

# Public Comments for School Board Meetings

#449

**I would like to provide: \***

In-Person Comments in the School Board Meeting Room

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**Select the meeting date:\* \***

June 16, 2022 6:30 p.m.

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**My public comments are related to: \***

General Public Comments

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**Topic \***

Resignation of Superintendent and a public security matter

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**Full Name \***

Deborah Ash

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**What is your relationship to ACPS? \***

Parent/Guardian of an ACPS Student

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To the school board members and staff:

I'm Debbie Ash, a former candidate for this very board and I am here to address a couple issues. The first being the resignation of Dr. Hutchings and the second being treatment of parents who are looking out for the welfare and education for their children.

I will direct your attention to excerpts from the Alexandria Times article of Thursday, June 6, 2022. Due to time constraints I won't read it all but will highlight parts of it.

Pages 13-14

However, the contract also states that if the superintendent voluntarily resigns, "all salary and benefits such as unused vacation and sick leave provisions shall cease as of the effective date of such resignation." If Hutchings' departure had fallen under the "voluntary resignation" category of the contract, he would not be leaving with most of the \$185,857 he is receiving from the separation agreement.

As a result of the early contract renewal and Hutchings' departure under the "mutual agreement" section of his contract, the separation agreement says that he will be paid four month's salary, which the agreement states is \$85,537, as part of his severance package. This total is at odds with the contract renewal Hutchings signed last June, which called for an annual base salary of \$244,080.62 and annual raises each year on July 1. One-third of that salary, which equals four months' pay, would total \$81,360. As part of his remaining leave payout, Hutchings will receive his vacation leave balance, totaling \$21,380; and 79 days of sick leave, totaling \$39,500. He will also receive an additional retirement contribution of \$30,000 and four months of COBRA coverage worth \$9,440.

"Personally, that's the part I find terribly offensive, because the School Board issued that contract with him. If they hadn't issued that contract, we wouldn't be in the hole for all that. It would have just been a natural separation and we just wouldn't have had to pay out his contract," [Amy] Hillis said.

I agree with Ms Hillis! I believe the Board's decision to renew his contract with over a year to go was hasty and ill-advised especially with the concerns that were raised about the delayed opening of in-person learning at ACPS schools during Covid. Additionally, the superintendent pushed a racially-divisive agenda through "Equity for All" vice "Equality for All". Why not give every student the same starting point and tools? let the teachers and administrators do their jobs to support the students and keep politics out of the classrooms. As a reminder, during the Covid lockdowns and virtual learning, Dr. Hutchings removed his child from ACPS and placed the child in a private school where students could attend in person and with relaxed mandates in the classrooms (e.g. no mandatory masking). That is not equality or equity. Not many of the families he claimed he was helping could have done the same thing; it's different kind of segregation don't you think? When the Board searches for the next superintendent, my hope is that community meetings will be held to get input from parents and taxpayers.

Regarding the treatment of parents by the school board: parental are given God-ordained rights to make choices for and speak on behalf of their own children. Recently I learned that a current member of the school board had an ACPS parent arrested on allegations of threatening to harm her. I don't know the details, but if it is happening with one parent because the school board doesn't like what that parent says, then it could happen to any one of us.

Members of the school board, you've been elected by the voters of Alexandria City to serve the students and give ALL students the ability to succeed..

**June 16, 2022 Alexandria Times Article**

## **ACPS superintendent resigns**

**By Olivia Anderson | [oanderson@alextimes.com](mailto:oanderson@alextimes.com)**

Alexandria City Public Schools Superintendent Gregory Hutchings, Ed.D. announced his resignation from the district on June 10, leading community members to react and speculate about the circumstances surrounding his announcement.

The resignation, which goes into effect on Aug. 31, has produced mixed responses. Some have criticized his management style on various issues, while others have praised his leadership.

“It has been both an honor and a pleasure to work alongside Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr. He has led our school division during extremely tumultuous times and, in doing so, has modeled for all of us what it means to lead with vision, integrity, and passion. Alexandria City Public Schools has benefited tremendously from his leadership. As a board, we are sad to see him go, but we wish him the very best in his future endeavors. I have no doubt that we will see him doing great things that will impact public education beyond the boundaries of Alexandria City Public Schools,” Chair Meagan Alderton said of his resignation in a statement.

Hutchings, who started in July 2018, has received heat over numerous issues during his time as superintendent. Despite Hutchings’ oft-repeated goal of “Equity for All,” the achievement gap between Black and Hispanic students and their white and Asian counterparts grew when learning shifted to virtual-only during COVID-19. Hutchings was criticized by many parents for not taking the initiative to resume in-person instruction sooner, and for working on his book last summer instead of leading the preparation to resume in-person classes last fall.

Most recently, Hutchings admonished the School Board, which oversees his position, to refrain from speaking with media following an alleged sexual assault at Minnie Howard and a deadly stabbing at Bradlee Shopping Center.

ACPS Parent Amy Hillis thought Hutchings was out of line in trying to muzzle the School Board.

“I felt he was very disrespectful to the board in terms of saying, ‘You shouldn’t be talking to the media.’ I really felt like those were very anti-democratic statements, and in this age, those are big red flags,” Hillis said.

Hutchings supporters point to successes like the launch of The Identity Project, a community-wide initiative to rename two schools, initiating an equity policy audit and achieving ACPS’ highest graduation rate and lowest drop-out rate since the state began reporting this data.

He reflected on his time with ACPS and future plans in an email to families, stating that “it is clear to me that this is the next phase of my career as an educator and the time has come for me to take this leap of faith, expand my reach, and move the needle on racial equity in education.”

“I have faith in the team that will soon be charged with keeping ACPS moving forward. Thank you for the opportunity to lead this amazing community of educators and to serve as an example to our students, so that they, too, can have their dream job. My hope is that ACPS will continue to develop lifelong learners who will continue to pay it forward,” Hutchings said.

Hillis said her reaction to Hutchings’ resignation was equal parts relief and surprise. When she heard the announcement, she’d been in the process of crafting a petition to put Hutchings on notice due to many parents’ perception that he had not been focusing on the right issues during COVID-19.

In Hillis’ view, some of the main concerns among parents included Hutchings’ aversion to media and parent inquiry, handling of violence in schools and COVID-19 safety. Hillis said many parents and community members in her circles have expressed relief upon hearing the news of Hutchings’ pending departure.

“I felt that there was a fundamental lack of communication and respect for all parents. I think that came through in his demeanor at School Board meetings, his lack of responsiveness to parents’ emails and phone calls,” Hillis said. “... I don’t think he had the tools in his toolbox to be a leader in a crisis of a massive organization. ... That’s how I see it; maybe the duck was paddling under the water and none of us saw it, but that’s also his responsibility: to inform us.”

She also expressed frustration regarding the previous School Board’s decision to effectively renew his contract more than a year before it was needed. The renewal, which went into effect last year and was scheduled to run through June 30, 2025, included a clause that allowed for mutual separation that reads, “The Board and the Division Superintendent may agree in writing to terminate this Second Agreement on such terms as may be mutually acceptable.”

However, the contract also states that if the superintendent voluntarily resigns, “all salary and benefits such as unused vacation and sick leave provisions shall cease as of the effective date of such resignation.” If Hutchings’ departure had fallen under the “voluntary resignation” category of the contract, he would not be leaving with most of the \$185,857 he is receiving from the separation agreement.

As a result of the early contract renewal and Hutchings’ departure under the “mutual agreement” section of his contract, the separation agreement says that he will be paid four month’s salary, which the agreement states is \$85,537, as part of his severance package. This total is at odds with the contract renewal Hutchings signed last June, which called for an annual base salary of \$244,080.62 and annual raises each year on July 1. One-third of that salary, which equals four months’ pay, would total \$81,360.



*Alexandria City Public Schools Superintendent Gregory Hutchings, Ed.D. in a publicity photo for his new book. Hutchings announced his resignation from ACPS on June 10.*

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According to former School Board member Margaret Lorber, Hutchings requested the early contract renewal, and much of the board supported it.

“We were huge supporters of his,” Lorber said. “He requested it. This was something Dr. Hutchings felt would make him more comfortable – the security of a contract. As for me, I wanted it because I wanted him to stay if he was willing to stay.”

Lorber expressed support for Hutchings and his contributions to ACPS. She said the COVID-19 pandemic threw a wrench in some of those efforts, but that Hutchings did “an excellent job” given the circumstances.

Although Hutchings’ push for racial equity and visionary ideas for the district were partially thwarted, Lorber said she supports his future endeavors.

“What he was trying to do really got derailed because of COVID, and my sadness is that if COVID had not happened, we would still have Dr. Hutchings, because the City of Alexandria would have been a wonderful case study for him,” Lorber said. “I think it’s fabulous that he’s launched a career in consulting school systems that truly want to address this issue. Our school system would have been a good one, but COVID just made it impossible.”

Next steps include heading the company Revolutionary Ed., LLC, which was registered in 2021. The organization’s website includes information about his just released book, “Getting into Good Trouble at School: A Guide to Building an Antiracist School System,” which includes methods to dismantle racist policies “that for centuries have kept students of color from experiencing educational engagement, opportunities and success as their white counterparts.”

Sabine Mead, former Student Government Association president and recent Alexandria City High School graduate, said that she had heard students express frustrations regarding Hutchings' leadership style, specifically surrounding school violence, COVID-19 and media inquiries, but that she still didn't completely foresee the abruptness of his resignation.

"I guess I had underestimated how much of a force that was in public opinion and how much pressure people were putting on the School Board," Mead said. "... I guess I was taken aback by that. I wasn't aware it was such a big deal."

However, regardless of any personal views surrounding the resignation itself, Mead expressed support for Hutchings' decision to pursue his life passions and goals.

In Mead's peer communities there was minimal discussion about the resignation, which she speculated highlights a potential area for improvement in school administration.

"The School Board and Dr. Hutchings' job – both of them are so crucial to our experience, where we go six hours a day five days a week. I kind of would have hoped that there was more discussion surrounding this, a little more centering of student voices," Mead said. "I talked about it with my parents once or twice but no one else has been talking about it, which I found a little odd."

The School Board will appoint an interim superintendent to lead the division until they find a permanent replacement.

Hillis emphasized that the main quality she values in a future superintendent is one who knows how to effectively lead and embolden large groups of people.

"It doesn't have to be somebody with some ground-breaking idea about equity or how to teach children to read – they can have that core foundation, but I would rather have somebody who's really good at empowering the teachers and the staff to do what they've been trained to do, and to communicate with the community," Hillis said.

Mead said that her hope for the future superintendent is one who nurtures, lifts and celebrates the diverse population of ACPS students.

"For me, the number one thing is transparency and student voices," Mead said. "In the search for a new superintendent, I think students' voices should be centered, of course, but especially the students who are underrepresented. I think that a new superintendent should be able to work with that, to be able to work with the public opinion and really understanding ... what goes on in our schools and the unique needs of our students."