MEETING MINUTES

JOINT SCHOOLS WORKING COMMITTEE

A Joint Committee of the
School Board of Stafford County and the Stafford County Board of Supervisors

May 25, 2023
5:00 p.m.
Alvin Y. Bandy Administrative Center
(Executive Session Room)
31 Stafford Avenue, Stafford, VA 22554

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Call to Order

The meeting was convened at 5:00 p.m.

B. Roll-Call

The following committee members were in attendance:

Darrell English – Board of Supervisors (Hartwood District)
Monica Gary* – Board of Supervisors (Aquia District)
Maya Guy – School Board (Aquia District)
Patricia Healy, Committee Co-Chair – School Board (Rock Hill District)
Maureen Siegmund – School Board (Garrisonville District)
Dr. Pamela Yeung, Committee Co-Chair – School Board (Garrisonville District)

School Board Member Susan Randall (George Washington District) and Board of Supervisors Member Tom Coen (George Washington District) attended as observers.

**Ms. Gary arrived at 5:02 p.m. Until her arrival, Supervisor Coen participated in her stead.*

Also in attendance were the following staff:

County	School Division
Randal Vosburg, County Administrator	Dr. Thomas Taylor, Superintendent
Michael Morris, Deputy County Administrator	Dr. James Stemple, Executive Director of Constituent Services
	Keba Baldwin, Executive Director of Transportation
	Jason Towery, Executive Director of Facilities and Maintenance
	Lionel White, Supervisor of Facilities Planning
	Melissa Hall, Clerk of the School Board

C. ~~Authorization for Member(s) to Participate Electronically in the Meeting~~

No committee members participated electronically.

II. AGENDA APPROVAL

A. Approval of the Agenda

Dr. Yeung moved, and Mr. English seconded, that the committee approve the meeting agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Approval of the February 28, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Dr. Yeung moved, and Ms. Siegmund seconded, that the committee approve the meeting minutes of February 28, 2023. The motion passed by a vote of five ayes and one abstain (Coen).

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Budget:

- **Five-Year Budget Plans – School Board and Board of Supervisors**
- **Contingency Fund for Emergency Repairs and Other Unexpected Expenses**
- **Budget Transparency**

Budget Transparency

At the request of Mr. English, the committee discussed the term “a keep-the-lights-on budget” and what it meant. He disagreed with the School Board’s use of this term for their local funding request when there are items in the schools’ budget that “should not be done.” Dr. Yeung added that Supervisor Meg Bohmke has also requested that the School Board use a more appropriate term. To aid the committee’s discussion on this request, Dr. Taylor disseminated copies of a summary of the School Board’s FY24 local funding request which was approved in February and presented to the Supervisors in March. The committee reviewed the summary, paying particular attention to the nondiscretionary items.

Dr. Taylor reminded the committee that Stafford Schools are one of the lowest-funded public school systems in the Commonwealth. He asked them to point out any line item that they believe should not be listed in the “nondiscretionary items” section of the summary document. Ms. Gary stated that she has no argument with any of the items in that section of the budget. Mr. English stated that using the term “keep the lights on” insinuates that electricity to the schools will literally be turned off if the Supervisors do not provide the full amount of funding requested by the School Board.

Ms. Siegmund stated that the message the School Board is trying to send is that without making any cuts to the programming we are currently offering, we need that additional

$16.4M of local funding. For example, by cutting the $253,200 earmarked for "Community Engagement: Special Events," we would no longer be able to have career- and college-planning events for students, we would no longer be able to recognize seniors for their decision day, we would no longer be able to recognize our retiring employees, etc. These are events that we offer every year, and they are an important way to make big impacts for relatively low costs. These events make students and employees feel valued and respected. Ms. Siegmund further stated that the extra $16.4M is needed largely due to inflation in all areas of the economy and the growth in the number of students and employees within the school division.

Mr. English asked how much these events cost and why some of them are held outside the county rather than inside. Dr. Taylor explained that the recent employee recognition event cost only $50.05 per person. He also stated that we routinely utilize discounts and donations to offset the costs of our events, and most of our events are held within the county. He explained, however, that when he and his team were searching for a venue that would work for the recent employee recognition event, they were unsuccessful in finding one within Stafford County that would fulfill all of the necessary requirements. The least expensive of all the suitable options was found to be the Silk Mill in Fredericksburg. Mr. English recommended implementing cost-savings measures in future, such as reducing the number of guests for these events.

Five-Year Budget Plans

Ms. Healy asked her fellow committee members to consider ways for the two boards to improve their relationship and foster a more positive budget-creation process on both sides of the aisle. To aid this discussion, Dr. Taylor disseminated copies of his proposed five-year budget plan for FY24-FY28. The committee briefly reviewed and discussed the proposed plan, and also talked about the pending FY24 State budget.

Ms. Gary recommended that the two boards hold more meetings leading up to the budget adoption, even if it is only one or two more. She asked that staff determine whether such a thing would be possible. Ms. Healy agreed, and urged better communication as well. Dr. Yeung stated that meetings are only successful if there is positive dialogue between the two parties, and if all of the meeting attendees want to participate. Dr. Yeung also stated that one-on-one meetings between members of the two boards are also extremely beneficial.

Mr. English stated that he does not like when the School Board members try to get members of the public to "work against" the Supervisors. He spoke about citizens who have told him they could not have afforded to pay the tax rate that the School Board requested. Mr. English also stated that it should not be an "us versus them" situation. For example, the two boards should have held budget town halls together instead of the School Board holding town halls and not inviting their counterpart on the Board of Supervisors.

Ms. Guy countered by saying that it is the job of the School Board to advocate for the students and employees of Stafford County Public Schools. She stated that the School Board has not asked parents to advocate against the Board of Supervisors; rather, the School Board has been asking parents to simply advocate for the educational needs of their children. This does not have to be adversarial unless the Supervisors make it so. Ms. Guy also noted that the committee just spent 10 minutes debating the relatively small cost of an employee recognition event that had a hugely positive impact on employee morale. In today's competitive job market, these types of events are important in our efforts to retain good staff (especially since we lack the funding to give them competitive salaries). Ms. Guy stated that with the exception of Dr. Yeung, the Supervisors do not seem to truly understand how dire the school division's need are.

Ms. Siegmund stated that past school boards did not ask for the funding that was truly needed – they only asked for what they felt they could get, which was never sufficient. Without a long-term plan, this will continue to be an issue.

Ms. Gary stated that if the two boards want to be productive and find solutions, individual members must take time to meet with one another and have conversations. Additionally, members have to show respect to one another during public meetings.

Dr. Yeung stated that building relationships is important, and she invited all school board members to call her at any time to discuss issues.

Ms. Healy stated that she agrees, in hindsight, with Mr. English's comment that the School Board's budget town halls should have been conducted collaboratively with the Supervisors.

Mr. English asked Mr. Vosburg whether the School Board could be invited to sit down with the Supervisors at some point during the Supervisors' next retreat. Ms. Gary voiced her full support for this request. Dr. Yeung stated that she is certainly amenable to inviting the School Board to meet, but it may not be feasible for it to occur during the Supervisors' retreat.

Contingency Fund for Emergency Repairs and Other Unexpected Expenses

Ms. Healy stated that the school division needs a larger contingency fund for emergency repairs and other unexpected expenses. She asked the Supervisors to keep this need in mind when it approves the School Board's future funding requests.

Mr. English asked why the School Board does not use its surplus funds at year-end for these types of expenses. Dr. Taylor responded that they do use their year-end surplus for this, but the amount of savings is very small. In fact, this year it will be less than a million dollars. A better plan for the long-term is to gradually build a 3R budget that can account for this.

B. Future School Sites – Update

Dr. Yeung asked for an update on the locations for Elementary Schools #18 and #19. Dr. Taylor reported that Elementary School #18 will be located adjacent to the new High School #6 on Truslow Road. The committee briefly discussed the property, particularly its ingress and egress points, and the associated roadway work. Mr. English asked if the cost for improvements to Truslow Road could be added to the loan for the High School #6 project. Dr. Taylor stated that it can be tied to the project, since the loan is through the Virginia Public School Authority (VPSA) bond program. Mr. Towery cautioned that any such addition to the project must be made very soon to avoid causing a delay to the project.

Mr. English asked what the estimated cost of the High School #6 project is. Dr. Taylor recommended that the committee not discuss the cost until after a contract has been awarded. Speaking publicly about it at this point will jeopardize the school division's bargaining position. He offered, however, to meet with the Supervisors in a closed session to discuss the cost estimates.

With respect to Elementary School #19, Ms. Healy reported that no decision has been made as of yet. Several sites are under consideration.

C. Location(s) of High School EMT Programs

Mr. Coen reported that some Fire & Rescue stations do not want to allow some of our EMT students to perform their practicum hours in their stations because they do not receive the same training as our other EMT students. He also reported that the paramedics who teach the EMT classes in our schools are apparently not permitted to respond to emergency situations within the school due to the presence of the school nurse.

D. Potential Acquisition of Bus Stop-Arm Cameras

Ms. Healy stated that the school division is currently exploring the feasibility of installing cameras on all of the bus stop-arms to capture images of vehicles that illegally pass stopped buses. The goal of the project is to make students safer when they are entering and exiting the bus. The committee briefly discussed this matter, with Dr. Taylor advising that a new local ordinance would be required. Dr. Yeung requested data to show how often this problem is currently being reported by bus drivers.

V. SCHEDULING OF NEXT MEETING

A. Scheduling of Next Meeting

The committee will hold its next meeting in August. The clerks of both boards will poll their committee members for potential dates and times.

Ms. Guy urged the committee to allow more than one hour for future meetings to ensure ample time for discussion.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

A. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.