

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, June 11, 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 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 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 Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the agenda as presented.

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
The Clerk read the statement of decorum for speakers who signed up to address the Board.
 1. Dr. Deborah Wahlstrom – SPS Climate Survey. Dr. Wahlstrom felt that the survey was not simply revealing what students and staff thought, but where the instructional system needs the most attention.

¹ Due to traffic, Board Member Riddick arrived at the meeting at 6:16 p.m.

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:

- Tanaya Thompson - LHS, recipient of the RRMM Superintendent's Scholarship Award, was presented with a \$2,000 check by Mr. Jeff Harris and Mr. Chris Couch of RRMM Architects.
- Participants of the Next Level Cohort received certificates for completion of the leadership program.
- Dr. Gordon recognized Mrs. Anthonette Dickens and her team for 17 national awards from the National School Public Relations Association.

➤ Calendar of Special Events

Dr. Gordon, highlighted information from the calendar of special events.

CONSENT AGENDA

➤ Approval of the Consent Agenda

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Riddick seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham requested removing items 2 through 5 and adding them to New Business for discussion. Board Member Slingluff requested, for a future meeting, a discussion regarding field trips due to possible violations of the regulations.

Vice Chair Howell amended her motion and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the consent agenda with the exception of the following items to be moved to New Business:

Item #2 - 2026-2027 Title I, Part A - Improving Basic Programs Grant Application

Item #3 - 2026-2027 Title II, Part A - Supporting Effective Instruction Grant Application

Item #4 - 2026-2027 Title III - Language Instructions for English Learners and Immigrant Students

Item #5 - 2026-2027 Title IV Part A - Student support and Academic Enrichment Grant Application

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

Upon approval of the Personnel Report, Dr. Gordon introduced the following new staff members: Dr. James Avery, new Principal at KFHS, Mr. William Hallwig, new Director of Technology, and Mrs. Candace Myrick-Bynum, new Coordinator II of Employee Relations.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was no unfinished business.

NEW BUSINESS

➤ SPS 2026 Climate Survey

Mr. Shawn Dickerson, Coordinator of Data Research, presented a demographic overview of the survey process. He explained that the survey gave division stakeholders the opportunity to express their opinions about the school division and provide feedback related to the learning environment at their school. Mr. Dickerson shared that the survey was administered online during the month of April to all SPS staff, parents, and students in grades 5, 6, 8, 9, and 12 (paper/pencil surveys were available upon request), there were 43 questions for staff, 44 for students, and 41 questions for parents, with participation from each group being 74% for staff, 54% for students, and 19% participation for parents.

Dr. Gordon provided insight into the survey results, feedback, perceptions and next steps. He provided a breakdown of results from the perspective of staff, students and parents highlighting areas of success including, support staff being happy to work in the division, school-based instructional staff feeling that gender, race, and education background are respected, parents believing that the school uses technology to help their child learn, and students knowing what behavior is expected of them. Dr. Gordon discussed areas of concern that resulted from the survey. Based on that information, he shared the focus for the 2026-2027 school year, which included the following:

- Review of school and departmental leadership groups in order to provide greater insight into decisions that impact their work.
- Implementation of new routing plan to increase overall efficiency in the transportation department.
- Continued revitalization of cafeteria menu options, packaging, food presentation and student feedback, in order to improve the dining experience.
- Review of school and grade level grading practices in order to reinforce grading practices with fidelity.
- Expansion of student leadership groups to provide greater feedback to school-based administration and to assist with strategies for improved peer respect.
- Review of division and school based advertisements for volunteering and family engagement and involvement.
- Review of cleaning and custodial schedule at all levels.

Board members and Dr. Gordon engaged in discussion regarding staff morale and initiatives for improvement, the breakdown of participation between instructional and regular staff, overlap of school rules and discipline, decline in student participation, custodial issues, sampling 10th and 11th grade students, and pre versus post surveys.

➤ Citizen Advisory Committees Approval

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the Citizen Advisory Committees appointments and members, as read by the Clerk.

The Board Clerk read aloud the list of School Board recommended appointments and members for each of the Citizen Advisory Committees. Discussion ensued between board members regarding approved citizen attendance and participation on committees. It was suggested that the Citizens Advisory Special Committee meet with approved members to ascertain reason(s) for their lack of fulfilling membership obligations.

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

➤ New Course Proposals

Board Member Riddick moved and Vice Chair Howell seconded the motion to approve new course proposals, as submitted.

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

➤ Board Meeting Adjustment - Move February 25, 2027 School Board Meeting Date to February 18, 2027

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Members Dr. Brittingham and Slingluff seconded the motion approving the school board meeting date adjustment (February 25, 2027 School Board Meeting date moved to February 18, 2027), as recommended.

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

➤ Payment of Bills and Payroll May 2026

Board Member Riddick moved and Vice Chair Howell seconded the motion to approve the Payment of Bills and Payroll May 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.

➤ Approval Request for 2025-2026 Budget Transfers

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Riddick seconded the motion to approve the request for the 2025-2026 budget transfers, as requested.

Conversation occurred among board members and Dr. Gordon regarding transferring funds before the start of the new budget year. It was explained that transfers were for the current budget year.

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

➤ Resolution 25/26-36: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia, Making An Award to Virginia Association of Counties (VACORP) to Provide Property and Casualty Insurance Services for Suffolk Public Schools and Authorizing the School Superintendent On Behalf of the School Board to Enter Into A Contract for the Aforementioned Services

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-36, 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 25/26-37: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia, Adopting a Code of Ethics for Members of the Suffolk City School Board

Board Member Slingluff inquired regarding the use of the wording “to affirm and to ratify” being included in the resolution and if the board versus individual board members would be legally bound to the resolution. Attorney Waller clarified that should the board adopt this resolution; it would be binding on all board members. He further explained that one of the

reasons why the board wanted the resolution format was to ensure that board members could not pull out of the statements contained in the resolution.

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-37, as submitted.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham expressed her concern with the language “to affirm and to ratify” being included in the resolution. She felt that it changed the substance of the resolution and making it a policy or regulation. Dr. Brittingham suggested amending the resolution to exclude the statement before voting. Board Member Riddick expressed his non-support for the resolution. Vice Chair Howell expressed that she would not be amending her motion. Board Member Slingluff indicated that the particular wording was never a part of the resolution that was considered by the Policy Review Committee. Attorney Waller was offended by the board member’s implication and stated that he would never add information to a document after the PRC has met. Board Member Slingluff clarified that she did not mean for her statements to be accusatory or insinuate the addition of information after a meeting. There was no further discussion.

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

- Ordinance 25/26-86: 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 and Adoption
Board Member Slingluff moved and Vice Chair Howell seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-86, as submitted.

Board Member Riddick suggested that Board Members who receive training paid for by the school division, paid personally, or gifted training, should disclose where training is being obtained and present/share information/literature with the full board to ensure equity in governance whereas all members are informed, being held to the same standards, and maintaining the goals and objectives of the policy. Additional conversation ensued.

Board Member Slingluff amended her motion and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 25/26-86 as is but then sending the policy back to the Policy Review Committee (PRC) for additional language.

Additional conversation ensued as board members expressed their disappointment regarding information that was submitted to the PRC to be considered for this policy, which was not included in the ordinance. Members felt that their voices were not heard or considered, and that the PRC is cherry-picking information to be included in policies.

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

- Ordinance 25/26-87 through Ordinance 25/26-88 were information items only. Board Member Riddick asked what prompted the change in the policy as it was not recommended by the board. Attorney Waller clarified that it was due to a change in state code by the General Assembly. He further added that the change in policy not impacted by state code is the change

from the 16 to 10 calendar days for placement of an item on the agenda. This change in policy will allow board members greater flexibility to have items added. No action was required at this time.

➤ 2026-2027 Title I, Part A - Improving Basic Programs Grant Application

Board Member Dr. Brittingham led the discussion regarding this item. She expressed concern that the grant was not providing enough staff (reading specialists, academic coaches, interventionists, and paraprofessionals) for each school needing assistance. Dr. Okema Branch, Chief Academic Officer and Dr. Catherine Pichon, Director of Elementary Leadership explained that the grant was for all nine Title I schools. They continued with a full explanation of the grant and what it will provide and/or continue to provide. Board Member Riddick suggested a work session to fully explain Title I and how Title I funds are used to help board members understand exactly how local, state, and federal resources are being used to advance the performance of students in Suffolk Public Schools. Board Member Dr. Brittingham continued expressing her concerns with funding.

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the 2026-2027 Title I, Part A – Improving Basic Programs Grant Application, as submitted.

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

➤ 2026-2027 Title II, Part A - Supporting Effective Instruction Grant Application

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the 2026-2027 Title II, Part A – Supporting Effective Instruction Grant Application, as submitted.

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

➤ 2026-2027 Title III, Language Instruction for English Learners and Immigrant Students

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the 2026-2027 Title III, Language Instruction for English Learners and Immigrant Students, as submitted.

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

➤ 2026-2027 Title IV Part A – Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant Application

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the 2026-2027 Title IV, Part A – Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant Application, as submitted.

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

No speakers registered to address the board.

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

➤ Comments and Reports by School Board Members

Board members congratulated Tanaya Thompson and the entire graduating class of 2026 who had 527 honor graduates out of a class of 1077. Board members enjoyed several events they attended throughout the division. They expressed pride in the Grow Your Own program and touted the benefits of the program. They thanked Dr. Gordon and his staff for keeping Suffolk Public Schools safe and Mrs. Dickens and her staff for their achievements. They also encouraged students to stay active and engaged during their summer break. Board members thanked their borough constituents and talked about their re-election possibilities/paperwork. They asked all to keep the family and friends of Mrs. Dickey in their thoughts and prayers. They wished all a good night, an enjoyable summer, and looked forward to seeing everyone in the fall.

Board Chair McGee reminded board members about upcoming evaluations and due dates.

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:

Record Review 2025/26-11RR 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).

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Jenkins 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 June 11, 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 Members Riddick and 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 Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to uphold the decision of the committee with the addition of a statement of facts for the record.

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

INFORMATION ITEMS

- Board Chair McGee encourage board members to review the information items listed and offered condolence and prayers to SPS families of the employees who passed away.

ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further discussion, Board Chair McGee adjourned the June 11, 2026 School Board Meeting at 9:00 p.m.

Sean McGee, *School Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*