

# REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, February 26, 2026 ~ 6:00 P.M.<sup>1</sup>

Suffolk City Hall, 442 W. Washington Street, Suffolk, VA 23434

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## Board Members Present:

Sean McGee, *Chair*  
Heather Howell, *Vice Chair*  
Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham  
Valerie Fields  
Karen Jenkins  
Tyron Riddick  
Kimberly Slingluff

## Administrative Staff Present:

Dr. John B. Gordon III, *Superintendent*  
Wendell M. Waller, *Esquire, School Board Attorney*  
Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*  
Keesha Johnson, *Deputy Clerk*

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## OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION

- Call to Order  
Board Chair McGee called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m. He apologized for the technical difficulties which delayed the start of the meeting.
- Pledge of Allegiance  
Board Member Slingluff led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Moment of Silence  
A moment of silence was observed by all in attendance.
- The Mission of Suffolk Public Schools  
Board Member Fields read the mission of SPS.

## APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- Approval of Agenda:  
Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve the agenda as presented.

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

## PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA / NON-AGENDA TOPICS

- Citizen Comments on Agenda Items  
No speakers registered to address the board.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to technical difficulties, the meeting was delayed until 6:07 p.m.

## **SUPERINTENDENT'S PROPOSED BUDGET**

### ➤ Superintendent's Proposed Budget for the 2026-2027 School Year

Dr. John B. Gordon III, Division Superintendent, and Mrs. Wendy K. Forsman, Chief Financial Officer led this discussion using PowerPoint presentation. Dr. Gordon provided an overview of the budget timeline so that everyone will be aware of various processes that will take place over the next couple of months. He highlighted areas of success when budgets are fully funded. They included increased scholarships, the S.T.E.M. Academy at BTWES, the nationally recognized PLTW programs at NRHS and LHS, middle school PLTW, athletics and fine arts achievements, increase of safety measures (SPS is the only division in Region II with three levels of safety staff: S3, School Security Officers, School Resource Officers), increased graduation rate (93.2%), increased honor graduates (16%), increased SPS digital/print platforms through the Communications/Community Engagement department, and an increase in early childhood education placement (84 seats). Dr. Gordon discussed common themes used in formulating the budget that were based on feedback from stakeholders, including staff raises, safety, and student achievement and literacy. He explained that student success is enhanced by fully funded budgets and are tied to the strategic plan, Destination 2028. Dr. Gordon also discussed salary increases including a mandated 2% state raise, 11% bus drivers raise (\$21 p/h), and an increased budget for Attorney contracted services. He also highlighted additional staff, programs, and website for the Communication and Community Engagement Department, and an additional printer position in the Printshop Department. He also highlighted the history of teacher raises which increased 17% over five years of his tenure and rank #2 in the region for starting salary. Dr. Gordon also discussed the following budget challenges: 1) Governor's proposed budget offers minimal increase (only 1.56%), expiration of all grant funding, including the state mandated Virginia Literacy Act (VLA), and other local programs that were grant funded. Inflationary costs, including safety items like metal detectors, facilities maintenance/supplies, tennis court replacement, software costs, and other fringe benefits add to higher costs. However, he indicated that SPS would absorb the increased cost with health insurance so employees could actually see the increase in their salary. Dr. Gordon stated that although the budget challenges occurred, financial sustainability must be achieved if we are to continue with programs that will foster success of our students, student achievement, and safety.

Wendy Forsman, Chief Financial Officer provided an overview of the budget book and its structure. She stated that the executive summary offers a high-level overview of changes in the proposed budget, new positions, raises, city requests, and state money allocations. She explained that categories are defined by the state, non-department items are not miscellaneous items but are expenses that are split over all departments due to potential retirements and workers compensation. Lastly, she explained the meaning of each of the three columns: 1) Actual – expenses as of June 30, 2025, funds that were actually spent on programs last year. 2) Revised – indicates where our budget is currently, 3) Proposed – shows what's being proposed, and 4) % Increased/Decreased which shows the difference between revised and proposed funds. Mrs. Forsman also explained that 84.05% (\$189,638,753) of the operating budget is dedicated to salaries and benefits (61.62% compensation and 22.43% benefits), and the remaining 15.95% (35,984,748) is dedicated to the operating costs which includes water, sewer, electricity, fuel, insurance, software, materials and supplies, professional development school allocations, textbooks, facility/maintenance contracts, copier maintenance contracts, ground services and consultant services. These are all of the things that keep our buildings open and insured. Therefore, the total operating budget is \$225,623,501. An increase of \$9,089,395.

Board Chair McGee asked board members to develop their questions and submit them to Dr. Gordon by March 6<sup>th</sup>, 5 p.m., so that he can provide answers. He thanked Dr. Gordon and Mrs. Forsman for the presentation.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### ➤ CSI/TSI School Board Approval

Dr. Gordon explained that approval was needed for the CSI/TSI document to be provided to the Virginia Department of Education. It is a multi-year school support plan to improve student outcomes for newly identified comprehensive support schools and targeted support schools. These schools include Mack Benn, Jr. Elementary, Hillpoint Elementary, Kilby Shores Elementary and Elephant's Fork Elementary Schools.

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the CSI/TSI Plans as submitted.

Board Members, Dr. Gordon and Dr. Branch discussed measurable outcomes of the plans being submitted which are inclusive of the scores that will be received from the SOLs.

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

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

### ➤ Attorney Wendell Waller read the following motion

A motion is needed to go into a closed meeting to discuss the following items and subjects pursuant to the Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711:

Discussion of the award of a public contract involving the expenditure of public funds, including interviewing a selected offeror and discussing terms and scope of a contract to provide services for a Forensic Audit pursuant to RFP 1910-P, where discussion in an open meeting would adversely affect the bargaining or negotiating strategy of the public body

Which is authorized by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, found at Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711 (A)(29).

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to go into the closed meeting as read by Attorney Waller.

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

Board Chair McGee reminded Board Members that personal devices are not allowed in the closed meeting and he informed the public that the closed meeting would last for approximately two hours.

## **RECONVENE IN OPEN MEETING**

### ➤ Meeting Called to Order

Board Chair McGee re-opened the public meeting at 9:48 p.m.

**CERTIFICATION OF CLOSED MEETING**

- Attorney Wendell Waller read the following certification

A Resolution of Certification of the Closed Meeting of February 26, 2026 Pursuant to Section 2.2-3712 of the Code of Virginia

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, requires a certification by 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 Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the Certification of the Closed Meeting as read by Attorney Waller.

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

**ACTION ON CLOSED MEETING ITEM**

- Action on Closed Meeting

There was no action on the closed meeting item.

**INFORMATION ITEMS**

- Board Chair McGee encourage board members to review the information items listed on the agenda.

**ADJOURNMENT**

- Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further discussion, Board Chair McGee adjourned the February 26, 2026 School Board Meeting at 9:50 p.m.

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Sean McGee, *School Board Chair*

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Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*