

MINUTES
WORK SESSION OF THE ALBEMARLE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD
Thursday, April 23, 2026
[Meeting Video Link](#)

Roll Call - UPON THE ROLL BEING CALLED, THE FOLLOWING WERE PRESENT:

Board Members - Dr. Kate Acuff, Mr. Bob Beard, Dr. Rebecca Berlin, Mr. Jim Dillenbeck, Ms. Judy Le, Ms. Allison Spillman, and Student School Board Representative Mr. Maximilian Kofler

Absent – Ms. Ellen Osborne

Staff Members - Superintendent Matthew Haas; Chief Legal Officer Josiah Black; Assistant Superintendent Patrick McLaughlin; Assistant Superintendent Daphne Keiser; Assistant Superintendent Chandra Hayes; Chief Operating Officer Rosalyn Schmitt; Chief Human Resource Officer Dan Redding; Public Affairs and Strategic Communications Officer Jason Grant; Clerk of the Board Christine Thompson

AGENDA ITEM NO. 1.0 CLOSED MEETING - At 5:15 p.m., Ms. Le offered a **motion** that the Albemarle County Public School Board of Albemarle County, Virginia go into a closed meeting as authorized by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, section 2.2-3711(A) of the Code of Virginia under Subsection 8 for consultation with legal counsel employed or retained by the School Board regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice by such counsel; the purpose of this item is for School Division Counsel to advise the School Board with regard to the proposed Memorandum of Understanding between the School Board and the Albemarle Foundation for Education. Dr. Acuff seconded the **motion**. **A voice vote was called, and the motion passed unanimously (6-0). [Ms. Osborne was absent]**

AGENDA ITEM NO. 2.0 OPENING ACTIVITIES

Agenda Item No. 2.1 Call to Order - At 6:30 p.m., Chair Berlin called the Albemarle County School Board meeting to order.

Agenda Item No. 2.2 Closed Meeting Certification - At 6:31 p.m., Ms. Le offered 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 in the Closed Meeting. Ms. Spillman seconded the **motion**. **A voice vote was called, and the motion passed unanimously (6-0). [Ms. Osborne was absent]**

Agenda Item No. 2.3 - Roll Call

Agenda Item No. 2.4 - Pledge of Allegiance Agenda

Agenda Item No. 2.5 - Moment of Silence

AGENDA ITEM NO. 3.0 APPROVAL OF AGENDA - Ms. Le offered a **motion** to approve the agenda. Dr. Acuff seconded the **motion**. **A voice vote was called, and the motion passed unanimously (6-0). [Ms. Osborne was absent]**

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4.0 ANNOUNCEMENTS

Agenda Item No. 4.1 Spotlight on Education

Dr. Chandra Hayes, Assistant Superintendent, recognized **Cameron Shuve**, an 8th grade student from Burley Middle School as this year's ACPS Spelling Bee Winner. Cameron advanced to Round 15 after correctly spelling *begrudge* in Round 14, and then won the championship by correctly spelling *belfry* in the final round. He later went on to represent ACPS at the Scripps Regional Bee on March 24, 2026. The Board was honored to present Cameron with a plaque in recognition of his achievement as the ACPS Spelling Bee champion and his representation of our division at the regional level.

Mr. Jim Dillenbeck honored Barbara Johns by reading a statement recognizing her courage, leadership, and lasting impact on public education and civil rights. He also presented a [proclamation](#) in recognition of her legacy and her role in advancing equal educational opportunity.

2026 Celebration of Excellence – [ACPS Honors Educators, Staff of the Year](#)

Agenda Item No. 4.2 School Board Superintendent Business

Maximilian Kofler, School Board Student Representative, Monticello High School

[Talk on Artificial Intelligence](#)

[Slides](#)

Ms. Spillman shared that she attended opening night of *High School Musical* at Western Albemarle High School and praised the production, which included more than 70 students, including Student School Board Representative Claire Curry. She encouraged others to attend and noted that the arts are “alive and well” in ACPS.

Ms. Spillman also shared that Arts in Western Education, an organization that helps support arts needs in the Western feeder pattern, is seeking new leadership as several current leaders have students who are graduating. She encouraged anyone interested in getting involved to contact her or reach out to the organization directly. She congratulated Ms. Pitts and Western Albemarle High School on a successful production.

Ms. Le shared that Monticello High School was also opening its spring musical, *Mamma Mia!*, and encouraged the community to attend. Board members noted that tickets for school productions are generally available through each school's website and may also be available at the door.

Dr. Acuff shared that she and Mr. Beard attended the Student Senate meeting on Friday. She noted that students heard from Senator Creigh Deeds, Delegate Amy Laufer, and Katrina Callsen, and that students asked thoughtful and sophisticated questions.

Mr. Beard added that the Student Senate continues to provide students with meaningful opportunities to engage with local and state leaders. He noted that students discussed topics including artificial intelligence and data centers in Virginia.

Mr. Dillenbeck also recognized the track and field programs at all high schools and shared that the Dogwood Track Classic would be held at the University of Virginia the following weekend. He described the event as one of the premier high school track meets on the East Coast, drawing athletes from ACPS schools and from several states.

Chair Berlin thanked Board members for their updates and encouraged families and community members to support ACPS students by attending athletic events, art shows, musicals, orchestra performances, and other school activities. She noted that information about these events is available on school websites.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5.0 PUBLIC COMMENT

Jen McDonald, an ACPS teacher with 31 years of teaching experience, including 24 years in Albemarle County Public Schools, addressed the Board regarding the division's grading policy. She stated that the policy has been disappointing and demoralizing for teachers and shared concerns about several grading practices, including assigning a minimum grade of 50 for missing work, allowing retakes, and not applying late penalties. Ms. McDonald stated that, in her view, these practices have reduced student motivation, inflated grades, weakened accountability, and made it more difficult for students to build necessary academic skills. She expressed particular concern that some students are passing English classes without completing formal writing assignments, which she described as inconsistent with the core objectives of English instruction. She also stated that current retake practices require significant instructional time and have contributed to her classes falling behind in curriculum. She said that the absence of late penalties has created a cycle in which students remain behind while trying to complete old assignments as new work is assigned. Ms. McDonald stated that she believes these grading practices are not preparing students for college or the workplace. She indicated that she had emailed possible solutions to the Board and concluded by stating that teachers are experiencing moral injury and that students are being done a disservice.

Brittany Lyons, a teacher at Greer Elementary School in the Jack Jouett District, addressed the Board regarding leadership and student progress at Greer Elementary School, a Title I school. She described the challenges many Greer students face, particularly in reading, and stated that these challenges disproportionately affect students of color. Ms. Lyons credited Principal Dr. Steve Saunders with helping create a system focused on grade-level instruction, high expectations, strategic student groupings, and stronger collaboration among teachers and reading staff. She stated that Greer staff have expanded this collaborative approach into math and are working as a unified team with shared responsibility for student success. Ms. Lyons shared that, at the beginning of the school year, 81 percent of students scored below the 50th percentile in oral reading fluency, compared with 46 percent at the time of her remarks. She stated that this progress was the result of strong, stable leadership, high expectations, and access to grade-level content. Ms. Lyons expressed concern about the impact of removing Dr. Saunders from Greer while assigning him to a more affluent school. She stated that if equity is a priority, historically underserved students should not lose leadership that is helping them succeed. She urged the Board to consider the importance of stability and the potential effect on Greer's progress.

Claire LaPlante, a reading specialist from the Rio District addressed the Board regarding the reassignment of Dr. Steve Saunders and its potential impact on literacy and student outcomes at Greer Elementary School. She stated that concerns about Dr. Saunders' move are not only about one individual, but about decisions that affect whether students learn to read. She shared personal experience as the parent of a child with dyslexia and stated that many families rely entirely on public schools to provide the reading support students need. Ms. LaPlante stated that Greer is making significant literacy gains and cited several examples, including growth in kindergarten and first grade literacy data, second grade performance exceeding division results in measured categories, a decrease in fifth grade students below the 15th percentile in spelling, and improvement in fifth grade oral reading fluency. She also stated that the achievement gap is closing, with Black students at Greer reaching a pass rate above the division rate. She attributed this progress to hard work, innovation, and the support of a strong administrative team. She expressed concern that removing Dr. Saunders could disrupt the systems currently supporting student growth, comparing the move to taking the engine out of one car and placing it into another while expecting the first car to continue running. She stated that teacher morale at Greer has declined, that several staff members are leaving or seeking other positions, and that staff feel unheard. She asked that Greer receive a leader of equal or greater quality and that the principal selection process be meaningful, with school interview recommendations

heard and respected.

Janet Bailey, a librarian at Greer Elementary School and resident of the Jack Jouett District, addressed the Board regarding the reassignment of Dr. Steve Saunders. She noted that more Greer community members may have attended but were participating in Greer's annual Culture Night. Ms. Bailey stated that Dr. Saunders has served as principal of Greer Elementary School for the past seven years and described Greer as a Title I school where approximately 83 percent of students are economically disadvantaged and the majority of students are Black and Latino. She described Greer as both challenging and rewarding and credited Dr. Saunders with building a school community grounded in inclusion, equity, and compassion. Ms. Bailey stated that, during Dr. Saunders' tenure, student attendance increased, test scores improved, and staff retention remained strong. She contrasted Greer's demographics with Crozet Elementary School, noting that Crozet is not a Title I school, has a lower percentage of economically disadvantaged students, and has a majority white student population. She expressed concern about the decision to reassign Dr. Saunders to Crozet Elementary School following the retirement of Crozet's principal, stating that the decision appeared to move a strong and effective leader from a Title I school to a more affluent school while leaving Greer to search for new leadership. Ms. Bailey referenced ACPS' guiding principle of trust and transparency and stated that, in her view, the reassignment and subsequent search process did not reflect commitments to honest and proactive communication, public trust, community voice, or accessible decision-making information. She urged the division to keep those values in mind as Greer moves through the leadership transition.

Lori Alridge, a teacher at Greer Elementary addressed the Board regarding the reassignment of Dr. Steve Saunders from Greer Elementary School and stated her opposition to the decision. She is an educator with nearly 30 years of experience across multiple school districts and states, including experience in Title I schools, and a member of the African American community. Ms. Alridge speaker shared that her own educational and professional experiences shaped her commitment to ensuring that every child receives a quality education. She stated that Dr. Saunders is providing the type of leadership the division says it values, including justice, dignity, and equity. She described him as an outstanding leader who has built trust with teachers, students, and families, communicates clearly, leads with purpose, and helps staff understand the reason behind their work. She questioned why the division would remove a leader from a Title I school while he is working to close achievement gaps and make meaningful progress. She stated that when leaders push systems to improve, that work may make others uncomfortable, but that discomfort should be a reason to support the leader rather than remove him. Ms. Alridge urged the Board to reconsider the decision and stated that the Board has a responsibility to ensure that leadership decisions serve the best interests of students, are transparent, and support what is right.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6.0 APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA - Ms. Le offered a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Mr. Beard **seconded the motion. A voice vote was called, and the motion passed unanimously (6-0). [Ms. Osborne was absent]**

- 6.1 Approval of Consent Agenda
- 6.2 Approval of the Minutes
- 6.3 For Info/Action: Federal Carl Perkins Grant
- 6.4 For Information: Policy Review and Revision
- 6.5 Personnel Action
- 6.6 FY 26 Bonus Payment
- 6.7 For Information: Gap Advisory Committee Charter

AGENDA ITEM NO. 7.0 ITEMS PULLED FROM CONSENT AGENDA – None.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8.0 AGENDA ITEM

Agenda Item No. 8.1 [FY 27 Budget Adoption](#) - Following the approval of the FY 27 Funding Request on March 12, staff provided a balancing scenario and technical adjustments based on projected available revenues. The recommended budget incorporates the balancing scenario and technical changes as presented on April 16.

Dr. Acuff moved to adopt the FY 2027 School Board Budget in the amount of \$308,067,157 for the School Fund and \$33,700,221 for Special Revenue Funds. Ms. Le seconded the motion. A roll call vote was conducted, and the motion passed 5-1-1, with Dr. Acuff, Ms. Le, Ms. Spillman, Mr. Beard, and Chair Berlin voting yes; Mr. Dillenbeck voting no; and Ms. Osborne absent.

Agenda Item No. 8.2 The Board took a break from 7:55 p.m. to 8:05 p.m.

Agenda Item No. 9.0 SCHOOL DIVISION WORK SESSION

Agenda Item No. 9.1 [Artificial Intelligence in Albemarle County Public Schools](#) - resources and policies guiding Artificial Intelligence and technology use for ACPS students and staff.

During Board discussion, Student School Board Representative Max Kofler shared his perspective on student use of artificial intelligence. He noted that, based on his experience starting an AI club and conversations with peers, many students understand that AI is important but do not always understand how to use it appropriately. He expressed concern that students may use AI for simple tasks where a traditional search would be more appropriate, which can raise unnecessary environmental concerns and reduce the quality of learning. He also noted that some students have become overly reliant on AI, with peers sharing that they feel they have lost confidence or ability in writing essays independently. He emphasized the need for accountability, discipline, and instruction around appropriate use.

Staff responded that the goal of the division's work is to help students understand balanced and appropriate AI use, including metacognition, reflection, and recognizing when AI use becomes a problem. Mr. Kofler also raised the concern that short-form social media content can shape student perceptions of AI by emphasizing environmental impacts without providing a fuller understanding of how AI may be used productively. Staff agreed that continued discussion and education can help students better understand both the risks and potential uses of AI.

Board members discussed the broader implications of AI for students and society, noting that while AI is changing many professions and may improve efficiency, it also raises concerns about whether students are losing opportunities for cognitive engagement, such as writing, debating, and developing original ideas. The discussion included the importance of clear expectations for students when AI is used in assignments, so that students understand the purpose of the work and are not simply using AI to generate a product without learning.

Staff noted that part of the Learning Technology Integrators' role is to research emerging technology, stay informed about rapid changes in AI, and support teachers and students in appropriate and responsible use. In response to a Board question, staff stated that the division has 14 Learning Technology Integrators, deployed across elementary and secondary teams.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 9.0 OTHER BUSINESS

Agenda Item No. 9.1 Other Business by Board Members and/or the Superintendent – None.

Agenda Item No. 9.2 Closed Meeting – None.

Agenda Item No. 9.3 Closed Meeting Certification – None.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 10.0 ADJOURNMENT - At 9:25 p.m., hearing no objections, Chair Berlin adjourned the meeting of the Albemarle County School Board.

Clerk

Chair

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