REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD
Thursday, April 16, 2026 ~ 6:00 P.M.
King's Fork Middle School, 350 King's Fork Road, Suffolk, VA 23434

Board Members Present:
Sean McGee, *Chair*
Heather Howell, *Vice Chair*[1]
Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham
Valerie Fields
Karen Jenkins
Tyron Riddick[2]
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*

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
  Board Member Dr. Brittingham 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.

- Musical Selection – Elementary School Combined Choir (CES/MBJES) – Directed by Emalee Alexander and Jamie Hockaday
  The Elementary School Combined Choirs of CES and MBJES performed two selections: "Kaleidoscope," and "Hot Cross Buns, Gently Sleep" (Recorder). Many of the students were caught in traffic and missed the performance. However, board members enjoyed the performances and congratulated the students.

PRESENTATION

- Recognition of Honor Graduates – Nansemond River High School
  There were 250 honor graduates out of a graduating class of 440 students (many students were absent due to prescheduled athletic events). The honor graduates have earned millions in scholarship offerings and have received hundreds of college acceptance letters. Board members were proud of the honor graduate's accomplishments and they congratulated the graduates, their families and all who support the students.

[1] Due to traffic, Vice Chair Howell arrived at the meeting at 6:05 p.m.
[2] Due to work responsibilities, Board Member Riddick arrived at the meeting at 6:31 p.m.

There was a brief pause in the meeting to allow students and parents the opportunity to exit the meeting room.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- Approval of Agenda:
  Board Member Riddick moved and Vice Chair Howell seconded the motion to approve the agenda with the addition of two items added to "New Business," 1. A Discussion Regarding the Location for Our School Administrative Offices and, 2. Joint-Use Meeting Between Suffolk City School Board and the Suffolk City Council.

  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 TOPICS

- Citizen Comments on Agenda Items
  There were no speakers who registered to address the board.

REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

- Good News Report
  Anthonette Dickens, Communications and Community Engagement Officer, highlighted the good news happening within the division. Dr. Gordon, Division Superintendent, and Mr. McGee, School Board Chair, recognized and congratulated the following:
  - Students who participated in the final competition in the Battle of the Books: KSES Green Jawsome Readers - students Aiden Sprouse, Haley Reese, Aliyah Baker, Bentley Mitchell, Lillian Myles, Allison Greene, and teacher Cynthia Council; CES Silver Foxes - students Elise Richie, Adelaide Joy, Elena Ross, Emma Mixon, and team sponsors Tyler Jones and Melanie Burnor; FBES Chapter Champs – Maria Bosco, Liam Quallis, Brittan Austin, Lauren Henley, Chelsea Taylor, and Sponsor Jennifer Podruchny.
  - Teacher Cadetes who participated in the Virginia Educators Rising Conference: Jinaro Boyd, Riley Mahaler, and Brian Silvio earned first place in the ethical dilemma competition and will represent VA on the national stage this June in Portland, OR. Their sponsor, Amy Blyth, was also recognized.
  - The BTWES Enchanted Steppers were recognized: Alisea Arrington, Hope Cotton, Milan Colbert, Lamont Garvin Jr., Laila Thomas, Logan Harper, Willow Parrett-Clemons, and Aria Standmire. Also recognized were coaches Jaylen Barnes and Michaela Whitley. Team moms Natasha Garvin and Tameka Banks were also recognized for all of their hard work behind the scenes.
  - The NRHS Girls Indoor Track Team State Champions: Michailyn Rose (also broke five school records for indoor track), Audrina Chew, Madison Beale, Nevaeh Chaney, Makhyah Johnson, Kylaa Willis, Simone Ellis, Jasmine Gaines, London Smith, and Lauren Harris. The Boys 4x400 State Champions were also recognized: Timothy McFarland, William Hampton, Jeremiah Jones, and Aaron Williams Jr. Coach Marco McKoy was also recognized for being named 2025-2026 Indoor Track Season Coach of the Year.

- <u>Calendar of Special Events</u>
  Dr. Gordon, highlighted information from the calendar of special events.

CONSENT AGENDA

- <u>Approval of the Consent Agenda</u>
  Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Members Slingluff and Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda.

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

  Upon approval of the Personnel Report, Dr. Gordon introduced the following new staff members: Heather Ford, Coordinator of English Instruction; Dela Jordan, Coordinator I of Student Services; and Anthony Lebron, Chief Financial Officer.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- <u>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</u>
  Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to take the School Board Code of Ethics and turn it into an annual resolution which is read aloud at the School Board Organizational Meeting each year in January.

  Conversation ensued between board members and Attorney Waller. Board members expressed their support for, opposition to, and/or language in the Code of Ethics Policy.

  Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 4 / Nay: 2 (Fields, Jenkins) / Abstain: 1 (Riddick). The motion Passed by vote of 4 to 2 to 1.

  Board Member Riddick explained his abstention citing that the Code of Ethics is just ceremonial and that there is not enough "meat" in the document to hold board members accountable to the Code of Ethics. He added that several violations have already occurred by the members who drafted or assisted with the drafting of the document. He also stated that the document must include clearly define parameters.

NEW BUSINESS

- <u>Payment of Bills and Payroll – March 2026</u>
  Board Member Riddick moved and Vice Chair Howell seconded the motion to approve the Payment of Bills and Payroll – March 2026 as submitted.

  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.

- <u>Bonus Appropriation</u>
  Dr. Gordon explained that the reason for the bonus appropriation was due to the General Assembly adopting a caboose bill which provided an additional $1,573,870 to school divisions that required a match to pay for a maximum $1,500 bonus to employees. He added that those

funds will be used as a retention bonus for staff. This additional funding has to be appropriated by City Council for the current fiscal year, but must first be approved by the school board.

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Members Riddick and Slingluff seconded the motion to approve the bonus appropriation, as submitted.

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

- <u>2025-2026 Calendar Adjustment - April 21, 2026</u>
  Dr. Gordon explained that due to the special election being held on April 21, 2026 (some schools are polling sites), concerns raised regarding the safety of students and staff during the arrival / dismissal times. After meeting with our emergency services team as well as having discussions with our regional partners, and ensuring that instructional hours required by the Virginia Department of Education would still be met, the team felt that it was in the best interest of the school division to make a calendar adjustment to convert April 21, 2026 to a staff and student holiday.

  Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve the calendar adjustment and make April 21, 2026 a student and staff holiday.

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

- <u>Perkins Grant</u>
  Dr. Gordon explained that the Perkins Grant is an annual local plan and tentative budget for Career and Technical Education. This annual local plan includes specific requirements for involvement by the CTE Advisory Council, the creation of a career pathway plan of study into our degree programs at Paul D. Camp Community college, and awareness of the Virginia Credential initiative. The Perkins budget for the 2026-2027 school year is $324,856.43. This budget proposal will cover professional development, student career leadership activities, the expansion and modernization of our quality CTE programs, Virginia credentialing initiative (exams/publications), administration, and administrative equipment.

  Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve Perkins Grant as submitted.

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

- <u>Special Education Annual Plan Presentation</u>
  Kimberly Warholak, Director of Special Education, gave an overview of the annual plan Part B Flowthrough Application for SPS and the application process. She indicated that the plan, once approved by the Virginia Department of Education, is also regulated by VDOE. However, before the application can be submitted, it must first be reviewed by the Local Advisory Committee for Special Education (SEAC) and then submitted to the school board for approval. The plan is submitted annually to receive federal funds for special education under Title IV-B of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act. Mrs. Warholak explained that the application needed to be submitted by May 8, 2026 for consideration.

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham/Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the Special Education Annual Plan, as submitted.

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

- <u>Resolution 25/26-25: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Expressing Its Support for House Bill 182 Which Was Approved by Vote of the Virginia Senate and by the Virginia House of Delegates and is Now Before Governor Abigail Spanberger for the Governor's Signature</u>

  Board Member Fields explained that the Governor signed House Bill 182 into law and that it would be in the best interest of our school division to adopt Resolution 25/26-25 supporting this house bill. The bill gives the division the opportunity to provide students with the option of taking AP African American Studies in lieu of World History I/World Geography to satisfy the History and Social Studies credit.

  Board Member engaged in conversation regarding the resolution.

  Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Fields/Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-25 thereby solidifying Suffolk Public Schools position on House Bill 182.

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

- <u>Resolution 25/26-26: A Resolution of The School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Approving an Award to Excel Paving Corporation Pursuant to Written Invitation For Bid Issued By Suffolk Public Schools</u>

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

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

- <u>Ordinance 25/26-82: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 1, Article 7, Section 1-7.4 entitled "Programs and services; programs to enhance quality of effectiveness; funds budgeted annually; appropriate activities and services; new member orientation; reports required; conferences etc. not sponsored by VSBA or COSSBA special requirements; policy effective date" of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading</u>

  Board Member Riddick recommended that the Policy Review Committee look at adding additional language to this policy which states that if a board member(s) receive any training, paid for by Suffolk Public Schools or by using personal coffers, which impacts a members governance for SPS, that member is to present information received from their training to all board members so that all can be on the same playing field when making decisions. Board Members engaged in dialogue regarding this recommendation and Attorney Waller clarified that the board can take action on policies that are slated for First Reading and listed as an information item. This includes returning a policy to the Policy Review Committee for further consideration.

  Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to send Ordinance 25/26-82 back to the PRC to consider adding the caveat that any training that is used by board members, whether paid for by SPS or by individual board members, where knowledge is gained that impacts their governance is to be shared with the full board and a presentation is given to the board.

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

- <u>Ordinance 25/26-83 Ordinance 25/26-83: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 2, Article 2, Section 2-2.6:1 entitled "Aspirational Statements; School Board Norms; Protocols; Filing complaints; and Consequences for Violations; Guidelines for Board Members" of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading</u>
  Board Member Fields led the discussion regarding this ordinance. She suggested that the policy would be enhanced by stating that board members must indicate that it is their "personal point of view" when making comments to media, in public gatherings, in print, and on social media, relative business of the board for Suffolk Public Schools. This would diminish confusion as others may think that a member is speaking for the entire board, which is not always the case nor the consensus of the board. Board Member Fields recommended adding to the policy language which states that board members should first, or in some way, indicate that it is their personal point of view when making public statements. She also asked for additional language to be added to say that board members are not to respond, make comments, deliberate, or take action at any time during the public meeting regarding comments made by members of the public who addressed the board. This would mean that board members would not respond to public speakers when they are making their comments, nor when a board member is making closing statements (Business by Board Members). Conversation ensued between board members regarding Sub-Section D, ramifications when violations occur, and whether or not suggestions that are being made by one board member on the Policy Review Committee are being considered. Additional conversation was had between board members and Attorney Waller regarding censoring board members.

- <u>Ordinance 25/26-84 and Ordinance 25/26-85 (Information Item Only)</u>
  First reading only, no action required at this time.

- <u>Discussion Regarding Location for School Administrative Offices</u>
  Board Member Riddick lead this discussion expressing his concerns with the failure of the River Bend project and the lack of a sufficient office building for the School Administrative Offices. He explained that Driver Elementary School and the property at Freeney Avenue could have been repurposed and used as the School Administrative Offices. He questioned what the next steps are to secure a building for SAO. Conversation ensued between Dr. Gordon and board members. Dr. Gordon stated that due to current time constraints two viable options for moving forward includes: (1) Reintroduce the conversation about the human resources building located behind city hall; and (2) Expand the current Operations Center's footprint on Route 460. Mr. Riddick asked Dr. Gordon and his staff to come up with another option and to possibly look at the vacant buildings/warehouses around the city as a potential location.

- <u>Discussion Regarding a Joint Use Meeting of the Suffolk City School Board and Suffolk City Council</u>
  Board Member Riddick lead the discussion regarding this topic. He asked the board to request a joint City Council / School Board meeting to have serious discussion regarding a location for the School Administrative Offices, instead of spending $700,000 to lease space. Mr. Riddick suggested the following topics to be discussed at the joint meeting: (1) School

Administrative Offices; and (2) Taking liabilities and using them to create assets. Attorney Waller clarified that it would be appropriate to have a motion and call for a vote instead of polling the board at a later date.

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion for Suffolk City Public Schools to request a joint meeting between Suffolk City Council and Suffolk City School Board to discuss items, but not limited to the following: the School Administrative Offices, Strategic Plan to remove our liabilities (SAO, Maintenance Center) to assets.

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 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. Kenneth Madison – Re: Hiring Decisions Associated with SNH Article. Mr. Madison commended the board for changing their mind and hiring Anthony Lebron as the Chief Financial Officer. He indicated that it's hard to find people to fill those types of positions. He also stated that board members are not paid enough for what they do, and commended the Superintendent for being named Superintendent for the Year for Region II.

2. Jonathan Creekmur – Re: Volunteer Policy. Mr. Creekmur shared his concerns with students volunteering in classrooms without sponsored supervision or without an identified goal of service to the school or the class. He also expressed his concern that school officials did not provide prior notification to parents informing them of volunteers in the classroom. He stated that the matter was brought to his attention by other students. He suggested that the matter be investigated and a response provided to him regarding the question, "What capacity was this student volunteering in the classroom?" He also urged the board to review volunteer the guidelines for individuals under 18.

3. Valerie Boykin – Re: School Board Operations. Ms. Boykin expressed her ongoing concern with dissensions that are displayed by the board on a regular basis. She stated that these actions could have a detrimental impact on the operations of the school system and affect the education of Suffolk Students. She cited the denial, then the reversed decision to hire the Chief Financial Officer recommended by Dr. Gordon. She felt that the position is critical to a well-functioning organization, especially one which is going through an unnecessary forensic audit. Ms. Boykin also stated that by not approving payment of SPS bills, it shows a lack of responsibility and not being fiscally sound. She also expressed concerns with suspending the DEI policy, and major editing of the transgender policy.

4. Dwight James – School Board Priorities. Mr. James felt that with the new leadership on the board, different outcomes will be visible. He stated that our kids cannot afford delays, distractions or missed opportunities. Additionally, Mr. James recommended that optional resources that are available like mentorship programs, outreach programs, and parent engagement programs, should be required with parent participation, clear expectations, follow-ups, and accountability. This should be the outcome on both sides. He felt that you cannot keep investing in a child and ignoring the environment they go home to. He reminded the board that they are here to make decisions that are in the best interest of our

kids future and that they should be putting forth a budget that prioritizes teachers pay and retention.

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

- Comments and Reports by School Board Members
  Board members congratulated the honor graduates from NRHS, students and staff who were highlighted in the Good News Report, students for their athletic wins, and the teacher cadet program. They also thanked everyone involved with the division for making a difference in Suffolk Public Schools, thanked board members for a productive meeting, and thanked public speakers for sharing their thoughts and concerns with the board. Board members enjoyed various events at the schools and looked forward to the upcoming graduation. Board members were encouraged to always work for what's best for our students.

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 item and subject pursuant to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act found at Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711:

  1. Record Review 2025/26-10RR 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.

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

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

  Upon roll-call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 7 to 0.[3]

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

RECONVENE IN OPEN MEETING

- Meeting Called to Order:
  Board Chair McGee reconvened the public meeting.

CERTIFICATION OF CLOSED MEETING

- Certification of Closed Meeting
  Attorney Wendell Waller read the following certification:

  A Resolution of Certification of the Closed Meeting of April 16, 2026 Pursuant to Section 2.2-3712 of the Code of Virginia

[3] Due to personal illness, Vice Chair Howell exited the meeting at 9:11 p.m., after the vote to go into a closed meeting.

WHEREAS, the School Board of the City of Suffolk ("School Board") 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 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.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham 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: 6 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 1 (Howell). The motion Passed by vote of 6 to 0 to 0 to 1.

ACTION ON CLOSED MEETING ITEM

- Action On A Closed Meeting Item - Student Record Review #25/26-10RR
  Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Jenkins/Slingluff seconded the motion to uphold the Student Services Review Committee's (SSRC) recommendation.

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

INFORMATION ITEMS

- Board Chair McGee encourage board members to review the items listed in the information section of the agenda and he expressed condolences to the three SPS employees who passed away.

ADJOURNMENT

- Adjournment of Meeting:
  There being no further discussion, Board Chair McGee adjourned the April 16, 2026 School Board Meeting at 9:21 p.m.

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Sean McGee, *School Board Chair* Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*