

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, March 26, 2026 ~ 6:00 P.M.

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

Board Members Present:

Sean McGee, *Chair*
Heather Howell, *Vice Chair*
Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham
Valerie Fields¹
Karen Jenkins
Tyron Riddick
Kimberly Slingluff²

Administrative Staff Present:

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

OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION

- Call to Order
Board Chair McGee called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.
- Pledge of Allegiance
Vice Chair Howell led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.
- The Mission of Suffolk Public Schools
Board Member Jenkins read the mission of SPS.
- Moment of Silence
A moment of silence was observed by all in attendance.
- Musical Selection – NRHS Jazz Band – Directed by Dr. Edward Woodis
The NRHS Jazz Band performed two selections: “Summertime,” and “25 or 6 to 4.”

Board members enjoyed the performance and congratulated the students and Dr. Woodis for a wonderful performance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- Approval of Agenda:
Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Members Riddick and Slingluff seconded the motion to approve the agenda with the removal of Resolution 25/26-24: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk Approving the Budget for Suffolk Public Schools for Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Totaling \$250,120,235 which Includes Local Funding from the City of Suffolk in the Amount of \$88,191,901 and replacing it with Resolution 25/26-24A: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk Approving the Budget for Suffolk

¹ Due to traffic, Board Members Fields arrived at the meeting at 6:04 p.m.

² Due to traffic, Board Member Slingluff arrived at the meeting at 6:05 p.m.

Public Schools for Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Totaling \$257,120,235 which Includes Local Funding from the City of Suffolk in the Amount of \$95,191,901.

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

Board Chair McGee answered the question that was raised regarding explanation for a “No” vote indicating that an explanation is required only for an abstention vote. He also clarified for a board member that it was too late to add to the agenda as that should have taken place during discussion of the item.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA / NON-AGENDA TOPICS

➤ Citizen Comments on Agenda Items

The Clerk read the statement of decorum for speakers who sign up to address the Board.

1. Jennifer Willman – Re: Community Feedback & Chromebooks in Elementary Education. Ms. Willman, began her comments thanking the board for moving forward with the forensic audit. She hoped that would be the practice going forward.

Due to the title of Ms. Willman’s comments, there was confusion regarding her topics of discussion and comments being made as her opening was non-agenda comments. Attorney Waller clarified that combining early and late appearance speakers was not in accordance with board policy. Board Chair McGee apologized for the confusion and asked Ms. Willman to speak at a subsequent meeting regarding non-agenda topics. Ms. Willman agreed and asked that agenda and non-agenda topics information be clearly available to the public.

Ms. Willman continue with her comments sharing her concerns with technology for early learners. She agreed that technology is a valuable tool, but it should be carefully considered and there should be limited use among elementary students, especially in K-2 classes. She asked the board to revise Chromebook issuance policies and to implement a policy to regulate screen use and instruction in classrooms.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

➤ Ordinance 25/26-81: An Ordinance Adding Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 2-2.6:2 entitled “School Board Code of Ethics; Yearly ratification required” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - Second Reading

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to table Ordinance 25/26-81 until after the Policy Review Committee (PRC) meeting at the end of the month (March 30, 2026).

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

NEW BUSINESS

➤ Suffolk Education Foundation Overview

Bethanne Bradshaw, Administrator, gave an overview of what the Suffolk Education Foundation does and how they partner with Suffolk Public Schools. She highlighted their board of directors, and major programs, including scholarships. She discussed various

scholarships and programs that are offered through SEF, including a \$3,000 scholarship which is offered to KFHS students who are pursuing a career in education (Future Educator Scholarship). She also talked about how SEF offers tuition assistance, classroom grants for teachers (SEF Instructional Grants), staff recognition, and supplies the Teacher Supply Store. Mrs. Bradshaw highlighted SEF Sponsors, and fundraisers. A brief conversation was had regarding scholarships and intent letters offered to students who intend to pursue a career in education, and volunteering at the Teacher Supply Store. Board Chair McGee thanked Mrs. Bradshaw for her presentation as the board looked forward to continued partnership with the Suffolk Education Foundation.

➤ Department of Human Resources - Personnel Report for March 26, 2026

Board Member Jenkins moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion to approve the Personnel Report as submitted.

Upon roll-call vote, the vote was: Aye: 3 / Nay: 3 (Dr. Brittingham, Slingluff, McGee) / Abstain: 1 (Howell). The motion Tied by vote of 3 to 3 to 1. The motion failed.

Vice Chair Howell indicated that her abstention was due to the lack of information provided for the recommended applicant.

➤ Resolution 25/26-21: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of a Memorandum of Understanding Between the Portsmouth Public School Board, Operating As Portsmouth Public Schools, and the School Boards of Chesapeake, Franklin City, Isle of Wight County, Norfolk, Southampton County, Suffolk and Virginia Beach City, to Establish and Operate A Regional Adult Education Program (Region 20) and to Apply For Grant Funding From the U.S. Department of Education and the Virginia Department of Education, Office of Adult Education

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-21 as submitted.

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

➤ Resolution 25/26-22: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of an Agreement Between the Suffolk City School Board and Outdoor Concepts LLC, D/B/A Atlas General Contractors to Replace the Gym Floor at Northern Shores Elementary School

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion to approve the Resolution 25/26-22 as submitted.

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

➤ Resolution 25/26-23: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Recognizing that the VSBA has Designated the Month of March 2026 as Equity in Education Month and by its Adoption of this Resolution the School Board Reaffirms Its Commitment to Providing Opportunity and Support for Every Student Enrolled in Suffolk Public Schools

Board Member Jenkins led the discussion regarding adopting this resolution which was initiated by VSBA. She indicated that SPS already follows this standard and felt that adopting the resolution would be in harmony with practices. After the clerk read the resolution aloud, conversation ensued regarding support for the designation, concerns regarding implementation of the resolution without a CFO, and requested clarification regarding

mandatory compliance. Attorney Waller clarified that the resolution was not a policy nor a compliance document and that it only stated the intent of the local school board. Additional conversation ensued regarding satisfying the board's intent regarding the resolution without appropriate staff and funding in place.

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-23 as submitted.

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

Board Member Riddick explained that his abstention was due to his questions being misconstrued/twisted to fit a narrative painted by Board Chair McGee. He added that his discussion was not discussing personnel matters but was questioning how the division would comply with three specific statements in the resolution without the personnel required to help in this regard. Board Member Riddick specifically addressed the following: (1) Students with resources in education, (2) Ensuring that every student is supported, and (3) Compliance with the board's intent to act in harmony with the resolution. Board Member Riddick added that his questions were not addressed but were twisted as he was asking board members to engage in a discussion, and that some board members refused to give even a general answer to the public regarding how the board intends to comply with the resolution's intent without adequate staff or funding.

- Resolution 25/26-24A: A Resolution Of The School Board For The City Of Suffolk Approving The Budget For Suffolk Public Schools For Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Totaling \$257,120,235 Which Includes Local Funding From The City Of Suffolk In The Amount Of \$95,191,901

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-24A as submitted.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham explained why she would be voting "No" to the resolution. She indicated the following non-negotiable priorities that are not addressed in the budget. The proposed budget: (1) Does not address the needs of the five elementary schools identified as off track and needing intensive intervention; (2) Makes a divisive shift in how we prioritize special education, financially and philosophically; (3) Does not include targeted investment in qualified personnel; (4) Does not address growing resilience and reliance on long term substitutes and the minimally prepared career switchers; (5) Does not ensure that teacher compensation reflects the importance of their role; and (6) Does not support introduction of merit-based pay structure. She requested that the board include any additional money needed to fund positions at the five identified schools and hire the appropriate number of special education teachers, aides, and paraprofessionals so that the budget is targeting areas know for improvements that will aide students success in classrooms.

Board Member Slingluff requested that the motion be amended to cover an additional \$1.54 million request for the city to cover addition money needed to give all SPS teachers and staff a 3% raise in the new fiscal year. She felt that with the allocation of a 2% raise for staff and the cost of living adjustment for 2026 being 2.8%, staff would be taking a .8% cut in pay due to the cost of living raise.

Board members engaged in a conversation regarding additional funding requests, members' new-found attention to the budget while never approving all previous budgets, conversations

being held with city counterparts, board members not communicating with the Superintendent during 2x2 meetings to discuss their desires/concerns, unfunded mandates and their costs, and sacrificing preventative maintenance funding to address the work needed at NSES. Board Chair Howell indicated that she would not be amending her motion. Dr. Gordon added to the conversation by providing clarification to various statements and concerns shared by board members including cost of living increase and any additional funding going to staff raises, the global teacher shortage, merit-based pay, and the lack of revenue-sharing models as in some cities; therefore, SPS must be strategic in creating, asking for, and applying funding to the division. Additional conversation ensued between board members.

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-24A as submitted.

Upon roll-call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 1 (Dr. Brittingham) / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 6 to 1.

➤ Discussion Regarding the Use of Chromebooks in Elementary Schools (Information Item Only)

Conversation was had between Board Members and Dr. Gordon as members expressed concerns with the overuse of technology and the amount of screen time used by elementary students. They discussed the impact/affects that Chromebooks may have on early learners' reading, writing, speech/language, social skills and cognitive ability. Board Members requested a presentation from Dr. Gordon and his staff to address Chromebook usage in grades K-3. Additional dialogue will be held after the presentation is made at a subsequent school board meeting.

MOTION TO GO INTO A CLOSED MEETING

➤ Motion To Go Into A Closed Meeting

Board Member Riddick moved to go into closed meeting by amending the reasons for the closed meeting to include a discussion regarding the Superintendent's recommendation for Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Board Chair McGee asked Attorney Waller for clarification regarding adding this discussion to the motion. Attorney Waller clarified that the closed meeting was already approved on the agenda and, as with any motion, the motion to go into a closed meeting can be amended.

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to amend the reasons for going into a closed meeting by adding a discussion regarding the superintendent's recommendation for Chief Financial Officer.

Conversation ensued which required clarification from Attorney Waller regarding a need to vote on information discussed in a closed session. He clarified that board members can go into a close meeting and come out and not have a vote on that discussion. He also stated that discussing a personnel matter is something that is permissible under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Additional conversation ensued as board members expressed their concerns with and support for adding this discussion to the motion.

Upon roll-call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 2 (Dr. Brittingham, Slingsluff) / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 5 to 2.

Attorney 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 Freedom of Information Act found at Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711:

1. Record Review 2025/26-9RR regarding the assignment of a student to Turlington Woods School, where the discussion in an open meeting would involve disclosure of information contained in the student's scholastic record.
2. Discussion and/or consideration regarding the Superintendent's recommendation for the employment of a Chief Financial Officer for Suffolk Public Schools.

All of which is authorized by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, found at Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711 (A)(1) and (2).

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

Upon roll-call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 2 (Dr. Brittingham, Slingluff) / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 5 to 2.

Board Chair McGee reminded Board Members that personal electronic devices are not allowed in the closed meeting.

RECONVENE IN OPEN MEETING

➤ Meeting Called to Order

Board Chair McGee re-opened the public meeting at 9:27 p.m.

CERTIFICATION OF CLOSED MEETING

➤ Attorney Wendell Waller read the following certification

A Resolution of Certification of the Closed Meeting of March 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 Jenkins 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 Item – 2025/2026-9RR

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion to uphold the recommendation of the Student Services Review Committee as submitted.

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 – Personnel Report

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Members Riddick and Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the superintendent's personnel recommendation for Chief Financial Officer.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 4 / Nay: 3 (Dr. Brittingham, Slingluff, McGee) / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 4 to 3.

INFORMATION ITEMS

- Board Chair McGee offered condolence to the family of employee Benita Powell who passed away March 13, 2026.

ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further discussion, Board Chair McGee adjourned the March 26, 2026 School Board Meeting at 9:30 p.m.

Sean P. McGee, *School Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*