

REGULAR MEETING OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, December 9, 2021 ~ 5:00 P.M.

City Council Chamber, 442 W. Washington Street, Suffolk, VA 23434

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

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*

OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION

➤ **Call to Order:**

The School Board Meeting/Work Session was called to order by Chair, Dr. Brooks-Buck. Dr. Brooks-Buck welcomed everyone to the meeting. ¹

➤ **Center for Performing & Production Arts Specialty Programs Update:**

Dr. Maria Lawson-Davenport, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and Dr. Joleen Neighbours, Supervisor of Fine and Performing Arts, presented information and renderings of the classrooms for the Fine Arts program to the Board. Some of that information included: areas of study (Music Performance, Music Technology and Production, Theatre Performance and Production, Digital and Visual Arts); Implementation Timeline; Open House Date (Tuesday, December 14, 2021); Application Process (December 14-January 13, 2022); Auditions (video submissions, Feb. 25-March 4 & in-person auditions, Feb. 28, 2022). They also explained the program of study and multiple pathways for courses.

Dr. Brooks-Buck reminded everyone in the room to wear their masks if they were not speaking.

The session ended with the opportunity for Members to ask questions.

➤ **Career & Technical Education (CTE) Report:**

Mr. Andre Skinner, Coordinator of Career and Technical Education, presented information to the Board regarding the success of the program, and re-establishing partnerships that were lost during the pandemic. He shared information about the CTE Advisory Council, their functions, and how this Council is important to our students. He also highlighted the Competency Attainment Rates (561 CTE completers last year obtained 100% Competency Attainment Rates which meant that 80% of the tasks were mastered in levels one through three for particular students); School Report Cards (out of 561 completers,

¹ Two members were late arriving however, the meeting began as a quorum was present.

518 took a test and 432 passed – the participation rate was 92% and the pass rate was 83%). Mr. Skinner also recognized Kelsey Hamby for receiving the Program Excellence Award for her outstanding work with CTE, and Suffolk Public Schools for receiving the PLTW Distinguished Schools Program and Distinguished District recognition.

Board Members congratulated Mr. Skinner, the teachers and all involved with the CTE program for a job well done.

➤ **Gifted and Advanced Instruction Updates SY 20-21:**

Dr. Maria Lawson-Davenport presented information to the Board. She stated that the responsibility of the Gifted Advisory Board was to review the district's local plan for the gifted and provide recommendations for areas of focus and provide community seminars/information sessions on topics relevant to gifted learners. She also highlighted that although the year was challenging with the pandemic, 3rd grade students were screened during hybrid instruction and 74 were found eligible. Screenings also took place during the fall 2021-2022 school year for all 3rd graders and eligibility is still in progress. She stated that these numbers will increase by the end of the school year. Dr. Lawson-Davenport indicated that the Governor's School for the Arts had 28 participants during the 2020-2021 school year and 27 for 2021-2022. Students participating in the IB programs had a slight decrease due to students being overwhelmed with virtual learning however, there were a total of 121 students enrolled for the 2021-2022 school year. She highlighted that despite lower numbers, students are still participating in advanced instruction programs as indicated by the following numbers for the 2021-2022 school year: PLTW Engineering = 83; PLTW Biomedical Sciences = 52; AP Courses = 394; Dual Enrollment = 165. She also stated that she and her team are focusing on educating parents and students about the many programs offered in Suffolk Public Schools.

Dr. Gordon and Board Members appreciated Dr. Lawson-Davenport explaining shortfalls in the division's Gifted and Advanced Instruction Programs as they work together to introduce students and parents to available programs. Board Members ended this session with questions and answers.

There being no further questions, the meeting was recessed.

RE-OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING

➤ **Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order by the Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck. She welcomed all to the meeting and reminded attendees to wear their mask.

➤ **Pledge of Allegiance:**

Board Member Riddick lead all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING

Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck reminded attendees to sign up to speak, wear their mask while in the Chamber, of the time limit for speaking and thanked all for their cooperation.

➤ **Limit Public Budget Hearing Comments to Five (5) Minutes Per Speaker**

Vice-Chair Byrum moved, and Member Mayo seconded the motion to limit the time to five (5) minutes for each speaker.

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

Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck clarified that Suffolk Public Schools' audit was done by the same company that audits the City of Suffolk. She stated if you agree with the City's audit, then you agree with Suffolk Public Schools' audit as they are one in the same. SPS's audits are included in the City of Suffolk's audit report. Suffolk Public Schools does not choose who the auditor will be, this is solely secured by the City of Suffolk.

- Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham (Budget for Athletic Income) – Dr. Brittingham felt that the athletic and income budgets are not what they should. She felt that there is no paper trail of where or how monies are being allocated and dispersed and requested that the last five years of budgets/audits be posted to the website.

There being no further speakers, the Public Budget Hearing was adjourned.

RE-OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING

➤ **Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order by the Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck. She welcomed all to the meeting and reminded attendees to wear their masks.

➤ **Fine Arts Holiday Performance:**

The Orchestra Ensemble from Col. Fred Cherry Middle School, under the direction of Mrs. Puentes, performed holiday music for the Board and all in attendance.

Board Members thanked the students for their fine performance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Vice-Chair Byrum moved, and Member Johnson seconded the motion to approve the agenda.

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

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS

- The Clerk read the opening statement regarding decorum for those who signed up to speak.
 - Carly Bosco – (Concerns Regarding Personnel Report) – Mrs. Bosco felt that the division was not in compliance with contracts and compensation was not being offered to teachers working past their contractual hours and for handling additional duties. She questioned what is being done to rectify teacher staffing and retention.
 - Deborah Wahlstrom – (Personnel, Student Services Reports, Payment of Bills & Payroll) – Dr. Wahlstrom felt that there was a staffing issue within SPS and encouraged the Board to do whatever will work in recruiting and retaining teachers. She stated that SPS must obtain programs that will work for the schools that will deter disciplinary issues. She questioned the use of purchase cards, who made purchases, and indicated that she has made several FOIA requests for the names of people making purchases on these cards.

REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

- Good News Report: Ms. Ward, Community Engagement Officer, highlighted good news events happening throughout the division.
 - Student athlete, Jean-Claude Bile from KFHS, was recognized by WTKR for his academic and athletic excellence.
 - Angela Howell, Supervisor of Food and Nutrition Services, was recognized by WTKR as the 2021 Humanitarian Award Winner.
 - KFHS Football team won the Regional 4 A Championship Title. It was the first time in the school's history winning this championship.
 - Jayla Harris, 11th grade student at NRHS, auditioned and was selected to be a part of the High School Honors Choir at Carnegie Hall.
 - Camden Sutton, Ricky Bolton, and Jada Johnson were the winners of the Superintendent Holiday Cards contest. Jada Johnson was the division-wide winner and her holiday card will be displayed in the local newspaper.
 - The 5th Grade Engineering Club participated and placed in the National STEM Day Competition.
 - One hundred eighteen (118) Suffolk Public Schools students participated in painting holiday scenes on local businesses. This year marks the 20th year of this partnership with Suffolk businesses.
 - Teachers throughout the division were recognized for their dedication and hard work for the month of November (Melissa Liddle-KFHS, Davide Devers-LHS, Nathan Rountree-NRHS, Brenden Rawls-NRHS, Edward Woodis-NRHS, Shantea Pretlow-CES, Elizabeth Witworth-FBES, Megan Farabaugh-HES, and Nicole Frederick-HES).
 - The Science Departments received the HRGreen Mini-Grant for \$500 for "Growing the Best SPS" which will help students learn in outdoor learning classrooms.
 - The faculty and staff of NSES, were celebrated at an event held at the Hilton Garden Inn for their dedication, hard work for being named a Blue-Ribbon School. This accomplishment was recognized by Congressman Bobby Scott who sent a letter to be read in honor of this accomplishment.
 - Suffolk Public Schools received COVID-19 safety supplies that were donated by Warrant Officer Penigar and her husband Chief Petty Officer Penigar who are the founders of Innovative Veterans Outreach, Inc., a non-profit organization that provide educational scholarship to military families and community outreach.
 - Angie Salerno was recognized as the Elementary Art Teacher of the Year.
- Calendar of Special Events: Dr. Gordon highlighted events on the calendar.

CONSENT AGENDA

- Approval of the Consent Agenda

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

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

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- Ordinance 21/22-21 Amending Chapter 5, Article 4, Section 5-4.2, Entitled "Maximum Safety and Efficiency Required; Review of Bus Routes; Traffic Control Plan Required; Superintendent to Develop Regulations".

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

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

NEW BUSINESS

- New Substitute Teacher Rates for the Remainder of the 2021-2022 School Year

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Johnson seconded, the motion to approve the substitute teacher rate as recommended for the 2021-2022 School Year.

Member Riddick did not agree with the difference in compensation for degreed versus non-degreed substitutes.

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

- Scheduling of 2022 School Board Organizational Meeting for 6 p.m., Tuesday, January 4, 2022 in Suffolk City Council Chamber

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Jenkins seconded the motion to accept the date, Tuesday, January 4th, at 6 p.m. for the Reorganization Meeting in City Council Chambers.

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

- Resolution Number 21/22-9: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Honoring Northern Shores Elementary School for Being Selected by the United States Department of Education as a National Blue-Ribbon School.

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Johnson seconded the motion to accept the Resolution as read.

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

- Resolution Number 21/22-10: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Honoring Angie Salerno Who Received the State of Virginia Elementary Art Education Teacher of the Year Award for 2021

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Mayo seconded the motion to accept Resolution 21/22-10 recognizing Ms. Angie Salerno as Virginia Elementary Art Education Teacher of the Year.

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

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON NON-AGENDA TOPICS

- The Clerk read the statement regarding decorum for those scheduled to speak.
 - Greg Kasmark – (Current Events) -Mr. Kasmark did not agree with how SPS spent funds and requested a detailed report for how monies were spent. He did not agree with having additional police presence at Board meetings and had concerns with building two new middle schools. He invited Board Members to BTWES for their holiday lights festival.
 - Jonathan Powell – (Issues and Concerns with Contracts within SPS) – Mr. Powell was grateful for the access and information provided to him relative to the awarding of contracts and the bidding process.
 - Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham (Committees Formation in January) – Dr. Brittingham did not agree with how committees were being formed by the School Board. She felt that it was unethical to have less than three members on these committees and that the Chair and Vice-Chair should not be the only ones on various committees.
 - Angela Kilgore – (SPS Teacher Staffing Numbers & CRT-Is or Is Not Being Taught/Implemented Within SPS) – Ms. Kilgore felt that she was being used as an example as a security threat and that she did not enjoy speaking each week at the Board Meeting. She encouraged all to show appreciation to teachers and to give them gift cards during this holiday season. She also stated that teachers had to provide their own PPE for their classrooms.
 - Deborah Kliche – (Current Events) – Mrs. Kliche expressed concerns regarding staffing issues and felt that substitutes are not certified to teach in specific areas. She asked what the division was going to do to hire and retain teachers. She felt that schools in SPS were not working on improving student achievement.
 - Ebony Wright – (Current Events) – Mrs. Wright thanked the division for their efforts and their sacrifice while navigating through the pandemic. She felt it was imperative to acknowledge the achievements of the division and that the negative narrative being painted is not a true depiction of who we are. She stated that we all have a role in building up this community. She encouraged all to be mindful of their tone, to work together, to use your social media platforms responsibly, to work diligently to ensure the success of the school division, and to acknowledge the distinction between governance and school administration.

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

- Board Members thanked Dr. Gordon for his leadership and hard work ensuring that all students are successful. They were also appreciative and thankful for all of the “Good News” throughout the division and enjoyed the performance by the orchestra ensemble from CFCMS.
- Members were excited about the Blue-Ribbon School award received by NSES and challenged other schools to achieve that status. They were also excited about the many honors and recognition received throughout the division like PLTW, CTE, and the Fine Arts programs. Members stated that our students are extremely talented and were excited to see them being recognized.
- Members expressed the need for everyone working together to move our division and our city forward. They stated that fighting will prevent businesses and families from wanting to come to Suffolk and will also prevent the division from hiring and retaining quality/qualified employees and this will severely affect all students.

- Members expressed gratitude to Linda Johnson and thanked her for her service. Mrs. Johnson indicated that she learned a lot and had a deep appreciation and respect for School Board Members and the duties they performed. Member Johnson emphasized that her experience as a Board Member was invaluable and made her see many things differently. She vowed to continue learning and growing from her experience and looked forward to diligently supporting Suffolk Public Schools and the City of Suffolk.
- Members wished everyone Happy Holiday and Happy New Year.

INFORMATION ITEMS

- SPS Health Dashboard Update
- Financial Report – Capital Projects
- Accident Report – October 2021
- Financial Report November 2021
- Accident Report November 2021
- VFOIA Financial Requests table

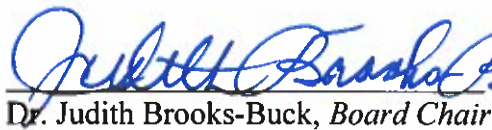
ADJOURNMENT

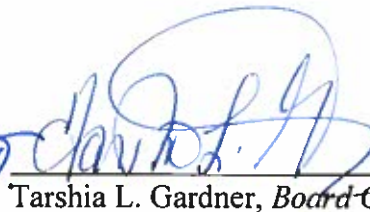
- There being no further business or questions Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Vice Chair Byrum moved, and Member Johnson seconded, the motion to adjourn.

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

Board Chair Dr. Brooks-Buck adjourned the December 9, 2021 School Board Meeting at 10:02 p.m.


Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck, Board Chair


Tarshia L. Gardner, Board Clerk