



MINUTES

**Charlottesville City School Board/City Council Joint Budget Work Session
December 18, 2025 (5:00 p.m.)
Walker Upper Elementary School Cafeteria
1564 Dairy Road, Charlottesville, VA**

1.1 Call to Order: School Board Chair Emily Dooley and Mayor Juandiego Wade called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

1.2 Remote Participation by a School Board Member (Nicole Richardson): Ms. Dooley informed the Board that Ms. Richardson requested permission to participate in the December 18, 2025, Joint Work Session virtually via Zoom due to a professional work conflict. Mr. Morse moved, and Ms. Torres seconded, to approve Nicole Richardson's remote attendance for the Joint Work Session with City Council. Upon a roll-call vote, the motion carried 5-0, with Ms. Burns, Ms. Dooley, Mr. Morse, Mr. Meyer, and Ms. Torres voting aye. Ms. Cooper and Ms. Richardson were absent for the vote.

2.1 Roll Call:

The following School 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	

The following School Staff Members were present:

Dr. Royal Gurley	Dr. Katina Otey
Ms. Kim Powell	Ms. Renee Hoover
Ms. Maria Lewis	Ms. Rachel Rasnake
Ms. Carolyn Swift	Ms. T. Denise Johnson
	Ms. Leslie Thacker
Ms. Julia Green	

The following City Council Members were present:

Mayor Juandiego Wade	Mr. Lloyd Snook
Ms. Natalie Oschrin	Mr. Michael Payne

The following City Council Members were absent:

Vice-Mayor Brian Pinkston

The following City Staff Members were present:

Mr. Sam Sanders	Ms. Krisy Hammill
Mr. Mike Goddard	Ms. Kyna Thomas
Mr. James Freas	Mr. John Maddux
	Mr. Remy Trail

3.1 Approval of Proposed Agenda: Ms. Torres made a motion, seconded by Mr. Morse, to approve the proposed agenda. Upon a roll-call vote, the motion carried with Ms. Burns, Ms. Dooley, Mr. Morse, Mr. Meyer, and Ms. Torres voting aye. 5 ayes, 0 nays. Ms. Cooper and Ms. Richardson were not present for this vote.

4.1 Presentation of FY 2027 Budget Priorities & Estimates to City Council: Dr. Royal Gurley, Division Superintendent, and the Executive Leadership Team presented the December 18, 2025, Joint Budget Work Session Presentation for information and discussion. Information presented included:

- **Background**
 - Virginia Code legally requires the Superintendent to prepare a "needs-based budget" estimating the funds required to support the school division.
 - The figures presented are early projections and do not represent a recommended budget change or the final Superintendent's Proposed Budget.
- **Budget Development Process**
 - The process is collaborative, involving the School Board, leadership teams, collective bargaining units, and the community.
 - The work is guided by the Strategic Plan through 2028, focusing on academic achievement, safety/wellness, staff support, and efficient operations.
- **Budget Priorities**
 - The four primary areas of focus are:
 - Staffing, Compensation, and Retention.
 - Student Support, Achievement, and Well-Being.
 - Facilities, Maintenance, and Capital Improvements.
 - Early Childhood Education.
- **Alignment of Strategic Plan to Budget Priorities**
 - The budget aims to equip learners for the future, foster a sense of community, recruit/retain teachers of color, and modernize facilities.
- **"What We Face, We Can Change"**
 - The 2025-26 focus is on refining and building systems to identify and address learning gaps specifically for Black students.
- **Enrollment: Fall Daily Membership Trends**
 - Enrollment for the 2025-26 school year is 4,357 students, continuing a slight decline from the 2018-19 peak of 4,561.
- **Student Demographics**
 - As of June 2025, 51.3% of the student body is classified as economically disadvantaged.
 - The demographic breakdown of disadvantaged students is 41.19% Black, 25.61% White, and 33.21% "Other."
- **English Learners Fall Enrollment Trend**
 - English Learner enrollment (including former EL students) has risen steadily to 924 students in 2025-26, up from 520 in 2015-16.
- **State Accountability and Accreditation**
 - All Charlottesville City Schools are fully accredited.
 - Schools are rated by framework scores (80 is the benchmark); Sunrise is "Distinguished" (91.4), while several others are "Off Track," including Jackson-Via, Summit, and CMS.
- **K12 Region 5 City School Divisions Pass Rates**
 - Charlottesville City Schools has a 67% pass rate in both Reading and Math, which is lower than the state averages (74% Reading / 72% Math).
- **Reading Pass Rates by Group**
 - There is a significant achievement gap in Reading: White students have a 90% pass rate, while Black students have a 42% pass rate.
- **Math Pass Rates by Group**
 - In Math, White students have an 89% pass rate, while Black students have a 41% pass rate.
- **2024-25 CCS Reading & Math SOL Pass Rates**

- This chart details pass rates across all subgroups, showing lower performance for English Learners (24% Reading / 36% Math) and Students with Disabilities (38% Reading / 35% Math).
- **Virginia's New Accountability: 2026-27 Implications**
 - New state expectations include higher proficiency "cut" scores and smaller student group sizes that will impact future school ratings.
- **Instructional Funding Next Steps**
 - Priorities include re-evaluating school supports, reviewing class size requests, and updating instructional materials for reading and math.
- **Staff Allocation**
 - The division employs 905 total staff: 560 Licensed Professionals, 279 Support Professionals, and 66 Administrators.
- **Division & License Staff Retention**
 - Retention has improved, with the overall division retention rate rising to 86.20% for the 2025-26 school year.
- **Salaries & Benefits**
 - Employee compensation accounts for 74% of the FY26 budget.
 - Estimates show a \$4.7 million increase for compensation and an 8% (\$821,000) increase in health insurance costs.
- **Early Childhood Education**
 - The division is prioritizing preschool expansion and exploring the Oak Lawn property as a potential early learning center.
- **Facilities Maintenance - Operational Costs**
 - Operations are split between HVAC/Electrical and General Maintenance, with costs assigned to either "School" or "City" budget centers.
- **Facilities Services - Updating the MOA**
 - Staff are collaborating on a new Memorandum of Agreement with the City to define service standards; the update is intended to be budget-neutral.
- **Non- Discretionary: City Maintenance Contract**
 - Contract costs have grown at a five-year average rate of 7.44%, with a projected increase of \$394,379.
- **Transportation Services - Ongoing Pupil Driver Shortage**
 - The division faces a 32% overall vacancy rate in transportation, with 58% of 30-hour positions currently vacant.
- **Non-Discretionary: City Student Transportation Contract**
 - Transportation costs have escalated sharply since FY23, with a projected increase of \$487,062 based on a 10.61% five-year average growth.
- **Capital Improvements**
 - CIP funding is required for modernizing facilities, improving safety, and creating dedicated spaces for specialists and interventionists.
- **FY 27 Revenue**
 - The total FY26 revenue is \$110.98 million, with \$79.026 million coming from the City Appropriation.
- **Next Steps Before the School Board Budget**
 - Action items before the January 22 session include evaluating the Governor's proposed budget and reviewing staff budget requests.
- **Preliminary Summary: FY 27 Budget Considerations**
 - Total preliminary budget considerations for FY27 are \$6.402 million (\$5.521M for compensation/benefits and \$0.881M for non-discretionary costs).
- **Budget Calendar**
 - The School Board is scheduled to approve the proposed budget on Thursday, February 19, 2026.

Discussion/Questions:

- Ms. Burns inquired about the mechanism and coordination with the collective bargaining unit to address the ongoing Pupil Driver Shortage, specifically for the 40-hour positions, and how funding requests are initiated. James Freas, City Staff, stated that discussions are focused on potentially adding six more 40-hour positions to address critical vacancies for the remainder of the year and the summer, noting that this is an ongoing conversation.
- Mr. Meyer emphasized the critical link between pupil transportation and school accreditation scores, noting that high unexcused absence rates, which affect attendance points, can lower school scores. He stressed the need to ensure buses run on time to prevent student absences, arguing that transportation directly impacts how schools are graded and appear overall. He also reflected on a past period of two months with insufficient drivers.
- Ms. Torres noted that the presentation was the "first pass" for the board, which only had "a little preliminary access" to the information. Her remarks concentrated heavily on early childhood education, particularly the need to "continue to really focus" on the Early Childhood Center (ELC) and its capital improvement program (CIP) funding. She stressed the importance of ensuring there is no delay and that the facilities are optimized, stating the board wants to see that they are "maximizing the seats" and "maximizing what we do have" for early learning. Ms. Torres acknowledged that the challenges, such as the achievement gap for Black and Brown students, extend beyond the schools and require a greater community effort involving housing, jobs, and support for early learning care providers. She recognized the unpredictability of the financial outlook, noting that the budget, as well as the outgoing governor's budget, meant there are "still a lot of unknowns," despite the clear presence of "a lot of needs".
- Ms. Cooper focused on the achievement gap, emphasizing the need to support the family as a whole. She raised a concern that many in the homeless population are going untracked and stressed the importance of understanding how housing prices in Charlottesville affect families. She urged a community approach to wrap services around families to ensure student success, and called for intentionality in budgeting to provide the right services that meet the families' needs.
- Mr. Morse supported the previous remarks and focused on state accountability standards for student skills. He stated that while state standards may change, their mastery of skills can be observed in real-life activities like "writing emails" and "writing resumes and cover letters." He concluded by re-emphasizing the importance of a community approach, stating that "literacy will take everyone."
- Mr. Meyer inquired about the number of FTEs budgeted for support staff who provide basic services to families and community members, which are necessary for students to be able to learn in the classroom. Dr. Gurley responded that the division is staffed "way more" than similar school divisions of 4,300-4,400 students, with "way more FTEs than the average school division." However, he added that even with this higher staffing, it often "doesn't feel like enough" due to a "growing need of students who are in elementary school with escalating behaviors," which he attributes to the schools addressing issues that "should have been addressed within a community setting."
- Ms. Burns thanked her colleagues, echoed their comments, and expressed that she looks forward to Dr. Johnson and Dr. Sherica Jones-Lewis leading community-schools work. This effort is aimed at better connecting community services to provide more robust support for students. She also expressed appreciation for the work done on what she acknowledged was only a "first pass" of the budget.
- Ms. Dooley stated her belief that retention rates will demonstrate the effectiveness of collective bargaining in the division. She connected desirable working conditions to better retention, which in turn leads to longevity and continuity. She argued that this continuity improves relationships, staff collaboration, and training, and will ultimately help in decreasing the achievement gap. She also noted that the vast majority of the budget is personnel.
- Ms. Oschrin inquired about available volunteer programs, such as reading or math tutoring, and how community members could find and join them. Dr. Gurley directed her to Dr. Denise Johnson, who spearheads the work, noting that information is on the website and Dr. Johnson is the direct contact for the Level 1-3 volunteer training. Dr. Gurley also mentioned that substitute teaching is always welcome.
- Ms. Oschrin proposed using school property and new construction projects as an opportunity to include various types of housing (workforce, teacher, low-income, market-rate) to address community-level problems like housing insecurity that affect student success. She suggested that an outside developer could fund the construction, making it budget-neutral for the city and school division. Ms. Dooley, Ms.

Burns, and Ms. Torres all expressed support for exploring the concept. Ms. Dooley requested case studies of where this has been implemented, while Ms. Burns mentioned examples in North Carolina and California and offered to collaborate on the effort with Ms. Torres. Ms. Torres also noted examples from a previous VSEA presentation and suggested looking into a potential early childhood learning center that could be subsidized for city employees and teachers, even as a joint effort with the county.

- Mayor Wade stated that the difference in test scores is painful to see and noted that similar discrepancies existed 20 years ago during his time on the school board. He questioned if the current approach, curriculum, or "widget" used to address the issue needs to be changed and asked for specific examples of classroom actions being taken to improve results.
- Dr. Gurley stated that state test scores measure whether a student passed a specific test rather than their absolute reading ability. He reported that an internal audit found inconsistent staff responses to student deficiencies, leading to a new focus on standardizing systems, ensuring practitioners know how to access resources, and creating a linear process for remediation.
- Dr. Gurley noted that a previous focus on a "growth mindset" sometimes resulted in students showing annual growth without ever reaching grade-level proficiency. He explained that the district is now retraining principals to triangulate data and is being more prescriptive in school success meetings regarding the specific requirements for black student achievement and engagement.
- Dr. Gurley and Mayor Wade discussed how schools are tasked with significant responsibilities, but student success is also impacted by factors outside of school, such as early childhood preparation and support during academic breaks. Mayor Wade noted that basic needs like food and safety must be addressed before learning can take place.
- Dr. Gurley and Ms. Oschrin discussed successful models in other localities, with Dr. Gurley stating that school divisions in Virginia with smaller achievement gaps typically have a higher level of black middle-class residents. He noted that schools have students for seven and a half hours a day, and results are influenced by the resources available to students outside of that time.
- Mr. Payne and Dr. Gurley addressed the availability of achievement data broken down by family income level. Dr. Gurley confirmed this information is available and noted that the district has triangulated data specifically by student addresses in Charlottesville.
- Mr. Meyer provided context on the socioeconomic makeup of the student body, noting that approximately 85% of Black students and 34% of White students are classified as low-income.
- Mr. Payne stated that the data reflect broader economic inequality in the city, suggesting that the presence of the University of Virginia brings in significant wealth without a corresponding strategy for community wealth building or economic mobility for the working class. He observed that the lack of a local middle class is an issue beyond the power of the school system to fix independently.
- Mr. Payne and Ms. Powell discussed pupil transportation, specifically confirming that 30-hour positions include benefits. Dr. Gurley noted that the employer contribution rate for these positions is adjusted and reduced compared to full-time staff.
- Mr. Payne compared the school transportation staffing to previous models used for CAT bus drivers, questioning the effectiveness of non-40-hour positions based on historical recruitment or retention experiences, and stressed that there is "no shortcut to just having the positions be market competitive." He also raised a structural concern about the city adopting its budget before the state's budget is finalized, noting that this practice forces them to "finalize our budget not knowing a lot of information," especially in a year with potential substantial state-level changes. Finally, he asked about the process for the School Resource Officer (SRO) decision and whether it would come to the City Council as a budget request.
- Mr. Sanders and Dr. Gurley addressed the status of the School Resource Officer (SRO) plan, confirming that the current plan for two officers is budget-neutral and does not require additional FTEs, with the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) finalized and the operating procedures (SOP) in development. Mr. Sanders clarified that any future expansion of the SRO program would require a budget request to City Council. Regarding the overall budget, Mr. Sanders reported that the budget gap has not yet been fully identified, but the preliminary ask for FY27 budget considerations is \$6.4 million. He noted that revenue projections are "flat," making it challenging to absorb a number this large, and that the City will begin earnest work in the new year to balance the budget. Concerning capital projects, Mr. Sanders

confirmed that funding for the pre-K center is available in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), and a team is currently assessing the Oak Lawn property to determine its viability for the center. Finally, Mr. Meyer and Mr. Snook discussed the long-term CIP and the committee's work on an infrastructure improvement plan. Mr. Snook stressed the need for a fully vetted plan by July 1st if the city is to pursue a sales tax referendum.

5.1 Comments from Members of the Community:

- Nikuyah Walker, Community Member and former Mayor, addressed the Board with concerns regarding the proposed SRO agreement and the school division's budget requests. She stated she came to speak about SROs but was alarmed by broader budget discussions, particularly what she perceived as an implication that little can be done for students who are not middle-class. Drawing on her personal experience as a former CCS student and parent of three graduates, she pushed back against narratives about students who struggle, questioning why they are in trouble and challenging the system's role in their outcomes. While expressing past support for collective bargaining and increased teacher pay, she criticized the division for repeatedly requesting additional funding without demonstrating measurable results, asking for clearer accountability and evidence of progress. She also raised concerns about class disparities affecting student outcomes and argued that the SRO proposal is not truly budget neutral, contending that funds could be directed elsewhere. Ms. Walker urged accountability from both school and city leadership and cautioned against what she described as policing students rather than investing in meaningful solutions.
- Dr. RaShall Brackney, former Chief of Police for Charlottesville, addressed the Board, stating that as an educator with a doctorate in instructional management and leadership, schools must not use systemic challenges as an excuse for poor outcomes. She emphasized that while accountability standards have changed statewide, the same metrics apply to all students, and Charlottesville cannot attribute the lack of success solely to increased rigor. Citing models such as the Harlem Children's Zone, she argued that barriers to success must be removed and that children—particularly poor Black and Brown students—can excel when given proper support and resources. Dr. Brackney encouraged the Board to think creatively about solutions, including alternative transportation partnerships used successfully in other cities. Regarding school resource officers, she questioned what specific problem the division is trying to solve, asserting that if that question cannot be clearly answered, reinstating SROs is unwarranted and counter to prior decisions to remove them.
- Zyahna Bryant, Community Member and School Board Member-elect, addressed the Board with comments reflecting on persistent inequities within Charlottesville schools, noting that the same concerns she experienced as a student—particularly the lack of diversity in honors and AP courses due to tracking and socioeconomic barriers—remain unresolved. While reiterating her opposition to SROs, she emphasized that her primary concern is strengthening a culture of care within schools by maximizing existing staff roles, particularly Care and Safety Assistants (CSAs). She suggested expanding training and responsibilities for CSAs to provide more comprehensive support services, rather than hiring additional personnel, and encouraged the division to adopt innovative, wraparound approaches similar to the Harlem Children's Zone. Bryant urged stronger collaboration with local organizations and more strategic use of current resources to better support student achievement and well-being, stating she looks forward to advancing these solutions as a Board member.

6.1 Upcoming School Board Meetings: Ms. Dooley read the upcoming meetings.

7.1 Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned at 6:59 p.m.

A video of the December 18, 2025 meeting can be located at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1J3zgjFrZlem2ZhpS5EEdeepCiXHZdYb9/view?usp=drive_link