



MINUTES
SCHOOL BOARD SCHOOL BOARD BUDGET WORK SESSION
CHARLOTTEVILLE CITY SCHOOL BOARD
Walker Upper Elementary School Cafeteria, 1564 Dairy Road
Thursday, January 30, 2025 (5PM)

1.1 Call to Order: Emily Dooley, School Board Chair, called the budget work session to order at 5:04 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. Chris Meyer
Ms. Nicole Richardson	Ms. Lisa Torres

The following Board Members were absent: Mr. Dom Morse

The following Staff Members were present:

Dr. Royal A. Gurley, Jr.	Dr. Katina Otey
Mr. Pat Cuomo	Ms. Kim Powell
Ms. T. Denise Johnson	Ms. Carolyn Swift
Ms. Rachel Rasnake	Ms. Leslie Thacker
Ms. Renee Hoover	Ms. Julia Green

The following Staff Members were absent: Ms. Maria Lewis Ms. Beth Cheuk

3.1 Approval of Proposed Agenda: Ms. Cooper made a motion, seconded by Ms. Torres, to approve the proposed agenda. Upon a roll-call vote, the motion carried with Ms. Burns, Ms. Cooper, Ms. Dooley, Mr. Meyer, Ms. Richardson, and Ms. Torres, voting aye. 6 ayes, 0 nays.

Items for Discussion

4.1 Reconfiguration Furniture Purchase for 5th Grade Classrooms: Kim Powell, Chief Academic Officer, presented information regarding a proposed purchase of reconfiguration furniture for 5th grade classrooms. This furniture is needed to accommodate the 5th grade students returning from Walker to the six elementary schools for the 2026-2027 school year. The recommendation is to authorize using the fund balance to issue purchase orders, beginning in February 2025, for up to \$379,150. This proactive approach will secure the necessary furniture and mitigate potential manufacturer price increases. This purchase aligns with Strategic Plan Priority 4, which focuses on ensuring effective and efficient operations, modernizing facilities, advancing operational efficiencies, and demonstrating fiscal stewardship. Dr. Gurley recommended that the Board receive the proposal and authorize the use of fund balance for this purpose at the February 6, 2025, School Board meeting.

Questions/Discussion:

- Mr. Meyer inquired about the possibility of using the city's CIP contingency funds for the furniture purchase, noting the city's prior denial of funding. Dr. Gurley mentioned potential access to those funds

for safety projects. Ms. Powell clarified the request to authorize the use of the district fund balance as a contingency, allowing the purchase to proceed while leaving the possibility of securing city funding later. Mr. Meyer noted the district's potential surplus and the importance of maintaining a sufficient fund balance while reiterating his belief that the city should be responsible for the expense. He acknowledged the need to proceed with the purchase while continuing to pursue reimbursement from the city.

- Ms. Torres echoed Mr. Meyer's concerns about the district's limited fund balance, emphasizing her belief that the city should cover the cost of the furniture. She stressed the importance of remembering this issue for future discussions and advocacy.
- Ms. Dooley acknowledged Mr. Meyer's points and noted that recent discussions included the possibility of receiving surplus funds to address outstanding items for which the city was originally responsible. She expressed frustration that the district is expected to be grateful for these funds, which she characterized as fulfilling a prior contractual obligation. She assured Ms. Powell that the board would take action on the furniture purchase at the next meeting and continue discussions with city partners.

4.2 [January 30, 2025 Budget Work Session Presentation](#): Dr. Royal Gurley, Jr., Division Superintendent, and Renee Hoover, Director of Finance, presented the proposed changes to the FY 2025-2026 Budget. The presentation addressed the school division's revenues, including increases in State and City, as well as key expenditures. Highlights of the expenditures include salary and benefits adjustments resulting from Collective Bargaining agreements and additional staffing required to meet State-mandated increases in English as a Second Language (ESL) and other student support needs.

Detailed information presented included:

FY 2025 - 2026 Budget Development Update

- Agenda
 - Award: Association of School Business Officials International Meritorious Award for excellence in preparation and issuance of its budget for the Fiscal Year 2024-2025.
 - Priorities
 - Ensure effective and efficient operations
 - Provide a culture of safety, wellness, and belonging
 - Increase academic achievement
 - Support Staff
 - Revenues
 - Primary funding sources (Based on 2025 Budget):
 - City Appropriation - 62.4%
 - State 21.2%
 - Federal - 6.8%
 - Fund Balance - 4.5%
 - Local - 5.2%
 - State revenue decreased by approximately 3% (\$200,000) from FY 2024 to 2025
 - State's K-12 Education Budget
 - Second year of the State's 2024-2026 Biennial Budget
 - Local Composite Index (LCI): Measure of the Local Ability-to-Pay
 - Charlottesville's LCI: 77.02%
 - State's revenue share: 22.98%
 - Governor's proposed budget includes technical updates for:
 - Adjusted daily membership (ADM) projections based on actual fall membership;
 - Lottery-funded programs;
 - State sales tax distribution for school-age population; and
 - English language learner data.
 - State Revenue Impact for Charlottesville
 - Total revenue Increase: \$538,553

- Funding areas with increases:
 - Compensation Supplement: State’s share for the 3% SOQ teacher and staff raises
 - At-Risk: Adjustments to estimated Lottery proceeds supporting K-12 education
 - English as a Second Language (ESL): Changes to SOQ Proficiency Levels
- Trends in City Revenues
 - FY 2026 funding formula contribution: \$3,435,555
 - Additional funding over formula: \$1,492,333
 - Total City funding increase: \$4,927,888
- Expenditures
 - Student Fall Membership Enrollment Trend

School Year	Fall Membership
2018-19	4561
2019-20	4544
2020-21	4259
2021-22	4290
2022-23	4491
2023-24	4444
2024-25	4446

- Expenditures by Categories
 - Salaries and Wages - 52.6%
 - Benefits - 21.6%
 - Contract Services - 11.9%
 - Materials and Supplies - 6.4%
 - Capital Outlay - 1.2%
 - Tuition Payment to Joint Operations - 0.9%
 - Other Charges - 0.8%
 - Other Uses of Funds - 4.5%
- Staffing Allocation
 - Instructional - 69.9%
 - School-Based Services - 18.9%
 - Division Support and Administration - 11.3%

Staff Salaries and Benefits		
Collective Bargaining	Revise the Teacher’s Pay Scale with an even 1.5% step spread	\$ 2,216,615
Collective Bargaining	Annual 5.5% salary increase (1.5% step + 4% raise)	2,595,480
Administrative and General Staff	3% salary increase (1.5% step for an average 3% raise)	677,799
Health Insurance	6% increase	585,248

Savings	Vacancy and Virginia Retirement System (VRS) Hybrid Rate Separation	(2,500,000)
	Total Increase in Personnel Cost	\$ 3,575,142

Non-Discretionary		
City Maintenance Contract	8.94 % increase due to the implementation of the new Collective Bargaining Contract	\$ 434,525
CATEC	Increase resulting from loss of student tuition from Albemarle and program purchase of services contract	207,353
	Total Increase in Non-Discretionary	\$ 641,878

Explanation for Changes since the December Joint City Council/School Board Meeting:

- An Increase of \$73,525 reflects the implementation of Collective Bargaining contract effective 7/1/2025.
- Decrease in Transportation to net zero due to a position being shifted to the Schools and there are no new requests.
- A reduction of \$110,550 was made to CATEC for technology.

- Support Student Needs

English Learners Standards of Quality (SOQ) Proficiency Levels Changes for Teachers					
School	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Total
No. Students Division Wide	324*	193	208	37	762
SOQ Teacher Ratio per Student	1:20	1:30	1:40	1:50	
No. of Teachers	16.2	6.43	5.2	.74	28.57
Current Budgeted ESL FTEs					26.00
Additional FTEs Needed					2.57
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● State Additional Funding: \$159,382 for SOQ teacher-student ratios ● Additional Staffing Needed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2 FTEs to meet SOQ requirements ○ 1 FTE anticipated for enrollment growth ● Cost of a Teacher: \$94,882 per FTE ● Total Cost for 3 FTEs: \$284,646 					
* Estimate for enrollment growth					

■ **New Accountability Implications**

- Next school year, schools will be evaluated under a new accountability system.
- While enrollment has plateaued, the needs of our students continue to grow.
- Human capital and instructional resources will need to be allocated differently across our schools to address these changing needs.

- Although we will strive to meet our needs internally, there are simply not enough resources to support the rising demands among our student subgroups.
- The Standards of Quality (SOQ) continue to fund schools at levels far below the minimum required to appropriately support our students.

Additional Positions	FTE	Cost
Teachers: ESL	3.0	\$ 284,646
ESL: Family Engagement Liaison	1.0	74,995
Teacher: Reading & Math Specialists	2.0	189,764
Teacher: Health & Medical Sciences (CHS)	.5	59,260
Human Resource: Recruiting Specialist	1.0	103,343
Transportation: Coordinator	1.0	125,206
Clinical Social Workers		239,207
One-Time Walker Retention Bonus		173,000
Total Additional Support Student Needs	8.5	\$ 1,249,421

- FY 26 Budget Summary
- Summary of FY 26 Budget Changes
-

Revenue Increases: State and City	\$ <u>5,466,441</u>
Expenditures	
• Salary and Benefits	3,575,142
• Non- Discretionary	641,878
• Students Needs/Improvements	1,249,421
Total Expenditure Increases	\$ <u>5,466,441</u>

- Upcoming Budget Meetings
- FY 2025-26 Funding Request (Changes to FY 2025)

Strategic Plan Priority	SALARY & BENEFIT ACTIONS	AMOUNT	FTE
3	Teachers: Change Pay Scale to 1.5% even spread & 5.5% increase	4,812,095	
3	Administration: Average 3% increase	279,737	
3	General (Support): Average 3% increase	398,062	
3	Benefit: Health Insurance (Estimate 6%)	585,248	
	<i>Total Salary & Benefit Actions</i>	6,075,142	
	RECURRING & NON-DISCRETIONARY CONTRACTS		
4	City Contract: Maintenance (Estimate 8.94%)	434,525	
4	CATEC: Sustain Academic and Operation Services	207,353	

	<i>Total Recurring & Non-Discretionary Contracts</i>	641,878	
Strategic Plan Priority	SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAM SUPPORTS & IMPROVEMENTS		
1	Teachers: English Second Language	284,646	3.0
2	Liaison: ESL Family Engagement	74,995	1.0
1	Teachers: Reading and Math Specialists serving Division Wide	189,764	2.0
1	Teachers: Health & Medical Science (CHS)	59,260	0.5
3	Specialist: Human Resource Recruiting Specialist	103,343	1.0
4	Coordinator: Student Transportation	125,206	1.0
3	Clinical Social Workers	239,207	
3	One-time Walker Retention Bonus	173,000	
	<i>Total School-Based Program Supports & Improvements</i>	1,249,421	
	REDUCTIONS		
	Vacancy savings & Separation of the VRS Hybrid Rate	(2,500,000)	
	<i>Total Reductions</i>	(2,500,000)	
	Total Increase Expenditures	5,466,441	8.5
	REVENUES		
	Increase: State	538,553	
	City (Estimated Request)	4,927,888	
	Total Increase Revenues	5,466,441	

Questions/Discussion:

- Mr. Meyer raised concerns about the city's funding formula, which is based on 40% of real property taxes. He argued that this formula is outdated and doesn't reflect the city's increasing revenue from other tax sources (personal property, lodging, food). He pointed out that the city often underestimates real property tax revenue, resulting in surpluses, a portion of which he believes should go to the schools. He suggested that the graph showing the 40% formula should be removed from future presentations and advocated for a new, needs-based funding formula rather than relying on the current, non-binding "rule of thumb." While acknowledging the city's proposed \$5 million contribution (an increase of nearly \$1.5 million over the formula amount), he believes this number is insufficient and should be increased based on the school division's needs-based budget previously presented to the city. He emphasized that the current proposal is just an initial offer and is subject to change. Dr. Gurley confirmed that the \$3.4 million was the initial formula-based amount, and the additional \$1.4 million was secured through advocacy efforts, recognizing that the formula amount was insufficient to meet the division's needs.
- Ms. Torres expressed concern that the budget process had moved forward too quickly, bypassing a crucial collaborative meeting. She felt the board had not had sufficient opportunity to discuss the budget in detail with Dr. Gurley and his team before the proposed budget was presented. She referenced a previous budget cycle where the initial ask was higher (\$12 million), then reduced (\$9 million), and ultimately settled at a lower amount (\$7 million), implying a more iterative and collaborative process. She questioned the purpose of the upcoming February 10th meeting with the city council, given that the proposed budget had already been presented. Ms. Torres emphasized the need for more discussion, particularly regarding the uncertainty surrounding federal funding and its potential impact on state and local allocations, including Title monies. She stressed the importance of ensuring student needs are met amidst this uncertainty. Dr. Gurley responded that they didn't have to meet with the council again and reiterated his position that he advocated for the \$5 million regardless of the city's initial offer. Ms. Torres acknowledged the work done by Dr. Gurley's team but reiterated her desire for a more thorough discussion and planning process, especially given the current unknowns regarding federal funding.

- Ms. Dooley suggested moving forward with the presentation to allow Dr. Gurley and his team to share the details of the proposed budget. She felt that this would provide the board with the necessary information to determine if the budget adequately addressed their established goals. She emphasized the importance of hearing the presentation before further discussion about the adequacy of the funding.
- Mr. Meyer reiterated his concern about the use of the 40% real property tax formula, arguing that it weakens the school division's negotiating position. He believes it portrays the city's additional allocation as an act of generosity, rather than a rightful share.
- Ms. Dooley clarified that the current presentation materials, including the slide in question, did not necessarily have to be included in the final presentation to the city council. Her priority was to allow the staff to present their work.
- Mr. Meyer inquired about benchmarks for the expenditure categories, asking if there were comparisons available. Dr. Gurley indicated he wasn't aware of any readily available industry-wide benchmarks for these specific allocations. Ms. Powell recalled a state-offered efficiency study conducted about a decade prior, which showed the division was very efficient in its administrative spending compared to other school divisions. Mr. Meyer suggested that highlighting this past efficiency could be beneficial, demonstrating that the division spends a greater proportion of its budget on instruction and less on administration. Ms. Powell offered to share the old report and reiterated that the study confirmed the division's administrative efficiency. No current benchmarking data was identified.
- Mr. Meyer clarified that the \$2,595,000 figure represents only the 4% raise for licensed staff, not including the additional 1.5% step increase. Dr. Gurley confirmed this and explained that the \$2.2 million covers the cost of standardizing the steps on the teacher pay scale to 1.5%, which is a one-time cost. He further explained that teachers will move up a step, which is 1.5% higher, for a total increase of 5.5% (the 4% raise plus the 1.5% step increase).
- Mr. Meyer then asked if the proposed budget addresses the staff compensation concerns raised in a recent email from Charlottesville United for Public Education (CUPE). Dr. Gurley responded affirmatively, stating that the raises reflect the work done through the collective bargaining process with the teachers' union. He also noted the upcoming collective bargaining with support staff as another opportunity to address their compensation concerns.
- Mr. Meyer inquired whether the \$2.5 million in savings from the retirement system was a one-time occurrence or an annual savings. Ms. Hoover confirmed it was a one-time savings. Mr. Meyer expressed concern that this would necessitate finding an additional \$2.5 million the following year to cover the current year's salary increases. Ms. Dooley clarified that the first line item (the \$2.2 million for step standardization) was also a one-time cost, suggesting some potential offsetting effect. Mr. Meyer reiterated his understanding that an additional \$2.5 million would need to be found next year. Ms. Dooley disagreed. Ms. Hoover then clarified that the second row (the 5.5% total increase) would be an annual cost, potentially even more the following year due to the agreement. Mr. Meyer acknowledged that the \$2.2 million was a one-time cost, which he felt somewhat balanced the situation.
- Ms. Torres clarified that the collective bargaining agreement with the teachers' union had not yet been finalized, as it was still in the ratification process. She emphasized that the board had not yet approved the contract and wanted this noted in the record. Dr. Gurley explained that while the ratification process was ongoing, the financial terms of the agreement, including the salary increases, were fixed and would not change. Ms. Torres then asked about the average teacher salary increase over the past five or six years, noting the board's consistent prioritization of maximizing teacher compensation. Dr. Gurley stated that the average increase has been about 4%.
- Mr. Meyer observed that the 6% increase in healthcare costs seemed slightly higher than general inflation, though he acknowledged that healthcare inflation typically runs higher. He questioned whether this 6% increase was above average compared to other entities. Ms. Hoover clarified that the division's healthcare cost increase was significantly lower than the market trend, which is closer to 9 or 10%. Mr. Meyer concluded that the division's current healthcare programs are effectively managing and slowing cost increases compared to market benchmarks.
- Ms. Powell provided details regarding the non-discretionary contracts, specifically the pupil transportation contract. She explained that the "net zero" increase in this contract was due to the

division absorbing costs associated with a transitioned planning and routing position. She also mentioned an increase in uniform costs for the city's driver core.

- Ms. Powell then discussed the city's use of 30-hour vs. 40-hour positions for its drivers, noting that many 30-hour drivers work over 30 hours but don't receive full-time benefits. This is a long-standing issue to be addressed internally by the city, likely through collective bargaining. A key initiative is to reduce the division's reliance on contracted services for special needs transportation. The plan is to increase the number of vans and van drivers, shifting funds from the "purchase services" budget line to the van driver payroll line. This requires collaboration with the city's HR and finance departments to streamline the hiring process for van drivers. Ms. Powell mentioned that she would write a letter to clarify the division's needs in this transition. While no immediate savings are expected due to van purchases and other transition costs, the goal is to significantly reduce the division's dependence on expensive contracted services (currently costing over \$600,000). She declined to estimate potential savings.
- Ms. Burns raised concerns about the city maintenance contract, specifically regarding record-keeping. She cited a section of the contract that requires the city to maintain accurate records of services rendered and allow the school board to inspect those records. She questioned whether these records were being adequately maintained and suggested that any savings resulting from unperformed work should be returned to the school system, rather than going into the city's surplus. She acknowledged that Dr. Gurley was working with the city manager to review the agreements and improve clarity. Ms. Burns emphasized the board's desire for more detailed, line-item accountability for the services provided under the contract.
- Dr. Gurley confirmed that he and Ms. Powell had already begun working on this issue, collaborating with the city's finance director to establish a mutually understandable reporting system that would detail the services provided and their associated costs.
- Ms. Burns suggested that, ideally, the board would like to see a couple of years of these reports to identify trends and ensure that the work is being done effectively and in line with the contract's intent. Dr. Gurley reiterated that he had already initiated this process.
- Mr. Meyer expressed concern about school bus driver staffing levels, recalling a past shortage. While pleased that the transportation budget wasn't increasing, he asked about current staffing. Ms. Powell acknowledged that staffing is fluid, but that significant improvements have been made. She couldn't guarantee they were fully staffed at that moment, but they were much closer than before, while acknowledging there is still a revolving door of employees.
- Mr. Meyer suggested potentially allocating funds to move 30-hour drivers to 40 hours to improve retention and avoid driver shortages in the future. Ms. Powell agreed to provide a report on current vacancies, filled positions, and the hiring pipeline. She also committed to providing data on the number of drivers working over 30 hours but classified them as 30-hour employees. She cautioned about interfering with the city's collective bargaining process but agreed that ensuring adequate drivers was crucial.
- Mr. Meyer emphasized the importance of reliable transportation for students, particularly English Language Learners, given the impact on attendance and school accreditation. Ms. Powell reassured the board that, based on current information, there were no concerns about starting the next school year with the same routes and no waitlists as the current year. She acknowledged the past transportation issues and didn't take anything for granted, but wanted to provide that reassurance.
- Mr. Meyer inquired about the possibility of bringing Nelson County into the CATEC program to help reduce costs. Dr. Gurley responded that discussions had taken place with multiple localities, but Nelson County hadn't yet expressed a firm commitment. He noted that the division had taken on additional students from Fluvanna County and received interest from other areas. He stated that CATEC is currently performing well, and the budget number reflected a \$110,000 decrease from the figure presented in December. Mr. Meyer expressed hope that the cost would decrease further. Dr. Gurley shared that hope.
- Mr. Meyer observed that the projected increase in ELL students (around 740-750) was minimal. Dr. Gurley clarified that the figures presented were the current numbers. He and Ms. Hoover explained that the calculations for staffing needs were based on a mix of current student numbers plus an estimated 20 additional students in Level 1 services. This estimate, they said, was based on the data presented by Dr.

Pfautz in her November presentation. They reiterated that the calculations involved reviewing the number of students in each level (Level 1, Level 2, etc.) as presented in that November table.

- Ms. Dooley inquired about the potential for reallocating ELL teachers if student numbers decrease. She asked about teacher licensure and whether they are dual-endorsed. Dr. Gurley explained that ELL endorsement is no longer an add-on but can be a teacher's sole endorsement. He expressed hope that staff repurposing wouldn't be necessary but acknowledged that they would review teacher licensure to identify other potential roles within the buildings if needed. He also stated that they will continue monitoring ELL student numbers for any significant downward trends. Ms. Dooley noted that improved student-teacher ratios would result from lower student numbers. Dr. Gurley confirmed this.
- Mr. Meyer asked if any large housing developments were expected to come online over the summer. Ms. Powell confirmed that there were no such projects anticipated for the following year.
- Ms. Torres asked if all 26 budgeted ELL teacher positions were currently filled. Dr. Gurley replied that there was a 0.5 position vacant at Johnson Elementary, but they had received applications for it.
- Ms. Torres asked about the Transportation Coordinator position, clarifying whether it was filled by Ms. Devall or a new position. Ms. Powell explained that Ms. Devall is currently in the role. The division is invoicing the city for her payroll expenses through the end of the year. The transportation software (Versatrans) has also been brought in-house, which allows the division to utilize its full functionality, something that was restricted when it was under the city's control. The division is also invoicing the city for the remaining software costs for the year.
- Mr. Meyer asked about the role of the clinical social workers, clarifying whether their work focused on psychological services, connections to social services, or both. Dr. Gurley explained that their primary focus is the mental well-being of students, and they are integral members of school mental wellness teams. He noted that they are deployed differently across schools, working alongside school psychologists, mental health professionals, social-emotional workers, and support counselors, all under the leadership of Rachel Rasnake.
- Mr. Meyer then observed that the clinical social worker funding seemed equivalent to 2.5 FTEs and asked if they were contractors. Dr. Gurley clarified that they are Charlottesville City Schools employees, but their positions have been funded with non-recurring (one-time) funds. This is why no FTE count is shown.
- Mr. Meyer expressed support for the reading and math specialists being deployed to schools with the highest needs, particularly those facing testing and accreditation challenges. He then asked if the family engagement liaison would focus on attendance issues, given the importance of attendance for accreditation.
- Dr. Gurley reported that current attendance initiatives are showing positive results, with chronic absenteeism rates significantly decreasing compared to the same time last year. He attributed this improvement to the work of attendance staff and their deployment in schools. He explained that the family engagement liaison's role focuses on connecting with families to identify their needs, particularly at Tier 3 (students not meeting with success). This liaison acts as a bridge between school and home.
- Ms. Cooper asked if the family engagement liaison was a new position or if it was filled by an existing person. Dr. Gurley clarified that it was a new, additional position, expanding the team from two to three members. This new liaison will work directly with Bianca Johnson.
- Ms. Dooley inquired about the removal of the restorative justice position that was seen in the December budget draft, referencing Bianca Johnson's compelling presentation at the previous board meeting. Dr. Gurley clarified that Ms. Johnson will continue doing restorative justice work. The change involves her relinquishing some family engagement duties, which will be taken over by the new family engagement liaison position. This allows Ms. Johnson to dedicate more time to restorative justice while still engaging in some family engagement activities. Dr. Gurley explained that having two coordinators (Ms. Johnson and a new liaison) wasn't necessary. He emphasized that the focus remains on restorative justice, but the budgetary needs for family engagement are being addressed through the new liaison role.
- Ms. Dooley confirmed her understanding that the new position is not a dedicated restorative justice position. Dr. Gurley clarified that the previously discussed additional full-time restorative justice position was never formally approved. He reiterated that Ms. Johnson will focus on restorative justice, but the family engagement liaison will handle some of those duties, freeing up Ms. Johnson's time.

- Ms. Dooley asked about the qualifications for the family engagement liaison, specifically whether a teaching license was required. Dr. Gurley stated that it was not required and that the position could be filled by anyone with the necessary skills and a passion for the work. Bilingual or trilingual skills would be preferred. He noted that Ms. Johnson, for example, does not have a teaching background. The job description is still being developed.
- Ms. Cooper emphasized the importance of family engagement and requested that the job description for the liaison not have unnecessary restrictions, such as requiring a degree, to ensure that community members with relevant experience are eligible to apply.
- Mr. Meyer noted that many of the proposed positions address identified needs and the upcoming accreditation challenges. He also acknowledged the division's efforts to address observations from CUPE, particularly regarding permanent substitute positions. He asked if there was still a need for additional permanent substitutes.
- Dr. Gurley stated that principals would likely say yes to more permanent subs. However, he clarified that the previously budgeted permanent sub-positions are recurring for the current year and have generally met school needs. He mentioned a recent meeting with the high school principal, who expressed appreciation for the pay increase for substitutes, noting its positive impact on school climate and productivity.
- Mr. Meyer then asked if teachers were still frequently having to cover classes during their planning periods or lunch breaks. Dr. Gurley confirmed that this still occurs, citing an example from the high school. Mr. Meyer suggested exploring alternative solutions to this issue, which Dr. Gurley indicated they were doing.
- Dr. Gurley addressed the Walker School reconfiguration and the anxieties it created among staff. He explained that the Walker representatives had requested several things, including retention bonuses. He felt that granting these bonuses wouldn't set a negative precedent because of the unique circumstances of a school closure. He emphasized the difficulty Dr. Thompson would have filling positions if staff left for other schools within the division. Therefore, he recommended a \$2,000 retention bonus for licensed staff (including administrators, as confirmed by Ms. Dooley) and a \$1,000 bonus for support staff at Walker, paid in two installments: December 15, 2025, and May 15, 2026. This is intended to retain staff and maintain a smooth operation during the school's final year. Dr. Gurley also mentioned that Walker teachers will learn their placements for the following year soon, with the first phase of notifications going out the following week, and the remainder the week after. He stressed the importance of retaining the Walker staff and acknowledging their value and contributions.
- Ms. Torres thanked Dr. Gurley and his team for their work on the budget. She then commented that the budget was heavily focused on personnel and asked if there were any programmatic changes or investments that should be considered to improve the student experience. She acknowledged the many changes in education, some mandated, and asked if current programs were meeting student needs.
- Dr. Gurley responded that instructional programs are evolving due to legislative changes, such as the Virginia Literacy Act, which has impacted reading programs and master schedules. He believes the division is meeting student needs and doesn't think adding more programs at this time would be beneficial, given the existing workload on teachers.
- Ms. Torres then asked about funding for field trips and similar activities, inquiring if those were adequately budgeted. Dr. Gurley confirmed that they were and that such requests are rarely denied. He explained that part of this year's budget process involved shifting funds between accounts to avoid constant transfers later in the year.
- Finally, Ms. Torres asked if there were any areas of the budget where they should be more cautious, given the current uncertain climate. Dr. Gurley stated that he didn't think so and that they were proceeding with a "business as usual" approach. He reiterated that the division would continue its established practices regarding curriculum and student support. He added that he relies on his team as a "thermometer" to gauge the effectiveness of their efforts and that he is always open to suggestions.
- Ms. Cooper revisited the retention bonuses for Walker School staff, suggesting a tiered approach might create a sense of inequity. While licensed personnel would receive \$2,000 and support staff \$1,000, she suggested a smaller gap, proposing \$2,000 for licensed and \$1,500 for support staff. She expressed concern that support staff might feel undervalued with the larger difference. Ms. Dooley asked about the

budgetary impact of increasing the support staff bonus to \$1,500 and how many staff that would affect. Dr. Gurley deferred to Ms. Hoover for the exact number but stated that they would bring that information to the next meeting.

- Ms. Torres asked if all support staff from Walker had been placed in other positions. Dr. Gurley confirmed that all teachers had been placed, and only a handful of support staff positions remained in limbo.
- Ms. Torres thanked Ms. Cooper for raising the bonus concern, sharing a personal anecdote about a recently deceased support staff member from her high school, emphasizing the positive impact these staff members have. Dr. Gurley acknowledged the importance of support staff and confirmed they would address the bonus question at the next meeting.
- Mr. Meyer inquired about the impact of a potential loss of federal funding (6.8% of the budget) and whether the fund balance could cover it. Dr. Gurley explained that even when federal funds were available, they were often already allocated. He deferred to Ms. Hoover for further explanation.
- Ms. Hoover clarified that Title I and Title 6B funds are formula-driven and the current awards are secure, having already passed through the state. She also stated that the calculation methods for these funds were not affected by the financial assistance being targeted by the federal government, so they felt safe in that regard. However, she acknowledged that if federal funds were to completely disappear, they would need to request additional funding from the city to make up the difference (approximately \$7 million).
- Mr. Meyer then asked about the current amount of the budget's fund balance, which Ms. Hoover estimated to be around \$6.5 or \$6 million.
- Mr. Meyer expressed relief that the division had some funds in reserve for a "worst-case scenario" with federal funding. He then reiterated his concern about relying on the city's funding formula, emphasizing that the board should advocate for more funding beyond that "artificial" number. He recalled past enrichment programs, like Spanish instruction in elementary schools, and expressed a desire to move beyond a "survival mentality." He suggested that the community should invest more in its students and schools. He encouraged Dr. Gurley to advocate strongly for the division's needs and assured him that the board would also negotiate with the city council. He asked Dr. Gurley if there were any specific gaps in the budget, acknowledging that the current proposal was different from the initial one with all the desired FTEs.
- Mr. Meyer then shifted to the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), noting that the priority project allocation had remained at \$1.25 million for five years. He asked if this amount was increasing, as he didn't see it reflected in the city's recent presentation. Ms. Powell confirmed she hadn't heard of any increase. Mr. Meyer stated that he would like the division to also present its CIP requests to the city, not just the operational budget. He felt there were gaps in the CIP and that the city needed to increase funding to ensure facilities were properly maintained and provide a healthy and comfortable learning environment. He also expressed a desire to see an accelerated rollout of solar energy projects and other initiatives that could reduce expenses.
- Ms. Richardson asked about the status of diversity and inclusion programs and funding. Dr. Gurley mentioned the executive order and confirmed that Dr. Johnson continues her equity work. He noted that her department has evolved and is now referred to as the Office of Strategic Initiatives, reflecting the programmatic work they do. He reiterated that the approach to diversity and inclusion remains "business as usual."
- Ms. Dooley thanked Mr. Meyer for his comments, noting that they provided valuable feedback for the board as they collaborated on the upcoming presentation to the city council.

5.1 Comments from Members of the Community: There were none.

6.1 Upcoming Meetings: Ms. Dooley read the list of upcoming meetings.

Ms. Dooley read a statement acknowledging community concerns regarding recent executive orders and their potential impact on students and staff. She reaffirmed the school division's commitment to fostering a learning environment where every student feels valued, safe, and supported, regardless of background or identity. She

acknowledged the uncertainty created by recent policy changes and assured the community that the division's focus remains on the well-being of all students and staff. She reiterated the division's long-standing values of diversity, inclusion, and respect, and confirmed that the curriculum has not changed and will not change. She concluded by expressing the division's commitment to its mission of "being better together."

7.1 Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

A video of the January 30, 2025 meeting can be located at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Qa7TRMkK0cYFY1THrC3wtC7oSL0D0Sjl/view?usp=drive_link



Emily Dooley, School Board Chair



Leslie Thacker, School Board Clerk