

MINUTES
VIRTUAL SCHOOL BOARD RETREAT
ALEXANDRIA CITY SCHOOL BOARD
December 14, 2020 (6:00 p.m.)

Meeting Held via Zoom

On March 12, 2020, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam declared a State of Emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, in accordance with Va. Code § 2.2-3708.2(A)(3) and Acts of Assembly Chap. 1283 § 4-0.01(g), virtual School Board meetings held during the State of Emergency are limited to:

- addressing the public health emergency declared on March 12, 2020 (Va. Code § 44-146.17); and
- business that is necessary to continue school division operations and to discharge the School Board's lawful purposes, duties, and responsibilities.

Notice of any virtual School Board Meetings will be posted on the ACPS Calendar and on the School Board Meeting web page, where the public may link to join or watch live meetings. Virtual Special Called School Board Meetings may also be watched live in Alexandria on Comcast Channel 71. Video recordings and minutes for these meetings are posted online as soon as available after the meeting.

ROLL CALL

THE FOLLOWING WERE PRESENT AT THE RETREAT:

BOARD MEMBERS: Cindy Anderson
Veronica R. Nolan
Meagan L. Alderton
Ramee A. Gentry
Jacinta Greene
Margaret Lorber
Michelle Rief
Christopher A. Suarez
Heather Thornton

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., Susan Neilson, Jennifer Abbruzzese, Laurie Cromwell

The School Board Retreat began at 6:06 p.m. All Board Members were present at the meeting.

Ms. Laurie Cromwell, School Board Facilitator, invited the School Board Members to speak about processes, outcomes and decision making that has gone well this past year. Some areas they mentioned were that setting Budget Priorities made the budget process easier, the cohesiveness the Board has developed, the Strategic Plan process and the focus on Equity, thoughtful decision making, and making educating students their top priority. Board Members also discussed some areas of difficulty such as reactions from the public and the lack of civility, not getting clear or precise messages out before the public reacts, and the chatter from the community that interrupts the decision-making process and requires staff to shift to address those issues.

Discussion Topics

1. Discuss Potential Civility Policy

Dr. Hutchings gave a presentation regarding the subject of Civility. He addressed the possibility of establishing a School Board policy to address expectation of civility from the community. Board Members gave feedback and made suggestions on ways to encourage civility. The Board was more comfortable establishing a policy or standards for behavior for ACPS including students and staff, but not directly for the public. Lastly, Dr. Hutchings relayed personal experiences of being a Black man and the only Black superintendent in this area.

3. Discuss the Pandemic Effect on School Board Meetings, Strategic Plan and Other Division Work by the School Board

Board members discussed ways in which the pandemic is impeding work and shared their concerns for students. Dr. Hutchings shared that the Board will be receiving information regarding absenteeism and student achievement, and that staff is responding to student needs early on. Board Members also discussed ways to make School Board Meetings more efficient, such as asking questions prior to the meeting in order to get the answers incorporated into the presentation or submitting questions afterward. Answers to questions can be posted later for the public. Other suggestions included limiting the number and length of Board questions or the number of agenda items.

4. What is the Role of Chair and Vice Chair?

Ms. Cromwell led a discussion about the role of the Chair and Vice Chair. She reminded the Board that with the upcoming election of the School Board Chair and Vice Chair, members should consider what these roles require. Both Chair Anderson and former Chair Ramee Gentry gave insight into the role of Chair. Vice Chair Nolan shared insight into her role as Vice Chair.

5. Implementing the Annual School Board Self-Assessment

Policy AFA requires that the School Board review its performance annually through a self-evaluation in order to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement. The Board is planning to complete its next self-evaluation in January or February. A revised evaluation instrument had been developed and the Board will use the new evaluation instrument.

Ms. Cromwell asked the Board to consider when they will return to in-person meetings. They discussed logistics of in-person or hybrid meetings, location, public access, and technology concerns.

The retreat ended at 9:00 p.m.



Chair



Clerk/Deputy Clerk

These minutes were adopted at the January 7, 2021 Organizational School Board Meeting.