MINUTES
CHARLOTTESVILLE CITY SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
Thursday, May 21, 2026 (5:00 PM)
Booker T. Reaves Media Center, Charlottesville High School
Video Link

A Closed Meeting of the Charlottesville City School Board was held on Thursday, May 21, 2026, at 4:30 p.m., in the Division Annex Exceptional Education Conference Room, 1400 Melbourne Road, Charlottesville, VA.

Board Members Present: Ms. Zyahna Bryant, Ms. Amanda Burns, Ms. Shymora Cooper, Ms. Emily Dooley, Mr. Chris Meyer, Ms. Nicole Richardson, and Ms. Lisa Torres
Board Members Absent: None

Executive Leadership Team & Staff Present: Dr. Royal A. Gurley, Jr. (Superintendent) and Maria Lewis (Director of Human Resources)
Executive Leadership Team & Staff Absent: None

Call the Closed Session to Order: Lisa Torres, School Board Chair, called the closed session meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

Remote Participation by a School Board Member (Nicole Richardson): Ms. Burns made a motion, seconded by Ms. Dooley, to approve Ms. Richardson's remote participation due to personal illness. Ms. Richardson attended the meeting via Zoom from her private residence in Charlottesville. Upon a roll-call vote, the motion passed with Ms. Bryant, Ms. Burns, Ms. Dooley, Mr. Meyer, Ms. Richardson, and Ms. Torres voting aye. 6 ayes, 0 nays. Ms. Cooper was not present for this vote.

1.1 Closed Meeting: at 4:30 p.m., Ms. Burns made a motion to go into a Closed Session as authorized by Section 2.2-3711 (A) (1) of the Code of Virginia, for the discussion of personnel matters. Ms. Bryant seconded the motion, and the motion passed with Ms. Bryant, Ms. Burns, Ms. Dooley, Mr. Meyer, Ms. Richardson, and Ms. Torres voting aye. 6 ayes, 0 nays. Ms. Cooper was not present for this vote.

1.2 Closed Meeting Certification: At 5:01 p.m., Ms. Burns made 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. Ms. Bryant seconded the motion, and the motion passed with Ms. Bryant, Ms. Burns, Ms. Cooper, Ms. Dooley, Mr. Meyer, Ms. Richardson, and Ms. Torres voting aye. 7 ayes, 0 nays.

Action: Ms. Dooley made a motion to amend the personnel recommendations to remove employee NH05-21-2026. Ms. Bryant seconded the motion, and the motion passed with Ms. Burns, Ms. Cooper, Ms. Dooley, Mr. Meyer, Ms. Richardson, and Ms. Torres voting aye. 6 ayes, 0 nays. Ms. Bryant abstained.

The board recessed from 5:01 p.m. until 5:05 p.m.

1.3 Call to Order: The School Board Chair called the public meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

1.4 Remote Participation by a School Board Member (Nicole Richardson): Ms. Dooley made a motion, seconded by Ms. Cooper, to approve Ms. Richardson's remote participation due to personal illness. Ms. Richardson attended the meeting via Zoom from her private residence in Charlottesville. Upon a roll-call vote, the motion passed with Ms. Bryant, Ms. Burns, Ms. Cooper, Ms. Dooley, Mr. Meyer, Ms. Richardson, and Ms. Torres voting aye. 7 ayes, 0 nays.

2.1 Roll Call of Board Members: Roll call was conducted to confirm attendance.

Board Members Present: Ms. Zyahna Bryant, Ms. Amanda Burns, Ms. Shymora Cooper, Ms. Emily Dooley, Mr. Chris Meyer, Ms. Nicole Richardson, and Ms. Lisa Torres

Board Members Absent: None

Executive Leadership Team & Staff Present: Dr. Royal A. Gurley, Jr. (Superintendent), Dr. Anna Isley (Chief Academic Officer), Ms. Kim Powell (Chief Operations Officer), Ms. Maria Lewis (Director of Human Resources), Ms. Renee Hoover (Director of Finance), Mr. Pat Cuomo (Director of Technology), Ms. Rachel Rasnake (Director of Student Services), Ms. Carolyn Swift (Director of Assessment and Accountability), Dr. T. Denise Johnson (Supervisor of Strategic Initiatives), Ms. Beth Cheuk (Community Relations Supervisor), Ms. Julia Green (Board Deputy Clerk), and Ms. Leslie Thacker (Board Clerk).

Executive Leadership Team & Staff Absent: None

3.1 Approval of Proposed Agenda: Ms. Dooley made a motion, seconded by Ms. Cooper, to approve the proposed agenda. Upon a roll-call vote, the motion passed with Ms. Bryant, Ms. Burns, Ms. Cooper, Ms. Dooley, Mr. Meyer, Ms. Richardson, and Ms. Torres voting aye. 7 ayes, 0 nays.

4.1 Comments from Students: There were none.

4.2 Comments from Members of the Community:

- Everest Koester, a recent Charlottesville High School graduate and former environmental club president, shared concerns regarding inconsistent management and high contamination in the current school recycling and composting programs. Koester then presented a student-led petition requesting universal systems managed by school staff rather than student volunteers.
- The speaker specifically requested that the board adopt a "paper and metal only" approach to recycling, ensure every classroom has a clearly labeled bin, and introduce paper towel composting in bathrooms and food composting during lunch.
- Sarah Delgado, Youth Outreach at Community Climate Collaborative (C3), supported the student-led initiatives and emphasized that consistent K-12 recycling and composting is the top concern for local student activists, urging the Board to collaborate across departments like Child Nutrition and Sustainability to ensure effective education and implementation.
- Jenn Horne, Charlottesville High School Teacher, cited Dr. Jared Cooney Horvath's "The Digital Delusion" to urge the Board to include teachers and students in decision-making processes. She criticized the current standards-based and equitable grading committees for lacking cohesion and further advocated for the implementation of technology-free learning environments to safeguard student mental health.
- Horne also offered to purchase copies of Dr. Horvath's book for the Board and host fundraisers to bring the author to the district for professional development.
- Reed Chrobak, junior at Community Lab School and Green Team Alliance member, described the burden placed on uncompensated student clubs to manually sort through contaminated bins and requested that the Board adopt the universal systems outlined in the petition and add the topic to the June 4th meeting agenda.
- Willa Gerlach, a recent Community Lab School graduate, supported the call for collaboration between the city and county school divisions on waste management, noting that manually sorting through compost as a student took significant time away from her academic periods.

- Sadhbh O’Flynn, Community Climate Collaborative (C3), argued that waste management is a municipal and custodial issue that should be handled by trained, fairly compensated staff rather than students, and she shared feedback from middle school students who expressed feeling "addicted" to their phones as further evidence supporting the need for phone-free spaces.
- The speaker explicitly requested that the Board provide direction to various schools to investigate waste management pathways and called for custodial staff to be "upskilled" for these tasks.

5.1-2 Adoption of Consent Agenda: The following item was included in the consent agenda: **Personnel Recommendations**. Ms. Dooley made a motion, seconded by Ms. Burns, to approve the adoption of the consent agenda (including a revised personnel agenda). Upon a roll-call vote, the motion passed with Ms. Burns, Ms. Cooper, Ms. Dooley, Mr. Meyer, Ms. Richardson, and Ms. Torres voting aye. 6 ayes, 0 nays. Ms. Bryant abstained.

Items for Discussion

6.1 Policy Work Session (Policy Review and Discussion): Carolyn Swift, Director of Assessment and Accountability, and members of the Executive Leadership Team presented a Policy Work Session on May 21, 2026, alongside the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA). The presentation was updated to incorporate slides from a Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) training session attended by staff only the day before. The presentation outlined the distinct roles, characteristics, and execution of school board policies versus administrative regulations. It established that policies are legally binding governance statements set by the school board to define the "what" and "why" based on community values and legal requirements. Conversely, it noted that the superintendent establishes regulations to detail the "how" regarding practical implementation and daily operations. The session also highlighted how boards can minimize operational risks—such as avoiding over-detailing policies or overstepping into administration —and concluded with a review of specific policy and regulation updates covering student services, student rights, instruction, and community relations. Additionally, Carolyn Swift and the Executive Leadership Team facilitated a discussion with the Board regarding these policy updates.

- **JFCH: Substance Use and Vaping**
    - Ms. Torres inquired about the division's legal ability to mandate restorative training or substance abuse counseling for students involved in repeat vaping offenses.
    - Ms. Rasnake clarified that while the division cannot legally mandate medical treatment, it can require participation in tiered educational activities for students who violate student rights and responsibilities.
    - Ms. Bryant raised equity concerns and requested information on the current use of vape detectors to ensure consistent enforcement.
    - Ms. Powell explained that detectors are currently prioritized in newer, more private restrooms because students in older bathrooms often use sinks to create messes that bypass the sensors.
    - The Board discussed that while students generally receive a three-day suspension for vaping, they may receive only one day out if they participate in "brief challenges" educational programming. Superintendent Dr. Gurley noted the division currently lacks data on how many parents are declining these offered educational services.
- **JL: Fundraising and Solicitation**
    - Superintendent Dr. Gurley noted that a staff survey revealed teachers feel they lack sufficient resources, leading some to use external crowdfunding platforms.
    - Amanda Simalchick emphasized that the primary administrative goal is educating staff on how to navigate the procurement process to access existing division funds.
    - Ms. Bryant questioned if there was data showing whether teachers serving high-needs students or teachers of color were more reliant on crowdfunding for basic classroom needs.
    - Superintendent Dr. Gurley stated that all curriculum-aligned needs are fully funded and that in-house resources, such as food pantries and clothes closets, are already in place to address student insecurity without external solicitation.

    - The Board discussed a specific ongoing issue regarding a rug replacement schedule, noting that lower-grade classroom rugs become "yucky" and expensive to replace. Staff reported that a recent audit of the "DonorsChoose" platform found only one active crowdfunding request for the entire division at that time.
- **IKEC: Promotion and Retention**
    - Ms. Burns argued that the word "learn" in the current policy is too subjective and suggested using terms like "comprehend" or "master" to define grade-level promotion.
    - Ms. Swift agreed that the previous policy from 2008 was outdated and noted the new draft includes multiple criteria for promotion as required by state code.
    - Ms. Cooper asked if school administration or parents typically initiate retention decisions.
    - Ms. Swift clarified that while both occur, the division must look at the "whole child" rather than relying on a single factor like attendance or a specific test score.
    - The Board noted that Policy IKEC had not been revised since 2008. Staff clarified that the Code of Virginia prohibits using a single criterion (like an SOL score) for retention decisions; multiple factors must be considered.
    - Ms. Dooley cautioned that the revised policy draft appeared overly detailed, containing operational language that should properly remain in administrative regulations.
- **Education Technology (EdTech)**
    - Mr. Cuomo presented an "off and away" philosophy for the 2026-2027 school year, where K-8 students will leave devices in classroom carts instead of carrying them throughout the day.
    - Mr. Meyer expressed support for the shift and requested that these operational changes be clearly communicated to parents to build understanding regarding limited screen time.
    - Ms. Bryant suggested that high school courses, particularly those that are writing-based, could benefit from similar no-tech periods to prepare students for college environments that often restrict technology use.
    - The Board discussed that the district currently uses tools like "ClassWise" and "LineWise," which allow teachers to view every student's screen and lock down devices to specific websites. The Board also discussed potentially drafting a formal resolution in support of Virginia House Bill 1486, which concerns instruction on the addictive nature of electronic devices.
- **KNAJ: Relations with Law Enforcement**
    - Ms. Torres recommended updating the policy language to align with the current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which requires an annual review of the program rather than a biennial one.
    - Ms. Swift confirmed the updated draft would reflect an annual review requirement for consistency.

7.1 <u>Board Member Comments</u>:

- Ms. Dooley expressed appreciation for the graduation celebration and student speeches, while thanking teachers for their hard work.
- Ms. Cooper congratulated the graduates, thanked district teachers for their dedication, and wished everyone a safe summer.
- Ms. Richardson praised the evening's policy dialogue and stated her intent to attend the upcoming Charlottesville Middle School graduation.
- Ms. Burns thanked staff for the policy presentation, appreciated the board’s willingness to discuss complex questions, and expressed anticipation for the June 1st meeting on board governance and policy.
- Ms. Bryant reflected on the powerful and inclusive nature of the recent graduation ceremony, particularly praising students at Lugo-McGinness Academy. She affirmed the board’s commitment to supporting educators and staff, noting the need to rebuild trust and engage productively regarding collective bargaining.
- She expressed gratitude to retirees who return to serve the division and praised the teachers working in the night school program at Lugo-McGinness Academy.

- Mr. Meyer attended the K-tech completer ceremony, shared his appreciation for the board's constructive policy discussion, and highlighted recent positive feedback regarding student reading results and the need for clear communication about upcoming EdTech implementation.
- He specifically mentioned attending the CATEC Completer Ceremony and noted recent recognition of the division's reading results by university studies.
- Ms. Torres expressed gratitude to the staff, teachers, and families for their support, and thanked the board members for their patience and collaborative efforts throughout the meeting.

8.1 <u>Work Session Wrap-Up</u>: There was **<u>one</u>** request from the Board:

- Feedback regarding targeted supports for vaping/drugs (Policy JFCH)

9.1 <u>Upcoming Meetings</u>: Ms. Torres read the list of upcoming meetings.

Superintendent Dr. Gurley recognized the communications team as "unsung heroes," praising their success in showcasing every facet of the school system through social media. He acknowledged that expanding this platform was a passion project for several board members and expressed his hope that the team's performance has successfully exceeded expectations.

10.1 Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 8:34 pm.

Lisa Torres, School Board Chair

Leslie Thacker, School Board Clerk