

SOUTHEASTERN COOPERATIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS
JOINT BOARD MEETING MINUTES
MARCH 25, 2026

The SECEP Joint Board convened on March 25, 2026, at 12:30 pm at the SECEP administrative office. Attending the meeting were:

JOINT BOARD MEMBERS:

Mr. Norman Pool	Chesapeake City Public Schools	
Mr. Robert Holt	Franklin City Public Schools	Chairman
Ms. Tanya Bhasin	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:

Dr. Dalphine Joppy	Chesapeake City Public Schools	Designee
Dr. Theo Cramer	Isle of Wright County Schools	
Dr. James Pohl	Norfolk Public Schools	Designee
Dr. Nicole Devries	Portsmouth Public Schools	Designee
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
Ms. Edna Felton	Assistant Director of Finance
Dr. Timothy Bostic	Assistant Director of Curriculum and Instruction
Dr. Christian Nierman	Assistant Director of Programs
Dr. Dwana White	Director of Human Resources
(*) Virtual	

CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Holt, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 12:32 pm.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

The January 27, 2026, meeting minutes were approved as presented.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC:

None.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER:

Dr. Robertson updated the Board on the Committee of Superintendents' meeting. Superintendents are encouraged by the progress being made at SECEP. SECEP presented the initial draft of the FY27 budget in January as requested by the Board and superintendents. Changes to the budget development timeline at SECEP support divisions as their budgets are

being developed. Superintendents followed up on budget discussions that began at the previous meeting. Seclusion policies were also discussed. Ms. Armstrong will provide an update to the Board in her report.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

Ms. Armstrong reviewed the enrollment and financial reports previously included in the Board documents. No questions were raised regarding those items. She then presented the second reading of the FY27 budget, noting that the revisions since the January reading were limited to editorial updates, including adjustments to reflect updates in division leadership and a formatting clarification within the staffing positions section. She further confirmed that there were no changes to rates, enrollment projections, or other substantive budget assumptions from either the prior fiscal year or the first reading.

In her budget presentation, Ms. Armstrong also outlined the staffing requests reflected in the proposed FY27 budget. She explained that SECEP is seeking ten additional special education teacher positions in anticipation of projected growth in ASP enrollment, while reducing general education teacher positions to align with reduced enrollment in the TRAEP programs. In addition, she reiterated that the request for additional teacher assistant positions is intended to strengthen SECEP's capacity to serve students with significant needs and to improve recruitment and retention in historically difficult-to-fill positions.

During the board discussion, members inquired about projected healthcare cost increases and the availability of resources to support both staff and students. Benefit cost increases are expected to remain modest, estimated at approximately \$20 to \$25 per pay period, although final figures have not yet been confirmed. Ms. Armstrong noted that SECEP has not experienced a benefits increase for several years and stated that SECEP will continue working collaboratively with Norfolk Public Schools on salary and benefits considerations in preparation for the next meeting. Ms. Felton and the finance team were recognized for the development of the budget proposal.

Ms. Armstrong briefed the Board on Virginia Beach City Public Schools' recent policy change regarding seclusion and restraint, specifically the elimination of dedicated seclusion rooms. She explained that this action impacts SECEP's two Virginia Beach sites, Renaissance Academy and Windsor Woods Elementary. Dedicated seclusion rooms were closed in accordance with the policy change. She further advised that SECEP, in coordination with facilities staff, has already begun repurposing those spaces, including transforming the area at Windsor Woods into a student break space and evaluating additional uses for other areas, such as storage or testing, as appropriate.

The Board approved the proposed update to SECEP's seclusion policy. Board discussion centered on staff safety, student safety, teacher input, and evidence-based practices associated with moving away from dedicated seclusion rooms. In response, Ms. Armstrong and Dr. Nierman outlined recent action steps and emphasized the organization's continued focus on antecedent strategies, proactive instruction, replacement behaviors, data analysis, and environmental adjustments to support students before behavioral escalation.

Additional discussion addressed staff wellness, teacher recognition, and supports available to

employees. Dr. White shared that SECEP regularly disseminates Employee Assistance Program information through Norfolk Public Schools and is exploring additional wellness opportunities for staff. Dr. Bostic added that self-care has been embedded into professional development for first-year teachers and noted that the coaching model has been intentionally structured to increase support, connection, and retention for new staff members.

Ms. Armstrong also provided a progress update on the strategic plan and program review. Highlights included ongoing professional development initiatives, including one-on-one coaching for new teachers during the first semester, increased support in IEP development, explicit instruction, time management, classroom routines, and instructional strategies for students performing below grade level. Staff surveys reflect positive responses to coaching, administrator support, colleague support, and stronger cross-divisional staff connections, while also acknowledging continued challenges associated with behavioral complexity, emotional escalation, paperwork demands, and navigation of the Synergy platform.

In the area of climate and culture, staff and student engagement efforts across SECEP were highlighted. Examples, include newsletter recognitions, participation in the Virginia Beach Polar Plunge fundraiser for Special Olympics, quarterly honor roll assemblies at the Suffolk Center, staff certification efforts tied to Project ADAM at the Chesapeake Center, the Speak Spot staff suggestion initiative developed by Human Resources, the REACH program teddy bear initiative at St. Mary's, and a blanket drive underway in Western Tidewater.

Finally, Ms. Armstrong updated the Board on the development of the new Memorandum of Understanding between SECEP and its participating divisions. She explained that the revised MOU is intended to align with updated VDOE expectations, clarify the respective responsibilities of SECEP and participating divisions, define the role of the fiscal agent, and identify areas where companion procedures or appendices may be necessary to address divisional variation. She reported that feedback from the special education directors had been incorporated into the latest draft and that the document had been forwarded to the Norfolk City Attorney for review prior to broader distribution to divisions for legal review.

JOINT BOARD ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION:

There were no additional items for discussion.

CLOSED SESSION:

A motion to enter into a closed session was made by Ms. Melnyk and seconded by Ms. Bhasin. The motion carried. (Ayes 6, Nays 0, Abstentions 0). The Motion for Entering Closed Session was read.

The Resolution Certification of Closed Session was read. A motion to approve the personnel docket was made by Ms. Bhasin and seconded by Mr. Pool. The personnel docket was approved (Ayes 6, Nays 0, Abstentions 0). Closed session ended at 1:15 pm.

PERSONNEL

Dr. White presented the personnel report and answered questions about turnover in teacher assistant positions. The personnel docket was approved. Ms. Melnyk made a motion to approve the personnel docket, and it was seconded by Ms. Bhasin. The motion carried. (Ayes 6, Nays 0,

Abstentions 0).

ADJOURNMENT:

Following a closed session, the meeting was adjourned at 1:21 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Laura Armstrong
Clerk of the Board



Mr. Robert Holt
Chairman