. Dr. Gordon also shared that staff will participate in bus tours by visiting school communities which they service during teacher pre-service week. Board Members were invited to participate in these activities and were invited to SPS 2025 Convocation on Wednesday, August 20, 2025.

Board members engaged in dialogue with Dr. Gordon and his team regarding flooding at JFKMS, mobile units and the expansion project at Northern Shores Elementary School, supply chain issues regarding busses, and air conditioned busses. They also talked about schools accreditation, professional learning opportunities for staff and long-term substitutes, Board priorities, and the effects of potential cuts to state funding. Board Members were excited about the Superintendent's vision and are looking forward to the new school year.

¹ Board Member Fields arrived at 7:05 p.m. due to traffic.

² Due to a prior speaking engagement, Board Member Riddick attended the meeting virtually from a location in Suffolk, VA.

MOTION TO GO INTO A CLOSED MEETING

➤ Attorney Wendell Waller read the following motion:

A motion is needed to go into a closed meeting to discuss the following item and subject pursuant to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act found at Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711:

1. The long-term suspension of a student from John Yeates Middle School where the discussion in an open meeting would involve disclosure of information contained in the student's scholastic record

Which is authorized by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, found at Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711 (A)(2).

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to go into the closed meeting as read by Attorney Waller.

Upon roll-call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 2 (Fields, Riddick). The motion Passed by vote of 5 to 0.

Board Chair Howell reminded Board Members that personal devices are not allowed in closed meeting, but SPS issued laptops are permitted in the closed meeting area.

RECONVENE IN PUBLIC MEETING

➤ Meeting Called to Order:

Board Chair Howell reconvened the public meeting.

CERTIFICATION OF CLOSED MEETING

➤ Attorney Wendell Waller read the following certification:

A Resolution of Certification of the Closed Meeting of July 10, 2025 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.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve the Certification of the Closed Meeting as read by Attorney Waller.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 1 (Riddick) / Absent: 1 (Fields).
The motion Passed by vote of 5 to 0.

MEETING RECESS

- Meeting Called to Order:
Board Chair Howell recessed the meeting at 6:37 p.m.

RE-OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING

- Meeting Called to Order:
Board Chair Howell re-opened the public meeting.
- Pledge of Allegiance:
Board Member Jenkins 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.

ACTION ON CLOSED MEETING ITEMS

- Student Appeal Number 2025/26-1SA
Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve the resolution agreement for Student Appeal Number 2025/26-1SA.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0 / Absent: (Fields). The motion Passed by vote of 5 to 0. Board Member Riddick did not vote as he was not a part of the closed session.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- Approval of Agenda:
Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve the agenda.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 1 (Fields). The motion Passed by vote of 6 to 0.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS

- Citizen Comments on Agenda Items:
No citizens registered to address the board.

CONSENT AGENDA

➤ Approval of the Consent Agenda:

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 1 (Fields). The motion Passed by vote of 6 to 0.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was no unfinished business.

NEW BUSINESS

➤ Scheduling of the 2026 School Board Organizational Meeting for 6:00 p.m., Tuesday, January 6, 2026 at King's Fork Middle School

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve the School Board Organizational Meeting on January 6, 2026 at 6 p.m., KFMS, as submitted.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 1 (Fields). The motion Passed by vote of 6 to 0.

➤ Adjustments to School Board Meeting Dates 2025-2026 School Year

Board Chair Howell explained the reasons for the schedule adjustments.³

Board Member Slingluff moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to approve the schedule adjustments:

Cancel Second School Board Meetings:

- November 27, 2025 (VSBA Conference and Fall Break)
- December 25, 2025 (Winter Break)

Adjust Meeting Dates:

- January 8, 2026 - Move to January 15, 2026, 5 p.m. at KFMS
- April 9, 2026 (Spring Break) - Move to April 16, 2026, 5 p.m. at KFMS
- April 23, 2026 - Move to April 30, 2026, 5 p.m. at KFMS)

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

➤ Request for Proposal for Audit

Vice Chair McGee requested to move the *Request for Proposal for Audit* (item #3) in New Business further down on the agenda to allow the Clerk time to attach the document to the electronic agenda. Attorney Waller provided clarification regarding the process as the order of the agenda had already been approved.

Board Members discussed their support and/or opposition to Vice Chair McGee's request to move the item further down in the agenda, and to the document he was submitting. They expressed concern with the process stating that it was a violation of board policy as board

³ Board Member Fields arrived at the meeting at 7:18 p.m.

members did not receive the document in advance of the meeting. Additional discussion was had between Board Members. Attorney Waller provided clarification regarding the matter. He indicating that there was no board/board member violation of policy.

Board Member Riddick moved to table the Request for Proposal for Audit, to the first business meeting in August (August 14, 2025) to allow the Board time to review the document submitted by Vice Chair McGee.

Before the motion was seconded, Board Chair Howell and Attorney Waller provided additional clarification on the matter. After a brief discussion, Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion.

Additional conversation was had by board members. They discussed the following: (1) Delaying Vice Chair McGee's proposal; (2) Individual Board Members speaking on behalf of the entire board; (3) Communication with the Finance Committee Chair; (4) Documentation being shared with certain board members and excluding others; (5) RFP process; (6) City of Suffolk's (Treasurer's Office) involvement in the audit; and (7) SPS's budget vs. city funds.

During this discussion, power/electronic connection was interrupted due to inclement weather. Board Chair Howell recessed the meeting to allow the technology team to reconnect with Mr. Riddick. She resumed the meeting at 7:44 p.m. and discussion continued.

Board Member Riddick renewed his motion and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to table the request to the first business meeting in August (August 14, 2025) to allow time to review the document submitted by Vice Chair McGee.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 2 (Dr. Brittingham, Slingluff) / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 5 to 2.⁴

Board Chair Howell shared additional information for full transparency relative to her miscommunication with handling this matter.

➤ Citizen Advisory Committees 2025-2026 Membership

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the Citizen Advisory Committees Membership for 2025-2026, as presented.

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

➤ 2025-2026 Standing Committee Appointment - Legislative Committee

Board Chair Howell recommended Board Members Slingluff, Riddick, and Fields serve on the Legislative Committee (School Board Standing Committee) for the 2025-2026 school year.

Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the Chair's recommendation for the Legislative Committee for the 2025-2026 school year.

⁴ Board Member Riddick left the meeting after his vote at 7:52 p.m.

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

- Resolution 25/26-1: A Resolution Of The School Board For The City Of Suffolk, Virginia Appointing The Employee Relations Administrator For Chesapeake City Public Schools To Serve As An Impartial Hearing Officer Pursuant To Virginia Code Section 22.1-311 Relative To Any And All Requests For Hearing Filed By Any Teacher Employed By The School Board For The City Of Suffolk, Virginia Who Has Been Recommended For Dismissal By The School Superintendent Pursuant To Virginia Code Section 22.1-309

Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-1, as presented.

Discussion ensued between Board Members, Attorney Waller, and Dr. Gordon regarding establishing hearing officers from multiple divisions.

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

- Resolution 25/26-2: A Resolution Of The School Board For The City Of Suffolk, Virginia Agreeing To Purchase Property Identified On City Tax Map As Parcel 35*161 Consisting Of 4.84 Acres Adjacent To John F. Kennedy Middle School For The Sum Of \$19,900.00

Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the Resolution 25/26-2, as presented.

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

- Ordinance 25/26-1: An Ordinance Amending Section 5-4.4 entitled “Student conduct on school buses; riding privileges suspended; bus driver to maintain order” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading and Adoption

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 25/26-1, as presented.

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

- Ordinance 25/26-2: An Ordinance Amending Section 5-5.3 entitled “Food Sanitation Program” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading and Adoption

Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 25/26-2, as presented.

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

- Ordinance 25/26-3: An Ordinance Adding Section 8-1.1:2 entitled “Annual notification to parents of Advanced or Accelerated Mathematics for students in grades five through eight; Automatic Enrollment and Parental Opt-Out Option; Eligibility other than automatic enrollment” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading and Adoption

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 25/26-3, as presented.

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

- Ordinance 25/26-4: An Ordinance Amending Section 9-11.6 entitled “General Statement of Policy; Superintendent to Develop Regulations, Notice Requirement” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading and Adoption

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 25/26-4, as presented.

Discussion/clarification ensued between Board Members regarding information in the policy.

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

- Ordinance 25/26-5 thru Ordinance 25/26-12

Board Chair Howell stated that Ordinance 25/26-10 included verbiage (...the school board clerk must provide members of the School Board with documentation evidence regarding the performance of the school board clerk...) that should not be included in the policy. She indicated that a correction will be made to the policy, with the concurrence of the Policy Review Committee Chair, (removal of the aforementioned information) and the ordinance will be presented to the Board for second reading at the August meeting.

Discussion ensued between board members and Dr. Gordon regarding Ordinance 25/26-12. It was recommended that the ordinance be returned to the Policy Review Committee for additional review/clarification.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON NON-AGENDA TOPICS

- Citizen Comments on Non-Agenda Items:
No citizens registered to address the board.

REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

- Good News Report:
Melvin Bradshaw, Community Engagement Facilitator, shared good news happening within the division utilizing a PowerPoint presentation.
- Calendar of Special Events:
Dr. Gordon, Division Superintendent, highlighted information from the calendar of special events. He added that Summer School Graduation would take place at Lakeland High School on Wednesday, July 30, 2025.

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

➤ Comments and Reports by School Board Members:

Board Members highlighted information for parents to consider as they prepare for the new school year, including cell phone ban, cyber bullying rules, and the vape ban order. They also appreciated the Board's conversation, discussion, collaboration, listening, and the short meeting. Board Members highlighted training received from the School Board for Academic Excellence (SBAE), and the summer food program. Additionally, they shared their concerns regarding morale, lack of transparency, the use of offensive language, the exclusion of members, and communication with media outlets. They also discussed the Board's role in governance, student achievement being the goal and focus when handling issues, working together and moving towards each other, and being committed to reason. Additionally, it was shared that the goal of board comments should be to educate and inform the public as to what board members learned, and should not be used to attack each other.

Board Member Slingluff requested an oral report by the safety audit committee.

INFORMATION ITEMS

➤ There were no questions or discussions regarding the information items listed.

ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further business, Board Chair Howell adjourned the July 10, 2025 School Board Meeting at 8:48 p.m.

Heather Howell, *School Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, Clerk