

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING OF THE ALBEMARLE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, December 12, 2024

[Meeting Video Link](#)

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

BOARD MEMBERS - Dr. Kate Acuff, Ms. Judy Le, Ms. Ellen Osborne, Mr. Chuck Pace, Mr. Graham Paige, and Student Representative, Ms. Isabelle Wang

ABSENT – Dr. Rebecca Berlin and Ms. Allison Spillman

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE - Superintendent Matthew Haas; School Division Counsel Josiah Black; Assistant Superintendent Clare Keiser; 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

Agenda Item No. 1.1 Closed Meeting - 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:

1. 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 review and discuss two confidential personnel matters;
2. Subsection 2 for the discussion or consideration of admission or disciplinary matters or any other matters that would involve the disclosure of information contained in a scholastic record concerning any student in Albemarle County Public Schools; the purpose of this item is to discuss a recent hearing of the School Board's Discipline Committee; and
3. 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 recent incident at a school involving allegations of bullying of one student by another. Mr. Paige seconded the **motion**. **A voice vote was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

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

NAYS: None.

ABSENT: Dr. Berlin and Ms. Spillman

Motion carried by a 5:0:2 vote.

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: Dr. Berlin and Ms. Spillman

Motion carried by a 5:0:2 vote.

Agenda Item No. 2.3 - Roll Call

Agenda Item No. 2.4 - Pledge of Allegiance

Agenda Item No. 2.5 - Moment of Silence

Dr. Acuff offered a **motion** to approve a contract addendum for Employee A. Ms. Osborne seconded the **motion**. **A voice vote was called, and the motion passed with the following recorded votes:**

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: Dr. Berlin and Ms. Spillman

Motion carried by a 5:0:2 vote.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 3.0 APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: Dr. Berlin and Ms. Spillman

Motion carried by a 5:0:2 vote.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4.0 ANNOUNCEMENTS

Agenda Item No. 4.1 [Spotlight on Education](#) - The Virginia Purple Star Designation Program recognizes schools across the Commonwealth that go above and beyond in creating welcoming environments and providing crucial resources for children from military families. These schools ensure that transitioning students receive consistent, high-quality educational experiences while addressing the unique challenges faced by military families.

To achieve this designation, schools must meet rigorous criteria, including having a trained staff point of contact for military families, offering professional development for educators, and maintaining accessible resources for military families on their websites. Schools must also demonstrate peer-to-

peer support programs and other activities designed to ease transitions for military-connected students.

Baker-Butler Elementary and Lakeside Middle have excelled in meeting and exceeding these criteria. Through their dedicated efforts, they have established themselves as leaders in fostering inclusivity, understanding, and support for students and families tied to military service.

This recognition is especially meaningful as it reflects not only the efforts of individual schools but also Albemarle County Public Schools' ongoing commitment to creating a military-friendly culture across the division. These schools have set an outstanding example by integrating innovative practices and prioritizing the needs of military-connected families, ensuring their success both academically and socially.

As of this year, 490 schools statewide hold an active Purple Star designation, with 228 earning this distinction multiple times. Baker-Butler Elementary and Lakeside Middle now join this distinguished group, showcasing Albemarle County Public Schools as a model of excellence in this area.

Albemarle County Public Schools are incredibly proud of the leadership, faculty, and staff at these schools for their dedication to the mission of the Purple Star Program. Their efforts underscore the importance of ensuring every child feels supported and valued, no matter where their journey begins or where it may lead.

Agenda Item No. 4.2 School Board/Superintendent Business

Dr. Haas had the opportunity to drive Susan Tapscott's bus in the morning and had a great time driving with her and learned a lot. He gained valuable insights into the experience of school bus drivers. He expressed appreciation for Susan, Scottsville Elementary and Walton Middle School for their hospitality. He also visited Murray Elementary School on Monday and participated in celebrations at each of the schools, including classroom tours focused on math and reading instruction. Dr. Haas recognized Mr. Darah Bonham and the Safety & Security Team for co-hosting a drug awareness program at Monticello High School alongside local officials and support programs. He attended Journey Middle School's Family Night, which was conducted entirely in Spanish, providing Latino families with information on attendance, extracurricular activities, and school involvement.

Ms. Isabelle Wang spoke on behalf of Albemarle High School students and raised concerns about microaggressions becoming a pressing issue across all four schools in the county. She emphasized that these subtle, yet harmful behaviors can significantly impact students' sense of safety and belonging. Addressing these incidents requires education, practice, and strong support systems. However, Ms. Wang noted that the anonymous alert system, which previously provided a way for students to report such incidents, is currently offline and inaccessible. This leaves students, particularly those without trusted adults in their schools, with limited options to safely report bullying, harassment, or discrimination. She also highlighted the need for curriculum diversification, particularly in history and English classes, to better represent marginalized communities, and cited a lack of Indigenous history in U.S. history courses and stressed the importance of learning about Indigenous cultures and contributions beyond the context of colonization, focusing on resilience and achievements. Ms. Wang acknowledged the board's commitment to fostering inclusivity and encouraged further student collaboration through initiatives like the student advisory committee. On a positive note, Ms. Wang shared that her high school successfully hosted a drug abuse and awareness program, an essential step in educating the community about the dangers of substance abuse and providing recovery resources. Additionally, she highlighted progress in her peer tutoring program, which recently integrated Pocketalk translation tools to support English Language Learners (ELLs).

This innovation has enhanced inclusivity and improved tutoring effectiveness, and she expressed hope that it could be expanded to other peer tutoring centers in the division.

Chair Le acknowledged Ms. Wang's concerns, specifically regarding the anonymous alert system, and expressed interest in ensuring better communication and accessibility around the HELPme platform as a reporting tool.

Mr. Paige requested that staff ensure Indigenous Peoples Month is celebrated in all schools. He also shared that he attended the *We the People* celebration earlier in the week, where 8th-grade students presented their research on various aspects of the U.S. Constitution. He noted that at least 16 students from Henley Middle School will advance to the state competition and highlighted that both Albemarle and Western Albemarle High Schools performed well at last year's state competition. Mr. Paige said that judging the students' presentations was an enjoyable and rewarding experience.

Mr. Pace shared that he was interviewed by broadcast students at Albemarle High School and was impressed by their professionalism, organization, and the depth of their questions. He noted that they produced and sent him the video quickly, highlighting their efficiency and skill.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5.0 PUBLIC COMMENT

Libby Hewett from the Samuel Miller district spoke in support of a bell-to-bell cell phone policy, citing research from Jonathan Haidt's book, "The Anxious Generation," which discusses the negative impact of smartphones and social media on students' mental health. She referenced studies showing increases in suicide rates, self-harm, and depression among youth since 2010, linking these trends to excessive screen time and lack of face-to-face interaction. She advocated for strict enforcement of phone restrictions in schools, suggesting phone lockers as a solution to help students focus, improve social skills, and create a more effective learning environment.

Robert Hewett of the Samuel Miller district, a former educator and administrator, supported stricter cell phone policies in schools. He emphasized that removing distractions like cell phones is essential for effective learning and student engagement. He cited a survey from the National Education Association showing that 90% of teachers support cell phone restrictions, with 83% favoring a full bell-to-bell ban. He also referenced a UK study where students reported improved focus, social interactions, and well-being after reducing their screen time, highlighting the importance of teaching students' self-regulation.

Chrishanthi Erkel, a parent with two high schoolers in the White Hall district, expressed strong support for an "Away for the Day" phone policy. She described smartphone addiction as a serious issue affecting student mental health, focus, and communication skills. She emphasized that developing adolescent brains are highly susceptible to addiction and that restricting phone use in school would help protect students' cognitive and emotional development. Ms. Erkel urged the board to take bold action to implement clear and enforceable policies, likening the need for phone restrictions to seatbelt laws and speed limits.

Christopher Seaman (White Hall District, representing "Forward") addressed a rise in hate speech and inflammatory language among students, including racist, homophobic, xenophobic, and misogynistic remarks. He reported hearing concerns from teachers, bus drivers, and parents about students repeating extremist rhetoric. Mr. Seaman urged the board to implement bystander

intervention training for staff and secondary students, citing its proven effectiveness in reducing harmful interactions and creating safer school environments. He emphasized the importance of empowering teachers and students to intervene when they witness discrimination or harassment.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6.0 APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

- 6.1 Approval of Consent Agenda
- 6.2 Approval of the Minutes
- 6.3 Personnel Action
- 6.4 For Information: Policy Review and Revision
- 6.5 For Action: Policy Review and Revision
- 6.6 2025-2026 Middle School Program Guide and High School Program of Studies
- 6.7 Info/Action: High School Center II and Mountain View Upper Elementary School – Associate Easements and Maintenance Agreements

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

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: Dr. Berlin and Ms. Spillman

Motion carried by a 5:0:2 vote.

AGENDA ITEM NO 7.0 ITEMS PULLED FROM CONSENT AGENDA - None

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8.0 – SCHOOL DIVISION BUSINESS

Agenda Item No. 8.1 – Albemarle County Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEAC) [Annual Report](#) and [Presentation](#) from the Parent Advisory Committee

Agenda Item No. 8.2 – Human Resources [Annual Report](#)

Dr. Acuff asked when the last market study was conducted and whether teacher assistant salaries were reviewed. Staff confirmed that the study was done in 2021, and at that time, teacher assistant salaries were found to be at market value. They conduct an annual general wage comparison, focusing on hard-to-fill positions. The most recent analysis showed that special education teacher assistants are below market, and discussions are ongoing to address this.

Dr. Acuff also inquired about licensed professionals, such as school psychologists, and whether their salaries were correctly posted. Staff explained that the classification of these roles was originally structured based on system capabilities at the time, but the division now has a more robust HR system that allows for better organization of position titles.

Ms. Wang asked whether there is an Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) teacher affinity group. Staff clarified that while there isn't one yet, they are open to employee-led initiatives. All affinity groups are employee-driven, with HR providing initial facilitation but not leading them.

Ms. Wang also noted that students have observed a lack of Black educators in higher-level classes, such as AP courses. Similarly, the Asian student population sees very few teachers from their background in advanced coursework. Staff acknowledged this as an important issue and suggested analyzing course registration data to identify disparities. They discussed the importance of

creating pathways for educators of color to obtain credentials and training to be eligible for these positions.

Chair Le thanked staff for the report, noting that the level of detail and transparency has improved significantly compared to when HR was under the county's oversight. She highlighted concerns about high variability in fill rates across schools, particularly in schools with higher proportions of marginalized students. Staff responded by outlining steps taken to address substitute teacher shortages, including allocating additional school-based substitutes to schools with persistent vacancies. They flagged that the Intensive Support Center had a 0% fill rate, which was deemed unacceptable. To address this, a vacant feeder-pattern substitute position was reassigned to the Intensive Support Center and Post-High program to ensure vacancies are covered.

Mr. Pace asked whether teachers were still being pulled from their planning periods to serve as substitutes. Staff acknowledged that while this still happens occasionally, it is not as frequent as during or immediately after the pandemic. However, when positions remain unfilled, someone must cover those classes, which sometimes means classroom teachers or classified staff are reassigned. Staff emphasized the importance of increasing substitute teacher coverage to prevent such disruptions. They noted that current substitute fill rates are the best they have been, even compared to pre-pandemic levels, thanks to ongoing recruitment and training efforts. Additionally, substitutes were invited to participate in professional development through the Making Connections program, which has helped strengthen the substitute pool. While progress has been made, staff acknowledged that work remains to further improve substitute coverage. They highlighted that school-based permanent substitutes have been a valuable asset, reducing the need to pull teachers from classrooms.

Dr. Acuff inquired about how administrators handle substitute coverage for employees on planned medical leave for 3-4 days. Staff explained that in such cases, the expectation is that the absence is logged in Frontline, allowing a daily substitute to pick up the assignment, while school-based permanent substitutes remain available for unexpected emergencies. For longer absences (over 10 days), the division actively advertises and hires long-term substitutes. The goal is always to secure the most qualified individual, ideally a licensed teacher in the relevant subject area or someone with relevant experience and expertise.

Chair Le reiterated her appreciation to the Human Resources staff and Mr. Redding. There was a lot of important information shared.

Ms. Osborne also thanked Mr. Redding, as she appreciated having all the information in one place.

Agenda Item No. 8.3 – The School Board took a break from 8:00 p.m. to 8:10 p.m.

Agenda Item No. 8.4 – High School Centers Name [Recommendation](#)

This item will be on the January 23, 2025 Consent Agenda for approval.

Mr. Pace inquired about the costs associated with renaming and signage updates. Ms. Karen Waters assured the board that renaming efforts would not be expensive and that building services were prioritizing this work to ensure timely signage for the new facility.

Ms. Osborne asked if the Board would be involved in approving the signage. Ms. Schmitt confirmed that, yes, they would and are in the process of renegotiating the space at Center I and signage is part of that contract.

Agenda Item No. 8.5 – FY 2024-25 First Quarter Financial [Report](#)

Ms. Osborne offered a motion to receive the FY 2024-25 First Quarter Financial Report. Mr. Paige **seconded the motion. A voice vote was called, and the motion passed with the following recorded votes:**

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: Dr. Berlin and Ms. Spillman

Motion carried by a 5:0:2 vote.

Agenda Item No. 8.6 – FY 26 [Budget Development and Compensation Update](#)

Maya Kumazawa, Director of Budget and Planning

Ms. Kumazawa posed three key questions to the Board:

1. Given limited revenues, what are their top one or two expenditure priorities?
2. What areas should staff review for financial efficiency?
3. What additional information would they like?

Insurance & Health Reserve Discussion:

- Chair Le inquired about the target market for insurance. Staff explained that the county transitioned to a self-insured model, covering multiple departments, including government construction and service authorities.
- Concerns were raised about the health reserve fund being below the target level, necessitating efforts to rebuild it while addressing rising medical costs.
- Discussion included strategies to limit healthcare expenditures, such as opening health clinics and exploring sustainable prescription drug plans.
- A staff member emphasized the importance of the health reserve in supporting employees and shared a comparison with other school systems.
- Board members discussed cost-saving benefits of an employee clinic, noting that it eliminates middleman costs and reduces expenses for common medical needs like strep tests.

Budget & Financial Planning:

- Dr. Acuff requested to revisit spending priorities and review the financial health of the reserve fund.
- Staff highlighted past challenges in predicting the local composite index (LCI) and emphasized a more strategic approach for the upcoming budget cycle.
- Board members expressed interest in reviewing last year's funded initiatives, such as SEL coaches, before committing to new programs.

- Mr. Paige inquired about communication to employees, and it was confirmed that employees were informed of premium increases through multiple communications.

Additional Budget Considerations:

- The Board discussed Scholar Studios funding and whether it should be centralized or managed at the high school level.
- They also mentioned exploring cost-saving initiatives related to logic models.
- There was interest in better tracking and reporting on financial efficiency efforts.

No. 9.0 OTHER BUSINESS

Agenda Item No. 9.0 Other Business by the Board Members and Superintendent

Dr. Acuff requested further discussion on the distinction between the *Help Me* platform and the *Anonymous Tip Line*.

Ms. Wang expressed concerns that many students, including herself, were unaware that *Help Me* could be used for reporting issues beyond mental health, such as bullying or harassment. She noted that the platform's name might unintentionally signal a focus on crises like drug use and mental health rather than broader concerns. She suggested that the lack of awareness may stem from insufficient promotion or communication about its full range of uses. Ms. Wang emphasized the value of student input on this matter, highlighting the importance of having a student representative in discussions on instructional and student support resources.

Agenda Item No. 9.1 Closed Meeting – None

Agenda Item No. 9.2 Closed Meeting Certification – None

Chair Le stated that this was the last board meeting for 2024 and wished everyone a peaceful and joyous season.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 10.0 ADJOURNMENT - At 9:09 p.m., hearing no objections, Chair Le adjourned the meeting of the Albemarle County School Board.

Chair

Clerk