



MINUTES
CHARLOTTEVILLE CITY SCHOOL BOARD COMMUNITY FORUM
"Budget Bistro" Community Forum
Charlottesville Middle School (CMS) Gymnasium
1000 Cherry Ave, Charlottesville, VA 22903
Wednesday, September 23, 2026 (6:00 p.m.)

This community forum provided an opportunity for community members and students to collaborate, discuss budget priorities, and share valuable feedback to guide the Charlottesville City School Board in planning for upcoming fiscal investments and strategic initiatives.

Board Members Present: Amanda Burns (Vice-Chair), Shymora Cooper, Emily Dooley, Chris Meyer, Nicole Richardson, and Lisa Torres (Chair)

Board Members Absent: Zyahna Bryant

Executive Leadership Team & Staff Present: Dr. Royal A. Gurley, Jr. (Superintendent), Dr. Anna Isley (Chief Academic Officer), Kim Powell (Chief Operations Officer), Renee Hoover (Chief Financial Officer), Maria Lewis (Chief Human Resources Officer), Pat Cuomo (Director of Technology), Rachel Rasnake (Director of Student Services), Carolyn Swift (Director of Assessment and Accountability), Denise Mulford (Director of Strategic Initiatives), Lamont Trotter (Director of Organizational Supports), Amanda Simalchik (Director of Community Relations), Carlton Jones (Director of Nutrition Services), Rodney Jordan (Director of Facilities and Operations), and Leslie Thacker (Board Clerk)

City & State Leaders Present: State Senator Creigh Deeds, City Councilor Natalie Oschrein, and City Councilor Jen Fleisher

Call to Order / Welcome & Purpose of the Forum: The School Board community forum entitled "Budget Bistro" was called to order at 6:00 p.m. Notice was given that a meeting of the Charlottesville City School Board took place as part of a community forum entitled "Budget Bistro." Three or more members of the School Board were expected to attend and participate. The potential for discussion of School Board business among attending members necessitated this notice in accordance with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act. Information gathered during the forum directly guides the School Board's planning for the upcoming fiscal year budget and the long-term strategic plan.

Opening Remarks & Welcome: School Board Chair Lisa Torres called the community forum to order at 6:00 p.m. and welcomed those present. She recognized visiting city and state leaders, highlighted the board's historic progress in collective bargaining (providing 5.5% raises for teachers and 10.5% for support staff), and stated that the forum aimed to align community budget priorities with the division's Strategic Plan. Vice-Chair Amanda Burns detailed the evening's flow, instructing attendees to review the budget menu and select up to 10 resource allocation priorities for future budget investment.

Appetizers & Division Info Stations (6:10 p.m. – 6:35 p.m.): Attendees visited educational stations in the front of the gym to engage with division leadership and learn about key programmatic areas and budget menu choices, for example:

- **Staff Compensation & Retention:** Division highlights included competitive starting teacher salaries (\$60,561), high licensed staff retention (92%), and collective bargaining multi-year salary structures.
- **Facilities & Reconfiguration:** Opening of Charlottesville Middle School (grades 6–8) and the Charlottesville Early Learning Center (CELC) in August 2026, returning 5th grade to neighborhood elementary schools.
- **School Safety & Mental Wellness:** Expansion of Care & Safety Assistants (CSAs), implementation of ALICE safety training, complete digital mapping for first responders, and doubling the capacity of qualified school mental health professionals since 2021.
- **Preschool Programming:** CELC opening on August 12, 2026, consolidating 6 preschool programs into one site with 193 VPI slots.
- **Academics, Literacy & Math:** Adoption of High-Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) across elementary levels (Bridges K–3, STEMscopes 4–5), Science of Reading implementation, and expanded Seal of Biliteracy languages (including Arabic, Dari, Pashto, and Swahili).
- **Device Protocols & Technology:** Implementation of new device procedures for 2026–27, including zero devices in Pre-K, K–8 Chromebooks stored on carts in classrooms, strict enforcement of zero phone usage during school hours, and evaluating shifts toward more print materials.

Dinner & Student Voice Conversations (6:35 p.m. – 7:05 p.m.): School Board members served dinner to attendees, after which attendees engaged in structured table discussions with Charlottesville Middle School (CMS) and Charlottesville High School (CHS) student ambassadors using guided prompts:

- **Academics & Electives:** Student feedback on favorite core subject experiences (English, math, science, history, PE), electives (arts, world languages, engineering, AVID, CTE), and suggestions for new course additions.
- **Extracurricular Activities:** Student input regarding participation in clubs, sports, and VHSL activities.
- **Student Supports:** Feedback on restorative justice programs, CSAs, SROs, mental health professionals, and academic specialists (math, reading, SPED, ELL).
- **Big Picture Vision:** Student perspectives on elementary school experiences, unmet needs, and desired division-wide improvements.

Board Meet-and-Greet & Budget Menu Collection (7:05 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.): Board members gathered at designated meet-and-greet stations at the front of the gymnasium to converse with community members, assist with finalized budget selections, collect completed "budget menu" preference forms, and distribute to-go desserts.

Adjourn: The community forum adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Lisa Torres, School Board Chair

Leslie Thacker, School Board Clerk