

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, May 14, 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*
Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham
Valerie Fields
Karen Jenkins
Tyron Riddick¹
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

- 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 Slingluff read the mission of SPS.
- Musical Selection – The Center for Performance and Production Arts (CPPA) Lakeland Cavalier Singers – Directed by Tiffany Carr
The CPPA Cavalier Singers performed two selections: “Stardust” by B.E. Boykin, and “Dies Irae” by Michael John Trotta. All in attendance enjoyed the performances and board members offered congratulatory remarks to the students and director.

Before moving to the next presentation, Board Chair McGee recognized Dr. Gordon for being named Virginia Superintendent of the Year.

PRESENTATION

- Recognition of Honor Graduates – Lakeland High School
There were 103 honor graduates. The students introduced themselves, their parents, and stated their future goals, whether additional education, military, or joining the workforce. Board members were proud of the honor graduate's accomplishments. Members congratulated the graduates, their families, and all who support the students.

¹ Due to work responsibilities, Board Member Riddick arrived at the meeting at 7:51 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:

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve the agenda with the addition of an info item to “New Business” titled, *Report from the Education Committee Meeting*.

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

- Vernon Jackson, for being named the School Plant Manager of the Year.
- Michael Allen, for having over 10 years of perfect attendance.
- Students who competed in the STEM Competition: Future Builders Cup (Kyler Lynch, Naomi Brown, Jermari Deck, Cooper Seidel, Cade Keefe. They also recognized the team sponsor.)
- Emily Hatton, member of the Hillpoint Elementary School (HES) News Crew, for winning 2nd Place in the WHRO PBS Kids Writers Contest. They also recognized the staff supporting Emily.
- David Haeberle, and Aurlander Skinner, the STEM Lego competition visionaries who worked tirelessly to bring this opportunity to life.

➤ Calendar of Special Events

Dr. Gordon, highlighted information from the calendar of special events. He thanked Mrs. Dickens and her team for their collaboration with his portfolio. Dr. Gordon also thanked school board members and many others for their support and congratulatory emails, and text messages received for being named Virginia Superintendent of the Year. Dr. Gordon is first Suffolk Public Schools superintendent to achieve this honor and he is looking forward to competing at the national level.

CONSENT AGENDA

➤ Approval of the Consent Agenda

Board Member Slingluff moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda with the removal from the Personnel Report, the reassignment of an assistant principal to a classroom teacher position so that it can be discussed and considered during a closed meeting of the school board.

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

Upon approval of the Personnel Report, Dr. Gordon introduced the following new staff members: Vernon Jackson, new Director of Facilities and Planning, Jimmecca Davis, new Coordinator of Special Education, and Derrick Bryant, new Director of Transportation.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

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

Dr. Okema Branch, Chief Academic Officer, led this discussion as she provided an overview of Suffolk Public Schools K-3 Chromebook usage. She was assisted by Dr. Stenette Byrd III, Chief of Schools, Dr. Catherine Pichon, Director of Elementary Leadership, and Mr. William Hallwig, Technology IT Systems Specialist, who provided an overview on background requirements on research, Chromebook usage, inclusive of the Virginia Department of Education Guidelines and Standards which includes instructional scheduling and instructional support programs. They shared that several students were required to have Chromebooks due to their special needs and for communication support. They highlighted how Chromebooks provided additional instructional support to students. The device was not being used just for fun and games. This assurance is handled by Dr. Byrd and his Leadership & Innovation team and school administrators. Working with teachers, parents, and administrators, they decide exactly how technology should be used, select the tools that actually help students learn versus the device being a digital toy, and they set clear rules and expectations around the use of Chromebooks. It was indicated that research showed that when students use technology that adapts to them, they can reach their learning goals much faster, digital tools help teachers see exactly where a student is struggling in real time and can address deficiencies immediately, and that students can see the results of their assessment(s) without having to wait until Friday because information is available in real time. They explained the integration of technology into the instructional blocks, how everything is targeted, and the data showing the amount of time that an elementary school student spends on their device per day. It was noted that K-3 students utilize a fraction of the 385 total minutes in a school day on their electronic device. When using those devices, students use is primarily during targeted interventions (small group rotations) and assessments. This is a very structured and fluent process. Safety is a key component during technology use; therefore, all teachers are trained to actively monitor students while they are using their technology device.²

Board Members and staff engaged in dialogue regarding the information conveyed. Board Members were appreciative of the report and discussion.

➤ Ordinance 25/26-83, Ordinance 25/26-84, and Ordinance 25/26-85

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve (collectively) Ordinance 25/26-83, Ordinance 25/26-84, and Ordinance 25/26-85, as submitted.

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

NEW BUSINESS

² Board Member Riddick arrived during this discussion.

➤ Payment of Bills and Payroll – April 2026

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the Payment of Bills and Payroll – April 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.

➤ Financial Update

Mr. Anthony Lebron, Chief Financial Officer, led the discussion regarding the 2026-2027 budget update, a recap of the budget process, and discussed pending items that will impact the previously approved budget. He explained that due to pending action in the general assembly, and the action from city council when they adopted their budget for the 2026-2027 fiscal year, Suffolk Public Schools' information is complete but contingent upon final decisions at the state and local levels. He shared three different budget scenarios: 1) Best Case Scenario – City Council will approve the full \$88 million as requested by SPS Proposed Budget. This allows SPS to maintain current levels of service, provide a 2% salary increase and other rising operations costs, and funds new positions to support student outcomes. 2) Current Scenario – A reduction of \$2 million from the proposed budget. This scenario precipitates the elimination of 15 long-term vacant positions, a 3% reduction in purchased services allowance, and a 19.5% reduction of non-essential travel and training. Mr. Lebron explained the process for the Burn Rate Analysis (a process that is completed month by month to project where SPS will be at the end of the year and provided an update as of April 30, 2026. He explained that the actual expenses (funds spent as of April 30th) was \$217 million; Carry Forward Expenses (expenses that might cross fiscal years (deducted from total expenditures)) approximately \$3.879 million; and the projected amount to be spent in May and June 2026 (\$2.77 million - added to Total Annual Expenditures) to be approximately \$213 million. He further added that SPS is expected to receive \$216 million in revenues for this year. Revenue received, minus expenditures, leaves \$2.77 million estimated budget balance for the end of the 2025-2026 school year. Mr. Lebron indicated that the remaining balance (\$2.77 million) will be used for two major expenses: 1) Local Match for Staff Bonuses (\$1.5 million), and 2) Forensic Audit (\$134,000). The remaining \$1 million will be used for various projects/requests throughout the division as approved by the School Board. Mr. Lebron explained the following breakdown of staff bonuses: Full-Time Staff - \$1,500 (\$969.00 after tax), Permanent Part-Time & Long-Term Substitutes - \$750 (\$484.50 after tax), and Priority Substitutes - \$250 (\$161.50 after tax). Staff bonuses will be issued to Full-Time & Permanent Part-Time Employees on July 31, 2026, and Long-Term & Priority Substitutes in October 2026 (per eligibility criteria).

Board Members, Dr. Gordon, and staff engaged in discussion regarding a discrepancy in the cost for the audit, salary increases, staff bonuses, positions removed to reduce the budget, budget amendments, differences between the House budget versus the Senate budget and the City's budget, and researching various grants to offset budget shortfalls. There being no further discussion, Board Chair McGee thanked Mr. Lebron for his presentation.

➤ Middle School 6-8 STEM Program CTE Courses

Dr. Gordon led the discussion regarding this topic. He explained that the two courses, using the Project Lead The Way program, would be to expand middle school elective course offerings and will aid in working towards the goal to make Suffolk Public Schools the first sustainable K-2 STEM model in all of Virginia. The two courses will be offered at JFKMS and KFMS.

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Members Riddick and Slingluff seconded the motion to approve the Middle School 6-8 STEM CTE Courses, 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 25/26-30: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Approving an Award to HES Facilities, LLC, Pursuant to Written Proposal for Integrated Athletic Field Maintenance for All Middle School and High School Locations for Suffolk Public Schools

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-30, 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 25/26-31: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Approving an Award to Klett World Language for World Language Instructional Resources for French and Spanish for Secondary Schools for Suffolk Public Schools

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-31, 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 25/26-32: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Approving an Award to Kiddom Virginia Math to Provide Math Textbooks for Grades 3-8 for Suffolk Public Schools

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-32, 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 25/26-33: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Approving an Award to Mathspace to Provide Instructional Resources for Algebra Functions and Data Analysis (AFDA) for the Secondary Schools of Suffolk Public Schools

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-33, 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 25/26-34: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Adopting a Budget for Suffolk Public Schools for Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Totaling \$248,120,235 Which includes Local Funding From the City of Suffolk in the Amount of \$86,191,901

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-34, as submitted.

Board member Dr. Brittingham shared her concerns/non-support for the budget. She cited a lack of funding for non-negotiable priorities including: 1) Five elementary schools identified for intensive intervention, 2) Fiscally and philosophically funding special education, 3) Targeted investment in qualified personnel and licensed special education teachers, trained aides/paraprofessionals, and 4) proper allocation of funds. She stated that these things are required in order to deliver measurable, sustainable student achievement for all learners.

Board Chair McGee reminded board members of the approved policy limiting board members' time to discuss their position and provide rebuttal. Additional conversation ensued between board members as they discussed budget creation, input, and budget concerns & possible solutions. Board Chair McGee recommended that board members contact their counterparts on City Council and ask them to fully fund the schools budget. Board member Riddick suggested drafting a resolution to City Council asking that they fund the budget shortfall, and in the event state funding comes available, SPS would remit them back said funding.

There being no further discussion, Board Chair McGee restated the motion being considered: *Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-34, 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.

- Resolution 25/26-35: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia Authorizing a Bonus Payment to Certain Employees of Suffolk Public Schools and Incorporating by Reference the Memorandum Issued by Dr. John B. Gordon III, dated May 14, 2026, for This Purpose

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Members Riddick and Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-35, as submitted.

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

- Report from the Education Committee Meeting

Board Chair McGee led this discussion by sharing information that was discussed at the Education Committee meeting. He indicated that the committee discussed the following topics, 1) the school facilities study update, conducting a new study to be paid for by the City of Suffolk, and concerns whether SPS would seriously consider all information in a new report, 2) the school division's budget and/or carry-over funds and budget shortfall. Board Chair McGee shared all budget information with the city to ensure that both entities were on the same page. He also felt that City Council would amend their budget to pay for our \$2 million budget shortfall. 3) The School Administrative Offices (SAO). The committee discussed options for housing staff from the SAO. Some of those options include splitting staff between the current SAO and the professional building, the HR building, mobile units, and the operations center. Board members discussed their concerns with the options, the SAO building versus the costs for renovation of various properties. They also discussed exploring other options and the possibility of a closed session to discuss hiring a professional to find properties. The last item discussed was, 4) an energy performance contract. The committee talked about adding solar panels to some school properties to cut energy/maintenance costs. Board members and Dr. Gordon engaged in additional conversation regarding the feasibility of adding solar panels to old and outdated schools as the panels would outlast the schools. It

was suggested that board members research previous meetings regarding the energy performance contract and solar panels to understand why certain contracts were denied before the Joint Meeting with the school board and to reach out to counterparts on city council to understand their no vote as well.

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. James Yunker – Re: Traffic and Safety Issues-Southwestern Elementary. Mr. Yunker expressed his ongoing issues with the morning/afternoon drop-off/pick-up at SES. He stated that this situation also causes difficulty for emergency services vehicles trying to access the school. Mr. Yunker suggested a designated drop-off/pick-up lot be added to the Capital Improvement Plan.

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

➤ Comments and Reports by School Board Members

Board members congratulated Dr. Gordon for being named Virginia Superintendent of the Year. They also thanked and congratulated the honor graduates from LHS and commended them for learning and leading the way for others, and the CPPA LHS Cavalier Singers for an outstanding musical performance and the teachers who work with them. Board Members also enjoyed attending various plays, concerts, and athletic events. They were excited to recognize those who were mentioned in the Good News Report and the faculty and staff who work closely with the students, programs, and sports. They also thanked the public speaker for bringing his concerns and solutions to the issues he's observed with traffic at SES. Board members thanked Dr. Gordon and his team, and faculty and staff for the successes of Suffolk Public Schools. They also encouraged board members to find money to put towards their initiatives and learn how to read and understand the budget and to seek out the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) and COSSBA if assistance/training is needed. Board members also explained their no vote to the budget and suggested offering solutions to budget concerns. Lastly, board members wished all graduates a happy and exciting graduation, and an enjoyable and blessed summer.

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. The discussion and consideration of the reassignment of an assistant principal to a classroom teacher position with a corresponding reduction in salary.

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

Vice Chair Howell 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.

Board Chair McGee reminded Board Members that only approved, school issued electronics are allowed in the closed session meeting room.

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 May 14, 2026 Pursuant to Section 2.2-3712 of the Code of Virginia

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.

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Slingluff 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 A Closed Meeting Item
Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to uphold the recommendation of the Superintendent.

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

INFORMATION ITEMS

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

ADJOURNMENT

- Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further discussion, Board Chair McGee adjourned the May 14, 2026 School Board Meeting at 10:21 p.m.

Sean McGee, *School Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*