

**MINUTES**  
**SOUTHEASTERN COOPERATIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS**  
**JOINT BOARD MEETING**  
**JANUARY 29, 2025**

The SECEP Joint Board, ("Board") convened on January 29, 2025, at 12:30 pm, at the SECEP Administrative office and virtually. Attending the meeting were:

**JOINT BOARD MEMBERS:**

Mr. Norman Pool	Chesapeake City Public Schools	Alternate
Mr. Robert Holt	Franklin City Public Schools	Chairman
Mr. John Collick	Isle of Wight County Schools	
Ms. Tanya Bhasin*	Norfolk Public Schools	
Ms. Cassandra Hobbs*	Southampton County Public Schools	
Dr. Dawn Brittingham*	Suffolk Public Schools	
Ms. Kimberly Melnyk	Virginia Beach City Public Schools	Vice-Chair

**SUPERINTENDENTS:**

Ms. Diane Edwards	Chesapeake City Public Schools	Designee
Dr. Theo Cramer	Isle of Wight County Schools	
Dr. Sharon Byrdsong	Norfolk Public Schools	
Dr. Elie Bracy	Portsmouth Public Schools	
Dr. John Gordon	Suffolk Public Schools	
Dr. Donald Robertson	Virginia Beach City Public Schools	Executive Officer

**SECEP STAFF:**

Ms. Laura Armstrong	Executive Director
Dr. Angel Grant	Human Resources Generalist
Dr. Timothy Bostic	Assistant Director of Curriculum, Instruction & PD
Dr. Christian Nierman	Assistant Director of Programs
Dr. Dwana White	Director of Human Resources
Ms. Edna Felton	Finance Coordinator

**(\*) Virtual**

**CALL TO ORDER:**

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

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

There were no corrections or additions to the September 25, 2024, or the October 15, 2024 minutes. Both minutes were approved as written.

**COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC:**

None.

### **REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER:**

Dr. Robertson updated the Board on the Superintendents' discussion regarding variations in fees and charges among divisions. The superintendents will have further discussions on establish consistency. Dr. Robertson has been meeting regularly with Ms. Armstrong and updating Superintendents accordingly, which has been beneficial.

The Virginia Beach City Public Schools Office of Research and Evaluation is conducting a program review of SECEP. This review is not evaluative but aims to identify areas of excellence within various SECEP programs. The goal is to apply successful strategies from these areas to those needing improvement. The review is expected to conclude around May or June. However, since the next meeting in May would likely be too soon to present the final results, the findings are scheduled to be shared in September. Meanwhile, the committee of superintendents plans to review the findings earlier, around June, to begin implementing effective strategies in preparation for the next school year in August.

Dr. Robertson acknowledged and thanked the board for approving Ms. Armstrong's mentor, Dr. George Parker III. Dr. Robertson concluded the report by inviting questions.

### **REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:**

Ms. Armstrong welcomed additional board members who had joined virtually: Ms. Cassandra Hobbs, Southampton County, and Ms. Tanya Bhasin. Ms. Bhasin now represents Norfolk Public Schools on the SECEP Board as Mr. Clanton was elected to City Council.. Ms. Armstrong introduced the leadership team and recognized individual and collective contributions. The leadership team members are Dr. Bostic, the Assistant Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Professional Development; Dr. Christian Nierman, the Assistant Director of Programs; Dr. Dwana White, the Director of Human Resources; and Ms. Edna Felton, the Finance Coordinator. Dr. Grant, SECEP Generalist, served as the Clerk for the meeting.

#### **Program Report:**

Ms. Armstrong provided updates on the program as related to the strategic plan. Beginning with culture and climate, student activities were highlighted. The activities created opportunities for relationship-building during the fall and holiday seasons. SECEP staff members supported students and families in engaging in school-sponsored events such as pep rallies, homecoming activities, football games, McDonald's Night, trunk-or-treats, and character day.

Additionally, SECEP collaborated with St. Mary's Home to organize the first annual Holiday Balloon Parade, inspired by the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Students received mylar balloons of their favorite story and cartoon characters to carry in the parade. Students paired with staff from St. Mary's and SECEP to dress in holiday-themed clothing and character costumes. The hallways proved to be a warm and welcoming parade route, providing plenty of space for special guests to cheer them on. Harris Teeter was recognized for providing the helium for the balloons.

The Teacher, Teacher Assistant, and Related Service Provider of the Year have been selected and will be revealed on Friday. The Teacher of the Year teaches in the ASP and EBICS

programs at Renaissance Academy. The Teacher Assistant of the Year works with the Re-ED and TRAEP programs at the Suffolk Center. A speech therapist serving students across programs in Virginia Beach is the Related Service Provider of the Year.

With regard to the instructional goals of the strategic plan, SECEP has continued to make progress in collaborating with divisions to obtain instructional resources. An audit of online instructional program subscriptions was completed. Ms. Armstrong and Dr. Nierman attended the Virginia Beach City Public Schools November Principal League, which inspired a shift toward a more instructional focus in principal meetings. Weekly visits to classrooms and centers continue to be a weekly priority. Ms. Armstrong took the opportunity to work as a substitute teacher assistant for a day.

In the area of professional development, professional development sessions have been provided to staff via a combination of in-person, online, small group, and individual formats. Training modules on seclusion and restraint, which had been discussed in the previous meeting, were provided to support professional development in the areas of safety and behavior. All administrators are being offered access to a newly developed series of workshops on compliance and dispute resolution. The leadership team completed Title IX training conducted by Sands Anderson.

Staff members began recertified in Handle with Care, the crisis management system, on January workdays. Training for Southampton County was delayed due to snow, but will be completed soon.

Dr. White and the Human Resources department led highly effective recruitment and retention efforts, yielding results not seen in SECEP for years. Two recent job fairs—one at the Chesapeake Center and another at the Renaissance Academy Center in Virginia Beach—introduced a new approach to recruiting. Candidates were able to explore job sites and meet staff, leading to several new hires. Human Resources is also developing a retention plan, aligning with the upcoming intent form process.

As the program update concluded, Ms. Armstrong expressed gratitude to the Board and Superintendents for their continued support. She acknowledged the numerous unexpected challenges and emphasized her commitment to implementing the Board's recommendations. Ms. Armstrong further expressed appreciation for being provided with a mentor, Dr. George Parker III, who recently retired after 30 years of service in public education.

#### **Strategic Plan Update:**

Progress has been made since the last meeting. Key focus areas included improving student achievement in reading and math, reducing incidents involving seclusion and restraint, and strengthening staff recruitment and retention. Targets had been set for all goals

**Enrollment:**

Enrollment reports were reformatted to display data by the city rather than by program.

**Finance:**

Expenditure and Revenue reports were provided from July to May as well as expenditures.

**JOINT BOARD ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION:**

Mr. Holt asked if anyone wanted to bring a motion to carry the Joint Board Officer Slate as is. The motion was made by Mr. Pool and was seconded by Ms. Kimberly Melnyk. The motion carried. (7 Ayes, 0 Nays, 0 Abstentions)

**PERSONNEL DOCKET:**

A motion to enter into a closed session was made by Ms. Melnyk and was seconded by Mr. Collick. A motion to certify the closed session was made by Mr. Pool and seconded by Ms. Melnyk. A motion was made to approve the Personnel Docket. Motion carried. (7 Ayes, 0 Nays, 0 Abstentions)

**ADJOURNMENT:**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Laura W. Armstrong  
Clerk of the Board

APPROVED:



Mr. Robert Holt  
Chairman