

**REGULAR MEETING OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD**

**Thursday, August 12, 2021 ~ 5:00 P.M.**

**City Hall, 7401 Burbage Drive, Suffolk, VA 23435**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting was held while practicing social distancing.

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**Board Members Present:**

Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck, *Chair*

Phyllis Byrum, *Vice Chair*

Karen Jenkins

Linda Johnson

Lorita Mayo

Tyron Riddick

Sherri Story\*

**Administrative Staff Present:**

Dr. John B. Gordon III, *Superintendent*

Wendell M. Waller, *School Board Attorney*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*

Keesha L. Hicks, *Deputy Clerk*

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**OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION**

The School Board Meeting/Work Session was called to order by Chair, Dr. Brooks-Buck. Dr. Buck welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**CIP Update:**

- Wendy Forsman presented information showing the differences in what the School Board approved in last year CIP versus what the city approved that's currently in their CIP. A few of those differences include the following:
  - Major Systems Repairs: (HVAC, roofs, drainage, etc.) the School Board requested funding over 10 yrs. @ \$82.25m.
  - The City approved funding over 10 years @ \$36.5m. Totaling \$46.5m less funding than requested.
  - Operations Facility-Phase II: The School Board requested \$12.5m between 2022-2024.
  - The City approved funding @ \$12.5m however, they pushed back the time and the Warehouse department will not be able to move out of Freeney Ave. until 2026-2027 once its funded.
  - JFK Middle School Replacement: School Board requested \$48.2m over 2023-2025
  - The City approved \$48.2m over 2025-2028 therefore the replacement school will not be complete until 2031

There were other areas where other schools were highlighted, for example, KSES, EFE, NPES, etc. All of the information highlighted help us understand that SPS's CIP and the City's does not align.

At this time board member asked questions. Members helped all to understand that the city approved items in their CIP that were not requested (i.e. new high school) while other much needed projects were pushed back in the timeline (i.e. John F. Kennedy replacement school). With the CIP, the City did not give Suffolk Public Schools anything that they had asked for. It was also explained that schools which are no longer in use are returned back to the city. Driver is still with SPS because it is still being used by SPS as the facilities building keeps getting pushed back with completion by the City. Nevertheless, schools are not held by SPS.

The question was asked, what has SPS spent within the last 5-10 years? It was brought out that SPS has spent close to half a million dollars within the last weeks on sinkhole repairs alone and with aging buildings the cost will continue to rise. A question was asked if there is a liability against SPS for continuing to send students to a school (JFK) with these major problems (burst pipes, parts of falling ceiling tiles, etc.) and is there any liability against the City for not providing funding to the division to make these repairs? Mr. Napier indicated that a great deal of money is spent to bring in contractors or whatever is needed to make the repair and most of the cost falls with SPS. Mr. Waller indicated that the only way a School Board could have some liability would be in the case of gross negligence on behalf of the School Board. However, by the board taking proper steps to fix problems as they arise, this possibly takes away potential liability.

Mr. Napier highlighted information from the draft of the current CIP that is being recommended to the board. Dr. Gordon strongly recommended that the board be consistent with what the board asked for in December 2020. The goal is to be fiscally responsible however, with the timeframe being pushed back, the escalation will be enormous. Dr. Gordon highlighted that he is really concerned about the cost of inflation.

There being no further questions, Dr. Brooks-Buck directed members' attention to information they had on their desk from the CDC regarding mask wearing and vaccinated individuals. She asked board members to become familiar with the information that was read.

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

- Motion to Relinquish Recording Devices in Closed Meeting:  
Attorney Waller read the following:

**A MOTION IS NEEDED TO REQUIRE ALL SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS PARTICIPATING IN TONIGHT'S CLOSED MEETING OF THE SCHOOL BOARD TO RELINQUISH AND HAVE STORED IN A SECURE LOCATION DESIGNATED BY THE SCHOOL BOARD ALL RECORDING DEVICES TO INCLUDE CAMERAS, COMPUTER STORAGE DEVICES, DIGITAL VIDEO RECORDERS, SOUND RECORDING TECHNOLOGY OR TAPE-RECORDING DEVICES.**

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Riddick seconded the motion "so moved."

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed. 6 to 0.

- Motion to go Into a Closed Meeting:  
Attorney Waller read the following motion:

### **MOTION FOR 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 regarding the performance evaluation of the attorney for the School Board and any revisions to terms of his employment; and
2. The discussion and/or consideration regarding the performance evaluation of the clerk of the School Board and any revisions to the terms of her employment.

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

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Riddick seconded the motion “so moved.”  
Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed. 6 to 0.

\*Board Member Story arrived while the board was in closed session, however she did not attend closed session.

### **The Board reconvened in the Public Meeting.**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck.

Dr. Buck asked all in attendance to wear a mask following the CDC and Governor’s instructions for the health and safety of all in attendance. She informed all that if they do not wear a mask that they will be asked to leave Council Chambers.

Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck asked Mrs. Story to wear her mask. However, Mrs. Story stated that wearing a mask was a recommendation while in City Chambers. There was back and forth conversation between the two and Dr. Brooks-Buck again asked Member Story to wear her mask, in accordance with VA law. Member Story stated that she was not going to put on her mask. At that time, the following motion was read by Attorney Waller:

As provided by The Robert’s Rules of Order, a motion is needed that Sherri D. Story be removed from city council chambers because of her failure to abide by the order of the chair and CDC guidelines that all fully vaccinated and unvaccinated people wear a mask in public indoor settings in areas of substantial or high transmission to prevent the spread of the delta variant. The transmission level currently being high in the City of Suffolk.

Vice-Chair Byrum moved, and Member Jenkins seconded the motion “so moved.”

Member Story requested the reading of the motion for a second time which was done by Mr. Waller.

Member Story was asked again to wear her mask.

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

Member Story put on her mask and remained in the meeting.

## **CERTIFICATION OF CLOSED MEETING**

Attorney Waller read the Certification of the Closed Meeting.

### **A RESOLUTION OF CERTIFICATION OF THE CLOSED MEETING OF AUGUST 12, 2021, 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 of 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 Byrum moved, and Member Johnson seconded the motion "so moved."

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

## **ACTION ON CLOSED MEETING ITEM**

### **➤ School Board Attorney's Evaluation**

Vice Chair Byrum read Resolution 21/22-5: A RESOLUTION APPROVING THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF AN ADDENDUM TO A CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT BETWEEN THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD AND WENDELL M. WALLER.

Member Johnson moved, and Member Jenkins seconded the motion "move to approve."

Member Story asked to discuss the contract of the attorney and clerk as it involves an amount of money and all finances are to be done in open session. The resolution or approval of the contracts should also include the finances.

Mr. Waller indicated that contracts will be made available to the public under the Freedom of Information Act by making a request and that contracts will be provided within five work days.

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

➤ School Board Clerk's Evaluation

Vice Chair Byrum read Resolution 21/22-6: A RESOLUTION APPROVING AN ADJUSTMENT IN THE BASE SALARY TO THE CLERK OF THE SCHOOL BOARD.

Member Johnson moved, and Member Mayo seconded the motion "move to approve."

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

Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck informed all that Member Story chose not to evaluate the attorney and clerk of the board and all questions were answered at the time of the evaluation therefore, it was not known that there were any questions. Dr. Buck apologized to Member Story for not acknowledging that she might have questions however, Dr. Buck indicated that under normal circumstances, Member Story would have attended Closed Session.

Member Mayo lead all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Vice-Chair Byrum moved, and Member Johnson seconded the motion to approve the Agenda as presented.

The Clerk reminded the Chair that there is an addition to the agenda and the motion needed to be adjusted. The Clerk read Resolution 21/22-4 which was to be added to the Consent Agenda.

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Johnson seconded the motion to approve it with the addition of that resolution.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed. 6 to 0 to 0.

**PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS**

The Clerk read the opening regarding decorum for those wanting to address the School Board.

Dr. Deborah Wahlstrom was called to the podium to address, "Purchasing Cards and Minutes from the School Board Retreat."

She felt that the Superintendent and Board cannot know what is being spent when there is no report on the purchases. She feels that they are not doing their job and that things are still being done in secrecy.

Dr. Wahlstrom suggested a correction to the minutes from the Retreat. She claimed that the board retreat was not conducted in an open forum as it was supposed to be. She expressed her dissatisfaction with being named in the minutes as being the reason the retreat started late. Point of Order was called when Dr. Wahlstrom directed her anger towards Mr. Waller.

Dr. Brooks-Buck replied to Dr. Wahlstrom's comments about the workshop.

## **REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT**

Good News Reports: Ms. Ward, Community Engagement Officer, highlighted the following good news:

- a. Student Recognitions (Ayanna Johnson-NRHS, Jermaine Austin-LHS)
- b. National Night Out 2021 (highlighted pictures from this event around the city)
- c. Administrative Retreat 2021 (highlighted team building activities)
- d. Grants and Awards (\$50,000 Nourishing our Neighbours)

Dr. Gordon gave highlights from the Calendar of Special Events, reminded all to be safe as buses will be back on the road, and informed all of the mitigation strategies provided at convocation.

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Mayo seconded, the motion to approve the Consent Agenda.

A member asked for Resolution 21/22-4 Crisis Management Plan to be removed from the Consent Agenda.

Chair Brooks-Buck reminded the audience if they did not have on a mask, they would have to leave.

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

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

### ➤ **Ordinances 21/22-1 through Ordinance 21/22-19**

Vice-Chair Dr. Brooks Buck suggested to take the ordinances together as they are second readings.

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Mayo seconded, the motion to adopt Ordinances 21/22-1 through 21/22-19.

A Member indicated her preference to consider each ordinance separately stating that the items are not "Consent Agenda" items. She specifically asked that Ordinance 21/22-18 and Ordinance 21/22-19 be considered separately.

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Mayo seconded, the motion to adopt Ordinances 21/22-1 through 21/22-17.

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

➤ **Ordinance 22/21-18: An Ordinance Adding a New Chapter 1, Article 5, Section 1-5.1:2, entitled “Education Equity Defined; Guiding Questions; Equity Goals; Equity Measurements; Key Terms” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board – 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading**

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Jenkins seconded, the motion to approve Ordinance 22/21-18.

Member Story stated that the ordinance is not good for students nor the school division. She felt that equity in and of itself is unconstitutional and that we should have language that brings everyone to the lowest common denominator. She also believes in merit-based education, motivating students to do their best and differentiation. She believes that the equity policy is not a good practice and that we are not applying equity across the board but selectively. She stated that the policy puts teachers at risk for inequality relative to evaluations and that it should not be adopted as the public has not had time to review the policy.

There was a “Call for the Question.”

The Chair stated that we’ve had an equity policy for a while and that this policy is an addition.

Conversation ensued between board members and the Chair asked the clerk to call the vote.

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

Member Riddick explained that if the “Question is called” all debate and conversation ends and the vote is taken immediately. Conversation ensued between the members and order was obtained by the Board Chair who settled the matter and moved the meeting forward.

➤ **Ordinance 22/21-19: An Ordinance Adding a New Chapter 1, Article 6, Section 1-6.2:2, Entitled “Definitions; Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Prohibited; Student Privacy and Confidentiality Required; Use of Name and Gender Pronouns; Legal Name and Sex at Birth Required on School Records; Dress and Grooming Codes; Segregating Students Prohibited; Access to Restrooms Locker Rooms and Changing Facilities; Professional Development and Training; Superintendent to Develop Guidelines” (Transgender Policy) of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board – 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading**

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Mayo seconded, the motion to approve Ordinance 22/21-19.

Conversation regarding time and discussion ensued between Dr. Brooks-Buck and Member Story. The question was deferred to Mr. Waller for clarification. Mr. Waller clarified there is a 10-minute time however, a body can vary that time. Dr. Buck asked the “Body” if they would like to limit the discussion time.

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Mayo seconded, the motion to limit the discussion as stated to two questions.

Upon a roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 4 / Nay: 3 (Johnson, Riddick, Story) / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed. 4 to 3.

Member Story asked two questions: has sufficient time been given to the public to fully digest and discuss the transgender policy, and ask questions in a public way? Is it legal that parents are not being notified if their child decides to transition and parents are not notified? She hoped that parents understand that they are losing control over what they know about their student. She indicated that the policy takes the right away from parents regarding their student.

Dr. Gordon provided clarification as guidelines were put in place December 2019, and that the Transgender Policy is the law and all divisions must have a policy in place before their first day of school. The public had the opportunity to provide comments. The rights of the students are primary. No one is taking away any rights of a parent but we must preserve the rights of the students. SPS was proactive in putting together these guidelines. Not for fear mongering but for protecting students. Due to the high suicide rate and bullying of transgender students, why would you not want to put something in place to protect these students? We will always make a decision to protect kids first and we need to eliminate the narrative that the public has no knowledge of this. This conversation has been had for 18 months, since October 2019, and has been approved by the general assembly and must be in effect before school starts. It has been addressed.

Dr. Buck reminded that any person could have come to discuss this policy. And to say the public had no opportunity is a misrepresentation.

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Mayo seconded, to approve Ordinance 22/21-19: An Ordinance Adding a New Chapter 1, Article 6, Section 1-6.2:2, Entitled “Definitions; Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Prohibited; Student Privacy and Confidentiality Required; Use of Name and Gender Pronouns; Legal Name and Sex at Birth Required on School Records; Dress and Grooming Codes; Segregating Students Prohibited; Access to Restrooms Locker Rooms and Changing Facilities; Professional Development and Training; Superintendent to Develop Guidelines” (Transgender Policy) of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board.

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

## NEW BUSINESS

- **Resolution Number 21/22-4: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Certifying that Every School It Supervises Has Developed A Written School Crisis, Emergency Management, and Medical Emergency Response Plan, Consistent with the Definition Provided in Virginia Code Section 22.1-279.8(D)**

The Clerk read the resolution as requested. Member Story stated that she could not agree to the resolution because she had not seen nor read the emergency management plan. She stated that she asked for the plan and was denied access therefore she doesn't feel that the resolution is valid without being able to see and read the plan for herself especially as the School Board is responsible for making sure the plan is complete.



Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck clarified that the Board hired a designee to make sure this information is complete and that designee is Dr. Gordon. He is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the schools and the matter would fall under his area. She further explained that how the board is handling the plans is in compliance with VA FOIA. She said SPS is not doing anything wrong. The designee is supposed to make sure this information is accurate and we must believe he is doing the job that he is paid to do.

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Jenkins seconded, the motion that we accept resolution 21/22-4 on the crisis management.

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

➤ **Budget Calendar 2022-2023**

Mrs. Forsman explained the details of the calendar. Board Chair Brooks-Buck stated that if anyone would like input into the budget, there is plenty of opportunity to do so.

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Johnson seconded, the motion to approve the Budget Calendar for 2022-2023.

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

➤ **Potential Candidate for VSBA Regional Office**

Board Chair Brooks-Buck highlighted the accomplishments of Mrs. Jenkins stating that Mrs. Jenkins has worked hard getting grants for SPS and working with several organizations to bring resources to our division.

Member Riddick moved, and Member Johnson seconded, the motion “so moved.”

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

➤ **SPS Return to Learn 2021-2022**

Dr. Rice shared information with board members. She highlighted that as students are coming back to the building for five days, it is important to have layered mitigation strategies. VDH/VDOE recommended that each division look at five steps when making decisions for the students in face-to-face learning. These include: 1. Community Transmission, 2. Community Level Vaccination Coverage, 3. Consider the level of impact to a school, 4. Capacity and Needs of Community and School, 5. Layered approach (vaccination, masking, physical distancing, screening testing, ventilation, handwashing, cleaning, staying home when sick, contact tracing.) Dr. Rice explained the following recommendations:

- All staff, students and visitors wear masks in all SPS facilities regardless of vaccination status
- Masks required on all busses
- Masks will not be required outside
- Meals will be on rotation between classes and cafeteria
- Visitors limited to lobby area/mail office
- Maintain 3 feet distancing to the greatest extent possible (including outside)
- Water fountains for bottle fill only
- Update COVID Resource Guide
- Encourage vaccinations for those eligible

A member asked if there is a mandate for all school employees to be vaccinated. Dr. Gordon replied no, the mandate is for city employees and not school employees.

Vice-Chair Byrum moved, and Member Mayo seconded, the motion to approve the Return to Learn Plan as stipulated for 2021-2022.

Mr. Riddick asked how is adequate spaced is ensured in classrooms?

Dr. Gordon replied that some teachers will teach an additional section to increase the distancing in classrooms.

During discussion, a constituent shouted from his seat interrupting the meeting. He was escorted out of the meeting by Police.

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

➤ **SPS Online (Info Item)**

Dr. Branch gave a brief overview of SPS Online. This program was an option offered by SPS and is not mandated. This program is an option for those who would like to continue learning online. The following employees will serve as Online Associate Principals: Jill Paraska (Elementary), Steve Smith (Middle), and Dr. Shaka Miller (High).

➤ **Summer Series Update (Info Item)**

Dr. Branch gave an update to the Summer Series Programs

- Summer Academy – served 548 elementary students, 119 middle school students, and 43 high school students
- Summer Bridge – served 52 grades K-2 students, 49 grades 3-5 students, 16 grades 6-8 students, and 11 grades 9-12 students
- Summer School – served 452 middle school students, and 820 high school students
- SPS Explore
- Extended School Year ESY – served 33 elementary students, 27 secondary students, and 72 elementary special education support to students

Summer graduation rate was 97% (73 out of 75):

- KFHS – 33
- LHS – 22
- NRHS - 18

➤ **Vending and Soft Drink Partnership (Info Item)**

Mr. Hinds provided information regarding our new partnership with Cardinal Canteen. Suffolk Public Schools will receive brand new vending machines with credit card access for ease of use for teachers. He highlighted the following perks with this new partnership:

- Pepsi will be the new provider for all concessions and will sell to Booster clubs at a reduced rate
- Pepsi will allow the schools to order and will deliver the stock to the schools
- Pepsi will provide at no cost to the division, coolers for all of their product for the concessions stands.

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

The Clerk read the statement for all speakers.

- **Kim Elliott** – School Issues with Computer and Grading  
Mrs. Elliott expressed her concerns regarding her daughters' grades. She indicated that the report card received was different from the grades in the HAC system. She also stated that there was a lack of communication and she was not aware of any failing grades for her daughter. She stated that she had been having problem with HAC and grades/assignments not being fully submitted to teacher (parent computer said submitted vs. teacher never receiving assignments.)

## **BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS**

Board Members highlighted the following:

- Accomplished a lot despite a difficult meeting
- Thanked Dr. Gordon and his team for putting the Return To Learn plan together
- Hope for a successful good year and students safe and in classrooms
- We all have differences but we are here for the 14,000 students
- Negative perception being put on SPS is not fair
- We should do whatever it takes to make sure our children succeed
- Thanked Mr. Waller for his service
- Can all agree that we want the best for SPS
- Thanked the Clerk and Deputy Clerk
- Expressed disappointment in the CIP
- Impressed with the summer programs and thanked the partners who invested
- Congratulated all summer school graduates
- Thanked Food Service and Transportation Dept.
- Explore option of moving board meetings to our schools
- Wished everyone a good evening

At this time, the Board Chair yielded her time to Mr. Waller who read the following:

“I began representing the School Board in 1988, while working in the Office of the City Attorney. I was the Assistant City Attorney at the time and later became the Senior Assistant City Attorney. One of my assigned responsibilities in the Office of the City Attorney was to represent the School Board.

In 1992, the City went to elected school boards. Prior to 1992, members of the school board were appointed by City Council. With two elected bodies — City Council and School Board — the potential for political conflict increased. As a result, the School Board decided that it no longer wanted legal representation provided by the City, but wanted its own in-house legal counsel. I applied for the position and was hired by the School Board. I began serving as the School Board's in-house counsel on July 15, 1997.

Throughout my tenure, I have enjoyed serving in this capacity. I've had the privilege of serving alongside seven school superintendents: Mack Benn, Jr., C. Lindsey Suggs, Beverly Cox, Joyce Trump, Milton Liverman, Deran Whitney, and now Dr. John B. Gordon, III. I have also had the privilege of serving alongside nine chairs of the School Board: Lula Holland, David Sweat, Robert Baker, Mark Croston, Lorraine Skeeter, Michael Debranski, Enoch Copeland, Phyllis Byrum and now Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck.

I share with you my background information so that hopefully you will have some appreciation for what I am about to share with you. My working knowledge of this school division and the varied experiences I've had over the years, have given me insight into the operations of local government and in particular as it relates to public education. The challenges faced by those who hold elected office, and most notably school board members, are enormous.

As elected members of the school board you are responsible for playing an active role in the education of approximately 14,000 students and the employment of approximately 2,300 workers. In addition, you are expected to listen and respond to concerns raised by your constituents.

Often times these varied responsibilities can be competing and pose a conflict. Employees may want you to do something that parents and children are not in favor of. Parents and children may want you to do something that may not set well with some members of the general public — some of whom may have students enrolled in Suffolk Public Schools and some may not, but they all pay taxes, vote in elections, and they are your constituents.

The way in which you chose to navigate this landscape is extremely important for you, your constituents, and the school division. It requires a balancing act — a balancing of expectations, demands and responsibilities thrust upon you. If you move too far in one direction, you will offend either parents, students, constituents, or the school division.

Over the past two years, I have seen this ploy to the detriment of this school division. Although it is important that you advocate positions advanced by your constituents, it is equally important that you not do so in way that undermines the credibility of Suffolk Public Schools. The public must believe that the school division is doing what is right. It is important that they have confidence in the school division and believe that everyone is doing what is best for their children. Does this mean that the school division will never make a mistake? Of course not. But at the same time public confidence in Suffolk Public Schools must not be eroded.

We have witnessed at the federal, state and local levels of government an overwhelming lack of trust in governmental operations. This lack of trust did not start this year or last year, but it has been a constant erosion of trust over many years. We saw signs of it with those who protested against the Vietnam War, Watergate, Iran Contra, Weapons of Mass Destruction, and now most recently the pandemic and those who stormed the capital claiming that the election was not free and fair.

Our democratic system of government cannot survive if there is a lack of trust among the electorate — whether at the federal, state or local level. This is where you come in.

As members of the School Board it is important that you not sow seeds that will cause members of the general public to lose trust in the operations of Suffolk Public Schools. When decisions are made that you don't agree with, it is important that you publicly voice your support for the decisions that are made and encourage members of the public to do the same. You should not illicit a private coup to overturn what has been democratically decided. To behave in such a manner harms all of us — none of us are winners, but we all lose.

Members of the School Board should not participate in gamesmanship that will hinder the day to day operations of Suffolk Public Schools. We all have important work to do, and we should exercise extreme caution so as not to engage in behavior that could have an adverse impact on the overall operations of this school division.

Yes, it is important for you to express the views of those who elected you and to advocate for their cause; but you should not do so in such a way that causes members of the public to lose confidence in the school division. When there is misinformation, you must correct it and not allow it to fester and go unchallenged. When members of the public are taking positions that you think are harmful to the school division, you should speak up in support of the school division.

As legal counsel for the School Board and Suffolk Public Schools my ethical and legal responsibility is not to any one member of the School Board or School Administration. My ethical and legal responsibility is to Suffolk Public Schools. I represent the corporate body. As a result, if the actions of any member of the School Board or School Administration will place the corporate body in legal jeopardy, it is my responsibility to zealously defend the school division and represent its interests.

It is more important than ever before that you work together for the benefit of the children of this city. These are crucial times. We need a strong system of public education that will pave the way for future generations and the success of this school division is now in your hands.

I thank you for allowing me this opportunity to share with you some of my observations, reflections and concerns.”

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

There was no Second Closed Meeting

#### **INFORMATION ITEMS**

The following items were provided as informational items only and Board Members asked no questions.

- Accident Report July 2021
- Financial Report: Capital Projects
- Financial Report July 31, 2021

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business or questions, Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck adjourned the August 12, 2021 School Board Meeting at 10:04 p.m.

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Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck, *Board Chair*

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Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*