

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, July 9, 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
Kimberly Slingluff

Board Member Absent:

Tyron Riddick

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:
Board Member Fields moved and Vice Chair Howell seconded the motion to approve the agenda with the addition of a second topic for discussion and consideration in a closed meeting regarding appointment of Darlene Symborski and Duane Hoffler-Foster to serve on the Gifted Education Advisory Committee and Chila Nicholson to serve on the Local Advisory Committee for Special Education.

Board Member Slingluff questioned if the additional topic would violate FOIA if discussed in closed session. Attorney Waller clarified that the topic is appropriate for closed session discussion.

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
No public speakers registered to address the board.

REPORTS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

- Good News Report
Melvin Bradshaw, Community Engagement Facilitator, highlighted the good news happening within the division. Dr. Gordon, Division Superintendent, and Mr. McGee, School Board Chair, recognized and congratulated the following:
 - Class 5 State Champions: Boys Track (Mason Mills, John Cody, William Hampton, Timothy McFarland, Aaron Williams Jr.); Girls Track (Anatholia Augustine, Audrina Chu, Autumn Ellis, Brianna Speller, Gabriella Pagan Abreu, Jasmine Gaines, Callie Willis, Lauren Harris, London Smith, Madison, Madison Veil, Melanie Garza, Meckalyn Rose, Makhyah Johnson, Nevaeh Chaney, Simone Ellis, Indiana Meeks, Akaiya Johnson. They also recognized the coaches for their hard work
- HES presented the Excellence in Education (EIE) Award to Suffolk Public Schools & The Suffolk Public School Board. Mr. Russell LeBouf, Executive with HES, presented a plaque and a check in the amount of \$2,500 in honor of the valued partnership between HES and SPS to Board Chair McGee and Superintendent Dr. Gordon. Mr. LeBouf stated that out of 180 education partners, only 12 receive the EIE award. He thanked the board for their leadership and partnership.
- 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 Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda.

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: Steve Smith, new Coordinator II of Facilities, Planning & Maintenance.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was a motion made by Vice-Chair Howell with a second by Board Member Jenkins to approve Ordinance 25/26-87 Amending Chapter 2, Article 3, Section 2-3.2 entitled “Regular Meetings; Special Meetings; Quorum” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board, and Ordinance 25/26-88 Adding Chapter 7, Article 9, Section 7-9.3 entitled "Statement of Policy Value of teacher-student relationships; adults are to hold themselves to the highest standards; filing of complaints, mandated reporting requirement; superintendent to develop regulations” of the Policies of the Suffolk City 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.

NEW BUSINESS

➤ SPS Vision 2026 (Info item only)

Using a PowerPoint presentation, Dr. Gordon shared information regarding the plans for the school division for the 2026-2027 school year that are based on feedback received from the school board and the school community. He highlighted information from the climate and culture survey, middle school STEM programs at JFKMS and KFMS, the expansion of middle school extracurricular activities which includes: Girls flag football, competition expansion to Portsmouth Public Schools, introduction of the Scholastic Bowl, and Baseball/Softball beginning Fall 2026. Dr. Gordon also highlighted revisions that will strengthen the attendance policy to better address chronic absenteeism and attendance failures, and adjustments to the SOL timeline due to feedback from the General Assembly. He concluded with information from the SPS facilities and maintenance, highlighting major repair priorities that will be addressed during the summer/fall which included the following:

- John F. Kennedy Middle School Ribbon Cutting Ceremony
- Northern Shores Elementary Gym Floor Replacement
- Elephant's Fork Elementary Site Review
- Nansemond River High School Parking Lot Expansion
- School Safety Priorities from Public Safety Committee Funds (New Cameras for the SPS Bus Fleet, New Mobile AEDS for Extra-Curricular Activities, Additional Metal Detectors)
- Additional Priorities (New Auditorium Curtains at King's Fork Middle School, Painting at Hillpoint Elementary School, Tennis Court Replacement at all three high schools)

Dr. Gordon emphasized the theme for the 2026-2027 school year: #PathToAchievement. This theme focuses on educating students to the many paths available to be successful and excel in Suffolk Public Schools.

Board members engaged in dialogue with Dr. Gordon regarding the absenteeism initiative, make-up time, and maintenance priorities. They also thanked Dr. Gordon for his presentation and for being a visionary leader.

➤ Payment of Bills and Payroll – June 2026

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the Payment of Bills and Payroll for June 2026, as submitted.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 4 / Nay: 2 (Brittingham, Slingluff) / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 1 (Riddick). The motion Passed by vote of 4 to 2.

➤ Citizen Advisory Committees 2026-2027 Membership (Staff Approvals – Final)

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the Citizen Advisory Committees 2026-2027 Membership (Staff Approvals – Final), as submitted.

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.

➤ 2026-2027 Standing Committee Appointment – Legislative Committee

Board Chair McGee recommended Valerie Fields, Karen Jenkins, Heather Howell to serve as members and Sean McGee to serve as an alternate on the Legislative Committee for the 2026-2027 school year.

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Members Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the recommendation of the School Board Chair to appoint Valerie Fields, Karen Jenkins, Heather Howell, and Sean McGee (Alternate) to serve on the Legislative Committee for the 2026-2027 school year

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.

➤ Estimated Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Year-End Balance & Reappropriation of Year-End Surplus Memo to City Council

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the Reappropriation of Year-End Surplus and subsequently, the memo to City Council.

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.

➤ Resolution 26/27-1: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of the Memorandum of Understanding Between the Suffolk City School Board and Opportunity Scholars

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion to approve the resolution terms and conditions of the memorandum of understanding between the Suffolk City School Board and Opportunity Scholars.

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.

➤ Resolution 26/27-2: A Resolution of the School Board for the City of Suffolk, Virginia, Expressing Its Desire to Nominate Tarshia L. Gardner as the Virginia School Board Association Clerk of the Year

Board Chair McGee explained that the resolution was to recognize and nominate Board Clerk, Tarshia Gardner and to submit the application packet to the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) nominating her as the School Board Clerk of the year across the state of Virginia. Vice Chair Howell read the resolution and the board presented her with a plaque commemorating the recommendation.

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Members Jenkins and Fields seconded the motion to approve Resolution 26/27-2 as read by Vice Chair Howell.

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.

➤ Ordinance 26/27-1: An Ordinance Adding Chapter 9, Article 8, Section 9-8.1:1 entitled “Consistent school attendance is essential; chronically absent defined; elementary students; middle school students; high school students; excused and unexcused, and out of school suspensions considered; make up days allowed; superintendent to develop procedures” of the policies of the Suffolk City School Board - First Reading and Adoption

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion to approve Ordinance 26/27-1 to allow time for communication and adjustment before school starts.

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.

- Ordinance 26/27-2: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 4, Article 4, Section 4-4.2 entitled “Reporting pupil costs” of the policies of the Suffolk City School Board, and Ordinance 26/27-3: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 8, Article 42, Section 8-42.7 entitled “Non-disclosure of information” of the policies of the Suffolk City School Board
Both ordinances were first reading items. No action was required.

PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON NON-AGENDA TOPICS

- Citizen Comments on Agenda Items

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

1. Karima Lockwood - Re: Policy Revisions 3-1.1-1.2, 4-6.1-6.2. Mrs. Lockwood voiced her support for policy changes that will strengthen governance and modernized outdated language, and align policy with current Virginia Department of Education standards. However, she did not agree with policy changes which narrowed responsibilities traditionally carried out by the division superintendent which will redefine his role, and conflict with VDOE regulations. She also expressed concern with policy revisions that narrowed child safety certifications stating that those changes provided less protection to children.
2. Dr. Wendy VanHosen - Re: Policy. Dr. VanHosen also expressed her concerns with policy regarding the duties of the superintendent. She suggested that the board defer to language found in the VDOE regulations regarding the duties of the superintendent. She stated that the superintendent is responsible for the direction of leadership and coordination of students and staff in their efforts to reach educational goals adopted by the school board and to suggest anything differently would be in contradiction to the intentions of the regulation written by the VDOE.

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

- Comments and Reports by School Board Members

Board Members thanked Dr. Gordon for his vision and expressed excitement for the coming school year, congratulated the GED program graduates, thanked HES for their collaboration and award, congratulated students recognized for their athletic achievements, and congratulated Clerk Gardner for all that she does and for being the glue that holds it all together. They also attended the School Boards for Academic Excellence (SBAE) conference and were excited to begin using tools learned at the conference which offered practical solutions to student achievement, and board cohesiveness to strengthen public education. Board Members expressed their excitement regarding the upcoming ribbon cutting ceremony/opening of JFKMS. Board members also stated that they attended the opening of the new downtown Suffolk Library and encouraged parents/children to visit the library as it has something there for everyone. They also encouraged parents to seriously consider attendance/absenteeism policy and to make sure their child goes to school daily. Board Members thanked the board for working together for the good of the community, wished everyone a safe and enjoyable summer, and encouraged everyone to be motivated by the quote on the JFKMS plaque, especially when they are completely exhausted, to just try. The quote reads: “Every accomplishment starts with a decision to try.”

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

1. The discussion and/or consideration of an appeal to the full school board as requested by an employee in the transportation department, who is being recommended for dismissal by the school superintendent; and
2. The discussion and/or consideration of the appointment of Darlene Symborski and Duane Hoffler-Foster to serve on the Gifted Education Advisory Committee and Chila Nicholson to serve on the local Advisory Committee for Special Education.

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: 6 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 1 (Riddick). The motion Passed by vote of 6 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 July 9, 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: 6 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 1 (Riddick). The motion Passed by vote of 6 to 0.

ACTION ON CLOSED MEETING ITEM

➤ Action On A Closed Meeting Item – Employee Appeal 2026/2027-1

Vice Chair Howell moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to uphold the recommendation of the Superintendent.

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.

➤ Action On A Closed Meeting Item – Adding Appointees to the Gifted Education Advisory Committee and the Local Advisory Committee for Special Education

Board Member Fields moved and Vice Chair Howell seconded the motion for the late appointment of Darlene Symborski and Duane Hoffler-Foster to serve on the Gifted Education Advisory Committee and Chila Nicholson to serve on the Local Advisory Committee for Special Education.

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.

INFORMATION ITEMS

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

ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further discussion, Board Chair McGee adjourned the July 9, 2026 School Board Meeting at 7:59 p.m.

Sean McGee, *School Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*