



## MINUTES

### Charlottesville City School Board/City Council Joint Budget Work Session

December 19, 2024 (5:00 p.m.)

Walker Upper Elementary School Cafeteria

1564 Dairy Road, Charlottesville, VA

**1.1 Call to Order:** School Board Chair Lisa Torres and Vice-Mayor Brian Pinkston called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

#### **2.1 Roll Call:**

The following School Board Members were present:

Ms. Amanda Burns  
Ms. Emily Dooley  
Mr. Chris Meyer  
Ms. Lisa Torres

Ms. Shymora Cooper  
Mr. Dom Morse  
Ms. Nicole Richardson

The following School Staff Members were present:

Dr. Royal Gurley  
Ms. Kim Powell  
Ms. Maria Lewis  
Ms. Beth Cheuk  
Ms. Leslie Thacker  
Ms. Julia Green

Dr. Katina Otey  
Ms. Renee Hoover  
Ms. Rachel Rasnake  
Ms. Carolyn Swift  
Ms. T. Denise Johnson

The following City Council Members were present:

Vice Mayor Brian Pinkston  
Ms. Natalie Oschrin

Mr. Lloyd Snook  
Mr. Michael Payne

The following City Council Members were absent:

Mayor Juandiego Wade

The following City Staff Members were present:

Mr. Riaan Anthony  
Mr. Mike Goddard  
Mr. Jacob Stroman  
Mr. Sam Sanders  
Ms. Afton Schneider

Mr. Garland Williams  
Ms. Maxicellia Robinson  
Ms. Krisy Hammill  
Mr. Eden Ratliff  
Mr. Remy Trail

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

**4.1 Presentation of FY 2026 Budget Priorities & Estimates to City Council:** Dr. Royal Gurley, Division Superintendent, and the Executive Leadership Team presented the December 19, 2024 Joint Budget Work Session Presentation for information and discussion. Information presented included:

- Agenda:
  - Budget Priorities
  - Student Demographics & Data
  - Operational Costs
  - Budget Considerations
  - Upcoming Budget Meetings
- Budget Themes and Priorities:
  - Ensure Effective and Efficient Operations
    - Modernize school facilities, including safety recommendations
    - Invest in sustainability and energy efficiency
    - Advance operational efficiencies and upgrades
    - Practice fiscal stewardship
  - Provide A Culture of Safety, Wellness, and Belonging
    - Support social, emotional, and physical wellness
    - Foster a strong sense of community
    - Ensure a safe and positive learning environment
  - Increase Academic Achievement
    - Equip learners with a plan for the future
    - Engage in rigorous, inclusive, and relevant learning experiences
    - Eliminate achievement and opportunity gaps
    - Improve student outcomes in core subjects
    - Ensure small class sizes
    - Sustain fine arts funding
  - Support Our Staff
    - Recruit and retain high-quality teachers and staff
    - Offer meaningful, relevant, timely, and personalized professional learning
    - Recruit and retain teachers of color
    - Value staff voice
    - Ensure competitive pay and benefits
- Student Demographics & Data:
  - Fall Daily Membership Trends
  - Enrollment data as of August 28, 2024 (breakdown by school and grade)
  - Student Demographics (Economically Disadvantaged, Students with Disabilities, English Learners)
  - SOL Reading and Math Pass Rates (Spring 2024)
- 2025-26 Implications:
  - New accountability system for schools
  - Growing student needs despite plateaued enrollment
  - Resource allocation challenges
  - Insufficient Standards of Quality (SOQ) funding
- Operational Costs:
  - Energy Use Intensity & Water Use Intensity data
  - Total FY 2023 Utility Cost: \$1.37 million
  - Utility Rate Changes
- Facilities:
  - Safety & Security Infrastructure
  - CHS Modernization
  - Pre-K Center
  - Elementary Modernizations
  - Energy Efficiency Upgrades
- Transportation:
  - Personnel cost increases
  - Balance of 30-hour & 40-hour positions

- Reduced dependency on contract services
- FY 26 Budget Considerations:
  - CCS Salary Increase Rates
  - Benefits (Health insurance, VRS)
  - Non-discretionary costs (City Contracts, CATEC)
- Budget Requests for Student Improvement:
  - ESL Teachers: 5.5 FTEs (\$519,000)
  - Reading Specialist: 1 FTE (\$94,000)
  - Behavioral Technicians: 3 FTEs (\$282,000)
  - HR Recruiting Specialist: 1 FTE (\$103,000)
  - Health & Medical Sciences Pathway: .5 FTE (\$46,000)
  - Restorative Justice Education Specialist (\$105,000)
- Preliminary Summary of FY 26 Budget Considerations:
  - Compensation & Benefits: \$5.3 million
  - Non-Discretionary: \$1.5 million
  - Student Improvements: \$1.1 million
  - Total: \$7.9 million
- Budget Key Dates:
  - Regular School Board Meeting: Budget Update (January 9, 2025)
  - Budget Work Session: School Board (January 30, 2025)
  - Regular School Board Meeting: Presentation of Superintendent's Budget & Public Hearing (February 6, 2025)
  - City Council & School Board: Joint Budget Work Session (February 10, 2025)

#### Discussion/Questions:

- Ms. Oschrin raised a question regarding the consistency of the "economically disadvantaged" metric over time, specifically noting the shift from using free and reduced lunch applications to direct certification through TANF, SNAP, and Medicaid. Dr. Gurley clarified that while the method of identification has changed due to the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and the elimination of lunch applications, the underlying definition of "economically disadvantaged" as defined by the state has remained consistent. Ms. Oschrin further inquired if the 2004 data had been retroactively adjusted to reflect the current direct certification method. Dr. Gurley confirmed that the definition has always been the same. Ms. Powell added that while the definition remained constant, the methodology of identifying students changed. Before CEP, lunch applications were utilized, but now direct certification is used. She also highlighted a recent sharp increase in economically disadvantaged numbers, coinciding with increased participation in programs like summer care, which also relies on similar economic indicators.
- Mr. Pinkston calculated that 568 students out of a total enrollment of 4,446, receiving special education services, represents approximately 13%. Dr. Gurley confirmed the calculation's accuracy. He then emphasized the importance of recognizing the overlap in student demographics. Many students may fall into multiple categories, such as being economically disadvantaged, a student with disabilities, and/or an English Language Learner. This means that the total number of students requiring additional support is not simply the sum of each category.
- Mr. Meyer inquired whether the state was providing additional funding to support the school division in meeting newly imposed higher standards. Dr. Gurley confirmed that the state was not allocating any supplementary funds, characterizing the situation as a "you figure it out" model. He emphasized that teachers are deeply concerned about these new requirements, feeling that the outcomes will reflect on their performance, despite the mandates being externally imposed. Dr. Gurley reiterated that the division is tasked with addressing these mandates without additional resources. He further noted that 10% of student achievement will now be factored into the school division's accreditation, adding to the pressure and implications for educators.

- Ms. Oschrin asked Dr. Gurley to elaborate on the changes to the state accreditation standards. Dr. Gurley explained that the new standards include a revised weighting for student growth, the inclusion of chronic absenteeism, and factors related to advanced coursework and work-based learning. He expressed frustration with the inclusion of chronic absenteeism, as it's a factor largely outside of a teacher's control, although he acknowledged the school's efforts to address it. He also raised concerns about the emphasis on advanced high school-level courses in middle school, arguing that it can lead to students being pushed too quickly and becoming disengaged. Dr. Gurley highlighted that work-based learning is a positive addition to the new standards. He also clarified that both Science and History are included in the advanced courses.
- Mr. Meyer shared that he requested that the energy and water usage report be included in this presentation. He further stated that the purpose of the report's inclusion was to highlight potential cost savings within school operations. He emphasized that current consumption levels are not decreasing, resulting in funds being directed toward utility expenses rather than educational resources. He stressed the need for strategic investment decisions by the facilities and finance departments to reduce operational costs and prioritize funding for teachers and students. Mr. Meyer framed this as a policy decision regarding the allocation of resources within the school system.
- Mr. Snook questioned the 42.6% increase in electricity figures, prompting Mr. Meyer to clarify that this represented the rate change from 2011 to 2023, with the per kilowatt-hour rate nearly doubling. Mr. Meyer then emphasized the compounding issue of rising energy intensity and escalating electricity rates, stressing the need for proactive measures. He reiterated the school system's long-standing request for rooftop solar installations to mitigate energy consumption and hedge against future cost increases. Mr. Meyer concluded by urging the board to allocate necessary funds and staff resources to expedite solar projects, prioritizing investments in teachers and staff over increasing utility expenditures.
- Ms. Richardson inquired about the inclusion of gymnasium restrooms in the ongoing upgrades at Charlottesville High School (CHS). Ms. Powell clarified that the ultimate goal is to renovate all CHS restrooms to match the design of the recently completed B Commons restrooms and the planned Charlottesville Middle School restrooms. Due to funding constraints, a planned second-phase renovation of the B Commons second-floor boys' restroom was deferred. The successful B Commons renovation has demonstrated the effectiveness of the new design in addressing supervision and behavioral concerns but has also highlighted the need to renovate the remaining older restrooms, where those issues have now become concentrated. Ms. Powell emphasized that the new restroom design enhances both student privacy and supervision and that the plan is to address all CHS restrooms over time, acknowledging the significant financial commitment required.
- Mr. Snook inquired about the status of ceiling tiles and the MLK Performing Arts Center. Dr. Gurley described the ceiling tiles as being in a state of disrepair, with sagging and discolored tiles detracting from the learning environment. He also noted that the building's open design, while reflecting a past era, presents security challenges in the present. Regarding the MLK Performing Arts Center, Dr. Gurley acknowledged its value to the community but highlighted its dated aesthetic, including its color scheme and carpeting. She suggested that while comprehensive upgrades would be ideal, immediate improvements to carpeting and seating are necessary and, while costly, are being prioritized after previous delays.
- Mr. Snook then asked about the turf field. Dr. Gurley and Ms. Powell clarified that the turf field has exceeded its expected lifespan, although annual maintenance is being conducted to prolong its use. They indicated that the field is likely within three years of needing replacement, despite being technically past its due date, and that the athletic department is doing its best to keep it in usable condition through regular upkeep.
- Ms. Torres raised a point regarding the fixed allocation of \$1.25 million for school modernization, which has remained unchanged for at least five years. She noted that while the school system is grateful for this funding, which has supported elementary school improvements and projects like the CHS bathroom renovations, the fixed amount now provides less purchasing power due to inflation. She highlighted that at least one elementary school is still undergoing modernization, and requested that the allocation be considered for adjustment to reflect current costs. This request was previously discussed during the CIP joint meeting and a prior school board meeting.

- Mr. Pinkston inquired whether the school system currently had vans and van drivers, or if the proposed plan involved entirely new resources. Ms. Powell clarified that the system currently operates two vans. However, to reduce reliance on contracted services, it was determined that six additional vans are needed. Currently, bus aides are often pulled from their regular duties to drive these special transportation runs, which disrupts bus support. The proposed budget increase aims to balance supply and demand for transportation services, and it is hoped that future increases will be less significant once the system recovers from post-COVID imbalances. Ms. Powell also confirmed, based on her office's observations, that adjustments to the transportation system are necessary.
- Mr. Meyer raised the issue of transitioning to electric school buses (EVs) to reduce operational expenses, noting it's a city responsibility. Mr. Sanders responded that the city is committed to EV integration, currently operating two EVs, and considering applying for a grant for two more, contingent on budget availability. The goal is full fleet conversion, but it's a long-term plan.
- Mr. Meyer asked how the city's \$1 million annual CIP climate-related funding benefits schools, suggesting it could support EV bus matching grants or rooftop solar. Mr. Payne added that full EV fleet conversion relies heavily on federal funding from the bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act, and potential cuts to those programs could impede progress.
- Mr. Sanders clarified that the \$1 million climate fund was allocated to implement the city's climate action plan, with subject matter experts determining its deployment. There was no specific directive to allocate a percentage of the fund to schools. However, they are exploring using the fund for the EV bus grant's local match. He emphasized that he could not provide a concrete answer about how the fund specifically benefits schools because that wasn't how the fund was designed.
- Mr. Sanders also confirmed that the presented transportation changes were the result of collaborative discussions between Charlottesville Area Transit (CAT) and school staff, not a city mandate. He stressed that the focus was on meeting student transportation needs, and now the challenge is funding the agreed-upon changes.
- Mr. Williams commended Ms. Powell for her thorough explanation of the transportation information. He emphasized that the 16 full-time driver positions are crucial for ensuring adequate staffing during the summer months. He explained that relying heavily on part-time drivers could lead to staffing shortages during the summer, as they are not obligated to work during that period. The full-time positions are essential to guarantee consistent transportation for students throughout the year.
- Ms. Richardson asked about the current wage for the transportation positions and the potential impact of an increase. Mr. Williams responded that a scheduled wage increase will be effective January 1st, and the budget reflects the true cost of that increase. He further specified that the starting salary for pupil transportation drivers is \$23 per hour, with a top rate of \$31 per hour starting in January 2025. This rate will increase by approximately \$0.50 per hour in July 2025.
- Mr. Pinkston inquired about an update on rooftop solar for Charlottesville High School (CHS), noting he understood there were issues with Dominion. Mr. Sanders acknowledged that solar is a complex issue and that he didn't have enough information present to give a full answer. He stated that a financial effort is underway to determine a viable financing mechanism to accelerate rooftop solar projects and other improvements. He agreed to provide further feedback on the topic.
- Mr. Payne expressed interest in exploring power purchase agreements to reduce upfront costs. Mr. Sanders confirmed this is part of the strategy, but also acknowledged the complexity of the issue, stating that other municipalities have encountered difficulties. He also mentioned that further discussion regarding the impact of the CIP on maintenance is necessary with Mr. Goddard and Ms. Riddervold, as it involves significant changes to current practices.
- Ms. Burns expressed concern regarding a \$361,000 discrepancy in the budget, requesting greater transparency and accountability. She asked for a detailed breakdown of where those funds were spent last year, how the shortfall was covered (e.g., vacancy savings, departmental reallocation), and the specific departments involved, such as Public Works or Parks and Recreation. Furthermore, she emphasized the need to understand the budget allocation process and the relationship between departmental budgets and city support, clarifying whether the work was handled by existing maintenance staff or required additional city resources. Ultimately, she sought a clearer understanding of each department's financial accountability and the precise allocation of funds for specific spaces.

- Ms. Burns questioned whether adjustments to the student transportation budget stemmed from collective bargaining agreements. In response, Ms. Powell outlined the budgeted items, specifying funding for 12-13 drivers and the purchase of a van.
- Ms. Richardson raised a question regarding the staffing levels of reading specialists, specifically why only one additional specialist was being proposed in light of student population numbers. Dr. Gurley clarified that the decision was based on a recent change in the student identification screener, which impacted the identification of students requiring reading support. The addition of one reading specialist is intended to reduce the caseload for each specialist, ensuring they can provide more focused attention and exceed state-mandated caseload standards. Dr. Gurley emphasized the importance of strategically placing this new specialist to maximize their impact.
- Furthermore, Dr. Gurley detailed the influence of the Virginia Literacy Act (VLA), which has significantly increased the demands on teachers. The VLA has mandated "letters training" for teachers, a science-based reading professional development program, and required teachers to develop individualized literacy plans for students. This increased workload, combined with ongoing Student Success meetings, necessitates a collaborative approach to student support. Dr. Gurley explained that the reading specialist will work in conjunction with existing interventionists and classroom teachers to provide comprehensive support, justifying the current recommendation of one additional position to address the increased needs and workload. The committee was assured that the placement of the new reading specialist was being planned with intention, though specific school placements were not disclosed at this time.
- Mr. Payne inquired about the compensation benefits, specifically whether the budget included benefit increases related to collective bargaining. Dr. Gurley clarified that the budget only included salary increases, not benefit adjustments.
- Mr. Sander questioned the \$5.3 million compensation change, asking if it accounted for employees outside of the collective bargaining agreement. Dr. Gurley confirmed that the figure included projected increases for all employees. The \$7.9 million increase over last year's budget reflects overall personnel cost adjustments, and Dr. Gurley noted that they are looking to reallocate positions internally to minimize cost increases. Mr. Snook confirmed that the discussion was related to the operating budget, not the capital budget.
- Mr. Snook asked if there would be any additional capital requests. Mr. Sanders noted that there had been prior requests to reconsider lump sum allocations, which could result in an increase. He also mentioned that further prioritization of solar and modernization projects would require additional discussion.
- Mr. Snook raised concerns about a \$5.8 million lump sum allocated to schools from a prior year that appeared to be unspent, as well as a total of \$9 million in authorized but unissued capital commitments. Mr. Meyer clarified that the council, not the schools, manages the capital budget.
- Ms. Hammill explained that the unspent funds represented bonds that had not yet been sold, not necessarily unspent project funds. She stated that bond sales are timed to comply with IRS tax regulations, often reimbursing the city for prior expenditures. Mr. Snook expressed concern over the long-standing \$76 million capital project list, specifically \$19 million in school-related expenditures.
- Ms. Hammill provided updates on specific school projects, such as the Clark windows and the CHS roof replacement, noting that some are phased and subject to seasonal constraints. She reiterated that bond sales occur annually, influenced by IRS regulations. Ms. Torres added information regarding the phased nature of the CHS roof project.
- Mr. Pinkston requested that Mr. Goddard's recent presentation on his work portfolio be shared with the entire council, expressing confidence that any project delays were likely due to factors outside of Mr. Goddard's control. Mr. Snook reiterated his long-standing concern about the lack of transparent information regarding the progress of approved projects. Ms. Torres emphasized the critical need for all projects on the list, citing pressing safety and maintenance issues within the schools, including those identified in a recent safety audit. She clarified that the projects are not brought forward without serious consideration. Mr. Snook explained that his inquiry stemmed from a desire for better oversight of previously allocated funds, noting that a large list of citywide projects, including school-related ones,

remained uncompleted. He expressed a desire for the council to move beyond a "fire and forget" approach to project approvals and to improve tracking of project progress.

- Mr. Meyer advocated for a collaborative approach between the Council and School Board regarding school funding, suggesting a needs-based budget and more frequent CIP meetings to improve oversight and ensure project execution. He emphasized that the School Board depends on the city's prioritization and project management.
- Mr. Snook countered by expressing a desire for consistent, detailed quarterly reports similar to those provided by the Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority, covering all city government projects, not just those related to schools. He clarified that he aimed to improve information flow and transparency, not to increase meeting frequency.
- Mr. Pinkston acknowledged the existing committee overseeing school CIP projects and offered to share more comprehensive information. He defended the progress of school projects, asserting that they are well-managed and executed, and offered to address any specific concerns with Mr. Goddard.
- Dr. Gurley affirmed the city's responsiveness to school needs, particularly regarding recent bathroom upgrades, and acknowledged that project prioritization can sometimes lead to delays. She echoed the sentiment that the city is not unresponsive.

### **5.1 Comments from Members of the Community:**

- Derek Hartline, Jackson-Via teacher, addressed the board and city council, reiterating concerns about safety hazards at Jackson-Via Elementary stemming from inadequate grounds maintenance. He cited a recent vehicle fire and a staff injury due to accumulated leaves, fearing a repeat incident if the heavy leaf buildup isn't addressed over the winter break. Hartline also pointed to overgrown vegetation along the fence line, damaging vehicles, as another consequence of reduced groundskeeping efforts. He urged both bodies to ensure thorough clearing of leaves and brush before school resumes on January 7th, noting the school's status as a polling place, and promised an update at the January 9th meeting.
- Shannon Gillikin, a 15-year city schools teacher, parent, and president of the Charlottesville Education Association (CEA), addressed both the school board and the city council. She emphasized the real needs of students, including English Learners and homeless children, but stressed that these needs cannot be met without qualified educators. Gillikin highlighted the national teacher shortage and the almost 70 educators lost by Charlottesville City Schools (CCS) last year. She stated that the union has been working since 2021 to earn bargaining rights and has spent the last four months negotiating a contract with CCS that supports educators and values their time. She urged both bodies to fully fund the contract, arguing that without it, Albemarle County's higher pay would lead to further teacher loss. Gillikin concluded by asking the board and council to value the work of its educators.
- Celia Carr, representing both Charlottesville United for Public Education and Not Me I Believe, an anti-bullying organization, addressed the board and council regarding the upcoming budget season. She emphasized that budget line items reflect community values and commitment to children, educators, and each other. Carr noted that community engagement efforts have identified social-emotional wellness, school safety, and educator support as top priorities. She stressed the interconnectedness of these issues, arguing that a child's well-being affects their safety, just as educator support impacts their ability to foster wellness and safety. Carr also called for a deeper examination of systemic issues, stating that bullying isn't limited to student interactions but is embedded within structures that perpetuate inequality and disproportionately affect people of color. She acknowledged the importance of understanding the budget's impact on children and the community and expressed her commitment to attending future meetings.

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

**7.1 Adjourn:** The meeting was adjourned at 7:11 p.m.

A video of the December 19, 2024 meeting can be located at:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Cr6B3kvUUww4WBOfqJUZ0-p2f\\_j-Ece3/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Cr6B3kvUUww4WBOfqJUZ0-p2f_j-Ece3/view?usp=drive_link)

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Emily Dooley, School Board Chair

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Leslie Thacker, School Board Clerk