

**REGULAR MEETING OF THE
SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD
Thursday, January 14, 2021 (7:00 PM)**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting was held electronically.

Upon roll being taken, the following persons were present:

Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck, *Chair*
Phyllis Byrum, *Vice-Chair*
Karen Jenkins
Lorita Mayo
David Mitnick
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*

7:00 P.M. – OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING

The School Board Meeting was called to order by Board Chair Brooks-Buck.

Vice Chair Byrum lead all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Board Chair Brooks-Buck asked all to join her in a moment of silence for our nation.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Member David Mitnick asked to add his resignation to the agenda.

Vice-Chair Byrum moved, and Member Jenkins seconded the motion, to approve the agenda with the addition of Mr. Mitnick’s resignation being added to New Business.

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

1. ~~Therbia Parker, Sr. – Report from the Hostile Work Environment Complaint Against Sherri Story (NO SHOW)~~
2. Rev. Henry Diggs – Support of Dr. Gordon and Attorney Waller (TIME EXPIRED)
3. Fritz Whitfield – Complaint Regarding Sherri Story
4. Greg Kasmark – Covid-19
5. Deborah Wahlstrom – The Investigation Report and Corresponding Resolutions (Letter)

REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

Good News Reports: Presented by Ms. Anthonette Ward

- KFHS HBCU Virtual Band Recruitment Event

- High School Online Career Planner (Student Course Request)
- Virtual Virginia Canvas Top Performer Award
- Governor Northam’s Administration Appointments
- SPS Teacher Spotlight - December
- SPS Funds & Grants

Career and Technical Education (CTE) Advisory Council Annual Report

- Andre Skinner presented information to the Board and thanked all for their support.
- Dr. Gordon expressed his pride and excitement with CTE. He highlighted how the students came professionally dressed and was ready to interview and for internships. This is what makes our program successful.
- Mr. Skinner recognized Ms. Mayo and Mrs. Byrum. He highlighted how they helped guide him from elementary through high school and contribute to his success. He highlighted that because of the work they put into him, they are invested in the success of the CTE Program.
- Mr. Skinner thanked the entire Board for their support and for believing in him.

Calendar of Special Events

- Dr. Gordon mentioned wished his daughter a happy birthday before highlighting the events on the calendar.

CONSENT AGENDA

Member Mayo moved, and Member Jenkins 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

Ordinance 20/21-7: Amending Chapter 9, Article 26, Entitled “Management of Aggressive and Violent Behaviors” to read “Restraint and Seclusion” and Deleting Language Found in the Following Subsections: 9-26-3 thru 9-26.9 and Adding New Subsections 9-26.10 and 9-26.11 of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board – Second Reading

Vice-Chair Byrum moved, and Member Mitnick seconded, the motion to approve Ordinance 20/21-7 about the “Management of Aggressive and Violent Behaviors” to read “Restraint and Seclusion” and delete certain languages found in subsections.

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

Ordinance 20/21-8: Amending Chapter 10, Article 5, Section 10-5-1 Entitled “Public Appearances Before the School Board; Time Limits for Public Comments; Public Participation at the Special or Call Meetings” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board – Second Reading

Vice-Chair Byrum moved, and Member Mayo seconded, the motion to approve Ordinance 20/21-8 concerning Public Appearances.

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

Ordinance 20/21-9: Amending Chapter 2, Article 3, Section 2-3.2 Entitled “Regular Meetings; Special Meetings; Quorum” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board – Second Reading

Vice-Chair Byrum moved, and Member Jenkins seconded, the motion to adopt Ordinance 20/21-9 concerning meetings.

Member Mitnick indicated that he is opposed to the corrections made. He feels that it will be too strict for a special meeting to happen by requiring three members to request the meeting instead of two, then requiring the Chairs permission. Therefore, he is against the ordinance.

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

Ordinance 20/21-10: Amending Chapter 2, Article 8, Section 2-8.1 Entitled “Early Appearances Defined; Five Minutes and Not Less than Three Minutes for Presentation; When More than Fifteen Speakers” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board – Second Reading

Vice-Chair Byrum moved, and Member Mayo seconded, the motion to approve Ordinance 20/21-10 concerning Early Appearances and Five Minutes and Not Less than Three Minutes for Presentations.

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

NEW BUSINESS

Item 1 – 2021-2022 School Calendar

The Board Clerk indicated that there was a correction to Option 2 calendar (March 8- from asynchronous to professional learning day-no school day for students.)

Dr. Branch presented the options to the board of the 2021-2022 School Calendar.

- Dr. Branch highlighted the guiding principles for building the calendar:
 - Ten (10) days of pre-service for new teachers
 - Seven (7) days of pre-service for returning teachers
 - First day of school must be the Tuesday after Labor Day

- Must have at least 180 instructional days
- Election day in November should be used either as staff development, clerical, or a combination of staff development and clerical
- When Easter occurs prior to April 15th, Spring Break is scheduled the week following Easter
- When Easter occurs on or after April 15th, Spring Break should be scheduled the week preceding Easter (this is a part of the regional agreement, not just for SPS) (Easter – April 17, 2022, therefore Spring Break will be April 11-15, 2022)
- Up to 10 missed days of school will be made up by the additional instructional hours built into the school calendar
- If additional days are missed due to inclement weather, the makeup schedule will be determined by the School Board
- Dr. Branch indicated that the recommendation being made to the Board is for Option 1 to be approved which was agreed upon by the committee at their final meeting.
- Very little differences were between both options as two asynchronous days were added to both calendars (Oct. 22, and March 8). Students will work virtually these days.
- Difference between Options 1 and 2 regarding the end of the semester, January 31st in Option 1 is a half day to allow for clerical work at the end of the semester. Option 2 allows for half days for January 28th and January 31st.
- Another difference in the calendars was the date for the end of school: Option 1-June 20th, (the committee agreed that they wanted teachers to have an additional day to close out the school year therefore, the last day of school for students would be June 17th and the last day for teachers and staff June 20th.) Option 2-June 17th would be the last day for students, teachers and staff.
- As required, we have over 180 days. Hours are calculated differently at the high school (which has 1086.66) versus elementary school (which has 1057.83). These calculations give SPS 11 bank days which are typically used for inclement weather days. However, with the advent of virtual days, we may possibly decrease the need for these days as long as there is power service and no safety issues. Students and teachers can continue with the instructional day.

Member Story asked if the committee entertained/talked about the Governor’s suggestion for year-round school.

Dr. Branch indicated that it was not brought up as the committee’s last meeting was December 8th and the Governor just recently shared information regarding year-round schooling. Dr. Branch also stated that planning for year-round school would typically take between 6 to 8 months therefore it is not the consideration at this time for the 2021-2022 school year.

Vice-Chair Byrum moved, and Member Mayo seconded, the motion to adopt Option 1 of the Calendar 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 2 – Support Scale Review (Information Item)

Wendy Forsman presented information to the Board and highlighted the following goals for this review:

- Develop experienced based scale with at least 30 steps that is competitive

- Review and update job descriptions
- Evaluate and regrade position titles into pay bands based upon actual duties/responsibilities
- Keep in mind the increases in minimum wage (2026)
- Meet with groups of representative employees for input

Mrs. Forsman highlighted that final result would be Four (4) Pay Scales (Teachers, Bus Drivers, Support, and Administrative Scales). All scales will be based on years of experience and checked for competitiveness with Region II. She stated that you have to keep up with competitiveness on an annual basis.

Mrs. Forsman stated that our lowest hourly rate is \$7.93 which is for Substitute Bus Aides and our current support scale grades that are below \$15 per hour are grades 7 through 18. She also highlighted the following concept of the new pay scales:

- Zero to 35 years of experience (Hybrid retirement model)
- Change from currently used GRADES to PAY BANDS
 - Pay bands are broader than grades
 - Ranges of position may exist on the same pay band
- 5% differential increase between pay bands
- Steps for experience .5% each year – recognizes experience
- Allows SPS to use Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) increases to remain competitive

Mrs. Forsman stated that in order to move support employees to the new pay grades it must be done using the following phased in approach:

- Grades 7 through 13 – Fiscal 2021-2022
- Grades 14 through 21 – Fiscal 2022-2023
- Grades 22 through 29 – Fiscal 2023-2024
- Create Administrative Scales for all grades above 29

Phase 1 group include the following positions:

- Bus Aides/Cafeteria Associates (not Managers)
- Safety and ISS Monitors, School Crossing Guards
- Full Time Custodians
- Maintenance Helpers, Delivery Drivers, Trades Workers (not Journeyman or Master)
- Dispatchers/File and Textbook Clerks

There were no questions from Board Members at this time.

Item 3 – SPS Health Dashboard Update (Information/Action Item)

Dr. Gordon alerted the Board that this item will continue to be placed on each agenda as an info/action item which will give the Board flexibility if they wish to choose a return to in person instruction date.

Dr. Rice presented the health dashboard update to the board. She highlighted the following proposed learning models:

- High (Red/Orange) cases per 100,000 3.57 and above and/or percent positivity 8% and above – Virtual Learning
- Moderate (Yellow/Light Green) cases per 100,000 0.36 to <3.57 and/or percent positivity 3% to <8% – Hybrid Learning

- Low (Dark Green) cases per 100,000 <0.36 and/or percent positivity <3% – Normal Schedule

Dr. Rice presented the recommended changes for the proposed learning models:

- High (Red/Orange) cases per 100,000 - 8.93 and above and/or percent positivity 8% and above – Virtual Learning
- Moderate (Yellow/Light Green) cases per 100,000 - 0.36 to <8.93 and/or percent positivity 3% to <8% – Hybrid Learning
- Low (Dark Green) cases per 100,000 - <0.36 and/or percent positivity <3% – Normal Schedule

proposed changes in yellow highlight

Dr. Rice spoke about the collaboration with the health department for the roll-out of the vaccine and that all employees were notified. As of the meeting, there were about 800 employees who registered for the vaccine.

Member Mitnick asked how would information from the Governor’s press conference, and the memo by the Department of Health, and the Department of Education affect getting our students vaccinated and back in school. Mr. Mitnick clarified that he was talking about the new guidelines and the push to get kids back in school...following what the CDC said about the metrics.

Dr. Rice indicated that we are already doing this with the adoption of the five color bands and continued conversation with the Health Boards regarding transmission in the community.

Chair Brooks-Buck stated that it is up to the local community to make decisions about their local community. She reminded all that the CDC is making recommendations for the country and the country is going back to the communities to make decisions.

Dr. Gordon highlighted two main things that he and Dr. Rice had been talking about and was shared with Superintendents a while ago that we should look at how many hospital beds that are available, which is now a determining factor, and for school divisions to think about the availability of their staff...do you have the staff to open properly. Dr. Gordon indicated that according to the Governor’s press release, schools are not found to be a solid transmitter of the disease but what was not discussed is that that is because the majority of school divisions are either hybrid or out of school. Therefore, the rates in the community are actually higher than the rates there are in school because people are still out in the community. He is confident that the health plan submitted in August checks every box that’s actually in the new guidance. They are now pushing school divisions to look at more than just the total number of cases per 100,000 and more than just the percent positivity rate.

Item 4 – VHSL Athletics (Information Item)

Dr. Leigh presented information to the Board by highlighting the following:

- As of December 18, 2020 – due to increasing COVID-19 rates, VHSL winter activities will continue to be suspended. The next review will be on January 4, 2021. However, winter sports have been canceled for SPS and surrounding districts.
- Safety protocols for athletes
- VHSL Sports Calendar Championship 2020-2021
- The High School Sports Network:

- Cameras in gymnasium and on athletic fields
- Games streamed through the National Federation of High Schools (although spectators not allowed, games will be viewed by streaming methods)
- Pixellot cameras were chosen because the installation and equipment were free, system not able to be hacked, it is a stand-alone system.
- Cost to view games: Monthly Pass-\$9.99; Annual Pass-\$69 (for every annual pass purchased the school will receive \$20, and for every monthly pass, the school will receive \$1) Once pass is purchased, you can watch any game – anywhere in the country that's streamed through the NFHS.
- Schools will keep 100% of advertisement for their schools.
- Camera installation will begin next week.
- The following neighboring schools also on Pixellot: Chesapeake, Portsmouth, Norfolk, Newport News, and Virginia Beach Public Schools.
- The system can also be used for non-athletic use like graduation. Any event can be streamed using this system.
- It doesn't cost SPS any money and we get to share in the revenue.
- Beneficial to students, especially during covid, to be able to get good footage for college athletics/scouts to ensure that our kids are getting the necessary exposure they deserve.
- This includes Band performances as well.

Item 5 – Resignation of Member David Mitnick

Chair Brooks-Buck called for appoint of privilege and took up the business of Member David Mitnick's resignation at this time.

Mr. Mitnick shared the following comments:

- Each Board Member will receive a copy of his resignation as soon as the board meeting is over. He then read his resignation.
- Member Mitnick then indicated that he was unsure if his resignation was an action item.

Attorney Waller clarified that the resignation is an action item and that the Board should take a vote to accept the letter of resignation from Board Member Mitnick.

Vice-Chair Byrum moved, and Member Riddick seconded, the motion to accept the resignation of Mr. Mitnick from the School Board, effective January 15th.

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

Board Chair asked members to hold their comments until the end. She then proceeded with the business of the Board.

Item 6 – Resolution 20/21-11: Resolution of the School Board of the City of Suffolk, Virginia Adopting a Code of Ethics for Members of the Suffolk City School Board

The Clerk read the resolution.

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Riddick seconded, the motion to accept the Code of Ethics for Members of the Suffolk City School Board.

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

Item 7 – Resolution 20/21-12: Resolution of the School Board of the City of Suffolk, Virginia Adopting a Code of Conduct for the Clerk of the Suffolk City School Board
The Clerk read the resolution.

Member Riddick moved, and Member Jenkin seconded, the motion to approve.

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

Item 8 – Resolution 20/21-13: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Authorizing the Chair of the School Board to Arrange Training for Board Member Sherri D. Story in the Areas of Management or Leadership – to Include Training Relative to Maintenance of Confidentiality of Certain School Board Matters and Racial Sensitivity Training as Recommended in the Investigative Report

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Riddick seconded, the motion to approve.

Member Story stated the following:

- Two allegations that the report was centered on, the creation of a hostile work environment for Dr. Gordon and the basis of racial animus; the investigation that the resolution refers to fully exonerated me from both allegations.
- The attorneys, after their research of thousands of documents, emails, my personnel files, and after paying large attorney fees to take hours of testimony from 21 hand-chosen accusers to testify against me, the undisputed result was that not one piece of evidence was found to substantiate the two claims of the investigation.
- It was amazing considering the digging through files, and the overwhelming odds against me produced nothing concrete except perceptions and feelings which was very satisfying to me, my family, and my friends.
- If I had been allowed to have just one person to testify on my behalf, the investigators would have heard the same thing...that I have never said and/or written anything racist nor been involved in any conversations that would point towards me being labeled a racist in my personal, professional, and spiritual life.
- Mr. Riddick and Dr. Brooks-Buck called me a racist...twice by Mr. Riddick and using such inflammatory terms as a direct object has the intent of causing a person harm.
- To insult me in public...

At this point, Member Riddick called for the question.

Member Story continued to speak as Board Chair Brooks-Buck acknowledged the call for the question.

Board Chair Brooks-Buck banged the gavel to get Member Story's attention and to re-gain order of the meeting. Mrs. Story paused as the Chair indicated that the question has been called.

The Clerk proceeded with the vote.

During Member Story's vote, she voted no and stated the following:

- That was out of order. It's an abuse of the use of the call of the question and if you look in Robert Rules of order it's only to be used if everyone is done contributing.
- So, I say no and I will continue during my comment time.

There was an exchange between Chair Brooks-Buck and Member Story at this time. Chair Brooks-Buck said to Member Story that this was not the time to give a lecture to everyone and make accusations. The report is available to the public and I vote yes.

The Clerk continued with the vote.

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

Item 9 – Resolution 20/21-14: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Directing the Policy Review Committee to Review Current Policies of the School Board and Make Policy Recommendations that will Protect the Confidentiality of Closed Meeting Discussions

Vice-Chair Byrum moved, and Member Riddick seconded, the motion that Resolution 20/21-14 Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk Directing the Policy Review Committee to Review Current Policies of the School Board and Make Recommendations that will Protect the Confidentiality of Closed Meetings.

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

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON NON-AGENDA TOPICS

Letters were read by the Board Clerk

1. Karen Hurd – 2021-2022 Budget (Letter)
2. Brianne Ihlenburg – 2021-2022 Budget (Letter)
3. Deborah Kliche – 2021-2022 Budget (Letter)
4. Miller Cary – Refusal To Do The Work Necessary To Improve Our Schools (Letter)

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

The Board Chair reminded Members that comments are to be respectful, and to refrain from making unfounded accusations towards other members. She admonished that what you say, you will be accountable for and that comments be respectful and factual. The follow remarks were made by School Board Members:

Member Mitnick –

- Acknowledged the following:
 - Constituents of the Sleepy Hole borough for their support over the last six years and for sending him to serve on the School Board on three different occasions. Very grateful to get to know so many people in the borough.

- School Board Members present in 2015 when he first came on the board and those that joined in 2018. Dr. Debranski, Enoch Copeland, Mrs. Bouchard, and Mrs. Skeeter were the ones who molded him as a member and was so appreciative to Dr. Brooks-Buck and Mrs. Byrum and the board members of 2015 who help guide me along the way. I was glad to get to meet Members Mayo, Jenkins, Riddick and Story in 2018. I always looked for something I could take away from my relationship with people and I am grateful to work with all of the School Board Members.
- Dr. Gordon and his cabinet for their patience with me and their attention to detail as they answered my questions along the way. Also would like to thank Dr. Whitney as he was the Superintendent when I came on the Board.
- Special Acknowledgements:
 - Board Clerk Tarshia who does an amazing job keeping everything together and keeping us all straight and letting us know where we're supposed to be and when.
 - John Littlefield, since going virtual in March, has done an amazing job to make sure I have everything I need and I am able to communicate with the rest of you.
 - To my babysitter for so many school board meetings, Mr. Anthony Hinds, and for one meeting, Julie Masters, thank you for the time you put in to make sure I was able to participate in the school board meetings. You are all appreciated for the work that you did.
 - Members of the Suffolk City Public Schools community, I thank you all for what you do for making us and helping us build the best Suffolk Public Schools.
- Thanked all for their attention to his comments.

Member Mayo –

- Comments to Member Mitnick:
 - Really enjoyed working with Mr. Mitnick and enjoyed their times together with Mrs. Jenkins when they met for the Pupil Personnel Committee Meetings and had the opportunity to bond, talk and get to know each other.
 - Mr. Mitnick was my partner when doing in person meetings to my right and we would talk and enjoy each other's company.
 - Thank you for your service and that you genuinely do care about the students and you care about Suffolk Public Schools and you are to be commended for that.
 - I wish you well in all of your endeavors and stay safe, healthy, and enjoy the rest of your time away from the board and whatever other plans you have that will be coming in your life.
 - Best wishes to you and Godspeed.
- Congratulations to Dr. Gordon for his appointment by Governor Northam on the Education Commission of the States. We are most proud of you and this accomplishment and it says a lot for SPS because it helps to put us on the map for our Superintendent to receive such an important position and we thank you for your excellent work and leadership. You're doing a phenomenal job.
- Thanked Dr. Gordon's staff and SAO team.
- As always, our school administrators for your hard work; our teachers, especially our Special Education Teacher who are doing in person learning with our students.
- Thank you support staff and anyone who has a part in SPS. We thank you so very much.
- Teachers who were spotlighted, thank you for your dedication to our students.
- Proud of FGMS for wonderful grant to enhance communication media and various other things needed.
- Good news about the vaccines being available to our employees. This is a step to helping us move to some normalcy.

- Thank you Andre Skinner for the shout out. Proud of you and the CTE program and the opportunity it gives to our students. Your enthusiasm, energy, and love for our student is evident in what you do. Grateful for you and what you do for the program which we are proud of.
- Thanked all and wished everyone a prosperous new year. 2021 will be our year to get back to some normalcy.

Member Jenkins –

- Comments to Member Mitnick:
 - Thank you for all you have done for SPS.
 - We share some of the same schools and I always hear what a wonderful volunteer you have been...in the schools helping out administrators, teachers, and students.
 - I know they really appreciate you, and I do as well.
 - Whatever you plan, I wish you well, and good health in the years to come.
 - Thank you for all you have done for SPS.
- Congratulations to our Superintendent for the amazing appointment, no one can't stop what's for you. We hired you because we were impressed by your resume and interview and we knew you would bring great things to our school district, and you have not let us down.
- Thank you for everything you are doing.
- Congrats to all teachers who made the December spotlight.
- Thank you to all the staff and anyone involved in SPS. Your position is not less than anyone else and we cannot be a great school system without you. Whatever you do, in any capacity is much needed and appreciated.
- It is my hope and prayer that we as individual board members come together as a team and work together and continue to be a blessing to our students. The decisions we make impact families, admin staff, teachers, and support staff. We are here to make the best decision for all and to continue to have the best SPS we can have.
- I appreciate all of you and our board members...we are going to get this thing together and work on one accord for the good of the student and all involved with SPS.

Member Story –

- I am going to continue...it's really too bad because I wanted this to be associated with the motion that went with the resolution but I am going to continue.
- There's been a lot of talk and a lot of time taken where you all have had your say and I have refrained from much but I also have first amendment rights to speak and now I'm going to speak.
- Dr. Gordon, I have not created a hostile work environment for you, in my opinion. I am one voice of 7, one vote of 7.
- You have been allowed by this board to take over the district and do whatever you would like when it comes to hiring.
- You've been given the privilege to spend money, up to a legal limit, and you've been given the authority to do what you want during covid and I voted for some of that therefore is not a hostile work environment. I have one vote and one voice.
- You were able to get this board to not use my evaluation of you, this certainly isn't a hostile board or work environment.
- You and this board, by doing so, advocated its oversight, they rolled over and played dead for you, especially when it comes to holding you accountable to contractual agreements with SPS and student achievement.
- I'd say from my opinion, you've been awarded tremendous favor and it is anything but a hostile work environment.

- The investigators agreed with me and I'm not sure why it took \$55,000 to see the obvious.
- I believe it is the proper time and place for me to address it, being that this investigation was put in the Suffolk News Herald, to address the editor, Tracy Agnew.
- When I endured my public censure, which I will argue at a later time and place, that was a gross overstep of power by the board on the sanction by the state legislation. You, Ms. Agnew, wrote in the Suffolk New Herald editorial that I needed to defend myself from the accusations. I understood what you were saying I understood where you were coming from. I've always found you to be fair. However, once the charges were slanderously made, what I wanted to say and was able to say was only to try to prove a negative. The best I could say at that time was that I'm not a racist. I never did the things that Mr. Riddick or others accused me of but as the irony of life would have it, I offer this defense to you now Mrs. Agnew. You and I now have the expensive and professional investigation done by one of the most reputable law firms in the nation that is worth a minimum of \$55,000 of tax payer money as proof positive that not one of the 21 people chosen to bring their best accusations against me could actually produce proof of my being a racist. Mr. Riddick's accusation of me using the "M" word to a group of students was absolutely bogus. Mrs. Agnew, this is more evidence and proof that I could have never given you at the time on my own when you asked for it. But it is pretty ironic that I now have the board to thank for this extensive proof.
- On the other hand I want to express total regret to the taxpayers of Suffolk and to our City Council that this exorbitant amount of money was spent in this way. It was not covered by insurance so this money had to be taken from some district account to personally persecute me and to go on a fishing expedition that produced what...absolutely nothing.
- Now the particular resolution that was on the table addresses training for me and it certainly was purposely written with racial overtones therefore, I feel I need to respond to the three specific items that was in the investigation that accused me of targeting people due to race. I would like the public to consider these accusations in the context of the narrative. First, the accusation that I have questioned the cleanliness of our school buildings in order to target custodial staff because they are mostly African American is false. It is one of the most egregious accusations without context. Since I have been on the board there has never been one custodian to come to the podium and speak regarding how clean the buildings are, or are not. Nor have I ever disagreed with a custodian personally, not one. I have never referred to any custodian by name or complained about any custodian by name but I have challenged the reporting of Mr. Napier sometimes with visual evidence I saw in our buildings, sometimes with reports I received from teachers in the buildings, and sometimes I have questioned whether the list of items he said occurring daily or weekly were actually occurring. Yes, I have questioned those reports and he has always answered well but the last time I observed Mr. Napier, he's Caucasian and I assume he is still Caucasian and so the truth of my questioning the cleanliness of our buildings had to be spun for the report because it didn't fit the race narrative the board was looking for. Second, evaluations were brought up, as if I evaluated our appointee based on race, but I noticed Ms. Gardner's evaluation was not mentioned in the report, she is African American and an appointee and I did evaluate her this year. Why wasn't her evaluation brought up because I gave her a nearly perfect score or maybe it was perfect and again this was not mentioned in the report because it didn't fit the narrative the board was looking for. Third, I want you the public to consider the narrative that six board members reported about me seemingly attempting to physically attack Dr. Gordon in a closed session. I just want the community to think on these facts Dr. Gordon is about 6'4 and I'm 5'2 he's practically taller seated than I am standing up. He's 47 years old in the prime of life and I'm 67 not so much prime he works out every day and is obviously very fit not a pound overweight I assume and he takes great pride in this I don't blame him I would too I do not work out much anymore at all let alone every day and I have two artificial knees and arthritic

hands and shoulders now given these stats does anyone in the community really believe the scenario that was described as if I was looking to attack Dr. Gordon me, the aggressor, does this even seem logical or probable or reasonable I can't even sit down or stand up without my knees cracking or sounding like an orchestra.

- Dr. Gordon if I had been you and this is just me talking I would've never allowed such a thing to be said or printed
- If I were you again this is just me it would have been embarrassing as someone who obviously prides himself in being in very good shape to say that this 60 year old grandma out of shape somehow intimidated you — that's just me
- It was Mr. Riddick in an open part of a school board meeting who provided this improbable scenario that had taken place and yet I noticed In the resolution after this one that his name did not pop up in terms of revealing things that happened in closed session yet once again this board has provided evidence for me and the community of their totally prejudicial dealings against me personally
- This resolution concerns training when I asked what outcome the board was looking for it was Mr. Waller who responded that the board was counting on the law firm in giving some advice about what they hoped they could do with me. This was sad prior to the investigation I'm sure at the time the board was hoping for very different results that could have led to something much different and bigger than sending me to leadership training I understand as my fellow board members consider this training I would like to say to spend any more money on this inquisition it is absolutely unconscionable
- I am one voice, I am one vote it will not change my voting which I base on my value system, my educational training and my conscious
- As if the outer budget money spent already isn't enough wasted tax dollars
- I would want the Suffolk City Council to take note of any additional money spent on this railroaded witch-hunt targeting one member of the school board
- In terms of training let's talk about equity that's one of the biggest buzzwords in education at this very moment, equity and equality I would volunteer to attend any free training as soon as there has been an equitable study done to determine if any one of you have created for me a hostile work environment , whether you have defamed my character to inhibit my influence and ideas or have you done anything to slander my reputation in public
- I want an equitable and equal opportunity to choose 21 people to come and testify in an investigation to have evidence presented to attorneys to investigate whether a biased and hostile environment has and was set up to target me from before day one thereby demonstrating a willful intent to intimidate and inhibit my abilities to carry out my duties as an elected official who represents 14,000 residents of the Chuckatuck borough.
- Allow me the same equitable latitudes to choose the law firm to set the cost let us see what type of report may be written
- As soon as this equitable investigation is complete I am more than willing to discuss attending a training perhaps for you, and I.
- One last note if I had been allowed in the closed session when the board was given multiple copies of this investigation that were being discussed and edited I want to say this to you Dr. Gordon I would have fought hard for the entire report not to be released at the end of the day not for me I don't think the board did you any favors I don't know if you were a part of the decision I suspect you probably were but I cannot see any advantage for you long-term
- Perhaps you make hay with it in this culture for a short time two to four or six years maybe the culture shifts and this will be out there forever when someone googles your name I would have strongly fought to not release the full report for your career sake
- It doesn't hurt mine, my career is done but it could hurt yours going forward and for that I'm sorry I think it was a bad decision by this board

- Thank you, madam chair, for the time to speak to the resolution although it wasn't at that time.
- I would now like to address Mr. Mitnick, Mr. Mitnick I will miss you on the board I'm sorry to see you leave I know that health conditions can certainly hinder our ability to work but I will miss you we had a lot of good fun times and texting back and forth and I'm really sorry that it turns out to be physical things that keep you because that's very difficult if you have a progressive disease I'm so sorry but I will miss you and I hope that we know each other's phone numbers and that we can continue to have a relationship and text
- As for some of the good things that came and were reported to the board, I agree with many of what my colleagues said there are some very good things happening I am really impressed with the work that is being done by many of our staff
- I agree with my board members they have brought up many good things
- I want to bring up one thing that a citizen texted me just to look at it seems that on the calendars perhaps the date for elections was not considered because I do think the governor called for it to be a holiday, is that true and that we should have it off.
- I see Dr. Gordon shaking his head so it might not be true but I just thought I would bring it up and if it's not a state holiday that has to be off, so be it. I just wanted to bring it up now.
- We have some I think we're going to have a lot of decisions and a lot of unrest yet coming because of Covid.
- Dr. Gordon I was truly impressed that you were able to get vaccines and that Suffolk is handing them out in January I think that it's phenomenal and I give you kudos on your part for however you were able to arrange that for staff and teachers I think that's absolutely excellent. That was a surprise email and I was very glad to see it. Whatever strings whatever you had to do to get that thank you very much for being very on top of it to help our staff be safe and healthy
- I hope everyone has a good, we will be gathering I believe next probably before our next board meeting at the meeting that is joint. I look forward to the joint meeting between the city and the school board to hear what the report is in terms of moving forward and what may be built for SPS and how we can best accommodate our students so I look forward to that meeting, that joint meeting
- I must say that unfortunately, once again I have my son in law and daughter now both in a bed side by side in the shock trauma center in Baltimore and I've been receiving a lot of texts throughout the board meeting and my daughter is headed back to surgery. She has an infection in her arm that she might lose her left arm so I'm going to sign off, I really need to take these texts. I wish everyone a good night and that we can move forward hopefully finding, as Ms. Jenkins said, some common areas to help SPS be the best.
- I'm going to sign off now and wish you the best thank you.
- Board Chair Brooks-Buck wished Mrs. Story's family the best.
- Member story thanked the chair stating I really appreciate that, thank you.

Member Riddick –

- So much I could say but I will not say, I will keep it short sweet and to the point. I'm not going to address theatrics
- It has been a rewarding year thus far despite some of the inner turmoil we're going through and I'm praying that some good will be done and some things would work itself out
- Comments to Mr. Mitnick:
 - you will be missed

- I came on the Suffolk Education Foundation after you and from talking to some of the long term SEF Board Members your footprint will be forever engraved into SEF and I want to say thank you for all the work you have done for SPS
- I know you're retiring from the board however I know you're still going to be active as much as you possibly can
- I wish you well and if there is anything I can do please don't be a stranger reach out
- I can't speak for the board but can speak only for myself, I'm a man of integrity and everything I say I can back it up and that's all I'm going to say to that
- Dr. Gordon has done such a great job and you were chosen out of all of the superintendents in the state to represent us and we want to say thank you
- Thank you to the former chair Ms. Byrum and the other board members for moving swiftly to operate in a capacity to protect this board and for that I want to say thank you
- Thank you to our current Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck for her wonderful way of handling this meeting and I look forward to many meetings to come.

Vice-Chair Byrum –

- Applauded Dr. Gordon, we're lucky and fortunate to have him. He is a professional, well known and a well-respected Superintendent; Governor Northam selected wisely and I look forward to other announcements that will propel Dr. Gordon to better positions
- Thanked Mr. Skinner for his comments. She has known him for a long time and believes that his comments came from his heart. Ms. Mayo guided in him in elementary and she guided him through his high school years.
- She will always be Mr. Skinner's biggest and proudest cheerleader as he is a product of Suffolk City Schools. He graduated from NRHS and is an outstanding employee. He always performs a top-rate job.
- Thanked everyone involved in SPS. We cannot be as successful as we are without each one of you. We appreciate every one of you. You all work diligently and because of this, we accomplish a lot.
- Stated we should always look at all the positive things going on in SPS.

Comments to Mr. Mitnick:

- I've known you for quite a number of years
- Served on the board for six years
- Was here when you came and still here
- Thank you for all of your devotion you've had over the years
- Thank you for your work with the Suffolk Education Foundation. You've worked very hard with their different activities. You were even responsible for the words used for the first spelling bee.
- Spent countless hours working on scholarships for our students and grants for our students and teachers.
- Everyone enjoyed working with you on the various committees.
- I thank you for volunteering in the schools. The teachers and the students are really going to miss you and I know you will miss them as well.
- There was a time before covid when Mr. Mitnick used to be our driver for conferences. I thank you for those times we shared and fellowshiped. Each time, I learned a little more about David P. Mitnick.
- Thank you David for all you have done for SPS and I will keep in touch.

Chair Brooks-Buck –

Comments to Mr. Mitnick:

- Sometimes we definitely don't agree and that's alright because we can disagree without being disagreeable.
 - When David said let's have a town hall, I was thinking, is he out of his mind? Does he really want to talk face-to-face in a cafeteria with people who might be mad at the both of us? But we did it and it was successful. Although I think we came away thinking different things, we got it done and we did it together.
 - One time while performing on stage at Chrysler Hall in Norfolk, I received a text message from David saying you did a good job. I was extremely excited as I realized he was in the audience.
 - We sat by each other for years working on PPC and several other committees for SPS. I'm really going to miss you.
 - I talked to David about whether he really wanted to leave or not, but I understand when dealing with your health you have to do what's best for you, your wife and your family.
 - I want you to know that you've done a great job for us and we really appreciate it.
 - You and I got chastised regarding being in the schools teaching reading. However, David and I never went into the schools to try to solicit any information from any teacher, we were just teaching reading.
 - I just want you to know, I appreciate all you have done for SPS and all that you continue to do.
- I never like to leave falsehoods in the neighborhood and I wanted to make sure that the public understands that this is a public venue we're using.
 - The report is online for people to read. There are people who will take away information and misconstrue or misunderstand what the information states.
 - The report does not say that everything was fine and nothing was found. The report says that there was no racial harassment of an employee but there was harassment. We have an obligation that if an employee complains about being harassed, the Board must examine the facts. That's why taxpayer money was spent because we had no choice but to investigate the claim of employment discrimination. It was indicated that the discrimination based on race did not meet the legal definition based on the 4th District Court standards, but the recommendation we listed in the resolution came directly from the report. We would not have made the resolution had it not come from the report. So please understand very clearly that the steps we are taking are based on the recommendations from the report. We did not make them up.
 - As the largest employer in Suffolk, as with any employer, we are to examine those charges and do what is necessary to mitigate any kinds of problems that exist and we will continue to do so. Yes, we are being sued again and we are going to deal with that in whatever way we need to and the public needs to know and be aware of this.
 - I'm going to move on because we have some wonderful things happening in Suffolk that I'm not going to repeat as they have already been spoken so that we can end this meeting by 10:30. We are not having any more midnight meetings, if I have anything to do with it.
 - We have some wonderful teachers who are moving along nationally and internationally and we want to thank our staff for doing what they do.
 - We are so proud of Dr. Gordon. I am elephant proud and hyena happy about what you're doing and what's going on in our school system.
 - Thank you Mr. Waller for always keeping us out of trouble. We appreciate all your efforts on our behalf.
 - We will continue sending out necessary information to the public and Mr. Waller is going to continue to lead and guide us in whatever we need to do.

- As we start the process of looking for someone to fill Mr. Mitnick’s shoes, let me say it’s going to be a difficult process.
- Thank you all so much for what you are doing.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

- Accident Report December 2020
- Financial Report: Capital Projects
- Financial Report December 2020
- Payment of \$200 bonus to Part-time Instructional hourly staff who did not receive the bonus in December such as Algebra Readiness tutors, ELL tutors and Adult Ed. night instructors.
- Results of Surplus Bid

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further questions, the Board Chair adjourned the January 14, 2021 School Board Meeting at 10:11 p.m.

Judith Brooks-Buck, Ph.D., *Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*