



MINUTES

CHARLOTTESVILLE CITY SCHOOL BOARD WORK SESSION & MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS CHARLOTTESVILLE AREA TECHNICAL EDUCATION CENTER (CATEC)

1000 East Rio Road, Charlottesville, VA

Thursday, October 23, 2025 (4:00 PM)

1.1 Call to Order: Emily Dooley, School Board Chair, called the work session to order at 4:01 p.m.

2.1 Roll Call of Board Members:

The following Board Members were present:

Ms. Amanda Burns

Ms. Shymora Cooper

Ms. Emily Dooley

Mr. Dom Morse

Mr. Chris Meyer

Ms. Nicole Richardson

Ms. Lisa Torres

Jayla Turner, Student
Representative

The following Board Members were absent:

None

The following Staff Members were present:

Dr. Royal A. Gurley, Jr.

Dr. Anna Isley

Mr. Pat Cuomo

Ms. Kim Powell

Ms. Carolyn Swift

Ms. Maria Lewis

Ms. Rachel Rasnake

Dr. T. Denise Johnson

Ms. Renee Hoover

Ms. Leslie Thacker

Ms. Julia Green

The following Staff Members were absent:

Beth Cheuk

2.1 Approval of Proposed Agenda: Ms. Torres made a motion, seconded by Ms. Burns, to approve the proposed agenda. Upon a roll-call vote, the motion passed with Ms. Burns, Ms. Dooley, Mr. Morse, and Ms. Torres voting aye. 4 ayes, 0 nays. Ms. Cooper, Mr. Meyer, and Ms. Richardson were not present for this vote.

Items for Discussion

4.1 Early Childhood Learning Update: Dr. Elizabeth Korab, Planning Principal of the Charlottesville Early Learning Center, presented an update on the evolving work being done to prepare staff and the building for the opening of the Early Learning Center (ELC) in the fall of 2026, as part of the division reconfiguration. Topics covered the following key areas:

Topics of Discussion

- Bringing Everyone Up to Speed:
 - This section included information on the school's Name, Colors, and Mascot, which is the "Colts".

- The presentation also covered who and where the ELC is and the School Improvement Plan.
- Envisioning: Hopes & Dreams:
 - Goals included ensuring children are Kindergarten Ready STRONG.
 - Specific focus areas were Literacy, Mathematics, and Executive Functioning.
 - Other aspirations included Family Engagement, use of Developmental Screeners, and providing rich, purposeful, & inclusive experiences for students & families.
 - Emphasis was placed on the quote: "The hallmark of developmentally appropriate practice is intentionality" (LETRS p.11).
 - Long-term goals also included increasing enrollment and fostering aligned and intentional Community Partnerships.
- Staff Preparation Work:
 - Focus areas included the ELC Adult Culture, establishing commonalities in expectations; instructional resources, data & systems.
 - Professional Learning was noted at \$2/month\$.
 - Spring 2026 work sessions on operations were planned.
 - Central Office work involved Reconfiguration with HR and Regular meetings.
 - Inclusion Ideas for the Greeting were reviewed, which included providing communication supports for students with speech and language challenges.
- "Space" Preparation Work:
 - The work involved clarifying the why of decision making, visiting other schools, and ongoing handbook development & operations.
 - Details were provided about "THE plan" and VMDO's involvement.
 - Planning was ongoing for the Interim Center and the New Center & Committees.
 - For the Interim Center, plans included building use and accommodations.
 - The presentation showed "A" Building Level 2 Option 1, which featured classrooms that prioritize access to daylight.
 - Restroom accommodations were shown, including a Potty Step that is easy to move for cleaning and a Step 'n Wash sink that can be installed on the floor and retracted for cleaning.
 - The playground design, Option 1, focused on Gross Motor Play.
 - A rendering of the Proposed Center on Walker Campus was displayed.
 - The newly acquired land from UVA, Oaklawn, was discussed for its potential to provide cascading opportunities, with preschool feasibility to be determined soon.
 - ELC Staff Tasks included trying new ideas and finalizing Operations & Positive School Culture.

Discussion/Questions:

- Ms. Torres inquired about the planned enrollment, asking if the ELC was planning for 200 students. Dr. Korab confirmed this number, adding that it aligns with the current year's enrollment, while clarifying that a previously circulated figure of 217 may have represented the total number of available slots.
- Ms. Torres expressed excitement and asked a key question regarding the pedagogical approach: How the ELC plans to balance focused literacy instruction with intentional developmental play time. Dr. Korab responded by referencing the overarching goal from the presentation's Envisioning section: providing "The rich purposeful experience for families."
- Ms. Torres asked for specific changes being made now to support staff in the area of "science reading literacy support." Dr. Korab responded by stating that the entire team is taking an early childhood LETRS course.
- Mr. Morse asked Dr. Korab about the ELC's potential direction, specifically inquiring if the reach-out from Montessori was influencing their plans to move toward that model. Dr. Korab responded by confirming that the planning team is currently visiting those types of centers as part of their preparation work.
- Dr. Gurley provided an update on the "Why Oaklawn Matters" slide, detailing the status of UVA's newly acquired land. He confirmed that Mr. Sanders has permission to begin initial work, and that UVA commissioned Mitchell and Matthews to conduct extensive site massing, investigating the subsurface

conditions and topography to determine building feasibility. This research resulted in a substantial 40-50 page document outlining different building scenarios. The site, identified as offering "cascading opportunities" with a significant amount of usable and flexible land, appears promising for the ELC's "hopes/dreams" version, despite the presence of historic features. The team is now working with the City, VMDO, and utilizing the detailed report to expedite decision-making and determine the next steps, with the anticipation of using the Walker Campus as the interim location for two to three years.

- Ms. Dooley inquired about a "drop-dead date" for decision-making regarding the ELC's final location. Dr. Gurley clarified that regardless of the decision—whether the ELC remains at the Walker Campus or moves forward with the Oaklawn site—the team anticipates "camping out" for three years at the interim Walker location. He also noted that the final decision-making process is running concurrently with the financial planning aspects of the project.
- Ms. Powell confirmed that the high level of detail provided by the work turned over by Mitchell and Matthews gives them a high level of confidence that all necessary information will be presented for the decision-making process to occur early in the first quarter of the next calendar year. She noted that this timeline still projects the ELC to be at the Walker Campus for three years and is "not in jeopardy of missing any windows."
- Ms. Burns asked if VMDO would be taking over to draw new schematic plans for the Oaklawn site. The answer confirmed that the design work still needs to be done with the team that is currently working on it, indicating that while the preliminary site analysis is complete, the detailed design phase is next for the designated architectural team.
- Ms. Torres followed up on the timeline, asking if the interim period at the Walker Campus would still take three years even without the Oaklawn acquisition, specifically referencing the envisioned "wrap-around services" at the Walker site.
- Ms. Powell responded that the introduction and possibility of Oaklawn caused the timeline to shift to the more definite three-year period.
- Dr. Gurley elaborated, saying the FEI, which he felt caused a shift in focus, had drawn the city's attention in different directions. He agreed that even without the Oaklawn acquisition, the interim period likely would have still been three years.
- Ms. Dooley expressed appreciation that high school staff were present for the ELC update, acknowledging that the high school and the ELC are interconnected from a space perspective. Speaking for the board, she stated their eagerness to see the ELC "up and running" and recognized the importance of the "cascading effects" it will have.
- Her primary concern was financial transparency: as the board approaches the budget cycle, she noted that they need a sense of the anticipated financial ask for the ELC. Since they know the final number "is going to be a big number," she stressed that having this information would be helpful for them to know what they need to "lobby for setting aside."
- Ms. Cooper raised a concern regarding the preschool's daily schedule, noting that a 2:30 p.m. dismissal is challenging for working parents who cannot pick up their children at that time. She expressed hope that the ELC would be able to offer longer days to accommodate these families. Dr. Korab responded that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the YMCA is currently in the works to provide wrap-around care. She further noted that this care would be offered on a sliding scale payment model.
- Mr. Meyer inquired about the goal of increasing enrollment, noting that the division currently uses income qualifications for Pre-K students. He asked if there is an opportunity to expand access to the program beyond those specific income requirements. Dr. Korab responded that this topic has been a talking point during their visits to other centers. She explained that the team is currently examining how other divisions determine local criteria, though she noted that funding mechanisms make the inclusion of private or non-qualifying attendance complicated. Mr. Meyer also appreciated the proposed YMCA wrap-around care services.
- Ms. Burns expressed gratitude for the update and focused on the goal of increasing enrollment. She inquired about future engagement opportunities designed to "meet families where they are" in the community, such as at housing communities and city events. She specifically asked about efforts to assist families directly with the application process. Dr. Korab acknowledged that the previous year's Pre-K day

was organized on short notice. She explained that future plans involve combining Pre-K and Kindergarten registration events to provide additional support for families. She also noted that the division is emphasizing the importance of applying by a priority deadline.

4.2 Student Supports and Responses: Superintendent Dr. Royal A. Gurley, Jr., Dr. Justin Malone, Principal of Charlottesville High School, Dr. Lamont Trotter, Program Administrator at Lugo-McGinness Academy, Rachel Rasnake, Director of Student Services, and Dr. Denise Johnson, Supervisor of Strategic Initiatives, provided an overview of the complexities of student behavior. Their presentation included an examination of behavior types, administrative responses, and emerging trends. Additionally, the presentation highlighted the continuum of supports available to students, alternatives to suspension, and the development of an off-site suspension center.

Information presented included:

- CONTENTS
 - The agenda covered complexities of behavior, threat assessments, student behaviors and administrative responses, a scenario, student support continuum, and overlapping concerns.
- Behavior is Complex
 - Managing student behavior requires balancing empathy with accountability, understanding with consistency, and structure with flexibility.
- Complex by the Numbers (Threat Assessments)
 - There was an increase in total incidents from 130 to 159 between the 2024–2025 and 2025–2026 school years, primarily driven by increases in "Threat to Self" and "Threat to Others." Elementary schools accounted for the most cases.
- Who's in the Numbers? (Out-of-School Suspensions)
 - Black/AA students were approximately 4.51 times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than white caucasian students.
- Student Behavior and Administrative Response (SBAR)
 - The SBAR policy provides minimum behavioral standards, defines appropriate conduct, offers alternative interventions, aims to minimize law enforcement involvement, and provides clear language for behavioral expectations.
- Level 1
 - Focused on early intervention to prevent further behavioral issues while keeping students in school, with responses like written reflection, in-class time-out, or warnings.
- Level 2
 - Designed to prevent further behavior issues and keep students in school, potentially including short-term removal from the classroom.
- Level 3
 - Behaviors at this level may cause short-term out-of-school suspension and referral to law enforcement where required, with a focus on Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA) and Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIP).
- Level 4
 - More serious behaviors that may require a report to the Superintendent and consideration of a long-term suspension or Manifestation Determination Meeting (MDR).
- Level 5
 - Reserved for behaviors requiring a referral to the Superintendent, including the possibility of expulsion.
- SBAR State Reporting
 - The Code of Virginia requires annual submission of student behavior data to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) for school quality profiles.
- How do we respond?
 - Administrators are expected to note discipline sanctions, behavioral interventions, and instructional support when responding to student behavior.

- Student Scenario - Profile Overview
 - Presented a student with 14 referrals, mostly at CHS.
- Scenario Document - Summary of Student Behaviors
 - The student demonstrated inconsistent attendance, frequent tardiness, repeated concerns regarding adherence to school routines, disruptive behaviors, and disrespectful language.
- Student Scenario Supporting Information
 - Provided information on incidents since August 2025.
- Guiding and Reflective Questions
 - A series of questions was posed to encourage reflection on responding to challenging student behavior with empathy, accountability, and support.
- Administrative Response
 - This slide was likely intended for discussion on administrative responses to the scenario.
- Student Support Continuum
 - Outlined various social-emotional learning curricula, student success meetings, alternative learning options, and student support personnel.
- Student Support Continuum Gaps
 - Identified gaps such as alternative learning options before grade 7 and direct support for student behavior when not eligible for special education, with proposed solutions.
- “Out-of-school suspensions and chronic absenteeism are closely linked to lower academic achievement.”
 - Highlighted the negative impact of suspensions and absenteeism on academic achievement and student engagement.
- Overlapping Concerns
 - Discussed the link between chronically absent students, suspended students, and the importance of relationships in reducing discipline problems.

Discussion/Questions:

- Ms. Cooper opened the discussion by requesting that the presentation be approached with intention, emphasizing that this is a topic of significant importance to her.
- Ms. Burns expressed a desire to understand the student perspective, specifically asking what students expect from their peers and whether they believe necessary changes are happening. She further requested more detailed data regarding suspensions to help the Board understand exactly how many individual students are affected by out-of-school suspensions.
- Dr. Gurley responded to the data inquiry, noting that there are "quite a few" students who account for a large portion of the out-of-school suspensions, with some accumulating 20 to 25 suspension days.
- Mr. Morse asked if the division has the ability to map student data—without making assumptions about specific neighborhoods—to identify patterns and better leverage community partners for targeted support.
- Ms. Cooper voiced concerns regarding the utilization of interventions. She said she feels some resources, such as school counselors and conference calls, may not be utilized effectively to address underlying issues. She requested data on home visits and specific interventions currently being implemented. She further emphasized the need to utilize community support to combat current issues and noted that building relationships can help address unknown underlying factors.
- Ms. Burns remarked that it remains difficult to quantify exactly how many students are represented by the data provided. She asked how the division deploys resources into the community when specific events occur and how those needs are identified.
- Dr. Malone responded that there is an ongoing audit of community and school resources, including the work of engagement specialists and counselors.

Motion to Pause Work Session

At 6:50 p.m., Ms. Burns made a motion, seconded by Mr. Morse, to pause the session and reconvene at 7:00 p.m., noting that while the current discussion is vital, the visiting legislators had arrived. Upon a roll-call vote, the

motion passed with Ms. Burns, Ms. Dooley, Mr. Meyer, Mr. Morse, and Ms. Richardson voting aye. 5 ayes, 2 nays. Ms. Cooper and Ms. Torres voted nay.

Reconvened discussion (following the Legislative discussion) at 7:00 p.m.

- Dr. Gurley noted that approximately 2% of the student population utilizes 80% of the resources. He spoke to the challenge of balancing the focus on behavior with the need to ensure every student has a positive experience. He thanked the Board for their feedback and suggested that, as a next step, the Board prioritize specific information requests. This would allow staff to provide clear, concrete answers without having to speculate on the Board's intent.
- Ms. Dooley said she and Ms. Burns are scheduled to meet with Dr. Gurley the following Wednesday. She requested that Board Members submit any specific items they wish to elevate prior to that meeting to assist with organization. She then transitioned to the Public Comment portion of the meeting.
- Ms. Torres indicated that, due to time constraints, she would submit her remaining items via email. She stressed her focus is on accountability. While acknowledging the significant investment in support systems, she questioned the accountability mechanisms for that work, noting the difficulty in translating data points into effective interventions. She further inquired whether the intervention process includes opportunities for direct student input, specifically asking if students are eventually given the space to articulate their own needs.
- Ms. Cooper acknowledged and thanked the six Care and Safety Assistants (CSAs) present. She noted that during a previous community discussion regarding School Resource Officers (SROs) in Kindlewood, these individuals were specifically encouraged to attend this Board meeting to express their questions and concerns. She regretted that the meeting schedule did not allow time for them to speak. Ms. Cooper emphasized the importance of honoring commitments made to the community, highlighting the personal sacrifice required to attend, given the high cost of living and the fact that many hold second jobs. She urged the Board to value people's time and suggested establishing a channel for these attendees to submit their questions via email.

5.1 Work Session Wrap-Up: The Work Session concluded with three requests from the Board.

- More data regarding how we are responding to the discipline data (# of home visits, etc)
- Mapping behavior incidents and communities
- Concrete follow-up regarding behavior - written report? - prioritize what they want

6.1 Comments from Members of the Community:

- There were none.

Ms. Dooley thanked Delegate Callsen and Senator Deeds for their patience with the delay and asked for forgiveness as the previous conversation ran late.

7.1 [Legislative Priorities for the 2026 General Assembly](#): Dr. Royal A. Gurley, Jr., Superintendent, led a planned discussion of the Legislative Priorities for the 2026 General Assembly with Senator Creigh Deeds and Delegate Katrina Callsen on October 23, 2025. These priorities were previously presented for Board discussion and review on September 4, 2025, and subsequently approved. The priorities are aligned with the School Board's 2023-2028 Strategic Plan and its focus on equity. The current meeting was specifically for discussing these updated and strengthened priorities with state legislators, and no approval action was required.

The Legislative Priorities for the 2026 General Assembly were refined to include specific calls to action. The priorities were organized under three main headings:

School Construction and Renovations

- The Problem: Building quality directly impacts student success, and Charlottesville City Schools has two schools approaching 100 years old, plus other facilities that have only undergone minimal renovations. Aging and outdated buildings cannot adequately meet today's needs for instruction, health, safety, and technology.
- Calls to Action (Refined Priorities):
 - Dedicated State Funding: Establish consistent and sustained funding streams to support school renovations and new construction that meet modern standards for health, safety, instruction, and technology.
 - Implement JLARC K-12 Education Funding Recommendations: Support continued implementation of the 2023 Joint Legislative Audit & Review Commission (JLARC) K-12 Education Funding Report recommendations.
 - Local Revenue Authority: Provide all counties and cities the authority to impose a local sales and use tax of up to one percent for school capital projects, restricted to school facilities, contingent upon voter approval in a local referendum.
 - Local Sales Tax Referendum (Specific to Charlottesville): Grant Charlottesville the ability to generate local revenue through a local sales tax referendum.

Teacher Retention

1. The Problem: Teacher shortages directly impact student success, and Charlottesville City Schools continues to face challenges attracting and retaining a strong pool of teachers, particularly in special education, mathematics, and several middle school disciplines.
2. Calls to Action:
 - Targeted State Funding: The state should provide targeted funding to localities to help address teacher shortages and support retention strategies, including assistance with housing, childcare, professional development, and other incentives.
 - Policy Approaches to Strengthen the Workforce:
 - Streamline and expand pathways into education careers.
 - Support the recruitment and development of a diverse and sustainable educator workforce.
 - Reduce barriers to entry for aspiring teachers, particularly in high-need areas.

State Testing and Accountability

- The Problem: While the division supports SOL testing as a tool for measuring mastery and growth, they believe it is not the only way to assess student achievement. Frequent changes to testing and accountability requirements by the Virginia Department of Education create instability, increase stress, and make it difficult to accurately measure student learning and progress.
- What is Needed (Refined Priorities):
 - Consistent and Transparent System: A system that values both growth and mastery is needed.
 - Stability in Policy: Stability in state testing policies is required to enable students, educators, and families to adapt and succeed.
 - New Accountability Framework: Support a statewide accountability framework that prioritizes school improvement, allows for local flexibility, and includes evidence-based models that recognize English learner progress, student growth, and locally adopted assessments.
 - Local Input: Opportunities for local input are needed to ensure assessments align with student needs and instructional goals.

Next Steps

- Charlottesville City Schools will continue to seek legislative feedback.
- The School Board held a Legislative Priority Session with Senator Deeds and Delegate Callsen on October 23 at 6:00 PM in the CATEC Auditorium.

Discussion/Questions:

- Michael Salvatierra, Music Teacher and Trailblazer Elementary and CEA Representative, addressed the Board and Legislators to share CEA priorities.
- Delegate Callsen inquired about the current state of hiring within the division. Dr. Gurley responded that the division experienced one of its best hiring years. He attributed this success to the implementation of collective bargaining, which provided increased salaries and a clear three-year compensation agreement. Dr. Gurley further noted that the hiring cycle aims to secure sought-after teachers by May.
- Mr. Meyer referenced the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) study regarding Standards of Quality (SOQ), suggesting that adjusting staffing ratios would be a key factor in addressing current issues.
- Senator Deeds noted that while strides have been made, the potential federal government shutdown creates a difficult reality where 800,000 to 900,000 Virginia families risk losing SNAP benefits, with further losses expected in Medicaid coverage.
- Delegate Callsen cautioned that the upcoming session will be a "tough budget year," emphasizing that the priority will be protecting the services that students rely on.

8.1 Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 7:37 p.m.

A video of the October 23, 2025, meeting can be located at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sZmrXMMlQ8OeG6y6aVj68m2YertZ6m79/view?usp=drive_link

Emily Dooley, School Board Chair

Leslie Thacker, School Board Clerk