SECOND MONTHLY MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD
Thursday, September 25 ~ 6:00 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 Fields
Karen Jenkins
Tyron Riddick
Kimberly Slingluff

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 MEETING

- Call to Order:
  Board Chair Howell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

- Pledge of Allegiance:
  Board Member Dr. Brittingham 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 Fields read the mission of Suffolk Public Schools.

- Musical Selection – CPPA Seniors – Directed by Tiffany Carr:
  The Center for Performing and Production Arts (CPPA) Senior Vocal Group performed "The Star-Spangled Banner, arranged by Russel Robinson and "Bambelela (Never Give Up)," arranged by Ruth Morris Gray.

  Board Members thanked the students, the director, and enjoyed the exceptional talent displayed during the musical selections.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

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

REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

- Good News Report:
  Anthonette Dickens, Community Engagement Officer, shared good news happening within the division utilizing a PowerPoint presentation.

  Dr. Gordon and Board Chair Howell recognized the following:
  - SERTOMA (Michael Jackson and Ray Lora) presented a check to Dr. Gordon and Mrs. Howell for $31,000 to support students with hearing loss/impairment. SPS presented Mr. Jackson and Mr. Lora with gear for their generous donation and partnership.
  - FGMS – 2025-2025 National Beta School of Distinction
  - CFCMS & HES – Statewide Recognition for Exemplary Counseling Practices
  - HES/CFCMS – School Statewide Recognition for Exemplary Counseling Practices
  - KSES – 2025 Peggy Kubert Model School Award
  - JYMS & KFMS – 2025 Peggy Kubert Four Pillar Awards

  Dr. Gordon updated the Board on newly released information regarding new SOL cut scores received from the Virginia Department of Education. The score of 400 will no longer be the pass rate for students. All webinars and town halls from VDOE regarding this information are scheduled to take place by October 6, 2025. Dr. Gordon indicated that SPS showed growth but no data has been finalized as errors are still being corrected.

- Calendar of Special Events:
  Dr. Gordon, Division Superintendent, highlighted information from the calendar of special events.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS

- Citizen Comments on Agenda Items:
  The Clerk read the statement of decorum for speakers who sign up to address the Board.
  1. Dr. Deborah Wahlstrom – Re: Forensic Audit. Dr. Wahlstrom was pleased that board members supported and voted to conduct a forensic audit that will restore public trust.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- Audit Action
  Board Chair Howell led the discussion reminding the board of the approval of the audit and highlighted areas for consideration. The items included (1) Scope of Services, (2) Removal of the word "etc.", (3) Confirmation of proposal requirements, (4) Points Scale (rubric), and (5) Terms of Agreement. Board Member Dr. Brittingham recommended adding verbiage shared with the Board from a proposal from Essex County School Division to provide the auditors with more information as to what the Board is looking to accomplish. Discussion/clarification ensued between the board, Dr. Gordon and Mrs. Bates, Finance Manager regarding information in the proposal. Board Members agreed to consider all items regarding the proposal for a financial audit individually.

- Audit Action #1
  Board Chair Howell confirmed the first items of consideration was to confirm the dates that the audit would cover (2022/2023, 2023/2024, 2024/2025) and correct the Contract Term to read January 1, 2026 through December 31, 2026 (page 3).

Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to confirm fiscal years 2022/2023, 2023/2024, 2024/2025 and to correct the contract term from January 1, 2025 to January 1, 2026 through December 31, 2026.

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

- <u>Audit Action #2</u>

  Board Chair Howell led the discussion regarding the highlighted item on page 4, the removal of item #7 "Etc.".

  Board Member Riddick moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to remove item #7, Etc. from the proposal.

  Discussion ensued regarding other areas where "Etc." had been used, and if they require removal as well. This discussion led to Mr. Riddick amending his motion.

  Board Member Riddick moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to remove all "Etc." listed on page 4 of the proposal.

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

- <u>Audit Action #3</u>

  Board Chair Howell indicated that the next item for consideration on page 7, confirming the point scale (rubric).

  Board Member Riddick moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to approve the point scale on page 7 of the proposal.

  Board Member Dr. Brittingham affirmed that the point scale recommended is widely used throughout other divisions she researched.

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

- <u>Audit Action #4</u>

  Board Chair Howell indicated that the next item for consideration on page 9, confirming the terms of agreement (January 1, 2026 ending the end of the calendar year, including the opportunity to extend the process by up to four (4) years, one at a time).

  Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to accept the recommendation of staff on the terms of agreement.

  Discussion ensued regarding the length of the audit and if a vote is required each year for additional years of audit. Attorney Waller clarified that the agreement typically would have an automatic renewal period. It would automatically renew unless it is terminated at the end of December 2026. If not terminated, another audit could take place starting in 2027 and each year thereafter. It was also mentioned that under the recommended terms additional audit years would have to be agreed to by the parties. Additional conversation ensued regarding audit terms, incomplete work by auditors causing a violation of terms. Board Member Riddick recommended removing the verbiage extending the process. Additional conversation was had which led to the original motion remaining the same.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to accept the recommendation of staff on the terms of agreement as listed on page 9 of the proposal (January 1, 2026 ending the end of the calendar year, including the opportunity to extend the process by up to four (4) years.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 4 / Nay: 3 (Fields, Jenkins, Riddick) / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 4 to 3.

- <u>Audit Action #5</u>
  Board Chair Howell indicated that the next item for consideration on page 6, proposal requirements recommended by Mrs. Forsman and Mrs. Bates and to ensure that the proposal is all inclusive of what the board is suggesting for the auditors.

  Vice Chair McGee moved to take the language from Essex County's RFP proposal submission requirements, items one (1) through six (6) and place them in the Board's RFP.

  Conversation/clarification ensued between board members and Mrs. Bates regarding the helpfulness of the language in Essex County's RFP. Vice Chair McGee continued with his motion.

  Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to adopt the language from Essex County's RFP proposal submission requirements, items one (1) through six (6) and place them in the Board's RFP, Section 2-Proposal Requirements.

  Additional conversation was had by the Board regarding merging the two documents and allowing the board to review it before publishing it for responses. Vice Chair McGee amended his motion.

  Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the amended motion to remove the Board's original "Proposal Requirements" on page 6 of the RFP and insert items one (1) through six (6) from Essex County's RFP.

  Additional conversation ensued regarding information from Essex County's proposal by replacing the information submitted by SPS staff for the Board's RFP. There being no further discussion, Board Chair Howell called for the vote.

  Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the amended motion to remove the Board's original "Proposal Requirements" on page 6 of the RFP and insert items one (1) through six (6) from Essex County's RFP.

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

- <u>Ordinance 25/26-23 through Ordinance 25/26-31</u>
  Board Chair Howell asked if the board would consider the ordinances collectively or separately.

Board Member Riddick agreed to consider the ordinances collectively except for Item #4-Ordinance 25/26-25, Board Member Dr. Brittingham recommended removing Item #9-Ordinance 25/26-30 and Item #10-Ordinance 25/26-31.

Board Member Jenkins moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to collectively approve Ordinance 25/26-23, Ordinance 25/26-24, Ordinance 25/26-26, Ordinance 25/26-27, Ordinance 25/26-28, and Ordinance 25/26-29, with the exception of those recommended to be removed for discussion.

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

- <u>Ordinance 25/26-25: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 7, Article 16, Section 7-16.1 entitled "Hiring by School Board; Emergency Situations" of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - Second Reading</u>

  Board Members expressed their support and opposition to the policy. Board members also raised concerns regarding the Board's involvement in the Superintendent's hiring process the need to have in place safeguards to prevent persons seeking employment information from having that information shared, and issues of confidentiality, trust and acting ethically. Conversation ensued between Board Members, Dr. Gordon, and Attorney Waller.

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

  Board Member Riddick suggested approving the motion but sending it back to the Policy Review Committee to add safeguards to protect SPS and define parameters regarding information the Board Received. Additional conversation was had regarding how to outline consequences of sharing confidential information. Board Chair Howell suggested that Mr. Riddick put in a request to the PRC to revisit the Norms and Protocols with discussion regarding safeguarding confidential information. Board Member Riddick did not agree. Board Member Dr. Brittingham did not agree to amend her motion.

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

  Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 4 / Nay: 3 (Fields, Jenkins, Riddick) / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 4 to 3.

- <u>Ordinance 25/26-30: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 10, Article 1, Section 10-1.1 entitled "Goals and Standards" of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - Second Reading</u>

  Board Member Dr. Brittingham expressed her concern with grammatical errors in the ordinance. Board Chair Howell clarified a previous conversation with Attorney Waller regarding typographical errors that doesn't require separate action nor was there a need to have the policy sent back to PRC. The correction will be made if the policy is approved.

  Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 25/26-30.

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

- Ordinance 25/26-31: An Ordinance Adding Chapter 10, Article 7, Section 10-7.5:2 entitled "Surveys funded by federal government; human research committee established; responsibilities of the Committee; when outcome assessments exempt; definitions" of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - Second Reading

  Board Member Dr. Brittingham expressed her concern regarding reference to special education instruction strategies and recommended sending the policy to be reviewed by the Local Advisory Committee for Special Education (formerly SEAC) before voting.

  Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to send Ordinance 25/26-31 to the Local Advisory Committee for Special Education (formerly SEAC) before voting to approve.

  Dr. Gordon and Attorney Waller clarified that the policy is not specific to Special Education, but for regular education encompassing all students. Additional conversation was had which led to Dr. Brittingham amending her motion.

  Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the amended motion to approve Ordinance 25/26-31.

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

NEW BUSINESS

- RRMM Northern Shores Elementary School Project Update

  Using PowerPoint presentation, Jeff Harris, Administrator at RRMM, provided an update to the NSES expansion project. Mr. Harris updated the Board regarding the overall floorplan, relocation of portable classrooms, first and second floor classrooms, the interior design and color palette, design renderings for the central commons, cafeteria expansion, and classroom accent colors. He indicated that the project was estimated at $14.6 Million, but with a 2025 escalation the estimate was $15 million for construction only. Mr. Harris added that at bid day, they came in under budget.

  Board Members were appreciative of the update and engaged in conversation regarding the project. They discussed the number of additional bathrooms, project timeline, projected completion date, ADA compliance of the building, and the possibility and/or incentives to accelerate the project's completion date.

- Resolution 25/26-8: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of an Easement Relocation Agreement Between the School Board of the City of Suffolk and the City of Suffolk, Virginia

  Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-8.

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

INFORMATION ITEMS

- VSBA Take Your Legislator to School Month: November 12, 2025 - 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. at Nansemond River High School was highlighted by Board Chair Howell.

ADJOURNMENT

- Adjournment of Meeting:
  There being no further business, Board Chair Howell adjourned the Second School Board Monthly Meeting of September 25, 2025 at 8:35 p.m.

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Heather Howell, *School Board Chair* Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*