

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE ALBEMARLE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD
Thursday, September 11, 2025
[Meeting Video Link](#)

Roll Call - UPON THE ROLL BEING CALLED, THE FOLLOWING WERE PRESENT:

Board Members - Dr. Kate Acuff, Dr. Rebecca Berlin, Ms. Ellen Osborne, Mr. Graham Paige, Ms. Leslie Pryor, Ms. Allison Spillman, and Student School Board Representative Ms. Amy Wang

Absent – Ms. Judy Le

Staff Members - Superintendent Matthew Haas; School Division Counsel Josiah Black; Assistant Superintendent Patrick McLaughlin; Assistant Superintendent Daphne Keiser; Assistant Superintendent Chandra Hayes; Chief Operating Officer Rosalyn Schmitt; Acting Public Affairs and Strategic Communications Officer Jennifer Butler; and Acting Clerk of the Board Lauren Crawford

At the start of the meeting, Chair Acuff made the following statement: *“Ms. Judy Le is out of town on business and unable to attend tonight’s meeting in person. As permitted by School Board Policy BDD and Virginia Code § 2.2-3708.3, which allow for remote participation under certain circumstances, Ms. Le will be joining us by phone for Item 1.1, the Closed Meeting.”*

AGENDA ITEM NO. 1.0 CLOSED MEETING - At 5:30 p.m., Mr. Paige 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 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 for School Division Counsel to provide an update on contract negotiations with the Albemarle Education Association and to advise the School Board with regard to recent Executive Orders at the federal level. Ms. Pryor seconded the **motion. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously (6-0).** [Ms. Le was absent]

AGENDA ITEM NO. 2.0 OPENING ACTIVITIES

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

Agenda Item No. 2.2 Closed Meeting Certification - At 6:31 p.m., Mr. Paige 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. Osborne seconded the **motion. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously (6-0).** [Ms. Le was absent]

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. 3.1 APPROVAL OF AGENDA - Ms. Osborne offered a **motion** to approve the agenda. Ms. Spillman seconded the **motion. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously (6-0).** [Ms. Le was absent]

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4.0 ANNOUNCEMENTS

Agenda Item 4.1 School Board and Superintendent Business

School Board Student Representative Amy Wang, Albemarle High School – [Statement](#)

Dr. Chandra Hayes, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, requested the Board grant 12-month ACPS employees a half day on Wednesday, November 26th. This aligns with the recent decision made by the governor for government employees.

Dr. Berlin offered a motion to grant 12-month employees a half day on Wednesday, November 26th. Mr. Paige **seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously (6-0).** [Ms. Le was absent]

Ms. Rosalyn Schmitt reported on the new security screening systems, first piloted at large athletic events last fall, are now in daily use at the three comprehensive high schools. The rollout began last week in phases, and while the process represents a major change, schools are quickly becoming more efficient. Current clearance times are improving; Monticello by 9:00 a.m., Western Albemarle by 9:05 a.m., and Albemarle by 9:07 a.m., with further gains expected. Ms. Schmitt emphasized that the goal is a safe, secure, and smooth start to the day that does not interfere with instruction, and continuous improvements are being made to meet that goal.

The Board recognized September as Suicide Prevention Awareness Month with a statement and resolution.

Dr. Chandra Hayes read a statement recognizing September as **Suicide Prevention Awareness Month**, emphasizing the importance of raising awareness, sharing hope, and reminding the community that suicide is preventable. The statement highlighted national initiatives such as the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline and acknowledged ACPS's local supports, including the "Help Me" confidential reporting system, mental health specialists, counselors, and psychologists who provide daily guidance to students. Staff present at the meeting were recognized for their service, along with those unable to attend. The division's efforts such as Teen Mental Health First Aid were noted as part of building a culture where every student feels seen, valued, and supported. The statement concluded with a call to work together as educators, families, and community partners to ensure that no student feels alone.

Ms. Spillman read a [resolution](#) recognizing September as **Suicide Prevention Awareness Month**

Agenda Item No. 4.2 Spotlight on Education

Staff Recognition – Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

Presented by: Cabel Guy, Coordinator of School Counseling
Miles Nelson, Coordinator of Mental Health & Wellness
Kevin Kirst, Executive Director of Student Services

Staff emphasized the daily work of school counselors, psychologists, and mental health support specialists in helping students manage emotions, access resources, and build trust with adults. They noted the importance of supporting not only students who struggle, but also their peers who often carry the burden of concern. Mr. Guy thanked the Board for funding mental health positions that serve as the frontline of student well-being.

Staff also highlighted the contributions of community partners, including Region 10, SPARC (Suicide Prevention Awareness Resource Council), and others who strengthen the “community of care.” T-shirts were distributed to honor school-based mental health staff. The division’s implementation of Teen Mental Health First Aid was also noted—beginning with freshmen, with the goal that all high school students will be trained within four years to recognize signs of distress and connect peers to help.

The Board and community were asked to recognize and thank the school-based mental health professionals present at the meeting for their dedication to supporting students every day.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5.0 PUBLIC COMMENT

Sydney Duncan (Jack Jouett), a senior and captain of the cross-country team, spoke on behalf of classmates regarding concerns at Albemarle High School. She described challenges with the new weapons detectors, noting long lines, delays in getting to class (ranging from 5 minutes to over an hour), and feeling disrespected during bag checks. She expressed that while the division emphasizes both safety and attendance, the current procedures are making it difficult for students to get to class on time without stress. Sydney also raised concerns about overcrowding in hallways, restrictions during lunch, and strict enforcement of online passes that can result in lunch detention even when teachers forget to send them. She emphasized that students feel a loss of dignity and instructional time is being compromised. She urged the Board and administration to involve students in decision-making, stressing that safety measures should not come at the expense of student well-being, dignity, or access to education.

Indigo Mathon, a senior at Albemarle High School from the Rio District, spoke on behalf of classmates who feel unheard and overwhelmed. While acknowledging the importance of school safety, Indigo raised concerns about the new weapons detectors, which have created long delays, sometimes up to 45 minutes, for students entering the building, resulting in significant loss of instructional time and tardy marks. Indigo also highlighted issues with bathroom access, noting that only 40–45 stalls are available for over 2,200 students, well below the state’s 30-to-1 requirement. With some facilities closed, students risk lunch detention if their timed bathroom pass exceeds 10 minutes, even if delays are unavoidable. Overcrowding in hallways, classrooms, and lunch spaces was also cited as a serious problem, leaving many students without adequate space to sit or take breaks. Indigo urged the Board to reconsider these policies with meaningful student input, stating that while intended to promote safety, they instead create barriers, stress, and a sense of control rather than support.

Heather Lindsay, a parent of an Albemarle High School student and school counselor at Lakeside, thanked the Board for its support of mental health in schools and for recognizing the work of school counselors. With 25 years in the division, she shared that counselors have always been on the front line of students’ mental health and social-emotional needs, addressing concerns ranging from anxiety and conflict to loss and thoughts of self-harm. She emphasized that counselors’ daily work often shifts unexpectedly to respond to student concerns first, and she stressed that their role cannot be underestimated. Ms. Lindsay expressed gratitude for the Board’s recognition during Suicide Prevention Awareness Month and for restoring the Coordinator of School Counseling position, noting that this leadership will strengthen division-wide support and outcomes for students. She closed by inviting Board members to visit and observe the work of school counselors firsthand, reiterating her appreciation for their continued commitment to safe, healthy schools.

Heidi Gilman Bennett, a parent from the Samuel Miller District and officer of Family Council, spoke in her personal capacity about high school capacity needs. She urged the Board to prioritize building a new Northern high school, noting that approved housing developments in Albemarle will quickly fill such a facility to 1,500 students within 10 years. She strongly opposed building Center 3, arguing it would not resolve overcrowding at Western or Monticello, would raise transportation and operating costs, and pose safety and relationship-building risks in separating students between sites. Instead, she called for additions to existing

schools and cautioned against further reliance on trailers. Ms. Bennett stressed the urgency of developing a detailed, realistic plan for new construction and improvements, rather than a placeholder list of projects. She said families are already meeting with Supervisors, the Planning Commission, and housing experts, and urged the Board to deliver concrete solutions that provide safe, functional spaces where students can thrive.

Jim Dillenbeck, a resident of the Rio District and candidate for the School Board, emphasized his belief in education as the foundation for student success. He shared concerns about recent SOL test results, noting particularly low performance among Black students at Woodbrook Elementary (28% passing math, 26% passing reading, and 3% passing 5th-grade science). He pointed out that division-wide, more than half of K–12 students of color failed reading, math, and science SOLs, with two-thirds failing history, and highlighted the persistent 27–32% achievement gap between Black and white students. Mr. Dillenbeck stressed that the problem lies with the system, not students or teachers, and called for meaningful changes to improve outcomes for all students regardless of race, background, or economic status. He also urged the Board to move forward quickly with planning for a fourth high school, citing overcrowding concerns dating back to the mid-1990s.

ITEM NO. 6.0 APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA - Ms. Osborne offered a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Dr. Berlin **seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously (6-0).** [Ms. Le was absent]

- 6.1 Approval of Consent Agenda
- 6.2 Personnel Action
- 6.3-6.6 Religious Exemption (4)
- 6.7 Local Gifted Plan
- 6.8 Personnel Action: Athletic Coaches
- 6.9 For Action: Policy Review and Revisions
- 6.10 For Information: Policy Review and Revisions
- 6.11 For Action: Establish of Meeting Time, Date and Place 2026 and the FY 2026/27 Budget Development Calendar

AGENDA ITEM NO. 7.0 ITEMS PULLED FROM CONSENT AGENDA – None.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8.0 – SCHOOL DIVISION BUSINESS

Agenda Item No. 8.1 [Building Services Annual Department Overview & Project Updates](#) - The Building Services Department provided the School Board with an overview of 2025 construction and maintenance projects, as well as an annual departmental report.

Mr. Paige asked about vegetation and protective cover on the Mountain View property shown in a presentation slide. Mr. Wertman clarified that the photo was taken earlier in the design process, before grass had grown, and confirmed that the area had since been hydro-seeded and now has grass coverage.

Chair Acuff raised a question about the effectiveness of recycling in schools, noting concerns about responsibility and consistency. Mr. Wertman responded that efforts are underway to streamline recycling practices, including reducing packaging through purchasing changes, training custodial staff (who speak many different languages), and focusing initially on paper recycling in classrooms. Composting is also being piloted, with Albemarle High School highlighted as a positive example.

Agenda Item No. 8.2 – The School Board took a break from 7:37 p.m. to 7:47 p.m.

Agenda Item No. 8.3 High School Facilities Planning – This is a continuation from the August 14 Work Session, where staff provided background information about capital planning for high schools and alternatives for moving forward. The purpose of the session was for the School Board to discuss and provide feedback about their long-term vision for adding building capacity for high school students. The Long Range Planning Advisory Committee (LRPAC) will incorporate School Board feedback into the annual recommendation in October.

The Board held an extended discussion on high school facilities planning in response to persistent overcrowding and projected enrollment growth. Members agreed that the current center model, while originally envisioned as part of a broader strategy with additions and modernizations, has not been implemented at full scale, leaving the division behind on capacity needs. With thousands of new housing units already approved in Albemarle County, the Board emphasized that both short-term and long-term solutions are required.

Staff explained that the Long Range Planning Advisory Committee begins with the division’s existing list of projects and updates priorities annually. Their work is intended to be a **needs-based plan**, while funding sources are considered separately. Members directed the committee to take a serious look at including a new comprehensive high school in its upcoming plan, alongside additions at existing high schools, particularly Western Albemarle. Staff noted that while current CIP resources could support a 200-seat addition at Western, doing so would come at the expense of other critical renovation projects, such as maintenance upgrades, bathroom improvements, and accessibility enhancements.

Board members expressed strong consensus that overcrowding must be addressed through both **short-term additions** and a **long-term commitment to a new northern high school** with a projected capacity of 1,200–1,600 students. A new high school would require redistricting, would be the most costly and disruptive option, but would balance enrollment across four schools and potentially resolve capacity issues for a generation. Members also noted the significant community benefit of locating a high school in northern Albemarle given the concentration of new development.

Several potential **funding strategies** were discussed, including:

- The proposed **1% local sales tax**, estimated to generate ~\$25 million annually which could be used directly or invested to accelerate financing for a new high school.
- A **bond referendum**, modeled after successful efforts in other Virginia localities which is supported through community engagement.
- Leveraging County-owned land for potential development partnerships.
- Modest adjustments to County borrowing while maintaining the triple-A bond rating.

Board members emphasized that the issue cannot continue to be deferred, noting that students are currently learning in overcrowded classrooms, with trailers and spaces lacking natural light, and that community trust requires clear action. Members stated that the division must press its case to the Board of Supervisors and engage the wider community to ensure support.

The discussion concluded with direction to the Long-Range Planning Advisory Committee to prepare a detailed update by the end of October that reflects both immediate capacity additions and a long-term pathway to constructing a new high school.

Agenda Item No. 8.4 SOL Performance Review - The mission of Learning for All, the strategic plan for Albemarle County Public Schools, states, “Working together as a team, we will end the predictive value of race, class, gender, and special capacities for our children’s success through high-quality teaching and learning for all. We seek to build relationships with families and communities to ensure that every student succeeds. We will know every student.” Performance on SOL tests are a key indicator of our progress in achieving this mission.

Dr. Patrick McLaughlin presented the division’s SOL performance data, highlighting trends over the past three years and ongoing instructional efforts. Board members raised questions about high-intensity tutoring, summer school supports, and how funds are being allocated to improve outcomes. Staff explained that high-intensity tutoring is conducted outside of class time with certified teachers, often before or after school or during intersessions, and has been partially used to support summer programs such as the Algebra Bridge.

Board members expressed concern about persistent achievement gaps, particularly for Black and Brown students, and asked whether current strategies are producing results. Staff noted some gains in math and science for Black students, though reading progress has lagged. Chronic absenteeism was identified as a continuing challenge, disproportionately affecting students of color, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students, though some schools have shown improvement.

The Board also discussed the importance of early childhood education, student nutrition, and broader social supports in closing gaps. Members pressed for more clarity on what strategies are working, emphasizing the need to evaluate program effectiveness as budget decisions are made. Staff described efforts to promote **data-driven instruction**, professional learning communities, and cross-school sharing of best practices, as well as expanding the “90-day planning” model to focus schools on short-term improvement targets.

Woodbrook Elementary was discussed as a school receiving intensive division-level support due to significant performance challenges. Staff are providing targeted assistance through curriculum and intervention coordinators and student support services. Redistricting history and concentrated poverty in certain attendance zones were also noted as contributing factors.

Superintendent Haas commended staff and teachers for progress, pointing to the division’s implementation of 97% of recommendations from the 2020 Bellwether study. He stressed persistence, likening improvement to a “flywheel effect” that requires sustained effort before gains accelerate. He cautioned against shifting strategies prematurely and noted that while SOL cut scores and test rigor continue to increase, ACPS maintains a graduation rate above 93%. He urged continued support for schools like Woodbrook without stigmatizing their students as “failures.”

Chair Acuff closed the discussion by acknowledging incremental progress, reaffirming commitment to new curricula and instructional strategies, and underscoring the importance of staying the course while holding the division accountable for measurable gains.

No. 9.0 OTHER BUSINESS

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

Mr. Paige asked about concerns raised by Albemarle High School students during public comment regarding security screening. Student Representative Amy Wang reported that conditions have improved over

the past week, though initial lines took 20 minutes to an hour. She also noted stress related to bathroom pass restrictions with limited facilities, which can result in detention.

Board members expressed concern about reports of inappropriate searches, including students being patted down, and one female student was asked to shake out her clothing in public. Members emphasized the need for improved staff training on appropriate procedures, better communication with students, and ensuring implementation does not humiliate or distress students.

Ms. Wang also offered her perspective on facilities planning, stating she supports the construction of a new high school. She noted that many students are currently taught in trailers, which are not conducive to a strong learning environment.

Agenda Item No. 9.2 Closed Meeting – None.

Agenda Item No. 9.3 Closed Meeting Certification – None.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 10.0 ADJOURNMENT - At 8:50 p.m., hearing no objections, Chair Acuff adjourned the meeting of the Albemarle County School Board.

Clerk

Chair