

MINUTES
ORGANIZATIONAL SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
ALEXANDRIA CITY SCHOOL BOARD
January 7, 2021 (4:00 p.m.)

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:

Meagan L. Alderton
Cindy Anderson
Ramee A. Gentry
Jacinta Greene
Margaret Lorber
Veronica R. Nolan
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. Julie Crawford, Julia Burgos, Theresa Werner

Call to Order

1. Meeting Called to Order by Chair Anderson

Chair Anderson called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m. All members of the School Board were present at the start of the meeting except for Vice Chair Nolan, who arrived at 4:30 p.m. during the public comments.

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 January 7, 2021 Organizational School Board Meeting

Ms. Lorber moved to adopt the meeting agenda for the January 7, 2021 Organizational School Board Meeting. Ms. Greene seconded the motion.

Ms. Alderton moved to amend the agenda to add the item “Superintendent Update” to New Business. Ms. Gentry seconded the motion.

The vote to amend the agenda to add “Superintendent Update” to New Business was unanimous, 8-0. The motion carried. A roll call vote was taken.

The vote to adopt the meeting agenda as amended for the January 7, 2021 Organizational School Board Meeting was unanimous, 8-0. The motion carried. A roll call vote was taken.

Chair Anderson indicated she would like to reorder the agenda and move the Student Representative Report and Public Comments to after the Adoption of the Agenda to give Vice Chair Nolan time to join the meeting.

4. Report by Student Representatives Ashley Sanchez-Viafara and Lorraine Johnson

Ms. Johnson talked about the effect that the incident at the US Capitol had on students and about the community meetings held by teachers and counselors. She expressed dismay at the incident, about why an incident like this has to happen before changes can be made, and encouraged the Board to see and act for students who experience these inequalities every day.

Ms. Sanchez-Viafara spoke about student engagement and working with the Middle School Student Representatives to increase communication.

5. Public Comments

Ms. Molly Kaiman, ACPS parent, spoke on behalf of students who are not reaching their highest potential during virtual learning. She encouraged the Board and Dr. Hutchings to open the schools for in-person instruction.

Ms. Kate Tagert, ACPS parent, advocated for opening schools based on the data and health metrics as presented by the Virginia Department of Health. She stated Alexandria has been in the lower category of risk of COVID-19 infections or spread and should be open, but there is no plan to do so.

Mr. Kevin White, ACPS parent, spoke about the many reasons why ACPS schools should reopen for in-person learning. He called on the School Board to allow Alexandria as a community to play a larger role in getting students safely back in schools, and to insist that Dr. Hutchings state clear metrics for the reopening of schools.

Ms. Gina Baum, community member, expressed disappointment in ACPS and the Board who has not reopened schools. She expressed it was time for schools to be open.

Ms. Melissa Hagemann, ACPS parent, encouraged ACPS to move forward with plans to return to in-person learning. She shared her experiences with virtual learning while also being a single mother and full-time employee.

Ms. Janice Kupiec, community member, said that despite the best efforts of schools, teachers and counselors to provide both academic and emotional support to her student, it was not enough. She noted other districts have managed to bring students back to school successfully and encouraged ACPS to be honest and transparent about what is not possible this year, and begin planning for the next one.

Ms. Bridget Shea Westfall, ACPS parent, recounted her student's difficult experiences with ACPS Virtual Plus learning through the Campagna Center. She encouraged Dr. Hutchings and the Board to visit school sites to find promising practices for returning to in-person learning.

Ms. Stacie Andersen, ACPS parent, spoke about high school grade performance during Virtual Plus learning. She expressed concern about the percentage of failing grades during the first quarter and ACPS must immediately rectify the situation.

Ms. Erika Melman, ACPS parent, spoke about her student's experience with virtual learning while having complex special needs. She indicated that her student is struggling greatly both academically and emotionally as online learning does not work well for her student who is unable to lip read on a virtual platform. Ms. Melman concluded that the costs of virtual learning far outweigh the risks of returning to in-person instruction.

Mr. James McElhatton, ACPS parent, spoke about the effect of giving students a grade of zero for assignments not turned in. He advocated that teachers give a grade of 50, which is equivalent to an F, so that the zero does not mathematically skew a student's class grade to the extent that they are not able to recover.

The Board received the following written public comments:

Ms. Danielle Romanetti, ACPS parent, urged the Board not to forget working class families who rely on city agencies and non-profits who fill in the gaps for services such as pre-school and before and after school care that ACPS lacks. She stated that there has been little information on how these groups can plan to serve families once hybrid learning begins.

Nominations for Chair

Chair Anderson turned over the gavel to Dr. Hutchings to oversee the Election of the Chair.

6. Nominations for School Board Chair

Dr. Hutchings opened the floor for nominations for Chair of the Alexandria City School Board for 2021.

Ms. Anderson nominated Meagan Alderton for School Board Chair. She indicated that Ms. Alderton has great leadership qualities, and along with her expertise and experience, makes her a fantastic choice for the next Board Chair.

Ms. Thornton nominated Michelle Rief for School Board Chair. Ms. Thornton indicated that Dr. Rief has been a huge advocate for our division and students, and she appreciated her thoughtful and thorough analysis of complex issues which provides a valuable perspective to this Board. This, combined with her integrity, open communication, and

her willingness to give it her all in the goal of Equity for All, would serve her well as Board Chair.

There were no further nominations.

Dr. Hutchings asked if Board Members wished to make any comments about the candidates.

Ms. Nolan thanked Dr. Rief and Ms. Alderton for their willingness to serve in the role of Chair. She indicated that she would be supporting Ms. Alderton due to her leadership and place in the education field. She noted she was excited for Ms. Alderton to lead the Board through their next phase.

There were no further comments.

Election of Chair

7. Election of School Board Chair

Dr. Hutchings indicated Susan Neilson, Clerk of the Board, will call the vote by roll call.

Ms. Neilson asked Board Members to indicate “Yes” for their candidate of choice, and indicate “Pass” if they do not wish to support a particular candidate.

Six Members (Ms. Alderton, Ms. Anderson, Ms. Gentry, Ms. Lorber, Ms. Nolan and Mr. Suarez) voted in favor of Ms. Alderton for Board Chair. Three Members (Ms. Greene, Dr. Rief and Ms. Thornton) voted in favor of Dr. Rief. There were no abstentions.

The vote was 6-3, in favor of Meagan Alderton.

Dr. Hutchings congratulated Ms. Alderton as Chair of the Alexandria City School Board for 2021. Chair Alderton presided over the meeting going forward.

Nominations for School Board Vice Chair

8. Nominations for School Board Vice Chair

Chair Alderton opened the floor for nominations for Vice Chair of the Alexandria City School Board.

Ms. Gentry nominated Veronica Nolan for School Board Vice Chair. There were no further nominations.

Chair Alderton asked if Board Members wished to make any comments about the candidate.

Ms. Lorber thanked Ms. Nolan for her willingness to serve and noted the importance of having continuity of leadership.

There were no further comments.

Election of Vice Chair

9. Election of School Board Vice Chair

Chair Alderton indicated that the Clerk will call for the vote by roll call.

Ms. Neilson indicated that those in favor of Ms. Nolan should indicate “Yes,” or indicate “Abstain” if they do not wish to vote. Chair Alderton, Ms. Anderson, Ms. Gentry, Ms. Greene, Ms. Lorber, Ms. Nolan, Mr. Suarez and Ms. Thornton voted in favor of Veronica Nolan as Vice Chair. Dr. Rief abstained.

Eight Members voted in favor of Ms. Nolan as Vice Chair and there was one abstention.

Chair Alderton congratulated Ms. Nolan as Vice Chair of the Alexandria City School Board for 2021.

Vice Chair Nolan thanked the Board for their support. Board Members thanked Ms. Anderson for serving as Chair for two years, and made supportive remarks about her service.

Designees of the Division Superintendent

10. Appoint Designees of the Division Superintendent

Ms. Lorber moved to approve Dr. Terri Mozingo, Chief of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership, and Dr. Stephen Wilkins, Chief of Staff, as the Superintendent's Designees to serve in his absence. Ms. Greene seconded the motion.

The vote to approve Dr. Mozingo and Dr. Wilkins as the Designees of the Division Superintendent was unanimous, 9-0. The motion carried. A roll call vote was taken.

Superintendent's Recommendation for Clerk of the Board

11. Superintendent's Recommendation for Clerk of the Board and Deputy Clerk of the Board

Ms. Anderson moved to approve Ms. Susan Neilson as Clerk of the Board and Ms. Shanel Hill as Deputy Clerk of the Board. Ms. Greene seconded the motion.

The vote to approve Ms. Neilson as Clerk of the Board and Ms. Hill as Deputy Clerk of the Board was unanimous, 9-0. The motion carried. A roll call vote was taken.

Communications & Addresses to the Board

Each year at the Organizational Meeting, the Board reaffirms its Code of Ethics, Standards of Conduct, Rules of Order and Bylaws.

12. Code of Ethics and Standards of Conduct

Ms. Gentry moved to affirm the Code of Ethics and Standards of Conduct. Ms. Anderson seconded the motion.

The vote to affirm the Code of Ethics and Standards of Conduct was unanimous, 9-0. The motion carried. A roll call vote was taken.

13. Rules of Order and Bylaws

Ms. Gentry moved to affirm the Rules of Order and Bylaws. Ms. Anderson seconded the motion.

The vote to affirm the Rules of Order and Bylaws was unanimous, 9-0. The motion carried. A roll call vote was taken.

Consent Calendar

14. Delegation of Authority for Financial Functions

15. SY 2021-2022 School Board Meeting Calendar

16. Minutes for the December 14, 2020 School Board Retreat

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

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

Items Pulled from the Consent Calendar

No items were pulled from the Consent Calendar.

Chair Alderton called for a 5-minute recess.

New Business and Reports to the Board

17. Superintendent's Proposed FY 2022 Combined Funds Budget

Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr. proposed a FY 2022 Combined Funds Budget that aims to focus on recovering strongly from the dual impact on education of the COVID-19 pandemic and the reemergence of issues surrounding racial inequity.

The combined funds budget of \$320.59 million will support an instructional program focused on recovering from learning losses, recruiting and retaining quality staff, and reigniting a love of teaching, learning and leadership. In addition, the comprehensive financial blueprint provides for the resources and support necessary to continue the division's efforts to keep racial equity at the heart of all work.

The Board is expected to approve the FY 2022 Combined Funds Budget at the February 18, 2021 School Board Meeting.

18. Superintendent's Update on Transitional Learning

Dr. Hutchings gave an update on transitional learning. He reported that vaccinations are now available for educational staff members by the Virginia Department of Health. He also noted that Governor Northam will be sharing new information for metrics for reopening schools.

The superintendent shared additional information on dates for phased reentry, teacher status (virtual or in person), the decision matrix, and levels of community transmission. Dr. Hutchings also shared the results of the Family Choice form in which 40% of families selected the hybrid option for their students. He also informed the community that updates on decisions for returning to in-person learning will be announced on Mondays using video links by email and on the website.

Board Members asked questions about the decision matrix, communication to families, athletics, and student schedules.

Chair's Report

19. Report from the Chair

Chair Alderton noted that the School Board will hold a retreat on January 12, at 6:00 p.m. and hold the first Budget Work Session on January 14 at 5:00 p.m. She also announced the first Budget Public Hearing on the Combined Funds Budget scheduled for January 21, 2021 at 4:00 p.m. during the School Board Meeting. Members of the public who wish to speak should sign up using links on the School Board Meeting webpage by noon on January 20th.

Superintendent's Report

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

Superintendent Hutchings did not give a report.

Announcements

21. Announcements

There were no announcements by Board Members.

Closed Meeting and Certification of Closed Meeting

22. Closed Meeting and Certification of Closed Meeting

There was no Closed Meeting held.

Adjournment

23. Adjourn

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

The meeting ended at 7:08 p.m.



Meagan Alderton, Chair



Clerk/Deputy Clerk

These minutes were adopted at the January 21, 2021 Virtual School Board Meeting.