

MINUTES
VIRTUAL SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
ALEXANDRIA CITY SCHOOL BOARD
November 12, 2020 (4:00 p.m.)

Meeting Held via Zoom

On March 12, 2020, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam declared a State of Emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, in accordance with Va. Code § 2.2-3708.2(A)(3) and Acts of Assembly Chap. 1283 § 4-0.01(g), virtual School Board meetings held during the State of Emergency are limited to:

- addressing the public health emergency declared on March 12, 2020 (Va. Code § 44-146.17); and
- business that is necessary to continue school division operations and to discharge the School Board's lawful purposes, duties, and responsibilities.

Notice of any virtual School Board Meetings will be posted on the ACPS Calendar and on the School Board Meeting web page, where the public may link to join or watch live meetings. Virtual Special Called School Board Meetings may also be watched live in Alexandria on Comcast Channel 71. Video recordings and minutes for these meetings are posted online as soon as available after the meeting.

ROLL CALL

THE FOLLOWING WERE PRESENT AT THE MEETING:

BOARD MEMBERS: Cindy Anderson
Veronica R. Nolan
Meagan L. Alderton
Ramee A. Gentry
Jacinta Greene
Margaret Lorber
Michelle Rief
Christopher A. Suarez
Heather Thornton

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., Susan Neilson, Shanel Hill, Lorraine Johnson, Ashley Sanchez-Viafara, Dr. Gerald Mann, Jr., Dr. Carolyn Wooster, Donna Anthony, Andrea Heckel, Kathryn Harrington, Kimberly Schell, Farah Nichols Peterson, Ruth Conner, Dr. Terri Mozingo, Dr. Anthony Sims, Jane Richardson, Farah Nichols Peterson, Peter Balas, Dr. Stephen Haering, Theresa Werner, James Parker, Dr. Stephen Wilkins, T. Michael Carson, Julia Burgos, Helen Lloyd, Marya Runkle, Dominic Turner, Dr. Alicia Hart, Erika Gulick,

Call to Order

1. Meeting Called to Order by Chair Anderson

Chair Anderson called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m. All members of the School Board were present at the start of the meeting.

Moment of Silence

2. Observe a Moment of Silence

A moment of silence was observed.

Adoption of Meeting Agenda

3. Adopt the Meeting Agenda for the November 12, 2020 Virtual School Board Meeting

Ms. Greene moved to adopt the agenda for the November 12, 2020 Virtual School Board Meeting.

Ms. Lorber seconded the motion.

The vote to adopt the meeting agenda was unanimous, 9-0. The motion carried.

Communications & Addresses to the Board

4. Public Comments

Mr. Joseph Dominick, ACPS parent, asked the Board about the Virginia Department of Education's (VDOE's) guidelines for the number of learning days required of students. He noted that his students have been in Virtual Plus for 10 weeks (or 50 days) but have only received instruction on 34 (74%) of eligible days. By year's end, students will have missed 36 out of 180 instructional days. Mr. Dominick asked that given VDOE's policy for absenteeism, how does ACPS plan to make up these instructional days?

Ms. Amy Smith, ACPS parent, thanked the Board, teachers and staff who are working very hard for students. She indicated that at this time, the best place for her students is with in-person learning. Ms. Smith took issue with the capacity calculations of the number of desks that fit into classrooms as well as why ACPS has not used the Virtual Plus partners model to get more students into classrooms across the division. She recommended that the School Board make sure that they are not making decisions based on faulty information.

The following written public comments were submitted to the School Board:

Ms. Zion Bezu, ACPS parent, wrote to the Board about the discussions regarding student identities that have been going on in response to The Identity Project. She believes that these discussions are very important, but felt that the discussions were for select students. Ms. Bezu remarked that the on-going discussions should include all of the communities, especially Ethiopian and Arabic ones. This will help teach all students to be proud of their cultures and make them feel welcomed rather than ignored.

Mr. Andrew Cook, community member, submitted written comments to the School Board to express his disappointment in ACPS' response to the pandemic. Mr. Cook believes that through easily implemented and creative solutions, ACPS could open its doors to in-person learning.

Ms. Alix Coughlin, ACPS parent, wrote to the Board to express her frustration with virtual learning due to lengthy computer sessions, glitchy YouTube videos and garbled Zoom calls. She was also frustrated regarding lack of adherence to her student's 504 plan. Ms. Coughlin expressed that other school systems across the country and Virginia have safely opened schools, and ACPS should as well.

Ms. Heather Elkins, ACPS parent, wrote to ask that ACPS make a realistic and feasible plan to return to in-person learning. She explained that both she and her spouse must work and it is difficult to support her student's virtual learning, even with daily tutoring. Ms. Elkins advocated for the choice to return to in-person learning or Alexandria students will be left behind.

Deborah and Gerald File, community members and alumni, wrote to express their dismay with community activists who are set on renaming Matthew Maury Elementary School, Alexandria's only school named after a scientist. The Files felt that with the recent STEM partnership with

Virginia Tech's Technology Center, renaming the school will sabotage and undermine this futuristic program. They asked that if the historic Matthew Maury Elementary School is unfortunately renamed, it is hoped the School Board will recognize that our school population is more than 37% Hispanic and demand a name of an equally distinguished Northern Virginia Scientist of Hispanic origin with similar international achievement and recognition as the distinguished Matthew Maury.

Ms. Kathryn Grassmeyer, ACPS parent, wrote to the School Board as a concerned parent and medical professional regarding the lack of speed, creativity and community engagement in the ACPS reopening plan. She noted that the virtual platform is especially difficult for special needs students and families and is not equitable, inspiring or empowering. Ms. Grassmeyer emphasized that the extremely limited and often inappropriate options offered these families, as well as the lack of urgency in moving forward, demonstrates a gross misunderstanding of what is happening in the homes of some of our most vulnerable students.

Ms. Elizabeth Lockwood, member of the Alexandria Community Remembrance Project Research Group, provided the history of two African-American lynchings that occurred in Alexandria in 1897 and 1899. Although it was clear that law enforcement, prominent businessmen, elected officials, and ordinary white citizens were complicit in these acts, the authorities and the press were quick to move the blame for the lynchings away from Alexandria's white residents. Ms. Lockwood further stated that the legacy of systemic racism and white supremacy still surrounds us and influences our daily lives. Removing the name of the known racist T.C. Williams, whose actions and legacy directly hurt the Black citizens of our city, is the bare minimum of a first step.

Ms. Ashley Lombardi, ACPS parent, wrote to express her beliefs that it was time for ACPS to allow students back into the classrooms. She emphasized that the most recent studies on COVID and successes other school divisions have had in reopening classrooms, would allow ACPS to reopen schools in a safe and efficient manner.

Ms. Mary Kay Queen, ACPS parent, wrote to ask if the Board has considered asking qualified parents to volunteer for additional teaching or monitor positions.

Ms. Jessica Ramsay, ACPS parent, provided written comments to the Board asking them to create a realistic and feasible plan to return to in-person learning. She further stated that families and teachers must be given the choice to return to in-person learning this year. This choice shouldn't be forced, but an opportunity for all to assess the varying risk factors and choose the best option for their individual and/or family needs.

Mr. Thomas Savino, ACPS parent, wrote regarding the teaching of lessons on equality vs equity. Based on the lesson he overheard, Mr. Savino felt his student was being indoctrinated rather than taught. He cited statements during the lesson that had no facts or data to support the concepts being taught but instead reflected a political agenda obsessed with equity on one dimension.

Ms. Valerie Verano, community member, wrote to the School Board to ask for the reopening of ACPS schools to in-person learning. The valuable learning, such as social and emotional skills, can only come from in-person schooling, and are not attainable through virtual learning. She believes that with the right precautions and safe guards in place, such as wearing of masks, hand sanitizers, and social distancing, schools can and should be reopened.

5. Report from Student Representatives Lorraine Johnson and Ashley Sanchez-Viafara

Ms. Johnson gave an update on the High School Survey for students that she talked about at the last meeting. She reported that at this time, the student survey has been postponed. This will provide more time to develop questions and answer choices which will allow students to give their honest opinions on virtual learning. Ms. Johnson also reported on the Titan Fall Festival held at Chinguapin on November 7th.

Ms. Sanchez-Viafara reported on being invited to participate in an anti-racism seminar called “You Can Do More” which was organized by the NoVA District PTA. The seminar focuses on the trauma of racism and discriminatory education practices. The seminar will also provide action steps for dismantling racism for implementation in school divisions. Ms. Sanchez-Viafara also reported on starting engagement and education around social justice and hopes to provide resources for students and educators on Canvas.

Consent Calendar

- 6. Personnel Actions for the Month of October 2020**
- 7. FY 2022 Budget Calendar Revision**
- 8. Superintendent Evaluation Criteria Document Revision**
- 9. Appoint SY 2020-2021 Middle School Student Representatives**
- 10. Minutes for the October 21, 2020 Virtual Special Called School Board Meeting, and the October 15, 2020 Virtual School Board Meeting**

Ms. Lorber moved to adopt the Consent Calendar. Ms. Gentry seconded the motion.

The vote to adopt the Consent Calendar was unanimous, 9-0. The motion carried.

Items Pulled from the Consent Calendar

No items were pulled from the Consent Calendar.

Old Business & Action Items

11. Areas of Focus Update – Academic Disparities (PreK-2 Literacy)

Dr. Hutchings reminded the Board and community that each Board Meeting will contain updates on ACPS areas of focus. He indicated that literacy is one of the most important components of a student’s education experience.

As a result of the School Board's commitment to early literacy and in alignment with the 2025 Strategic Plan: Equity for All, ACPS has focused on its Pre-K-2 students' literacy achievement. Throughout the 2019-2020 school year, ACPS convened a K-2 Literacy Task Force to form a strategic plan to address the priority of K-2 literacy instruction in the coming years that analyzed student data, reviewed current academic research and literature, and inventoried current ACPS practices and resources. The Literacy Task Force identified goals and recommendations for improving PreK-2 literacy through new methods and professional learning that have also been adapted for virtual learning.

Board Members asked questions about strategies if there is no literacy improvement, how will ACPS catch up students who are falling behind in reading/writing after grade 2, effectiveness of strategies for struggling readers, literacy resources for older grades, and how is ACPS collecting data to identify best practices and strategies that work.

12. Enhanced Continuity of Learning 5.0: Reimagining Schools Update

Dr. Terri Mazingo, Chief of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership gave an update on the *Enhanced Continuity of Learning Plan 5.0: Reimagining Schools* which was originally presented to the School Board at the October 15, 2020 School Board Meeting with an update presented at the October 21, 2020 Special Called Board Meeting. Dr. Mazingo, along with staff members and guests, provided new information about the decision-making process for phasing students back to in-person learning, staff and students’ ability to return, gathering data to determine students’ instructional needs, and guidelines from the Virginia High School League (VHSL) on participation in athletics. Dr. Stephen Haering, Director of Alexandria’s Health Department, provided updated COVID-19 transmission indicators for Alexandria which affect the ability to reopen schools.

Dr. Hutchings addressed some of the concerns noted by the community around reopening of schools including capacity and health concerns. Mr. Peter Balas, T.C. Williams Principal, noted that the VHSL guidelines do not align with ACPS health guidelines. The Virginia Department of Health, reviewed the VHSL guidelines as well and does not recommend sporting activities with athletes in close proximity. Therefore, Mr. Balas announced that winter sports will not take place at this time. Ms. Theresa Werner, Executive Director of Specialized Instruction, reported on the in-person citywide program and noted that currently there is not enough staff for returning all students with disabilities to in-person learning.

Board Members asked questions about COVID-19 transmission risks, student physical, mental and social health, private school infections, communication efforts to the community, staff intent to return form, classroom capacity, athletic programs in other divisions and about student with disabilities.

13. Communications Audit Update

Ms. Burgos and Ms. Helen Lloyd, Director of Communications, updated the Board on progress made on the Communication Audit recommendations that were presented at the January 9, 2020 School Board Meeting. The update provided progress and metrics related to each of the 29 recommendations in the areas of staffing and organization, emergency communications, collaboration and opportunity, and processes and tools.

Ms. Lloyd also showcased the cross-collaboration of the newly combined team renamed as the Department of School and Community Relations which includes the Office of Communications and the Office of Community Partnerships and Engagement. She emphasized that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the recommendations outlined in the audit have been completed or are in development.

Board Members asked questions about the customer management system, staffing needs, ACPS Express and Insider, language barriers, and the diversity of staff.

New Business and Reports to the Board

14. SY 2020-21 Fall Membership, Transfer, and Student Ratio Report

Ms. Marya Runkle, Director of Education and Business System Support, presented details of ACPS student membership as of September 30, 2020. This information is provided annually to VDOE on the Fall Student Record Collection. Also provided is information on administrative, programmatic, capacity, and sibling transfers based on ACPS School Board Policy.

As of September 30, 2020, there were 15,588 full-time students enrolled in ACPS schools which includes 145 countries of birth, and 132 spoken languages. Ms. Runkle reported that 474 students did not return to ACPS for the 2020-2021 school year for various reasons, 144 students transferred to an out-of-boundary school, and she provided ratios of students to staff members by school.

15. Presentation of the Superintendent's Proposed FY 2022-2031 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Budget

Dr. Hutchings presented the FY 2022-2031 CIP Budget for the next 10 years which reflects the tight economic climate caused by the COVID-19 pandemic while also addressing ACPS' most critical needs. The budget proposed maintaining funds to support urgent technology, online textbooks and HVAC upgrades, while deferring several major modernization projects to a future date.

The Superintendent has proposed reducing the City's approved FY 2022 CIP for ACPS by \$28.6 million to future years to better align with the City's revenue expectations. This was originally allocated to The High School Project, although The High School Project completion timeline will not change. The superintendent also proposed deferring the modernization of George Mason

Elementary School and Cora Kelly School for Math, Science and Technology by one year; and Matthew Maury Elementary School and the new school project by two years. The modernization of the ACPS Transportation facility will also be deferred by a year. The total proposed request for the next 10 years is \$551,483,000.

The FY 2022-2031 CIP will be discussed at a series of work sessions, on the following dates:

- November 16, 2020—CIP Budget Work Session #1
- November 17, 2020—Joint City Council/School Board CIP Work Session
- November 23, 2020—Public Hearing on the FY 2022-2031 CIP Budget and the CIP Budget Work Session #2
- December 9, 2020—CIP Add/Delete Work Session #1
- December 15, 2020—CIP Add/Delete Work Session #2
- December 17, 2020—Adoption of the FY 2022-2031 CIP Budget

Board Chair’s Report

16. Report from Cindy Anderson

Chair Anderson reminded the public of the Joint City Council/School Board CIP Budget Work Session on November 17, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.

Superintendent’s Report

17. Report from Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr.

Superintendent Hutchings reported that ACPS has begun collaborating with the Open ACPS organization and have added two members of the group to the ACPS team meetings on reopening of schools. Dr. Hutchings also announced two community meetings on December 1st and 2nd for staff, families and students about the reopening of schools. Some of the topics for discussion include an update on COVID-19, a health and safety update, building capacity and upgrades to the HVAC systems in preparation for in-person learning. The meetings will be recorded and posted to the ACPS website after the events.

Announcements by Board Members

18. Announcements

Ms. Greene reported on Mount Vernon Community School student Naomi Waller who has a mural on view in the women’s suffrage movement exhibit “Girls” at the Smithsonian American History Museum.

Ms. Lorber encouraged the community to participate in the anti-racism seminar taking place on Saturday, November 14, 2020, 1:00-5:30 pm. via Zoom. The seminar “You Can Do More” is organized by the NoVA District PTA.

Closed Meeting and Certification of Closed Meeting

19. Closed Meeting and Certification of Closed Meeting (if needed)

No Closed Meeting was held.

Adjournment

20. Adjourn

On a motion by Ms. Lorber and seconded by Ms. Greene, the Board voted unanimously, 9-0, to adjourn. The vote was taken by roll call.

The meeting ended at 9:03 p.m.



Cindy Anderson, Chair



Clerk/Deputy Clerk

These minutes were adopted at the December 3, 2020 Virtual School Board Meeting.