

MINUTES

WORK SESSION OF THE ALBEMARLE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, March 28, 2024

[Meeting Video Link](#)

A work session of the Albemarle County School Board was held on March 28, 2024, at 6:30 p.m. at the Albemarle County Office Building – 401 McIntire Road, Charlottesville, VA

ROLL CALL - UPON THE ROLL BEING CALLED, THE FOLLOWING WERE PRESENT

Board Members: Dr. Kate Acuff, Dr. Rebecca Berlin, Ms. Judy Le, Ms. Ellen Osborne, Mr. Chuck Pace, Mr. Graham Paige, and Ms. Allison Spillman

Absent: None

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Dr. Matthew Haas, Superintendent; Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Clare Keiser; Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Patrick McLaughlin; Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Daphne Keiser; Chief Operating Officer, Ms. Rosalyn Schmitt; School Division Counsel, Josiah Black; Chief Technology Officer, Dr. Christine Diggs; Public Affairs & Strategic Communications Officer, Dr. Helen Dunn; Clerk of the Board, Ms. Christine Thompson; Education Advisory Board, Ms. Sade Young; Principals, Mr. Darah Bonham, Ms. Ashby Johnson, Dr. Steve Saunders; Director of Budget and Planning, Maya Kumazawa; Student and Family Support, Dr. Jesse Turner; Community Engagement, Mr. Russell Carlock; and Director of Community Education, Ms. Karen Waters.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 1.0 CLOSED MEETING

At 5:30 p.m., Dr. Acuff offered a **motion** that the School Board of Albemarle County, Virginia go into a closed meeting as authorized by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, section 2.2-3711(A) of the Code of Virginia under: Subsection 1 for the discussion, consideration, or interviews of prospective candidates for employment and the assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, demotion, salaries, disciplining, or resignation of specific public officers, appointees, or employees of any public body; the purpose of this item is to discuss a specific disciplinary matter and possible reductions in staffing for the 2024-2025 school year; Subsection 7 for consultation with legal counsel pertaining to actual or probable litigation, where such consultation or briefing in open meeting would adversely affect the negotiating or litigating posture of the public body; the purpose of this item is to discuss a potential contractual dispute; and Subsection 8 for consultation with legal counsel employed or retained by the School Board regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice by such counsel; the purpose of this item is to discuss legal aspects of a potential resolution for collective bargaining and the legal requirements and procedures relating to School Board compensation and benefits. Ms. Spillman seconded the **motion**. **A voice vote was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Dr. Berlin, Mr. Pace, Ms. Osborne, Ms. Spillman, Mr. Paige, Dr. Acuff, and Chair Le.

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 7:0 vote.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 2.0 OPENING ACTIVITIES

Agenda Item No. 2.1 Call to Order - At 6:31 p.m., Chair Le called the meeting back to order.

Agenda Item No. 2.2 CLOSED MEETING CERTIFICATION - At 6:31 p.m., Dr. Acuff offered a **motion** that the Board certify by recorded vote that to the best of each Board member's knowledge, only public business matters lawfully exempted from the open meeting requirements of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act and identified in the motion authorizing the Closed Meeting were heard, discussed, or considered in the Closed Meeting. Mr. Paige seconded the **motion**. **Roll was called and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Mr. Pace, Dr. Acuff, Ms. Osborne, Mr. Paige, Dr. Berlin, Ms. Spillman, and Chair Le.
NAYS: None
ABSENT: None
Motion carried by a 7:0 vote.

- Agenda Item No. 2.3 Roll Call**
- Agenda Item No. 2.4 Pledge of Allegiance**
- Agenda Item No. 2.5 Moment of Silence**

AGENDA ITEM 3.0 APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Dr. Acuff offered a **motion** to approve the agenda. Ms. Spillman **seconded** the motion. **A voice vote was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Dr. Acuff, Mr. Pace, Ms. Spillman, Mr. Paige, Ms. Osborne, Dr. Berlin, and Chair Le.
NAYS: None
ABSENT: None
Motion carried by a 7:0 vote.

AGENDA ITEM 4.0 APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

- 4.1 Approval of Consent Agenda
- 4.2 Personnel Action
- 4.3 Approval of the Minutes
- 4.4 Carl D. Perkins – Local Plan for Career & Technical Education in ACPS
- 4.5 For information – Resolution Providing for Collective Bargaining
- 4.6 For action – Policy Review and Revision

Dr. Berlin offered a **motion** to approve the consent agenda. Dr. Acuff **seconded** the motion. **A voice vote was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Dr. Acuff, Mr. Pace, Ms. Spillman, Mr. Paige, Ms. Osborne, Dr. Berlin, and Chair Le.
NAYS: None
ABSENT: None
Motion carried by a 7:0 vote.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5.0 ITEMS PULLED FROM CONSENT AGENDA - None

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6.0 ANNOUNCEMENTS

Agenda Item No. 6.1 School Board – Superintendent Business

Dr. Berlin offered a **motion** that the School Board of Albemarle County, Virginia join in the effort by school divisions around the country to change and seek redress for deceptive practices by social media platforms; and further moved that the School Board instruct School Division Counsel Josiah Black to engage outside legal counsel to represent the Division in this litigation and to act as the Division’s point person in the class action lawsuit. Ms. Spillman **seconded** the motion. **A roll call vote was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Mr. Paige, Ms. Osborne, Dr. Berlin, Dr. Acuff, Ms. Spillman, Mr. Pace, and Chair Le.
NAYS: None
ABSENT: None
Motion carried by a 7:0 vote.

Chair Le announced that in the interest of ensuring that all community members have the opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions with the School Board, we are reinstating in-person signup for public comment at School Board meetings. Community members must check in with the School Board Clerk beginning at 6 p.m. on the day of the meeting. The community will still have access to online signup beginning at 9 a.m. on the Monday of the week of the meeting through 2 p.m. on the day of the meeting and may also call the school board office at 434-972-4055.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 7.0 PUBLIC COMMENT

Chelsea Sachno is a literacy specialist at Albemarle High School who expressed concerns about adopting a traditional elementary intervention model for high school reading specialists, stating it is neither sustainable nor research based. This year, Chelsea collaborated with 12 teachers across three departments, supporting literacy instruction for 834 students. A pull-out model would limit the number of students reached and create inequities in service provision. Data shows 70% of 9th-grade students and 90% of African American 9th graders are at high risk for reading comprehension issues, suggesting a significant number of students in need. She argued that partnering with teachers to integrate literacy instruction and intervention into every classroom is more effective and supported by research. Secondary educators do not receive foundational literacy instruction in their training, unlike elementary teachers. Pull-out interventions marginalize adolescent learners, particularly those who have not mastered academic English, and are rooted in historically racist ideologies. Research supports a whole-school and community-based model for secondary literacy intervention, aligning with the division's strategic goals and recommendations from the Bellwether report. Chelsea emphasized the need for culturally responsive teaching practices, moving from a deficit-based to an asset-based framework, to support literacy development within content area classrooms. This approach would enable more equitable and effective literacy support for all students through partnerships with teachers, administrators, and community stakeholders.

J.B. Hurt, a resident of the Samuel Miller District, spoke about Agnor Hurt School, advocating for it to retain its name in honor of his father, Ben Hurt. Ben Hurt was a principal at Albemarle High School for 30 years, where over 10,000 students graduated under his leadership. He successfully managed the school's integration, hired the first female high school athletic director in Virginia, and was inducted into the Virginia High School League Hall of Fame. Mr. Hurt highlighted his father's unique ability to know every student by name, aligning with the Albemarle County Public Schools mission statement. He expressed concerns about the renaming process, questioning the recommendation despite widespread respect and affection for his father. He emphasized that Ben Hurt's dedication to knowing and impacting every student exemplified the school's mission statement. Mr. Hurt urged the board to vote against the recommendation to rename the school, allowing Ben Hurt's legacy to continue.

Vernon Liechti spoke for Elizabeth Collier who could not attend the meeting. A math educator with six years of experience in Virginia and 13 years in California shared the positive impact of partnering with a literacy specialist. The educator noted that students often struggled with math SOL exams due to difficulties in reading and comprehending questions. This year, literacy specialists at Albemarle High School have helped the educator and students develop skills to read, comprehend, and interpret math questions more effectively. The educator emphasized the importance of understanding both the language and symbols used in math problems. In previous years, middle school literacy coaches pulled out students for help, which did not always improve classroom comprehension and sometimes led to absenteeism. The current approach, where literacy specialists work with teachers, has reached more students and improved both student engagement and test-taking abilities. The educator praised the literacy coaches' work and emphasized the need for their continued role as coaches to support teachers and students.

Colin Thomas, a resident of the Rivanna district, addressed the board regarding redistricting. He requested that the board consider adding a provision to allow all students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to remain at their current schools. Mr. Thomas shared his concerns about his daughter Kira, who is autistic

and has ADHD, emphasizing her significant challenges such as work refusal and meltdowns. He highlighted the importance of trust and familiarity in caring for Kira, noting that transferring her IEP to a new school would disrupt the trust and support network built over two years at Stone Robinson Elementary (SRE). Mr. Thomas expressed his and his wife's ability to advocate for Kira's special dispensation, acknowledging that not all families have the same resources. He underscored the unique trust relationship Kira has developed with her current school, citing a recent positive example involving her teacher, Miss Stratis. Mr. Thomas concluded by expressing concern for other children who may face similar challenges and urged the board to consider the impact on students like Kira when making redistricting decisions.

Vernon Liechti spoke on behalf of Jackie Marinucci from the Rivanna district, who was unable to attend the meeting. Ms. Marinucci, a teacher at Elmore High School, shared her positive experience with Chelsea Sachno, a literacy coach at Albemarle High School, throughout the school year. Ms. Marinucci emphasized that collaborating with a literacy coach has significantly enhanced the quality and depth of her Algebra I instruction. She highlighted her increased awareness that students cannot be assumed to understand essential academic skills such as identifying, explaining, and predicting, and she now takes full responsibility for ensuring her students grasp these concepts. Ms. Marinucci noted the substantial benefits her students have gained from in-class literacy support in mathematics. They receive immediate assistance in unpacking and understanding both cross-curricular and mathematical vocabulary, leading to increased engagement and discussion about mathematics in the classroom. She emphasized that this shift from simply doing math to discussing it indicates significant student achievement and underscores the importance of continuing to integrate literacy coaches into secondary classrooms. Ms. Marinucci concluded by thanking the board for supporting this crucial level of support for all students.

John Glass, a resident of the Rio District and Spanish teacher at Albemarle High School, addressed two key points during the meeting. First, he expressed gratitude for Chelsea Sachno, the literacy specialist at his school, highlighting her exceptional support and impact on the educational environment. Mr. Glass noted significant improvements in his teaching methods, including the use of tiered vocabulary lists, anticipation guides, and student discussions to enhance language learning and address literacy gaps among students learning Spanish as a second language. Secondly, Mr. Glass raised concerns about the inconsistent enforcement of cell phone policies across schools within the district. He emphasized the challenges teachers face in monitoring and regulating cell phone use in classrooms, describing the current policy as ineffective and often disregarded by students. Mr. Glass pointed out the broader societal implications of constant student access to phones during school hours and suggested a need for stricter enforcement and support from administration and parents to address this issue effectively.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8.0 SCHOOL DIVISION WORK SESSION

Agenda Item No. 8.1 School Naming Review - Research into the namesakes of Agnor-Hurt Elementary, Guy T. Agnor Jr. and Benjamin Franklin Hurt indicates that while former County Executive Guy Agnor Jr. has no association or oversight of public remarks or images on the record that are not reflective of ACPS values and policies, this is not the case with former ACPS Administrator Benjamin Franklin Hurt, despite his many accomplishments and the community's great admiration of his work as an educator. Consequently, it is recommended that rather than engage in a complete renaming of the school, that the name of Mr. Agnor be retained as Agnor Elementary School effective July 1, 2024.

Chair Le expressed gratitude to Ms. Waters, thanking her for her diligent efforts. Chair Le emphasized that the board's focus is not to judge the character of any namesakes but rather to evaluate if their legacies align with the current values and identities of the student body.

Ms. Osborne offered a **motion** to accept the recommendation of rather than engage in a complete renaming of the school, that the name of Mr. Agnor be retained as Agnor Elementary School effective July 1,

2024. Ms. Spillman **seconded** the motion. **A roll call vote was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Ms. Spillman, Ms. Osborne, Mr. Pace, Mr. Paige, Dr. Acuff, Dr. Berlin, and Chair Le.

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 7:0 vote.

Agenda Item No. 8.2 FY 25 Budget Updates – Staff provided FY 25 budget updates and information and solicited feedback to prepare for budget adoption.

Ms. Spillman sought clarification regarding an additional \$3 million approved by the Board of Supervisors. Staff explained that the Board of Supervisors recently approved the advertisement for tax rates for the upcoming fiscal year, which includes a maximum rate to be adopted by May 1st. This advertised rate is a part of their budget projection, and unless directed otherwise, it will remain in effect until May 1st, when final approval of tax rates occurs. Ms. Spillman indicated that this approval could potentially provide an additional \$2.9 million, pending final decisions on May 1st.

Dr. Acuff inquired about the allocation of one-time funds within the budget. There was discussion regarding the restricted spending of these funds, specifically referencing the special revenue fund contingency and the general fund balance. The special revenue fund contingency, established years ago, serves as a reserve for unforeseen circumstances such as those encountered this year. It was proposed to utilize these one-time funds, which are not recurring, along with potential additional funds from the school fund balance. It was noted that there is currently no projection for the year-end balance, but plans were discussed to allocate any savings towards future needs as they arise. This approach ensures financial flexibility while managing resources effectively.

Mr. Paige requested a breakdown of class sizes by discipline. It was explained that each fall, the board receives a class size report which includes projections for the upcoming school year. Dr. McLaughlin indicated agreement and confirmed that he would distribute the report, detailing class sizes across subject areas and grade levels for the past five years. The report is scheduled to be provided in November, once enrollment figures are finalized, offering comprehensive insights into class size trends and distributions.

Ms. Spillman inquired about feedback from Teachers of the Year regarding class sizes, particularly in elementary schools. It was noted that while teachers expressed concerns, they emphasized that the average class size doesn't reflect individual experiences accurately due to significant variability. Teachers highlighted the wide range of class sizes they encounter and the challenges they face on an individual basis. Regarding budgeting, it was explained that predicting an average class size based on current staffing standards is the primary method used. Staffing decisions are made according to projected total student numbers, though alternative approaches could be considered in the future. The discussion concluded with an acknowledgment of the limitations in addressing individual class size variations within existing budgetary frameworks.

Dr. Acuff acknowledged the Board of Supervisors for working to increase the schools' funding that included some issues they were working on, but they have helped the schools close the funding gap and she was very appreciative of their efforts.

Next Steps

April 11: Approve balancing scenario

April 25: Adopt Budget

May 1: Board of Supervisors sets tax rates, adopts and appropriates budget

July 1: Fiscal Year 2024/25 begins

Agenda Item No. 8.3 – The School Board took a break from 7:27 p.m. to 7:37 p.m.

Agenda Item No. 8.4 Chronic Absenteeism - Absenteeism data and what ACPS is doing to combat it, what individual school programs are looking to be successful. **Education Advisory Board presentation**

Chronic Absenteeism as Defined by VDOE: Chronic absenteeism is missing 10% or more of the academic year for any reason, including excused absences, unexcused absences, and suspensions. Based on a 180-day school year, this is approximately 18 days per year or 2-3 days per month. Chronic absenteeism harms all students because the percentage of chronically absent classmates predicts low reading and math achievement for all students.

Dr. Acuff asked principals about the factors contributing to improved student attendance and whether they had spoken directly with students about their experiences. Principals shared that students cited various reasons for their improved attendance, including feeling more connected to the school community, receiving support for mental health issues through counseling or trusted relationships with adults, and becoming involved in school activities. To gather insights, principals conducted one-on-one interviews with students who showed significant attendance improvements, identifying individual trends and effective strategies. They emphasized the importance of creating personalized plans for students based on their specific needs and circumstances. These plans vary widely and may include strategies like check-in/check-out systems, scheduled breaks during the school day, or weekly goal-setting meetings with counselors. The approach aims to tailor support to each student, fostering a deeper understanding of their needs and involving both students and their families in the planning process to enhance overall success and engagement.

Ms. Spillman brought up concerns about the effectiveness and timing of attendance messaging efforts. She noted that while emails and nudges encouraging attendance are well-intentioned, there have been instances where these communications coincided with school closures or teacher workdays, which inadvertently caused confusion and frustration among parents and students. She suggested to review the timing of these messages to ensure they align better with school schedules and events. Additionally, feedback from parents highlighted that some communication, particularly letters sent home, may come across as overly punitive or lacking in empathy, which could negatively impact efforts to improve attendance. Ms. Spillman proposed that staff consider gathering input from parents to refine the messaging, making it more supportive and understanding of their situations.

Ms. Spillman asked about the usage of vans regarding the availability and utilization of them to assist with addressing chronic absenteeism across schools. It was clarified that each school has access to a van, which is utilized based on available staff resources and scheduling constraints. The effectiveness of these vans in improving attendance varies depending on the school's capacity to allocate staff to drive them. It was acknowledged that while the vans are available, there is no standardized operating procedure across schools due to varying logistical challenges and staffing constraints. Principals prioritize clear communication but refrain from making promises they cannot consistently fulfill, particularly in situations where travel distances pose significant logistical hurdles.

Dr. Haas expressed gratitude to the EAB (Educational Advisory Board) for their partnership and highlighted the effectiveness of their approach. He commended the process of learning from national landscape research and implementing best practices identified through EAB sessions. Dr. Haas noted the value of EAB's cohort model, which facilitates ongoing learning and adaptation within schools. He pointed out the positive impact of these practices as evidenced by data presented by Dr. Carlock, showing initial challenges followed by improvement trends in school outcomes. This cycle of learning, implementing, and seeing positive results demonstrates the efficacy of using evidence-based strategies from other educational contexts. In conclusion, Dr. Haas emphasized the importance of continuing to leverage best practices and research to enhance educational outcomes within the division.

Chair Le expressed gratitude to all participants for their contributions and provided several reflections on the discussions about absenteeism. Chair Le highlighted the collaborative teamwork observed across different parts of the school system, emphasizing the importance of cohesive support structures for students. She noted the correlation between transportation issues and a spike in absenteeism observed last year, underscoring the interconnectedness of all aspects of education in ensuring student attendance and success. She mentioned the need for more bus drivers, encouraging community members to consider applying for these positions.

Additionally, Chair Le acknowledged a shift in understanding regarding excused and unexcused absences, recognizing that both types impact student learning. This insight was considered valuable for parents and the community to understand better. Chair Le concluded by thanking everyone for their efforts and the valuable information shared during the meeting.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 10.0 OTHER BUSINESS

Dr. Acuff offered a **motion** to accept the Reduction in Force as presented by staff in Closed Session. Mr. Paige **seconded** the motion. **A roll call vote was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Ms. Spillman, Ms. Osborne, Mr. Pace, Mr. Paige, Dr. Acuff, Dr. Berlin, and Chair Le.

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 7:0 vote.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 11.0 ADJOURNMENT - At 9:30 p.m., hearing no objections, Chair Le adjourned the meeting of the Albemarle County School Board.



Clerk



Chair