

SOUTHEASTERN COOPERATIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS
SPECIAL CALL JOINT BOARD MEETING MINUTES
APRIL 30, 2025

JOINT BOARD MEMBERS:

Mr. Robert Holt	Franklin City Public Schools	Chairman
Mr. Jason Maresh*	Isle of Wight County Schools	
Mr. Tanya Bashin*	Norfolk Public Schools	
Ms. Quniana Futrell	Portsmouth Public Schools	
Dr. Dawn Brittingham*	Suffolk Public Schools	
Ms. Kimberly Melnyk*	Virginia Beach City Public Schools	Vice-Chair

SUPERINTENDENTS:

Ms. Dianne Edwards	Chesapeake Public Schools Designee
Dr. Sharon Byrdsong*	Norfolk Public Schools
Dr. Elie Bracey*	Portsmouth Public Schools
Dr. Cassandra McNair*	Suffolk Public Schools Designee
Dr. Okema Branch*	Suffolk Public School Designee
Dr. Donald Robertson	Virginia Beach City Public Schools

SECEP STAFF:

Ms. Laura Armstrong Executive Director
(*) REMOTE

CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Holt, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 12:30 PM

UPDATED BUDGET PROPOSAL:

The SECEP Board convened to address a single primary agenda item, which was to review the updated proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2026.

Ms. Armstrong began by thanking the board, superintendents, and Ms. Edna Felton, for their work. She outlined the adjustments made since the March 2025 meeting, noting that the update proposal reflects a 2.7% overall reduction, an increase from the previously proposed 1.3% reduction. Key revisions include:

- Discontinuation of the employee bonus program: Originally, bonuses totaling \$185,000 were proposed for recruitment, retention, and employees at the top of the salary scale. Removing these bonuses helped make room for a more equitable salary structure.
- Implementation of the 4.5% salary increase to align with Norfolk Public Schools: This increase includes a step raise and a cost-of-living adjustment. Ms. Armstrong emphasized the importance of maintaining parity to avoid developing and managing a separate pay structure, which would require significant administrative resources.

- Freezing of all program rates: In response to input from division superintendents, all service rates across SECEP programs will remain unchanged for FY26.
- Reduction of nine full-time equivalent (FTE) positions: Six positions were eliminated through attrition including one principal, three teacher specialists, and two educational specialists who are retiring or leaving and will not be replaced. Three additional reductions in teaching position, which includes two EBICS teachers and the Project Search Teacher.

Despite a slight decrease in enrollment across the Re-Ed and TRAEP programs, Ms. Armstrong advised not reducing classrooms at this time. These programs require certified staff for content instruction, and middle and high school enrollment fluctuates throughout the year. Retaining classroom staffing ensures SECEP can meet instructional demands and remain responsive to student transitions.

The board then discussed timelines and next steps. The Board discussed alignment of SECEP's final budget adoption with division-level budget approvals. SECEP's budget must be adopted after divisions finalize their local budgets to ensure funding commitments are confirmed.

Originally scheduled for May 28, the next SECEP board meeting has been tentatively moved to 11:00 AM on the same day to accommodate graduation schedules and to allow the Governor's School for the Arts to meet at 12:30 PM instead. If necessary, a backup meeting date of June 4 was proposed, pending feedback from each division regarding their final budget adoption timelines. Ms. Armstrong will present the final FY26 budget and a proposed FY27 budget development timeline at the next meeting. She stressed the need to begin future budget discussions earlier in the fiscal planning cycle.

Additional discussion and board feedback was as follows:

- Board members recognized SECEP's leadership and finance team for their responsiveness and ability to reduce the budget while meeting operational and staffing needs. The importance of better timing in future budget cycles to reduce last-minute revisions and pressure on staff.
- Questions were raised regarding SECEP's ability to establish its own pay scales. Ms. Armstrong clarified that historically, SECEP has followed Norfolk Public Schools' scales and benefits (including shared participation in the same health consortium). Creating and maintaining an independent pay scale would be a significant undertaking.
- A request was made for each division to report back their anticipated final budget adoption dates, so SECEP can schedule appropriately.
- The Board also agreed to revisit and potentially update the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and bylaws, which have not been revised in many years. A review committee or legal counsel will be considered to assist with this process.
- A committee is currently reviewing fee schedule disparities across divisions. Updates from this committee are expected at the next board meeting.

Final Actions and Closing

- A motion was approved to reschedule the May 28 SECEP board meeting to 11:00 AM and to adjust the Governor's School meeting accordingly.
- The Board agreed that the FY26 budget could be approved conditionally, pending final budget approval by all participating divisions.
- The meeting adjourned with multiple board members thanking the SECEP team for their transparency, diligence, and collaborative spirit in navigating a challenging budget cycle.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 11:50 AM

Respectfully Submitted,



Laura W. Armstrong
Clerk of the Board

APPROVED:



Mr. Robert Holt
Chairman