

MINUTES
FY25 DRAFT FUNDING REQUEST WORK SESSION OF THE ALBEMARLE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD
Thursday, March 7, 2024
[Meeting Video Link](#)

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, Ms. Allison Spillman, and Student Representative, Ms. Fernanda Cisneros.

ABSENT: None

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE: Superintendent Matthew Haas; School Division Counsel Josiah Black; Assistant Superintendent Clare Keiser; Assistant Superintendent Patrick McLaughlin; Assistant Superintendent Daphne Keiser; Assistant Superintendent Chandra Hayes; Chief Operating Officer Rosalyn Schmitt; Chief Technology Officer Christine Diggs; Public Affairs and Strategic Communications Officer Helen Dunn; Clerk of the School Board Christine Thompson; and Director of Budget and Planning Maya Kumazawa

AGENDA ITEM NO. 1.0 CLOSED MEETING

At 5:58 p.m., Dr. Acuff offered a **motion that the Albemarle County School Board** 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 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. The purpose of the item in the closed meeting is to discuss legal issues in connection with a resolution for public sector collective bargaining; a potential contract dispute; and a class action lawsuit by school divisions around the country against social media platforms. Ms. Spillman seconded the **motion. A voice vote was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Mr. Paige, Ms. Spillman, Dr. Acuff, Dr. Berlin, Ms. Osborne, Mr. Pace, 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 6:28 p.m., Chair Le called the Albemarle County School Board meeting back to order.

Agenda Item No. 2.2 Closed Meeting Certification

At 6:28 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. A roll call vote was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Dr. Acuff, Dr. Berlin, Ms. Osborne, Mr. Pace, Mr. Paige, 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 NO. 3.0 APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Agenda Item No. 3.1 Approval of Agenda – Mr. Paige offered a **motion** to approve the agenda. Dr. Acuff seconded the **motion**. **A voice vote was called, and the motion passed with the following recorded votes:**

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

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4.0 APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

Agenda Item No. 4.1 - Dr. Berlin offered a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Ms. Spillman seconded the motion. **A voice vote was called, and the motion passed with the following recorded votes:**

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

- 4.1 - Approval of Consent Agenda
- 4.2 – Consortium Incentive Grant Application for information (3/7) and approval (3/14)
- 4.3 – Personnel Action – Athletic Coaches
- 4.4 – Personnel Action

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5.0 ITEMS PULLED FROM CONSENT AGENDA

Agenda Item No. 5.1 – Items Pulled from the Consent Agenda – None.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6.0 ANNOUNCEMENTS

Agenda Item No. 6.1 School Board/Superintendent Business

Ms. Spillman shared that her and Chair Le had the opportunity to attend a meeting with the Albemarle High School Gender Sexual Alliance (GSA) students. Their insights into their experiences at Albemarle were invaluable, and they received some excellent feedback. Ms. Spillman and Chair Le plan to convey this feedback to Dr. Haas and Central Office staff, particularly concerning professional development initiatives aimed at better supporting the students.

Chair Le echoed Ms. Spillman’s remarks, stating that the students were brave and authentic and shared many wonderful stories and about their experience in high school. She appreciated it and was grateful they were willing to share.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 7.0 PUBLIC COMMENT

Agenda Item No. 7.1 Public Hearing – FY 25 Funding Request

Ms. Heidi Gilman Bennett from the Samuel Miller District spoke as a representative from Family Council. She expressed support for the Learning for All budget priorities, appreciating the engagement process that led to its formulation. The transparency exhibited in the published proposed evaluation schedule was also commended. The council backed the compensation increase, emphasizing the paramount importance of high-quality teachers and staff. She advocated for investments in English learner and special education growth, citing the significant portion of the student population they represent and the need to address their inequitable outcomes. She voiced support for social-emotional coaches to assist students struggling with mental health post-pandemic and address disruptive behavior in classrooms. Endorsed intervention services, expressing concern that the proposed funding merely maintains existing services rather than expanding and improving them as needed. Ms. Gillman Benett highlighted the potential burden on classroom teachers in the absence of sufficient support. She indicated plans to advocate to the Board of Supervisors regarding proposed capital expenditures, expressing concern over the absence of renovations for overcrowded school buildings. Ms. Gillman Bennett concluded by expressing gratitude to all involved.

Agenda Item No. 7.2 – Public Comment – Other Matters

Mr. Colin Thomas lives in the Rivanna district and came to speak about redistricting. Mr. Thomas offered a personal perspective on the matter. He emphasized the importance of diversity and shared his family's experience with their autistic daughter, currently a second grader at Stone Robinson. Despite her academic achievements and interests in space and music, she faces challenges with school transitions and refusal. Mr. Thomas expressed concern about the potential impact of redistricting on her education and well-being, highlighting the importance of stability and understanding for autistic individuals. He urged decision-makers to consider the needs of children like their daughter amidst the redistricting process.

Mr. Justin Weiler, a resident of the Rivanna district and parent at Stone Robinson, expressed dissatisfaction with the proposed redistricting plan for Baker Butler, Hollymead, Stone Robinson, and Stony Point. He criticized the committee's approach, particularly their recommendation to move students from Stone Robinson to Stony Point, which he deemed flawed. Weiler argued that instead of targeting Stone Robinson, students from Baker Butler should be redirected to Stony Point to address rapid growth. He accused the committee of disregarding community feedback and recommended Scenario B as the most favorable option, as it maintains teacher numbers at Stony Point without harming Stone Robinson and shifts students away from Baker Butler and Hollymead. Additionally, he proposed redistricting Gilbert Station and Burnley Station to Stony Point as a more effective solution to alleviate overcrowding. He concluded by expressing appreciation for the opportunity to voice his concerns.

Ms. Denise Holman, a resident of the Rivanna district, emphasized the importance of considering neighborhoods such as Gilbert Station and Burnley Station in the redistricting process, highlighting their stability and proximity to Stony Point. Holman argued that these areas should not be overlooked despite their rural status, especially considering the recurring issue of flooding affecting families regardless of their location. She criticized the primary focus on increasing enrollment, suggesting that addressing inadequate school facilities should not be overshadowed by this goal. Holman urged the committee to prioritize the needs of affected communities and ensure a comprehensive approach to the redistricting plan.

Ms. Katie Whitman, a resident of the Rivanna district and member of the redistricting committee, expressed concerns regarding the superintendent's redistricting recommendation, particularly the proposal to move Cascadia from Stone Robinson to Stony Point. Whitman argued that redistricting should only occur

when it alleviates overcrowding, which is not the case for Stone Robinson. She emphasized the lack of enrollment challenges at Stone Robinson and questioned the validity of moving Cascadia to address issues at Stony Point. Whitman highlighted the committee's dismissal of Gilbert and Berlin station areas without adequate data and urged consideration for the opinions of families in those areas. She advocated for a solution that truly addresses enrollment challenges at Stony Point and Baker Butler, emphasizing the importance of thoughtful decision-making in the redistricting process.

Ms. Karen Egan, a resident of the Rivanna district, addressed concerns about redistricting in the northern area. She highlighted the current plan's failure to address elementary school overcapacity, especially considering future development projections. Egan presented data showing overcapacity issues, particularly at Hollymead, and questioned the accuracy of enrollment numbers presented by the superintendent, noting discrepancies in capacity calculations. She raised concerns about the potential addition of trailers and the lack of transparency regarding this decision. Egan urged the committee to consider creative solutions to address overcrowding without negatively impacting students. Additionally, she emphasized the tight timeline for implementing changes, highlighting the need for swift action to accommodate affected families and staff.

Ms. Bridgette Rodgers, a resident of the Rivanna district, addressed the Board to share concerns regarding the redistricting proposal. She noted inconsistencies in the data regarding capacity numbers for Hollymead and questioned the effectiveness of proposed solutions in addressing long-standing capacity issues at Baker Butler. Rodgers highlighted the lack of consideration for future development projections, particularly regarding new housing developments that could exacerbate overcrowding. She expressed alarm at the potential for Hollymead to start the 2024-2025 school year over capacity and emphasized the need for a comprehensive solution that considers all affected schools in the northern feeder pattern. Rodgers relayed information from an Supervisor regarding plans for another northern school feeder pattern in 2026, suggesting a disconnect between projected solutions and community needs. She urged the committee to reconsider the proposed redistricting plan in light of these concerns.

The Murray Elementary Environmental Club presented a proposal to introduce reusable metal utensils in Albemarle County Schools. They highlighted the environmental benefits of reducing plastic waste and emphasized the potential cost savings compared to disposable utensils. Citing an example from a school in Minnesota, they illustrated significant monetary savings over several years. They suggested checking if the county's previous metal utensils are still available to reduce purchasing costs. If new utensils are needed, they recommended heavy-duty ones to prevent damage. They proposed a pilot program if necessary but preferred an immediate switch to metal utensils across all schools. The club expressed their commitment to environmental conservation and believed this initiative would be a simple yet effective way to reduce waste and save money for the school board.

Lauren Boggs Meslar – Murray Environment Club Co-teacher
4th grade students – Jack Nemett, Acadia Finan, and Miriam Hawkes

Ms. Erica Wyler, a resident of the Rivanna district, shared her personal story to urge reconsideration of the superintendent's recommendation to redistrict Cascadia to Stony Point. She recounted the deep bond her daughter had with her grandmother, who passed away just before her kindergarten year, and emphasized the trauma and grief their family experienced. Wyler highlighted the support and sense of community her daughter found at Stone Robinson Elementary over the past two years, likening it to an extended family. She expressed concern that redistricting would cause further emotional upheaval and disrupt the stability her daughter had found. Wyler argued that the proposed redistricting plan lacked logical justification, as it did not address overcrowding issues at Baker Butler and did not align with the objectives of the study. She urged decision-makers to consider alternative options that would maintain the cohesion and well-being of the Stone Robinson community.

Ms. Karol Kozak Lester, a new resident of Cascadia and parent of two students currently enrolled in 4th and 2nd grade, expressed strong opposition to the proposed redistricting plan, specifically Scenario A for Stony Point. She argued that Scenario A fails to meet the committee's objectives of reducing enrollment in overcrowded schools like Baker Butler and increasing enrollment at Stony Point to the desired threshold. She emphasized the lack of community support for Scenario A based on survey responses and highlighted the potential harm to Stone Robinson, including teacher cuts and loss of specialist positions. She advocated for reconvening the committee to explore alternative solutions that would allow children to remain at Stone Robinson, where they are currently well-served.

Ms. Dalaina Vizzier, a resident of the Rivanna district and a mother of a third grader, expressed opposition to the proposed redistricting plan. She highlighted concerns about the impact on students from the Cascadia neighborhood, noting overcrowding issues projected for the next five years, even with additional trailers. She raised concerns about the loss of teachers at Stone Robinson and challenges in maintaining adequate resources. She anticipated transportation difficulties with the opening of two new elementary schools in the next six years. Ms. Vizzier urged thoughtful consideration of the complex issues involved in redistricting and emphasized the need for careful planning rather than rushing to a decision.

Mr. Ben Xu lives in the Rivanna district and expressed concerns about the proposed redistricting of the community to Stony Point. He highlighted the lack of a formal presentation of survey results, which he believed rendered the feedback process ineffective. Mr. Xu fears the potential disruption to children's friendships and academic and social development by moving them to a new school after bonding with peers over the past two years, particularly in the context of the pandemic. He urged the board members to reconsider the final solution and uphold option A for Stony Point to address overcrowding while prioritizing the educational needs and well-being of the children.

Mr. Kyle Smoot, a parent from the Rivanna district, expressed his views on redistricting, highlighting the importance of careful consideration due to the complexities involved in moving children from their current schools. He acknowledged that there is no perfect solution to enrollment issues and emphasized that while addressing overcrowding at Baker Butler is essential, it should not be the sole focus. Smoot stressed the equity issue regarding resource allocation based on enrollment, noting that Stony Point receives fewer resources compared to other schools. Despite resource challenges, he believes Stony Point provides a quality education and is a well-maintained building with a strong community presence. Smoot advocated for sustainable solutions, suggesting that increased enrollment alternatives that pull students from rural areas along the northern border of the county are not ideal and could result in additional redistricting for those families in the future. He concluded by urging the board to approve the committee's recommendation to redistrict Cascadia or reconsider the decision in light of these factors.

Mr. Logan Henry is a Rivanna district resident. He was representing parents from children in the school district, and expressed support for Scenario B and urged the school board to reconsider moving Cascadia to Stony Point. He emphasized that Scenario B achieves the objectives of increasing student population at Stony Point while decreasing overcrowding at larger schools. Mr. Henry argued against moving students from Stone Robinson, highlighting the stable situation there compared to schools like Baker Butler. He suggested that reallocating resources, such as providing more teachers despite budget constraints, could address teacher-student ratios at Stony Point. Additionally, he proposed an alternative option of moving students from Gilbert and Burnley Station, which would create a more stable student population at Stony Point. He emphasized the social and emotional effects of moving schools, citing concerns about social anxiety, stress, and academic performance. Mr. Henry advocated for minimizing the number of students affected and stressed that Scenario B accomplishes this objective.

Ms. Tassia Araujo-Roper, a resident of the Rivanna district and a mother of three, expressed her concerns about the proposed redistricting plan. She shared her personal experience as a single mother, emphasizing the importance of finding the right school district for her children, especially her middle son with

special needs. Araujo-Roper highlighted the challenges her son faces with changes to routine and the need for stability in his education. She expressed disappointment in the decision-making process, particularly the ruling out of a community that seemed to make the most sense logically, without sufficient data to support the decision. Araujo-Roper urged reconsideration of the redistricting plan, emphasizing the need for a compelling reason to upend her life and create chaos for her family, and advocating for a solution that addresses overcrowding issues effectively.

Agenda Item No. 7.3 Break – The School Board took a break from 7:15 p.m. to 7:25 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8.0 SCHOOL DIVISION WORK SESSION

Agenda Item No. 8.1 Budget Work Session #2 – [Sustaining Focus on Continuous Improvement](#)

Maya Kumazawa, Director of Budget and Planning facilitated the budget work session of the FY25 draft funding request. K12albemarle.org/budget

1. [Tiered Interventions Overview & Proposal](#) – Craig Dommer, Director of Instruction – Tiered Supports

Ms. Spillman raised concerns about the allocation of interventionists and reading specialists in the high schools, particularly noting differences between Albemarle High School and Western High School. She mentioned feedback indicating that while Albemarle has three such specialists, none are directly working with students, whereas at Western, a significant portion of them are engaged with teachers. She expressed budgetary concerns regarding funding positions that may not be directly benefiting students. She requested clarification on how these positions will be restructured to ensure they are effectively supporting student needs moving forward. Mr. Dommer provided insight into how interventionists and reading specialists are utilized across the three high schools in the district. He explained that each school has adopted slightly different approaches based on their specific needs. At Monticello High School, the focus is primarily on supporting teachers, especially with a large student population. At Albemarle High School, there is a split of about 75/25 between direct student support and assisting teachers, with a particular emphasis on 9th-grade literacy. Western High School has one specialist who divides her time evenly between working directly with students and supporting teachers. Mr. Dommer mentioned ongoing efforts to refine these models through state training sessions, data analysis, and the development of clear job descriptions for reading specialists, guided by state research and models.

Mr. Pace inquired about the VALLS Norming process and its timeline. Mr. Dommer stated that there has been an extensive pilot conducted over several years and the process is nearing completion, as the tests currently indicate whether a student is above or below benchmark. However, they are refining the process to provide more precise numerical data, which is why they initiated a soft launch with 17 school divisions.

Mr. Paige inquired about the alignment between the Bellwether Report and the proposed changes. Mr. Dommer emphasized the importance of monitoring student progress and providing high-quality interventions and systematic resources to support their learning. He highlighted efforts to allocate resources based on student needs, aiming for appropriate staffing ratios to develop effective literacy plans that will be shared with parents.

2. **Special Education Overview & Proposal** – Katy Compel, Director of Special Education

Ms. Spillman commented that adding these FTEs will be helpful for these kids and it's much appreciated.

Chair Le inquired about the increase in students moving in after September 30th. Ms. Compel explained that there has been a significant increase in students entering through the IRC after the school year begins. Additionally, there has been an increase in transient students over the past two years, with some families moving back and forth between schools' multiple times during the year. Furthermore, there has been an increase in families moving to the area due to family members attending medical school.

Chair Le commented that this is the first time she has seen the race risk data. The previous data was disheartening but she is glad staff are spending time working on it. She further stated that we are the only division in the commonwealth that are bad at this, and it is alarming.

Ms. Osborne commented that as long as she's been on the board, she's never seen that kind of data. She appreciated the data-based approach.

Mr. Paige inquired about the Consistent Team Evaluations and how they contributed to reducing the number of evaluations compared to previous years. Ms. Compel explained that a team consisting of a school psychologist, a speech and language pathologist, a K12 specialist, and a preschool special educator completed evaluations for cases involving intellectual disability. This consistent approach allowed for the selection of culturally sensitive measures and ensured consistent best practices throughout the eligibility process. By centralizing the evaluation process, decisions were made based on a unified approach, rather than having 25 different eligibility teams across schools making decisions in the same category.

Mr. Pace raised a question about the need for a 12-month contract for the centralized special education evaluation eligibility team, considering if there would be enough work to justify it. Ms. Compel explained that the division will start with an 11-month contract next year with highly skilled staff who prefer shorter contracts. This approach aims to address challenges during the busiest times, particularly in the summer, and assess if it leads to sufficient improvement in performance before considering extending it to a full 12-month contract.

Mr. Paige inquired about whether other racial groups were separated out similarly to blacks, and if there were any issues with those groups. Ms. Compel indicated that all 12 disability categories and each racial group are separated out, and there have been no reported issues with any other racial groups.

3. **English Learner Program Overview & Proposal** – Lauren MacLean, Assistant Director of EL

Ms. Spillman was curious about how staff calculate projections. The process of projections involves examining growth trends over the past five years and averaging them to forecast future growth. However, unexpected events can lead to sudden increases in enrollment. In such cases, emergency staffing may be utilized to address the situation, including hiring additional instructors, interpreters, translators, and teaching assistants. The district aims to remain flexible and responsive to enrollment trends, continuously monitoring student movements to adapt as needed.

Dr. Acuff asked about what approaches we take with high school students, especially those with limited content for prior education. We have implemented a Newcomer Learning Community program for students in grades six through 11 who are in their first year of attending school in the United States and are beginning their English language acquisition process based on their WIDA scores. This program provides small class settings to help students rebuild trust in schooling and develop relationships with teachers.

Collaboration with the Boys and Girls Club facilitates this instructional approach, allowing for curriculum adaptation to meet the needs of these students effectively.

Dr. Berlin inquired about English learners in special education and requested data on their numbers, which the staff will provide. Staff regularly monitor concerns regarding over-identification or under-identification of students in special education and collaborate with the SPED department to address any issues, especially concerning students with complex medical needs.

Mr. Pace inquired about foreign language programs in elementary schools, and if any other language was used besides Spanish instruction. He asked for information on where the allocated full-time staff for these programs would be assigned. Ms. MacLean expressed concern about schools like Woodbrook struggling with fluctuating student numbers. She also commented that they are awaiting decisions on redistricting, which could impact staffing allocations.

Ms. Cisneros expressed enthusiasm for programs aimed at creating a sense of community for students from different countries. She highlighted the challenges some face in transitioning and learning English, noting that such programs help foster a supportive environment, encouraging students to persevere rather than give up.

Chair Le encouraged her fellow board mates to visit the Newcomer Learning Center. She visited last year and found it to be uplifting.

Dr. Acuff inquired about high school students – do they continue with their GED. The approach varies depending on individual circumstances. For students aged 14 to 16, efforts are focused on school enrollment and aligning with their grade level. For those older, conversations are held to assess their goals and options, considering factors such as immigration regulations and the student's progress in high school. While students up to age 22 can remain enrolled, addressing dropout rates remains a priority for the school district.

Dr. Berlin asked for the dropout rate. Ms. MacLean responded that it is at 25% unfortunately and the division is about 2% below the state. This is a problem we are all working on, but transparently our EL dropout rate is at our lowest.

Next Steps

March 11 – Board of Supervisors Work Session

- Chair & Vice Chair present funding request

March 14 – School Board Meeting

- Funding Request Approval

March 27 – School Board Meeting – updates

April 11 – School Board Meeting – updates

April 25 – School Board Meeting

- Budget Adoption

Chair Le expressed gratitude to all the presenters and noted significant improvements in the past four years she has been on the board, acknowledging the efforts of the staff in achieving these positive changes.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 9.0 OTHER BUSINESS

Agenda Item No. 9.1 Other Business by Board Members/Superintendent

Dr. Haas recognized Mr. Alan Swinger, who was in the audience. Mr. Swinger is one of the members of the Budget and Finance Committee. Dr. Haas appreciated his dedication to Albemarle County Schools. He also recognized Mr. Josh Walton, principal of Walton Middle School, who was also in attendance.

Ms. Spillman commented that she was happy to see the number of public commenters we had, and the Murray students were amazing. She stated that she would like to go back to allowing public comment to sign up at meetings.

Ms. Spillman offered a motion to direct staff to work towards allowing public comment to sign up at board meetings. Dr. Berlin **seconded the motion. A roll call vote was called, and the motion passed with the following recorded votes:**

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

NAYS: Mr. Paige and Dr. Acuff


ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 5:2 vote.

Agenda Item No. 10.1 Closed Meeting – None.

Agenda Item No. 10.2 Closed Meeting Certification – None.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 10.0 ADJOURNMENT - At 8:42 p.m., hearing no objections, Chair Le adjourned the meeting of the Albemarle County School Board.


Clerk


Chair