

MINUTES
SPECIAL CALLED SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
ALEXANDRIA CITY SCHOOL BOARD
August 19, 2021 (7:00 p.m.)

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, Jennifer Abbruzzese, Dr. Julie Crawford, Dr. Anne Gaddy, Dr. Stephen Wilkins, Ed Adshead,

Call to Order

1. Meeting Called to Order by Chair Alderton

Chair Alderton called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. All members of the School Board were present at the start of the meeting.

Adoption of Meeting Agenda

2. Adopt the Meeting Agenda for the August 19, 2021 Special Called School Board Meeting

Ms. Gentry moved to adopt the meeting agenda for the August 19, 2021 Special Called School Board Meeting. Ms. Greene seconded the motion.

Ms. Gentry moved to amend the agenda to add agenda items “Written Public Comments,” “Superintendent’s Report,” “Chair’s Report,” “Board Member Announcements,” and “Personnel Matter Review Panel”.

Ms. Greene seconded the motion. The vote to amend the was unanimous, 9-0. The motion carried.

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

Communications & Addresses to the Board

3. Written Public Comments

Ms. Zion Bezu, parent, wrote about her intentions to have her students participate in virtual learning, however, certain specialties and electives were only available with in-person learning. Although she moved her students to in-person, they were unable to get into their desired electives due to space issues.

Ms. Gayle Hartman, parent, wrote in support of requiring ACPS Staff to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

Ms. Arden Levy, parent, wrote to urge the Board to require COVID-19 vaccinations for all ACPS staff as well as make the vaccination mandatory for students as they would for other vaccines.

Ms. Kara Macek, parent, wrote to implore the Board to require COVID-19 vaccinations for all child-facing staff or submit to weekly testing. She further stated that staff who refuses to get vaccinated should be required to pay for their own COVID testing.

Mr. Nathan Macek, parent, wrote to urge the Board to adopt a COVID vaccination requirement for ACPS employees.

Mr. Yael Mangum, parent, wrote to thank the Board for the current COVID mitigations strategies it is employing for staff and students. He would, however, be more comfortable sending his students back if ACPS was following ALL of the mitigation measures recommended by the CDC.

Mr. Sean McNally, parent, wrote to ask the Board to immediately require all staff to be vaccinated as a condition of employment, and then begin the work to require all eligible students to be vaccinated as a requirement of attendance.

Ms. Sarah Miller, parent, wrote to express her concerns regarding meal times, when masks are removed while children and staff members are eating indoors. She asked the Board to consider implementation of outdoor meal/snack times to further reduce the potential spread of COVID.

Ms. Louise Muth, parent, asked the Board to continue requiring masks indoors for all, and make vaccines mandatory with an exemption opt-out to include mandatory frequent testing.

Ms. Lindsey Paulsen, parent, urged the school board to follow the example of the federal government and other local school districts in requiring K-12 teachers to be vaccinated. Across the board vaccination for city employees working with children will be a safeguard for promoting in-school teaching and ensure the safety of the most vulnerable in society right now-our children.

Mr. Jonathan Prather, parent, strongly urged the Board to support COVID vaccination or weekly testing for all ACPS personnel, as well as the use of tents for outdoor meals, classes and other activities.

Ms. Kara Roney, community member, wrote to strongly urged the School Board to require COVID vaccination for teachers and staff.

Ms. Teresa Schofield, parent, wrote to express her strong support of requiring all ACPS staff, to be vaccinated or submit to testing several times per week. Requiring all teachers and staff to get the vaccine, or be tested regularly, is a common sense and simple way to protect young children.

Ms. Shelley Shadron, community member, wrote that she believes vaccination is a deeply personal decision that should not be mandated by an employer. There are many reasons why an employee would choose to not be vaccinated and individuals have the right to make that choice.

Ms. Amanda Shapiro, parent, wrote that with the highly transmissible Delta variant raging, it is essential that all school staff and anyone going inside of the school building who is eligible for vaccination be vaccinated.

Ms. Bridget Shea Westfall, parent, wrote in to ask that ACPS mandate COVID-19 vaccines for teachers and staff, with limited exemptions for medical reasonable accommodations, subject to additional testing.

Mr. Francoise Thomas, parent, expressed his strong support, and urged the Board to vote for requiring any and all persons in ACPS -- teachers, staff, contractors, etc. to be required to be vaccinated to protect themselves and students, to stay out of hospitals and avoid serious illness and death.

Ms. Michelle Weaver, parent, wrote to express that vaccinations are a community responsibility and until the youngest of our children can get vaccinated, we have to do whatever it takes to protect them, our teachers and our community.

Mr. Devon Wells, parent, wrote to inform the Board that recently Justice Coney Barrett upheld mandatory vaccination at the Indiana University system. He further explained that students are required to receive multiple of vaccinations for school entry. So, there is no reason that ACPS should not require COVID vaccinations for students and staff.

Mr. Yuan Yuan, parent, wrote to express his gratitude for the recommendation of the Superintendent regarding COVID vaccination and regularly testing for all staff. While this is a step forward, it is not enough to protect our students. He further urged weekly testing of students and outdoor lunch as weather and space permits.

New Business and Reports to the Board

4. COVID-19 Vaccination and Testing for ACPS Staff

Dr. Hutchings indicated that as ACPS returns to five-days a week of in-person learning, additional public health safety measures must be taken to ensure the health and safety of all staff and students. ACPS will monitor staff for the COVID-19 virus or confirm that an employee is fully vaccinated. ACPS recommends weekly testing for those employees who are not yet vaccinated and for those employees who choose not to disclose their vaccination status.

Ms. Gentry made the following motion:

‘Madam Chair, COVID-19 continues to pose a serious health risk around the world, especially to unvaccinated individuals. Recent COVID-19 health metrics, including rising case-loads reflecting the impact of the highly contagious Delta variant, compel us to take proactive measures to protect our students, teachers and staff.

As we return to five-day a week, in-person learning in our school buildings for the 2021-22 academic year, we must come together to do our part. Therefore, Madam Chair, I move that ACPS require vaccination or weekly COVID testing for staff, in an effort to reduce transmission and exposure to COVID-19 and its variants. Staff must submit vaccination documentation by September 7 or submit to required weekly COVID testing beginning September 20. This requirement will be added to Policy GBE: Staff Health, effective immediately, and remains in effect pending any future Board review.

Working in partnership with the Alexandria Health Department, we will provide updates to the community as conditions evolve, and will continue acting in the best interests of our ACPS community, especially the children we are dedicated to serve.’

Ms. Lorber seconded the motion.

Mr. Suarez moved to amend the motion to change the dates in the current motion to change September 7 to August 30 as the deadline for staff to submit vaccination status or documentation; change September 20 to August 30 for when required COVID testing will begin for staff who have not been vaccinated or have not submitted vaccination documentation.

Ms. Lorber seconded the motion.

The vote to approve the adjustments of the dates in the motion was 5-4. Ms. Greene, Mr. Suarez, Ms. Anderson, Dr. Rief and Ms. Lorber voted in favor of the motion. Ms. Alderton, Ms. Gentry, Ms. Thornton, and Ms. Nolan voted against the motion. The motion carried.

Ms. Gentry moved to add language that “The Superintendent is instructed to proceed with the dates outlined above to the fullest extent possible and provide updates to the Board should any adjustments be anticipated.” And remove “or COVID test” before “by August 27” in paragraph 2.

Ms. Anderson seconded the motion.

The vote to amend the motion to add The Superintendent is instructed to proceed with the dates outlined above to the fullest extent possible and provide updates to the Board should any

adjustments be anticipated.” and remove “or COVID test” was unanimous 9-0. The motion carried.

The vote to approve the motion as amended was unanimous, 9-0. The motion carried.

Superintendent’s Report

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

Superintendent Hutchings did not give a report.

Chair’s Report

6. Report from Meagan L. Alderton

Chair Alderton congratulated Ed Adshead, ACPS Help Desk Coordinator, on his retirement after 30 years with ACPS. He has been supporting School Board Meetings since 2008 and they would not have run as smoothly without his support, kindness and patience.

Announcements

7. Announcements

There were no announcements by Board Members.

Closed Meeting and Certification of Closed Meeting

8. Closed Meeting

Vice Chair Nolan read the following motions to go into closed session:

“Madam Chair, I move that the Board convene a Closed Meeting pursuant to Virginia Code 2.2-3711(A)(1) for the discussion and consideration of employment, performance, and contractual matters for 20 specific public employee(s).

Madam Chair, I move that the Board convene a Closed Meeting pursuant to Virginia Code 2.2-3711(A)(29) for the discussion of the award of a public contract involving the expenditure of public funds, including interviews of bidders or offerors, and discussion of the term or scope of such contract, where discussion in an open session would adversely affect the bargaining position or negotiating strategy of the Board.

Madam Chair, I move that the Board convene a Closed Meeting pursuant to Virginia Code 2.2-3711(A)(8) for consultation with legal counsel employed or retained by a public body regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice by such counsel.

Ms. Greene seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous 9-0. The motion carried.

The Board moved into a Closed Meeting at 10:25 p.m.

9. Certification of Closed Meeting

Vice Chair Nolan moved that pursuant to Virginia Code 2.2-3712, that the Board certifies that to the best of each member’s knowledge, only public business matters identified in the motion by which the Closed Meeting was convened, and which are lawfully exempted by the Freedom of Information Act, were heard, discussed or considered by the Board in the Closed Meeting held on August 19, 2021.

Ms. Greene seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous, 9-0, to certify the Closed Meeting. The motion carried.

10. Personnel Matter Review Panel

Vice Chair Nolan moved to appoint Ms. Gentry, Dr. Rief and Christopher Suarez to the Personnel Matter Review Panel.

Ms. Lorber seconded the motion. The vote to appoint Ms. Gentry, Dr. Rief, and Mr. Suarez to the Personnel Matter Review Panel was unanimous, 9-0. The motion carried.

Adjournment

11. Adjourn

On a motion by Ms. Gentry and seconded by Ms. Lorber, the Board voted unanimously, 9-0, to adjourn. The meeting ended at 10:47 p.m.



Meagan L. Alderton, Chair



Clerk/Deputy Clerk

These minutes were adopted at the September 23, 2021 School Board Meeting.