

MINUTES

ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING OF THE ALBEMARLE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, January 9, 2025

[Meeting Video Link](#)

Due to the Governor's State of Emergency and potential hazardous road conditions from weather and refreezing, the January 9, 2025, Board meeting was held virtually.

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. Graham Paige, and Student Representative Cam Roper

ABSENT – None

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE - Superintendent Matthew Haas; School Division Counsel Josiah Black; Assistant School Division Counsel Erin Stone; Assistant Superintendent Clare Keiser; Assistant Superintendent Daphne Keiser; Assistant Superintendent Chandra Hayes; Assistant Superintendent Patrick McLaughlin; Chief Operating Officer Rosalyn Schmitt; 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. Haas 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 the appointment of a new School Board member for the Rio magisterial district for the remainder of the 2025 calendar year. Ms. Le seconded the **motion**. **A roll call vote was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 6:0:0 vote

AGENDA ITEM NO. 2.0 OPENING ACTIVITIES

Agenda Item No. 2.1 Call to Order - At 6:30 p.m., Dr. Haas called the Albemarle County School Board meeting back to order.

Dr. Haas made the following statement: "This meeting is being held electronically pursuant to Virginia state law due to the Governor's Declaration of a State of Emergency and potential hazardous road conditions resulting from severe weather and refreezing. The meeting is being streamed live on the Albemarle County Public School's website, and public comment may be offered through the Zoom waiting room feature in accordance with the School Board's protocol."

Agenda Item No. 2.2 Closed Meeting Certification - At 6:30 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. Ms. Le seconded the **motion**. **Roll was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 6:0:0 vote

Agenda Item No. 2.3 - Roll Call

Dr. Haas made the following statement: "In a few minutes, I will turn things over to Dr. Acuff for a special recognition of School Board Member Chuck Pace during the moment of silence. Before I do so, I ask that, along with our recognizing Chuck, we please keep two of our cherished staff members on our minds in their recent passing.

On December 25, Western Albemarle High School's beloved French Teacher Candace Cone passed away after battling cancer.

On December 28, Albemarle High School's beloved Theater and Social Studies Teacher Sal Giordano passed away after battling cancer.

We remember these special teachers who profoundly and positively impacted their students, colleagues, and school communities. Their passion, dedication, and care inspired all who knew them. Let us honor their legacies by supporting one another and continuing the meaningful work they so beautifully championed in their lives."

Dr. Acuff made the following statement: "In addition to the two ACPS teachers we lost last month, we lost a colleague on our school board, Chuck Pace. Chuck was in service all his adult life. He served in the military but for most of it he focused on education around children. Most of those years were with Albemarle County Public Schools as a teacher, a coach, an administrator, and last year as a member of the school board. From there he was appointed to fill the vacancy in January 2024. Chuck won the Rio district seat outright in a special election in November. Unfortunately, Chuck died a week after he was sworn into office. Chuck was an insightful, serious and hard-working member of the school board and will be sorely missed. Each of the school board members wrote a [remembrance](#) of Chuck that I would like added to the minutes."

Agenda Item No. 2.4 - Moment of Silence

Agenda Item No. 2.5 – Election of Officers and Appointment of School Board Clerk

Dr. Haas asked for nominations to serve as the Board Chair for the 2025 Calendar Year. Ms. Le nominated Dr. Kate Acuff

Hearing no further nominations, the nominations were closed; Ms. Le offered a **motion** to appoint Dr. Kate Acuff as the Chair of the 2025 School Board. Ms. Osborne seconded the **motion**. **Roll was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Mr. Paige, Ms. Osborne, Ms. Le, and Dr. Berlin

NAYS: Ms. Spillman

ABSTAIN: Dr. Acuff

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 4:1:1:0 vote

Chair Acuff asked for nominations to serve as the Vice Chair of the Board for the 2025 Calendar Year. Ms. Spillman nominated Dr. Rebecca Berlin.

Hearing no further nominations, the nominations were closed; Ms. Spillman offered a **motion** to appoint Dr. Rebecca Berlin as the Vice Chair of the 2025 School Board. Mr. Paige seconded the **motion**. **Roll was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

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

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: Dr. Berlin

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 5:0:1:0 vote

Mr. Paige offered a **motion** to appoint Ms. Christine Thompson as the Clerk of the School Board for the 2025 School Year. Dr. Berlin seconded the **motion**. **Roll was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 6:0 vote.

Agenda Item No. 2.6 – 2025 Appointments to Other Boards and Committees

Ms. Le offered a **motion** to approve the Board and Committee Assignments as follows:

Advisory Committee for Environmental Sustainability (ACES)	Graham Paige and Judy Le Alternate: Kate Acuff
Albemarle Education Foundation	Kate Acuff and Rebecca Berlin
Audit Committee	Ellen Osborne
CIP Advisory Committee	Kate Acuff and Allison Spillman

Communications Committee	Allison Spillman and Rebecca Berlin
Discipline Committee	Judy Le, Graham Paige, Allison Spillman Alternates: Ellen Osborne and Rebecca Berlin
Diversity & Equity Advisory Committee	Allison Spillman
Legislative Committee	Rebecca Berlin and Kate Acuff
New School Board Member Orientation	Josh Black
Piedmont Regional Education Program	Rebecca Berlin
Thomas Jefferson Adult & Career Regional Board	Ellen Osborne

Mr. Paige seconded the **motion. A voice vote was called, and the motion passed with the following recorded votes:**

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 6:0 vote

AGENDA ITEM NO. 3.0 APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 6:0 vote

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4.0 ANNOUNCEMENTS

Agenda Item No. 4.1 Spotlight – There was no Spotlight for this meeting.

Agenda Item No. 4.2 School Board/Superintendent Business

Chair Acuff made the following announcement: “The School Board has been advised by legal counsel that under Virginia Code, we may appoint an interim member to fill the vacant school board seat. State law also requires that any appointment be made within 45 days of the vacancy, by February 3rd. Seven applications were received before the January 7th deadline. The Board will

interview candidates in a special meeting on January 16th at 6:30 p.m. and hold a public hearing on January 23rd during our regularly scheduled work session to receive community input. After the public hearing, the Board will enter a closed session to deliberate and then return to the open session to announce our decision. The selected candidate will begin their service at the February 13th board meeting. All applicant information and meeting details are available on our website.”

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5.0 PUBLIC COMMENT

Katie George, a parent of twin first graders in the county school system, residing in North Garden. She expressed concerns about school closures due to the weather, feeling that the plan appears to be waiting for warmer temperatures rather than actively addressing icy conditions. Ms. George acknowledged different perspectives as a family from up north but noted that many residents share similar concerns. Ms. George suggested measures such as increased salting, sanding, and the use of bus chains to enhance safety while keeping schools open, and proposed training for school bus drivers on driving in snow, noting that other schools and communities continue operating under similar conditions. She expressed frustration with ongoing closures despite main roads being cleared and other area schools reopening.

Brendan Byrne of the White Hall district echoed Ms. George’s concerns, believing the district has become overly cautious in school closure decisions in the pursuit of equity. He argued that risk is inherent in daily life and that avoiding all potential accidents is unrealistic. He expressed concern that excessive caution is harming students by limiting their educational opportunities. Mr. Byrne acknowledged the necessity of closures earlier in the week but felt the extended closures were unnecessary. He urged the board to reconsider its approach to balancing safety with maintaining instructional time.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6.0 APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

- 6.1 Approval of Consent Agenda
- 6.2 Approval of the Minutes
- 6.3 Religious Exemption
- 6.4 Personnel Action
- 6.5 Personnel Action – Athletic Coaches
- 6.6 For Action: Policy Review and Revision
- 6.7 School Board Members and School Board Clerk Code of Conduct
- 6.8 FY 2024-2025 Carry Forward of Fund Balances
- 6.9 FY 2023-2024 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR)
- 6.10 Superintendent’s Designee to Attend Board Meetings in His Absence

Ms. Spillman asked that **Item 6.5 Personnel Action – Athletic Coaches** be pulled from the Consent Agenda and voted on separately so that she could abstain from the vote due to a potential conflict of interest.

Ms. Osborne offered a motion to approve the Consent Agenda minus **Item 6.5 Personnel Action – Athletic Coaches**. Ms. Le **seconded the motion. A voice vote was called, and the motion passed with the following recorded votes:**

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 6:0 vote

AGENDA ITEM NO 7.0 ITEMS PULLED FROM CONSENT AGENDA

Ms. Osborne offered a motion to approve Item **6.5 Personnel Action – Athletic Coaches** of the Consent Agenda. Ms. Le **seconded the motion. Roll was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

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

NAYS: None

ABSTAIN: Ms. Spillman

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 5:0:1:0 vote

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8.0 – SCHOOL DIVISION BUSINESS

Agenda Item No. 8.1 FY 2023-2024 - [4th Quarter Financial Report](#)

Ms. Osborne offered a motion to receive the FY 2023-2024 Fourth Quarter Financial Report. Ms. Spillman **seconded the motion. A voice vote was called, and the motion passed with the following recorded votes:**

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

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 6:0 vote

Agenda Item No. 8.2 Break – The School Board did not take a break.

Agenda Item No. 8.3 [Math Curriculum Adoption Update](#)

Ms. Spillman asked how staff were picking the parents to be on this committee. Ms. Green explained that staff had the principles to reach out to families. It was very similar to how we led the language arts adoption process. It was very open.

Ms. Spillman then asked about the budget implications for next year. Staff do not have those definitive answers. We would have to look a lot more deeply at what sort of reporting and follow-up is going to be on our new curriculum. Mr. Dommer further explained that the rubric that has been developed for the teams to review all the programs and assessments and data management is a key component to how we'll be evaluating the programs. The Bellwether report was to make sure that we had a better system for formative assessment, especially in elementary schools and math.

Cam Roper spoke about how math skills snowball and agreed with that concept. However, they inquired about ways to make sure that students don't get left behind. Ms. Green explained that the tendency she has seen in math is that the successful people move on and then those who don't quite get the idea do get left behind. What Cam is speaking to may actually lend itself more to what classroom practices are. So, part of what we are hoping to continue working with teachers on is what their classroom practices are. We are looking at programs and best practices.

Ms. Osborne asked if there was excitement on the ground with teachers about adopting a new math curriculum. We have heard absolute excitement and what opportunities we might find in this newness.

Dr. Acuff asked Ms. Green to speak to the timeline - that it seemed crunched in terms of hoping to have a launch in 25-26 when we may not have a product selected until May. And hearing from teachers about the challenge of implementing literacy program. Ms. Green explained that in regards to the standards, specifically the teachers are teaching and we can see that connection with a new program for instruction. What we are considering is what these programs are offering in the way of actual training and professional learning when it comes to us implementing a specific program, so that is very much something on our radar. Are we going to be able to support teachers sustainably?

Dr. Berlin noted that staff be cognizant of the potential fatigue on the K5 teachers coming after an intensive year of both professional development and support. And added that this board understands how much the teachers are the backbone of everything that we do. She also inquired about budgeting as we go into this, is there anything we can do to make sure we're supporting them in this adoption? There will be special education teachers on the committee and is there anything else staff are doing as the Committee will be doing to ensure that this curriculum meets the needs of all students, including those children with special needs. We know one curriculum can't meet everyone's needs but we make sure we find a curriculum that supports the needs of the majority of our children.

Agenda Item No. 8.4 [HELPme Anonymous Reporting System Update](#) - Our new HELPme app offers students, staff, and families a confidential way to access wellness resources, report concerning behaviors, request help, and connect with mental health support anytime. This app has replaced the one previously used, Anonymous Alerts. HELPme has introduced improvements to our anonymous reporting system.

Dr. Acuff inquired about student training and how that worked. Mr. Nelson replied that student training is offered from 5th through 8th grade, and it is on K through 5 websites. We have about fifteen parents that have submitted responses for HELPme. But we don't train students yet, and that's one of the conversations that we're starting to have with elementary principals - do we start to introduce this in fifth grade, and do we start to introduce in 4th grade? That's part of the iterative process of evaluating the system, but we started with our secondary schools because that's where we were with anonymous alerts. Then we're going to continue for that feedback piece.

Dr. Acuff asked Student Representative Cam Roper about their level of awareness of this app. Cam had not heard about anything like this before tonight, but they did not know how to access the program.

Cam asked about micro aggressions, and if that sort of thing can be reported through the HELPme app or is that the sort of thing students would go to a counsellor for or could it be both. Additionally, Cam noted that they barely knew any students that read the newsletters that might include the information on Helpme. Mr. Nelson replied that's what we are working on – how do we expand? How do we get this out to more students? We understand how it can get glossed over. We would like feedback about how we can make this better and how we can get into more people's hands so that they know it's there and how we can support students.

Agenda Item No. 8.5 School Safety and Security Overview - Staff presented an overview of work related to safety and security practices at ACPS. The presentation included an overview of staffing, policies and practices, physical infrastructure, partnership with student services, and planned work ahead. It included recommendations to update the strategic plan to more explicitly capture an objective and strategies related to safety.

Dr. Berlin expressed appreciation for the presentation's thoroughness, especially as budget planning season approaches. She inquired about the top needs for the upcoming budget. In response, Mr. Bradley identified key security-related budget priorities: Weapons screening systems – A critical need, with some grant funding identified to offset costs. Vape detection systems – Ensuring installation across all secondary schools. Transportation security – Updating bus security technology, including cameras, communication systems, and screening tools. Access control improvements – Addressing school security needs such as gates, fencing, and repairs to vulnerable access points. Ongoing safety needs – Acknowledging that additional security concerns may arise and will need to be addressed as they are identified. He emphasized the importance of continued assessment and communication to effectively meet safety and security challenges.

Mr. Paige asked whether tabletop exercises include discussions with principals about the need for additional school resource officers (SROs). Mr. Bradley responded that the experience with current SROs has been positive, highlighting Officer Kazinski as a beneficial presence. While survey results are still pending, initial feedback suggests that communities view SROs as a valuable resource, particularly in high schools. He noted that as he engages with families and staff, there is encouragement to expand the program. However, he emphasized the importance of careful hiring, proper training, and ensuring that SROs are placed in ways that positively impact students.

Mr. Paige inquired about the Lightspeed system, specifically the response time between detection, reporting, and action. Mr. Bradley explained that when a student types something concerning on their laptop, the Lightspeed system captures it in real time. The alert is then sent to designated staff within the district based on a call system. The initial review takes approximately 10 to 15 minutes to determine if the alert is actionable. During school hours: Staff members immediately notify school personnel to engage in the situation. After hours: If the concern is serious, principals are contacted, and law enforcement may be involved. Mr. Bradley emphasized that these alerts are taken very seriously, particularly in cases involving student distress, self-harm risks, or school safety threats. The goal is to address issues as quickly as possible to ensure student well-being.

No. 9.0 OTHER BUSINESS

Agenda Item No. 9.0 Other Business by the Board Members and Superintendent - None

Dr. Haas expressed appreciation for the staff's dedication and hard work in preparing and delivering the presentations. Additionally, he extended his gratitude to the School Board for their support, acknowledging their role in fostering a collaborative approach to addressing key issues.

Dr. Acuff took a moment to clarify her earlier remarks regarding committee assignments and the Public Education Foundation (PEF). She acknowledged that she may have been too blunt in her comments about Charlottesville's PEF, which has been in existence for over a decade. During her time on the board, the foundation faced financial challenges but has since flourished, aligning its

projects with ACPS's strategic plan, goals, and mission. She emphasized that PEF does excellent work and recalled the role of the Albemarle Foundation for Education's executive director, who ensured coordination rather than overlap between the two organizations. She expressed regret for any miscommunication and apologized to the PEF board.

Mr. Paige added that one of PEF's notable contributions is the summer science workshop at UVA, which brings together students from both Charlottesville and Albemarle County, highlighting it as one of their most impactful programs.

Ms. Osborne raised concerns about road conditions following severe weather, particularly the delays in clearing rural back roads. As someone personally affected, she asked how the process could be expedited to allow schools to reopen sooner.

Dr. Haas clarified that the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is solely responsible for road clearing and maintenance—neither Albemarle County nor the school system has the authority to plow, treat, or clear roads. The school division's role is limited to monitoring and communication:

- School patrol staff drive assigned routes to assess road conditions, including rural and urban areas.
- Photos and reports are compiled and shared with the board to illustrate road impassability.
- Ongoing coordination with Albemarle County Police and VDOT ensures the most current information is available.

Dr. Haas noted that the widespread impact of the storm across the state stretched VDOT's resources, limiting their ability to reallocate crews to specific areas. While VDOT handles road clearing, the school division remains focused on gathering data and communicating updates to support decision-making.

Chief Operating Officer Ms. Rosalyn Schmitt emphasized that the recent storm was uniquely severe, impacting not just rural back roads but also neighborhood streets near schools, such as those around Woodbrook Elementary, which were covered in ice. She clarified that the school division's decision to close was not a matter of back roads versus main roads, as both were dangerous. She highlighted that, in contrast, all school properties were properly cleared and salted, including parking lots and sidewalks, making them safe for walking. This is because maintaining school grounds is the county's responsibility, whereas road clearing falls under VDOT's jurisdiction.

Public Affairs & Strategic Communications Officer Dr. Helen Dunn noted that the division has expanded its explanations and rationale in weather-related communications. She suggested further discussions with the new Communications Committee on enhancing transparency and clarity. Additionally, she proposed convening a Communications Advisory Committee—including employees, students, and families—to gather input and refine messaging. The goal is to continuously improve communication so that the public fully understands the reasoning behind school closure decisions.

Agenda Item No. 9.1 Closed Meeting – None.

Agenda Item No. 9.2 Closed Meeting Certification – None.

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

Chair

Clerk