

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING OF THE ALBEMARLE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, September 12, 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, Mr. Moosa Ahmed.

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; and Clerk of the Board Christine Thompson

AGENDA ITEM NO. 1.0 CLOSED MEETING

At 5:58 p.m., Dr. Acuff offered a **motion** that the Albemarle County Public 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 1 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 terms or scope of such contract, where discussion in an open session would adversely affect the bargaining position or negotiating strategy of the public body; the purpose of this item is to discuss the selection of a vendor to provide architectural and engineering services to the Division relating to its building projects. 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 a pending lawsuit against the School Board and the possible resolution thereof. Ms. Spillman seconded the **motion**. **A voice vote was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

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

NAYS: None.

ABSENT: Dr. Berlin.

Motion carried by a 6:0:1 vote.

Dr. Berlin arrived shortly after the Closed Meeting started.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 2.0 OPENING ACTIVITIES

Agenda Item No. 2.1 Call to Order - At 6:30 p.m., Chair Le called the Albemarle County School Board 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. Paige, Dr. Acuff, Dr. Berlin, Mr. Pace, Ms. Osborne, Ms. Spillman, and Chair Le.
NAYS: None
ABSENT: None
Motion carried by a 7:0 vote.

Ms. Spillman offered a **motion** that the Board negotiate architectural and engineering services contracts with firms A, B, C, and D. Dr. Acuff seconded the **motion**. **A voice vote was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Ms. Osborne, Mr. Paige, Mr. Pace, Ms. Spillman, Dr. Acuff, Dr. Berlin, 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 – Chair Le asked those in attendance to take a moment to think about the family of Mr. Jose Lopez Jojoa, a dedicated custodian at Burley Middle School and valued member of our Albemarle County Public Schools community, who passed away on August 22, 2024.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 3.0 APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Agenda Item No. 3.1 Approval of Agenda - Ms. Osborne offered a **motion** to approve the agenda. Mr. Pace seconded the **motion**. **A voice vote was called, and the motion passed with the following recorded votes:**

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

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4.0 APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

- 4.1 Approval of Consent Agenda
- 4.2 Approval of the Minutes
- 4.3 For Action: Policy, Review and Revision
- 4.4 For Information: Policy, Review and Revision
- 4.5 Personnel Action – Athletic Coaches
- 4.6 Personnel Action
- 4.7 Religious Exemption
- 4.8 Religious Exemption
- 4.9 Religious Exemption
- 4.10 Religious Exemption
- 4.11 Religious Exemption
- 4.12 Religious Exemption
- 4.13 Religious Exemption

Ms. Osborne offered a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Mr. Paige **seconded the motion. A voice vote was called, and the motion passed with the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Ms. Osborne, Mr. Paige, Mr. Pace, Ms. Spillman, Dr. Acuff, 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 2024-2025 Student Representative to the School Board

[Mr. Moosa Ahmed](#), Monticello High School

Agenda Item No. 6.2 Spotlight on Education - Space Camp Summer 2024 - In December 2023, Northrup Grumman reached out to us with an exciting opportunity: they offered to fund a group of local students to attend Space Camp in Huntsville, Alabama. This generous offer has opened a unique and transformative experience for our students. Space Camp, renowned for its immersive and hands-on approach to space exploration and STEM education, took place from July 7-12, 2024. This year, we had the opportunity to send 23 students and 5 educators from Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS), a significant expansion from our previous capacity of just a few participants.

Space Camp in Huntsville is an exceptional program designed to inspire and engage young minds through interactive learning experiences related to space and engineering. Participants engaged in simulated space missions, teamwork exercises, and STEM activities that bring the wonders of space exploration to life. The camp's target demographic includes students in grades 6-8 who have shown potential and interest in STEM or Space. Four teachers excitedly accepted the challenge of selecting students based on criteria provided by Northrup Gruman. On July 6, our educators and 22 students boarded a plane to engage in 6 days of Space Camp. The teachers and students participated in separate tracks while at camp, rarely seeing one another. This was a great opportunity for our students but was equally as significant for our educators.

This opportunity represents a significant leap forward in our ability to provide enriching educational experiences for our students, particularly those who may not otherwise have access to such programs. By participating in Space Camp, our students will gain invaluable skills and inspiration that can help propel them toward future success in STEM fields.

Agenda Item No. 6.3 - School Board and Superintendent Business

Chair Le nominated Katie Walker to be the Rivanna district representative on the Long-Range Planning Advisory Committee. Dr. Acuff seconded the **motion. A voice vote was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 7:0 vote.

Dr. Chandra Hayes [addressed](#) the Board on the difficulties teachers were having with the HMH and LTRS training.

During the discussion, several key topics were brought up regarding CRT, HMH, and LTRS training, including:

- The feasibility of relaxing the CRT policy for greater flexibility.
- The additional hours required for teachers to complete HMH training.
- The possibility of offering summer training for CRT.
- The role of the School Board in setting deadlines for training.
- The classification of these decisions as operational.
- The importance of CRT in relation to our anti-racism policy.
- Potential budget implications associated with training.
- The School Board's responsibility in achieving outcomes and closing opportunity gaps.

Ms. Ellen Osborne offered a **motion** that teachers who are simultaneously in HMH and LTRS training complete the CRT training within three years of employment or by 2028. Dr. Acuff seconded the **motion**.

Ms. Osborne **amended the motion** and moved to direct staff to add regulations to the anti-racism policy, specifying detailed deadlines for ACPS teachers to achieve success completing CRT training. Dr. Acuff **seconded the motion. Roll was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 7:0 vote.

Superintendent Haas will present to the Board a revision of [Policy GCL](#) (professional staff development) to eliminate the CRT training expectations and establish regulations under [Policy ACC](#) (anti-racism policy). These regulations will extend the timeline for CRT training for teachers involved in LTRS training until the end of the 2027-2028 school year.

- Ms. Rosalyn Schmitt, Chief Operating Officer, provided an enrollment update. A more formal update will be presented at the October business meeting using data from September 30th, which is reported to the state and will include details by school. As of September 12th, we have approximately 300 more students enrolled compared to last year, exceeding staff projections by over 100 students. The staff has collaborated closely with schools experiencing higher enrollments and has allocated additional staffing where necessary.

- Superintendent Haas shared insights from his visit to Crozet Elementary School on Monday. He observed a transition to a Seesaw activity for sentence dictation, where Miss Hall engaged individually with students, including a chat about Pokémon with one student. This interaction showcased the strong relationships being built in the classroom. In Mr. Grassley's fourth-grade class, students participated in a "working snack" focused on mastering long and short vowel sounds. Mr. Grassley's creative approach allowed students to express their feelings using a magnetic whiteboard with zones of regulation. Each student could slide their name placard to indicate their emotional state, emphasizing the importance of recognizing where each student was at that moment.

The final stop was in Ms. Kaplan's fifth-grade art class, where students worked on color wheels and personal cubes representing their identities. They are also collaborating on a large mural that will include contributions from hundreds of students, combining their artwork into a cohesive piece.

Overall, the visit was highly positive, highlighting the school's welcoming environment, well-maintained facilities, and the effective management of the custodial and cafeteria staff. Thank you for your continued efforts in creating a supportive and engaging educational experience.

- Ms. Spillman noted that she has received considerable feedback from parents about locker availability, particularly in the western feeder pattern. As a parent herself, she has often been informed that lockers were not available, but it turns out they are accessible upon request. She emphasized the need for clear communication regarding this issue, as many parents have been misinformed about locker availability at schools like Henley and other middle schools in the area. While Henley allows lockers upon request, other schools assign them to 6th graders, highlighting inconsistencies in the information provided by school administrations. Ms. Spillman requests that this information be widely shared with families to ensure they have accurate details and that school administrations consistently communicate the correct policies regarding lockers.
- Ms. Spillman expressed her frustration regarding the Community In Schools program. She apologizes for the delay in bringing this up, as she was unable to attend last month's meeting due to COVID. She is disappointed that this program, which will incur significant costs over the next three years, was not discussed during the budgeting process. Although she understands from Dr. Haas that the funds in question have already been appropriated from COVID relief and do not require a board vote, she feels it is frustrating that these funds were not included in the discussions about potential cuts and budget allocations.

Additionally, while she appreciates the funding plan provided for the program, she is concerned about the responsibility of the CIS after the fourth year, especially since support from the Albemarle Education Foundation is not guaranteed. Ms. Spillman requests more information about the long-term funding strategy for this large program, which she is otherwise excited about. Moreover, she noted potential overlap between the Community In Schools program and the Office of Community Engagement. Given the significant investment in both areas, she asks for a report outlining how these two initiatives will work together, identifying any unnecessary overlaps and opportunities to better utilize existing resources.

Assistant Superintendent Dr. Daphne Keiser expressed her willingness to provide additional information regarding the Community and Schools model. She assured that this model directly addresses social challenges highlighted by administrators who seek more support in this area. Dr. Keiser is happy to clarify how this initiative connects with the work done in the Office of Community Engagement and thanked Ms. Spillman for bringing this important issue to the forefront.

Superintendent Haas noted that the detailed report shared with the board on July 12 outlined the program costs, but it only covers projections for three years, as that is the extent of what the district felt comfortable estimating. He clarified that it is not the plan for the school system to absorb all program expenses. He apologized for the limited projection but emphasized that when programs meet specific needs, the division utilizes one-time funds initially. These programs are then revisited during the budget process for potential integration into recurring funding. He likened this approach to past pilot programs, such as the SEL coaches, which were funded for three years before being adopted into the operating budget. Currently, the division covers about 25% of the program's costs. Superintendent Haas expressed optimism that, as the program progresses, the board may choose to continue and even expand it to other schools based on its success. He will resend the July report to the board, which includes all relevant details discussed.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 7.0 PUBLIC COMMENT – There were no public speakers.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8.0 – SCHOOL DIVISION BUSINESS

Agenda Item No. 8.1 – Department of Instruction Update. [PreK-12 Literacy with Instructional and Implementation Alignment](#)

Ms. Spillman inquired about reports from teachers claiming they were required to complete LETRS training outside of their contracted hours, asking if this was accurate and how the division is addressing the issue. Staff clarified that there have been two kickoff sessions for LETRS training, and they addressed concerns regarding a graphic circulating among teachers that overestimates the time needed to complete the training modules. They assured the board that the district has built in sufficient time during contracted hours for teachers to complete the training. Teachers have access to the training outside of school hours if they choose, but it is designed so that they can finish it entirely within the professional development time allocated during the school day. While acknowledging that individual learning paces may vary, the staff expressed confidence that the allotted time is adequate based on feedback from those who have completed the training.

Mr. Paige expressed support for the family room initiative but raised concerns about potential internet access issues in some areas of the county that could hinder access to the family room.

Staff replied that they have not yet received reports of internet access problems. The family room initiative is still being introduced to parents alongside literacy nights, module letters, and informational flyers. They are closely collaborating with the tech department to address any emerging concerns.

Ms. Spillman requested tracking data to monitor the time teachers take to complete training, asking for an update in about a month. Many frustrated teachers have reported spending excessive time outside of work on training, despite appreciating the program. The staff confirmed that LETRS is user-friendly for both teachers and administrators, with a dashboard allowing administrators to track teacher progress. However, they noted that time tracking can be inaccurate if teachers leave their session windows open, potentially inflating recorded completion times.

Feedback from 38 teachers who participated in the asynchronous training in the spring indicated that the time required was reasonable. Staff also shared tips with teachers, including the option to watch videos at 1.5x speed without losing comprehension and to have the text open while viewing videos to streamline learning. Principals are aware of time concerns and are working to incorporate adequate training time into schedules to ensure efficiency and support for teachers.

Dr. Acuff raised concerns about the availability of "help materials" for families, particularly regarding access to technology. She noted that by middle elementary school, students typically have tablets or computers they can take home but questioned whether the school provides devices for families or if they are left to fend for themselves. Superintendent Haas acknowledged this as a technology issue that needs further exploration. He stated that they would follow up with Dr. Christine Diggs, Chief of Technology for an update on technology access and coverage, which would be shared with the board. He also mentioned that students have their own Microsoft accounts, which include seven years' worth of consumables and reading passages. These materials are sent home for students to keep, especially in the early grades, to encourage continued reading at home.

Mr. Pace expressed concern about overwhelming teachers, sharing that a principal from one of his schools mentioned that they would only focus on LETRS training this year, indicating that it would be the sole priority. The staff acknowledged this concern, emphasizing the importance of allowing teachers to work at their own pace while noting that LETRS training is a mandated requirement. They highlighted the intention to provide flexibility within the division regarding other

initiatives, such as CRT, and to explore additional support options at the school level. As feedback is gathered from individual principals, adjustments can be made to ensure teachers receive the necessary support without feeling overwhelmed.

Superintendent Haas emphasized that the primary focus is on supporting teachers, not imposing unrealistic expectations. The goal is to ensure that students can succeed over time. If teachers don't complete their objectives by the end of the year, there will be additional time and resources available. He noted a trend from the Virginia Department of Education to impose tight deadlines on school systems. For instance, there was a strict deadline last fall to create a plan for All in Virginia. After feedback from superintendents, that deadline was softened to a mere goal. This pattern has prompted the board and staff to push back against these pressures.

Ultimately, the message from the Superintendent and staff is clear: this initiative aims to support teachers, not create burdens, with the end goal of benefiting students as they navigate the challenges of reading instruction in Albemarle County Public Schools.

Agenda Item No. 8.2 – The Board took a break from 7:55 p.m. to 8:05 p.m.

Agenda Item No. 8.3 – Sustainability Program Update + Advisory Committee for Environmental Sustainability (ACES) Annual Report. ACPS has historically been a leader in sustainability initiatives. This presentation reviewed current initiatives, planned initiatives, and discussed the annual report from ACES.

There was a discussion of the Energy CLASS grant award which will be used to fund Sustainability Liaison stipend positions at each school for FY 24-25.

Any recommendations made by ACES that have fiscal implications would be pursued and developed based on direction of the School Board. Any significant redirection of resources would be brought forward through the budget procedures established during the development of the 2025-2026 school budget.

- 1: ACPS Sustainability Update [Presentation](#) (2023-2024)
- 2: Advisory Committee for Environmental Sustainability (ACES) [Annual Report](#)

Dr. Acuff inquired about the PPA for generating solar energy at two new school buildings. The current PPA will cover ten locations, including solar installations at all high schools, middle schools, and several elementary schools. However, some schools are not included in this agreement. Funding for the solar installations will come from the school budget, depending on the bid outcomes for these projects. If the budget does not allow for it, another PPA may be considered.

Efforts are underway to establish cooperative contracts with solar developers for both new and existing schools. This will enable quick installation of solar panels as soon as projects arise, minimizing delays and ensuring timely implementation.

Ms. Spillman mentioned that the environmental club at Murray sent a letter to the White House, which received a positive response from Kamala Harris. She expressed enthusiasm for the club's ideas on improving the environment.

Ms. Spillman also inquired about the funding for ACES, noting that it primarily relies on community volunteers. The liaisons are paid \$815 per year, with an anticipated cost of around \$24,000 for 24 liaisons. While the program does not require ongoing funding, there are plans to secure necessary funds for the upcoming year.

Chair Le inquired about the location of the vermiculture boxes. She felt better knowing that the worms are kept in a more free-range environment. Chair Le thanked everyone for the information.

Agenda Item No. 8.4 – Middle School Master Plan - ACPS contracted with VMDO Architects in March of 2023 to develop a comprehensive study and recommended 20-year master plan for all middle schools to address capacity challenges and evaluate renovation needs for educational adequacy and parity. All recommendations were to be consistent with the vision, mission, values and goals of the Albemarle County Public Schools Strategic Plan.

Specific tasks of the middle school master plan included facility assessments, community engagement, and short-term to long-term recommendations including boundary changes, grade level configurations, additions and renovations, and a potential new facility to manage enrollment growth.

Recommendations were developed as a phased district-wide plan for middle school education over the next 20 years. Projects were estimated in current dollars, prioritized, and cost-estimated over time using an annual escalation rate of 5.25%.

General Recommendations of the Master Plan:

- Phase 1: Addition/Renovation to Community Lab School to increase admissions and mitigate enrollment challenges at other schools.
- Phase 2: Renovate/Improve Walton MS and conduct a redistricting study.
- Phase 3: Build a new middle school when needed to provide current capacity management and long-term growth projections. This phase could be interchanged with Phase 4 as indicated by enrollment growth.
- Phase 4: Renovate/Improve Burley, Journey, Henley, and Lakeside to equitable standards.

[MS Master Plan ACPS](#)

[MS Master Plan VMDO](#)

Dr. Berlin asked for clarification on a comment made during the presentation regarding "bringing Burley up to educational standards." She inquired whether different architectural or safety standards apply to various types of buildings.

In response, it was explained that the assessment of schools is twofold. First, it examines the physical conditions of the school. The building has undergone various additions and renovations, which complicates navigation due to multiple ramps and exits across different levels. This assessment is conducted alongside a review of current programming and classroom usage to identify deficiencies. The process involves comparing Burley's conditions against established guidelines for educational programming. Ultimately, the standards will be tailored to each school based on its unique needs and classroom allocations.

Dr. Acuff and Chair Le inquired about the demand for seats at Community Lab School. Superintendent Haas will get back to the Board with the numbers.

Dr. Berlin inquired about the plans for ADA compliance and whether any details were available. Staff responded that specific details could be shared later. They are aware of ADA considerations and has factored compliance into each school's proposals. For example, Burley presents challenges, but each proposal includes recommendations for bringing the building up to local and ADA codes. The approach and associated costs may vary from school to school.

Dr. Acuff inquired whether the new school price of \$150 million includes playing fields and land acquisition. It was clarified that the figure encompasses project costs, including hard construction costs, design fees, and other owner-related expenses, along with site construction costs.

Dr. Acuff also noted that this amount is significantly higher than previously discussed figures for a new high school. It was explained that all numbers presented are based on 2023 dollars and have been escalated by 5.25% per year, reflecting current costs and making the price seem quite surprising.

Mr. Paige asked why the redistricting study is scheduled for 2032. It was explained that discussions about redistricting involve various strategies to address capacity issues, such as looking at feeder patterns and adjusting boundaries.

Instead of proposing immediate redistricting, the goal is to explore multiple options, including renovations and additions to existing schools like Henley and Journey. For Walton, projected enrollments are significantly lower than its capacity, leading to discussions about enhancing Walton and considering redistricting to increase enrollments for equity purposes.

The decision to conduct a redistricting study in 2032 is based on recommendations from ACPS to evaluate whether this approach is appropriate, allowing for a comprehensive discussion on how to handle additions, renovations, and redistricting at that time.

Next Steps - During the Board's October business meeting, an update on the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) will be presented. As this is the off year for the biannual report, a full report will not be available; however, there will be an update to the CIP based on tonight's feedback.

The plan is to incorporate these recommendations into the CIP, with similar timelines for phases 1, 2, and 3. Staff discussions are ongoing regarding phase 4, with a recommendation to advance these projects due to existing needs at Burley and other schools. The only change in the plan will be to align these needs with the capacity project, contingent on funding.

Ultimately, the board will need to approve and act on the overall CIP recommendations at that time.

Agenda Item No. 8.4 - Building Services Updates: [Summer 2024 Projects Update](#). The Building Services Department provided the School Board with an overview of 2024 construction and maintenance projects.

Ms. Spillman noted that the parking lot at Western has significantly improved traffic flow, making it easier to enter and exit during the day. She also praised the quality of the track.

Chair Le inquired about the Albemarle High School construction work scheduled for next year and whether it should be factored into the calendar for the upcoming school year. Matt Wertman, Director of Building Services acknowledged the importance of this consideration, affirming that the calendar committee is currently at work and emphasizing the need for as much time as possible for the construction.

No. 9.0 OTHER BUSINESS

Agenda Item No. 9.1 Other Business by Board Members and the Superintendent

Dr. Berlin offered a motion to send a [letter](#) to the members of the Virginia Department of Education, families and community partners from the Albemarle County School Board, a statement on the VDOE's new School Performance and Improvement System. Ms. Spillman **seconded** the **motion**. **A voice vote was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 7:0 vote.

Agenda Item No. 9.2 Closed Meeting – None.

Agenda Item No. 9.3 Closed Meeting Certification – None.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 10.0 ADJOURNMENT - At 8:56 p.m., hearing no objections, Chair Le adjourned the meeting of the Albemarle County School Board.

Clerk

Chair