

MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING OF THE ALBEMARLE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD
Thursday, April 16, 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. Ellen Osborne, and Ms. Allison Spillman

Absent – None.

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; Public Affairs and Strategic Communications Officer Jason Grant; and Clerk of the Board Christine Thompson

AGENDA ITEM NO. 1.0 OPENING ACTIVITIES

- Agenda Item No. 1.1** **Call to Order**
- Agenda Item No. 1.2** **Roll Call**
- Agenda Item No. 1.3** **Pledge of Allegiance**
- Agenda Item No. 1.4** **Moment of Silence**

AGENDA ITEM NO. 2.0 APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Agenda Item No. 2.1 Approval of Agenda - Ms. Le offered a **motion** to approve the agenda. Dr. Acuff seconded the **motion**. **A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously (7-0).**

AGENDA ITEM NO. 3.0 ANNOUNCEMENTS

Agenda Item No. 3.1 Spotlight on Education – [Resolution](#) Month of the Military Child

Jamie Gellner, Director of Transportation, introduced the Board’s recognition of April 2026 as the Month of the Military Child. Ms. Gellner shared her personal experience as a military-connected student and noted that military-connected children serve alongside their families in ways that are not always visible but are deeply felt. She stated that these students often navigate frequent transitions, family separations during deployment, and other challenges with strength, adaptability, and resilience.

Ms. Gellner stated that Albemarle County Public Schools proudly serves 448 military-connected students across the division. She also recognized Ivy Elementary School, Baker-Butler Elementary School, and Lakeside Middle School for earning the Virginia Department of Education’s Purple Star designation in recognition of their support for military-connected students and families.

Ms. Gellner noted that schools across the division observed Purple Up Day in support of military children and their families. The Board recognized April 2026 as the Month of the Military Child and expressed appreciation for the strength, sacrifice, and service of military-connected students and their families.

Agenda Item No. 3.2 School Board, Superintendent, and Committee Updates

Dr. Daphne Keiser, Assistant Superintendent, provided an update on the Albemarle County Public Schools Student Senate Conference scheduled for the following day. She stated that student representatives from across the division's high schools would convene from 10:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. for a culminating session focused on reflection, student voice, and civic engagement.

Dr. Keiser shared that the spring conference was designed to celebrate student leadership and provide students with meaningful opportunities to engage directly with policymakers and community partners. The day would begin with a panel discussion featuring state legislators, including Senator Creigh Deeds, Delegate Katrina Callsen, and Delegate Amy Laufer. The panel was scheduled at the beginning of the day to allow the legislators to participate before attending the Dogwood Vietnam Memorial rededication ceremony later that morning.

She stated that the panel would give students an opportunity to discuss education priorities, safety, and ways young people can participate effectively in civic and policy processes. Following the panel, students would participate in a Student Senate showcase highlighting projects completed throughout the year that align with legislative priorities jointly developed by the School Board and Student Senate. The presentations would include successes, ongoing challenges, and student-generated recommendations for the following year.

Dr. Keiser also noted that the remainder of the day would include small-group rotations and discussions on topics such as the new student club policy, a community listening session on gun violence and school climate, cross-school collaboration, and reflection. She stated that the event reflects the division's continued commitment to elevating student voice and helping students understand how their perspectives can inform school and community decision-making.

Mr. Beard shared an update from the Advisory Committee on Environmental Sustainability. He reported that the committee discussed the division's Environmental Literacy Plan, which is being developed for elementary schools and includes topics such as recycling, watersheds, and energy use. He stated that the goal is to help elementary students become more environmentally aware.

Mr. Beard also shared an update regarding solar energy use in schools. He stated that nine schools currently have solar panels and that, within the next few years, the division expects to have 17 schools using solar energy, representing approximately half of the schools in the county. He noted that this supports continued implementation of the county's environmental goals.

Ms. Le reported that she and Dr. Haas toured Baker-Butler Elementary School earlier in the week after the visit had been rescheduled due to previous winter weather. She stated that it was a strong visit and thanked Ms. McCullen for hosting them. Ms. Le shared that they observed HMH curriculum materials being used in the classroom and noted that the curriculum was clear and being implemented with fidelity. She also described observing students learning to read an analog clock and expressed appreciation for that instruction. Ms. Le further noted that Baker-Butler is one of the division's Purple Star schools and that she saw Purple Star recognition displayed throughout the building.

Ms. Spillman shared information about Hope Fest, a family-friendly music festival being held at Rivanna River Company on Saturday from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. She stated that the event raises funds for Camp Hope, a summer camp serving children navigating foster care, adoption, disabilities, or trauma backgrounds. She noted that many Albemarle County students attend Camp Hope and that some of these students may not otherwise be able to attend traditional community-based summer camps. Ms. Spillman shared that the event would include a kid zone, a sensory-friendly area, live music, food trucks, and local vendors, and encouraged community members to attend in support of a cause that benefits Albemarle County students.

Mr. Dillenbeck reported that he and Superintendent Haas visited Community Lab School on Monday, the first day back from spring break. He stated that Mr. Ratliff and his staff were prepared for students' return and that there was strong energy and excitement in the school. Mr. Dillenbeck shared that they visited Lindsey Stallings' English class and another eighth-grade class, and said it was valuable to see the work taking place and spend time with students and staff.

Chair Berlin shared that she spoke with Mary McIntyre, President of the VEA who was attending the VEA conference with her team. She reported that the local VEA membership group received an award for having the largest percentage growth in membership. Chair Berlin congratulated Ms. McIntyre and her team and stated that the award reflects both their recruitment efforts and the importance of the issue to teachers and professional staff. She noted that other conference attendees were asking the team how they achieved the growth and said the success reflected long-term work built through relationships, trust, and the efforts of current and former leaders over time. [VEA Award](#)

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4.0 PUBLIC COMMENT

Jimmy Belew of the Samuel Miller district addressed the Board regarding communication, budget questions, and student support concerns. He stated that he had submitted multiple emails in recent weeks, including a list of 25 budget-related questions, and expressed concern that he had not received responses from the School Board. He also referenced prior communication regarding concerns at Monticello High School and stated that he had spoken with students and staff before raising those concerns.

Mr. Belew then addressed events at Stone-Robinson Elementary School in December and stated that his children continue to experience trauma related to those events. He shared an example of difficulty getting one of his children into school and praised Principal Leslie Wills-Taylor for personally assisting and supporting his child.

Kyle Smoot, a resident of the Rivanna District, addressed the Board regarding stakeholder engagement in division decision-making. He stated that the recent grading policy discussion and concerns at Greer demonstrated the need for greater inclusion of the people most affected by School Board and division decisions, including teachers, parents, and students. He expressed concern that the grading policy had been brought forward for reapproval without meaningful consultation and said that the revision process remained unclear to many community members.

Mr. Smoot recommended that each item brought to the Board by administration include a verification statement identifying who was consulted during the development process. He stated that if teachers, parents, or students were not consulted, the administration should explain why that input was not necessary. He also recommended that the division invest in more accessible and meaningful public engagement, including surveys distributed through schools, town halls held during the school day and on weekends, and student advisory input built into development timelines. He stated that involvement should occur throughout the process rather than after an initiative or policy has already been largely shaped.

Holly Odom, a Greer Elementary School parent and White Hall District resident, addressed the Board regarding the transfer of Dr. Steve Saunders from Greer Elementary School to Crozet Elementary School and the process for appointing a new principal at Greer. She referenced recent comments from the Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction regarding the trust families place in public schools and stated that Greer families have emailed Board members, contacted their county supervisor, researched, and organized since learning of the decision. Ms. Odom shared a story from a recent Girls on the Run practice at Greer, describing a student who showed empathy and took action to support a teammate who was having a difficult day. She used the example to ask the Board to lead with empathy, listen to Greer teachers and families, and respond with tangible action. She urged the Board to consider how it could show courage in addressing the concerns raised by the Greer community.

Claire LaPlante, a reading specialist at Greer Elementary School and White Hall District resident, addressed the Board regarding the decision to transfer Dr. Steve Saunders from Greer Elementary School. She stated that she has worked at Greer for 10 years, her children attend Greer, and her husband completed a school counseling internship there. She described Greer as a strong and diverse school community with deep family connections and a shared commitment to students. Ms. LaPlante stated that she was not speaking to be disrespectful of the decision, but to express concern and advocate for the Greer community. She emphasized the importance of culturally responsive teaching, relationships, trust, consistency, and strong leadership, particularly in a school serving many economically disadvantaged students and English learners. She stated that under Dr. Saunders' leadership, Greer has experienced steady growth, staff capacity-building, and a strong sense of collective commitment. Ms. LaPlante expressed concern that moving Dr. Saunders would disrupt stability, affect staff morale, and risk weakening the team that has been built at Greer. She stated that Greer does not need to be reset, but instead needs continued support to build on its progress. She urged the Board to reconsider the decision and stand with the Greer community.

Lauren Sammon, an English learner teacher at Greer Elementary School, addressed the Board regarding the decision to transfer Dr. Steve Saunders from Greer Elementary School to Crozet Elementary School. She stated that Greer has the largest population of English learners in the county and that the decision was unexpected and destabilizing for the school community. Ms. Sammon acknowledged that leadership decisions are confidential but stated that when a decision significantly affects a school community, there remains a responsibility to provide transparency about how the decision serves students. She emphasized that strong and stable school leadership is especially important for English learners and Title I schools, and expressed concern that Greer is now bearing the impact of a leadership transition without an explanation. Ms. Sammon raised concerns about equity and questioned whether one school was being prioritized over another. She asked how moving Dr. Saunders from Greer to Crozet aligns with the division's core value of equity and how the decision benefits Greer Elementary and its English learners. She also shared that her students expressed sadness and fear about Mr. Saunders leaving.

Stephanie McNerney, a parent of three Greer Elementary School students, a Greer and Jack Jouett alumna, and a pediatric nurse practitioner at UVA, addressed the Board regarding the decision to transfer Dr. Steve Saunders from Greer Elementary School and the process for selecting his replacement. She stated that the process has not been designed to hear the full diversity of Greer families and expressed concern that rescheduling a single parent interview day for a candidate reinforces the perception that a decision has already been made. Ms. McNerney stated that the community has not heard how the leadership change serves the whole division and said it feels as though one school is being served at the expense of another. She described schools as ecosystems of trust and cautioned that practices should not continue simply because they have been common in the past. She stated that systems that are not intentionally made more equitable can deepen existing gaps, particularly for vulnerable students and families. Ms. McNerney praised Dr. Saunders' servant leadership and stated that he has helped build a school where students feel known and staff morale is strong. She urged the Board to recognize the impact of what she described as a siloed and opaque process and to respond with leadership.

Julia Bruneau, a Jack Jouett District resident and Greer Elementary School parent, addressed the Board regarding the decision to reassign Greer Principal Dr. Steve Saunders to Crozet Elementary School. She stated that she has been a Greer parent for 10 years, with children who currently attend and have graduated from Greer and asked that the decision be reviewed and overturned. Ms. Bruneau stated that the decision raised broader concerns about the division's hiring and reassignment procedures, including transparency, engagement, and accountability. She said families, students, and staff deserve some rationale when leadership decisions are made that directly affect their school community. She asked how the division determines when a principal is reassigned rather than selected through an open hiring process, what factors guide that decision, how the benefits and drawbacks are measured, and how feedback from families and staff informs future hiring practices. Ms. Bruneau also questioned why the reassignment involved Greer, a Title I school, rather than another elementary school, and expressed concern that the decision appeared to benefit a more advantaged school at the expense of a more vulnerable one. She stated that asking families to trust the process without

providing a clear rationale erodes trust, and she asked the Board and administration to provide answers even if community members may not agree with them.

Tanya Wanchek of the Samuel Miller district, resident and parent of a Monticello High School student addressed the Board regarding the high school test retake policy. She stated that, from her perspective as a parent and as a UVA public health sciences instructor, the policy has encouraged some students to rely on retakes rather than preparing fully for the first assessment. Ms. Wanchek shared that her child and other students she has heard about have learned to delay assignments or approach initial tests less seriously because they know they may retake them. She stated that this also makes it harder for parents to understand a student's actual progress through Parent Square, because missing assignments or low grades may not reflect the student's final standing. She expressed concern that a blanket retake policy may not prepare students well for college expectations around deadlines, accountability, and preparation. She acknowledged the importance of second chances and meeting students where they are but stated that the current approach may be sending the wrong message to students.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5.0 APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA - Ms. Le offered a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Dr. Acuff **seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously (7-0).**

- 5.1 Approval of Consent Agenda
- 5.2 Personnel Action
- 5.3 Personnel Action – Athletic Coaches
- 5.4 FY 26 Appropriation for Capital Improvements Program
- 5.5 Authorization to Sign in the Absence of the Superintendent
- 5.6 Donations & Reimbursements to School Division FY26 – 2nd Quarter

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6.0 ITEMS PULLED FROM CONSENT AGENDA – None.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 7.0 – SCHOOL DIVISION BUSINESS

Agenda Item No. 7.1 Special Education [Annual Plan](#) for School Year 2026-2027 - Under the provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), the IDEA Federal Regulations, and the Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia, local educational agencies are required to submit an annual plan and application for providing special education and related services to children with disabilities in order to secure Federal funds. Albemarle County Public Schools ensures the community and Federal and State Departments of Education that its policies and procedures are consistent with the Regulations Governing Special Education Programs in Virginia, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act and corresponding Federal Regulations.

Board members and staff discussed the anticipated timeline for completion of the special education program review. Staff stated that the review is expected to be completed by the end of the current school year so that the division may begin work during the next school year. A Board member requested to be updated once the review is complete, and staff agreed to provide that information.

Board members also discussed the division's continued progress related to Coordinated Early Intervening Services. A Board member asked how CEIS compliance is monitored, including how data is reviewed within the special education department and whether it is also reviewed by division leadership outside of special

education. Staff explained that the division's indicator work, reporting to the Virginia Department of Education, and ongoing partnership with VDOE help monitor compliance and ensure that the division remains on track.

Dr. Haas added that state reporting involves a detailed data review process. He explained that the state maintains student-level data through unique student identifiers and reviews the data submitted by school divisions. If issues are identified, the data is returned to the division for correction and resubmission. He stated that this process continues until both the division and the state agree that the data is accurate. He compared the process to other state reporting requirements, including discipline, crime and violence, and SOL testing reports.

Dr. Haas noted that the process is not simply self-reporting, because VDOE also has access to the data and is responsible for ensuring that Virginia submits accurate information to the federal government. He stated that the process is collaborative and is intended to ensure that the data accurately reflects student progress and compliance requirements.

Agenda Item No. 7.2. [FY 27 Budget Updates](#)

Mr. Dillenbeck stated that staff hoped to return the following week with a recommendation for Board action. He asked whether similar bonuses had been provided in the recent past and whether fund balance had been used to pay for them. Staff responded that the most recent bonus was provided the previous year, but that the structure was different. In that instance, the division was able to distribute the state portion without providing a local match. Staff explained that the current bonus proposal would require the division to provide a local match in order to receive the state funding. Staff noted that ACPS has provided bonuses on a fairly regular basis when the state has made them available, but that the funding requirements have varied depending on how the state structured the bonus.

Dr. Acuff asked whether the proposed bonus was approximately the same size as the bonus provided the previous year. Superintendent Haas responded that the previous bonus was smaller because it did not require a local match. He explained that the division used the state funding available at that time and distributed the bonus evenly rather than supplementing it locally to reach a specific state-identified amount.

Dr. Haas noted that during the pandemic, the state also provided bonus funding, and the division was able to use mid-year savings to support those payments. He explained that while mid-year savings are not the same as fund balance, those savings may eventually become part of fund balance if not otherwise used.

Dr. Haas also discussed the division's fund balance and noted that when fund balance exceeds two percent of the operating budget, the excess may become available to the local government for capital improvement purposes and is no longer necessarily earmarked for schools. Staff explained that the projected increase in fund balance was due in part to salary savings and one-time healthcare savings related to changes in the school-year calendar, rather than an over-projection of the operating budget. Staff stated that revenue and expenditures have been closely monitored, and that using available savings for the bonus could be part of a broader strategy rather than allowing those funds to roll into fund balance.

Dr. Acuff asked whether the bonus item would return to the Board for discussion or action the following week. Dan Redding, Chief Human Resource Officer, stated that if the proposal changed significantly, it would return as a presentation item. If the scenario remained substantially the same, it would be placed on the consent agenda for action.

Staff noted that the division must notify the state by May 1 whether it intends to accept the state funding. A Board member asked how the matter would be handled considering the need for negotiations with the Albemarle Education Association.

Chair Berlin asked whether, after the Board approved the use of funds, the final distribution decision would remain with the negotiating teams and not require further Board action. Mr. Redding explained that the division would not be reopening the full collective bargaining agreement. Rather, the existing resolution and collective bargaining agreements allow negotiating teams to meet and make interim decisions between contracts without requiring full employee ratification or a separate Board vote on the details.

Josiah Black, Chief Legal Officer, stated that, without providing legal advice in a public setting, these types of agreements are typically documented through a side letter or addendum to the collective bargaining agreement and are common.

Ms. Osborne asked how the bonus would apply to employees who are not covered by collective bargaining agreements. Staff stated that the intent of the state bonus is for all employees, but that staff would need to review how to address employees covered by collective bargaining and those who are not, while meeting both collective bargaining requirements and state requirements.

Chair Berlin stated that the Board has spoken often about the need to support teachers and professional staff, particularly given concerns about educator compensation and Virginia's ranking compared with other states. The Board member acknowledged that the timing of the bonus and the use of fund balance are difficult in light of other budget decisions but stated that supporting front-line employees remains one of the Board's most important responsibilities.

Chair Berlin read the following statement regarding the Board of Supervisors' action on the FY27 budget and Capital Improvement Program:

"Last night, the Board of Supervisors decided to take \$6.4 million from the ACPS portion of shared county revenues in FY27 and again in FY28 to place a total of \$12.8 million in the undesignated Capital Improvement Program, CIP, reserve. This creates a shortfall in the School Board's balanced funding request, which we must address in order to adopt the ACPS FY27 budget next week. It also creates uncertainty with regard to our growing CIP needs.

Although we provided a comprehensive list of capital priorities and followed up with a balanced CIP proposal to fund improvements to Stony Point Elementary, Albemarle High School, and Western Albemarle High School based on available revenues and the Board's five-year CIP plan, both proposals were rejected. The Chair acknowledged that we provided requests in compliance with their CIP process and admitted that this is not working. However, they decided not to fund any new construction projects in their five-year CIP plan.

I am happy to report that there is strong interest in fixing this broken CIP process on both sides, and I look forward to working with Chair Gallaway and my fellow members of the School Board, along with the Board of Supervisors, to work together on a learning and planning process to find solutions so that we may finally modernize our aging school infrastructure.

While this is disheartening, we must acknowledge the reality that the Board of Supervisors' tax policy over the past ten years has reduced the share of taxpayer funding of the public schools in favor of other government programs and services. This shift in priorities must shape our decision-making going forward.

The Board of Supervisors made clear that they fully support funding the Collective Bargaining agreement and increased costs for maintaining current programs and services. They explicitly noted that the \$2.4 million reduction to our proposed operating budget was targeted at proposals for new programs and services, which we brought forward as well-thought-out initiatives to reduce student achievement gaps.

And so, as we consider how to best improve student learning and eliminate achievement gaps, we have to accept the reality that any new program or service recommended will likely require elimination of existing programs, services, or staff. We had a number of key new positions and services that the Board believed would help us make considerable gains in closing achievement gaps.

Rather than eliminating those positions and services, we asked the Superintendent and staff to review our budget and identify any areas that we may need to cut in order to provide funding for these new priorities. That is what we will hear tonight, and that is the mindset we will likely have to use as we approach our budget process going forward.”

Following Chair Berlin’s statement, staff presented updated FY27 budget recommendations for Board discussion.

Ms. Kumazawa presented updated FY27 budget balancing recommendations, beginning with technical adjustments to the proposed budget. She stated that two technical changes had been presented at the prior meeting, including a decrease in VRS rates and a decrease in the payment for CATEC. She then reviewed two additional technical adjustments that increased projected expenditures. These included an additional \$170,000 for licensing costs related to the restructuring of licensing expenses, including the division’s time and attendance system and financial system, and \$200,000 for projected fuel cost increases.

Ms. Kumazawa stated that the \$200,000 fuel adjustment was only a partial estimate. She explained that because the state budget had not yet been finalized, staff did not want to recommend additional service reductions for fuel until the full revenue picture was clearer. She stated that staff expected to return later with a more complete estimate for fuel costs as additional information became available. In total, the four technical adjustments increased projected expenditures by approximately \$60,450.

Ms. Kumazawa then reviewed the updated school fund expenditure reductions included in the balancing scenario. The first proposed reduction was to eliminate the proposed transfer to the Capital Improvement Program, reducing school renovation and construction project funding by approximately \$4 million.

The second proposed reduction was to discontinue the Short-Term Education Program, STEP, as a division-wide initiative beginning in the 2026-27 school year. Ms. Kumazawa stated that STEP was designed to reduce out-of-school suspensions, address disproportionality, and support students in developing self-regulation behaviors. She explained that, through the division’s regular logic model review process, STEP had remained consistently in yellow status and had not been implemented with fidelity to its original intent, despite annual staffing allocations. Eliminating the program would provide approximately \$450,000 in savings.

The third proposed reduction was to reduce Division Services FTE by a target amount of \$500,000. Ms. Kumazawa noted that this amount had increased from the \$400,000 reduction included in the prior balancing scenario.

The fourth proposed reduction was to decrease the recurring transfer to technology replacement by approximately \$1.4 million. Ms. Kumazawa stated that staff proposed using one-time revenues to offset this decrease, so there would be no change to planned technology replacements for the following year. She described this as a one-year funding bridge, changing the source of funding rather than the replacement plan itself. The proposed reductions totaled approximately \$6.4 million.

Ms. Kumazawa also reviewed the proposed use of one-time fund balance. She stated that \$1.4 million in one-time funding would be used to replace the recurring technology replacement funds being reduced. Additional one-time uses remained unchanged from the prior version of the budget scenario, including \$800,000 for display equipment, \$600,000 in additional transfer to the textbook fund for instructional resources, \$90,000 for security equipment on buses, and \$210,000 for security camera equipment in buildings. These one-time uses totaled approximately \$3.15 million and would be included in the FY27 budget, with revenues equal to expenditures.

In summary, Ms. Kumazawa stated that the technical updates added approximately \$60,450 in expenditures, the proposed one-time security, textbook, and technology purchases totaled approximately \$1.7 million and would be fully funded by fund balance, and the proposed service reductions totaled approximately \$5 million. She stated that the total expenditure change was a decrease of approximately \$3.25 million. When combined with the use of fund balance as revenue, the scenario would close the \$6.4 million budget gap.

Board members discussed the updated FY27 balancing scenario. Staff confirmed that the scenario presented would result in a balanced budget.

Mr. Dillenbeck expressed appreciation for the use of the division's logic model review process in identifying proposed reductions. He noted that the Short-Term Education Program, STEP, was intended to work effectively, but that the data indicated it may not be functioning as intended at the division-wide level.

Mr. Dillenbeck also asked for clarification regarding the technology replacement funding and whether the division was postponing the cost of technology hardware by one year. Staff clarified that the replacement cycle would continue as originally proposed. The change would be in the funding source, not the replacement schedule. Staff explained that the division would use one-time funding rather than recurring revenue for a portion of the technology replacement costs. Because one-time funds would not be available in future years, the Board would need to identify new revenues or another funding source in the following year to continue the replacement cycle.

Dr. Acuff asked about the proposed \$200,000 fuel cost adjustment and asked how fuel costs are projected given recent volatility in fuel prices.

Ms. Gellner stated that the division spends approximately \$150,000 per month on fuel, but that the most recent month's expenditure was approximately \$250,000. She explained that the proposed \$200,000 adjustment should be viewed as a first phase rather than a full estimate and noted that it is not a robust cushion given current fuel costs. Ms. Gellner stated that the situation continues to evolve and that additional adjustments may be needed as the state budget and overall revenue picture become clearer.

Ms. Gellner confirmed that the division has fuel contracts and receives a lower market rate than public fuel pump prices. She also noted, however, that the contract price has still increased and that the division is paying higher fuel prices than in prior high-cost years, particularly for diesel, which represents most of the division's fuel usage.

Mr. Dillenbeck shared comments regarding the FY27 budget from a broader governance perspective and thanked staff for responding to his budget-related questions. He stated that, based on conversations with community members, he believes the division is spending a significant amount on Division Services positions and programs, some of which may have limited impact on student learning. He expressed concern that test scores for some student groups have declined in recent years while the budget has increased, and stated that the division needs to evaluate whether current spending is producing sufficient results.

Mr. Dillenbeck stated that he was pleased an effort is underway to evaluate the effectiveness of Division Services positions but recommended that teachers and principals be included in that evaluation process. He stated that a thorough review could potentially identify additional future savings and that the proposed Division Services reduction in the FY27 budget is a start, but that he believes more can be done.

Mr. Dillenbeck offered two specific suggestions for consideration in FY27. First, he suggested eliminating the one-to-one computer program for students in kindergarten through grade five, citing concerns about screen time for elementary students and stating that the change could potentially generate savings. Second, he suggested that Division Services staff and School Board members spend several days each year working in classrooms as teaching assistants or substitutes. He stated that this could provide cost savings while also giving staff and Board members a better understanding of classroom conditions and the work of teachers.

Staff clarified the scope of reductions included in the FY27 balancing scenario. Staff stated that the scenario includes a reduction of approximately \$500,000 in secondary teaching assistant FTE related to the STEP program and an additional \$500,000 reduction in Division Services FTE.

Staff also noted that these reductions should be viewed in the context of reductions made in prior years. Staff explained that reductions from previous budget cycles are not restored in later years, but instead are carried forward as ongoing reductions. With the reductions included in the FY27 scenario, staff stated that cumulative reductions would total approximately \$10 million since FY25. Staff emphasized the importance of keeping that cumulative impact in mind as the Board continues through the budget process.

Ms. Osborne asked about the proposed use of \$600,000 in one-time funds for textbooks and instructional resources. She expressed concern that the division remain committed to following through on the Bellwether report recommendations, particularly those related to curriculum and instructional materials.

Staff clarified that the \$600,000 would be in addition to the proposed ongoing \$800,000 increase for instructional resources. Staff stated that the one-time funding would not replace or supplant the recurring increase. Staff further clarified that items not shown as reductions in the budget slides remain included in the draft funding request, and that the only proposed supplanting in the scenario relates to technology replacement funding.

Chair Berlin discussed the use of technology in schools and noted that additional research is emerging regarding the effects of technology on children, particularly younger students. She stated that the Board has received increased questions and concerns from parents about technology use in the elementary grades, especially kindergarten through grade five.

Chair Berlin stated that the Board has discussed the possibility of a future work session on this topic, including hearing from researchers, parents, and teachers about the effects of technology on students and instruction. She cautioned against making a rapid change without fully understanding the instructional impact, noting that teachers have spent several years building instructional practices around technology and that many services and instructional tools are currently delivered through technology platforms.

Chair Berlin stated that the proposed use of one-time funding for technology replacement may give the Board time over the next several months to study the issue more carefully as it begins preparing for the next budget cycle. She said the Board should consider the effects of technology on children, the impact on teaching and learning, and the costs that may come with reducing technology use, including possible increases in textbook or instructional materials costs. She also noted that the Technology Committee had recently discussed the issue and referenced a two-day airplane mode test.

Chair Berlin asked for clarification regarding the new human resources licensing cost. She confirmed that the cost is for software licensing, not teacher licensure, and asked whether it is a one-time cost or an ongoing technology cost. Staff confirmed that it is an ongoing new cost associated with the division's decision to move from a combined county human resources system to a separate school division human resources system. Chair Berlin noted that while she believes the decision was appropriate given the division's unique needs, it is a cost the Board will need to continue monitoring.

Chair Berlin also emphasized the importance of using program evaluations and logic models to guide fiscal decision-making. She stated that if a program remains in the "yellow" category for more than two years, the Board and staff need to take that seriously and not continue funding programs indefinitely without evidence of improvement. She expressed appreciation for staff's attention to this issue and said it is important for the Board to receive evaluation information earlier in the process so members can better understand program performance and make informed recommendations about programs that may need to be reduced or eliminated.

She further noted that, in the math proposal, this appears to be the first time the division has included required data measures tied to program continuation. She stated that if the required student outcomes are not met, the division should consider reducing and eventually eliminating those programs as part of its responsibility to be fiscally responsible.

Ms. Le expressed support for studying and learning more about the effects of technology on children. She noted that the issue should be considered carefully because technology can have both positive and negative effects, particularly in instructional settings.

She urged the Board to separate the instructional analysis from budgetary considerations at the outset. In her view, the Board should first evaluate the role of technology from an instructional perspective, including its benefits, drawbacks, and impact on students, before determining what budgetary or expenditure decisions may follow.

Dr. Acuff agreed that the Board should study the issue further, noting that excessive screen time is a concern for students and adults alike. She said she would like to better understand how technology is actually being used in classrooms, particularly in the earlier grades, and how much screen time students are experiencing during the school day.

She cautioned against relying too heavily on broad national studies about adolescent screen use when making decisions about classroom technology, since those studies may not reflect how technology is being used instructionally in ACPS. Dr. Acuff suggested that the analysis may lead to modifications in how technology is used rather than eliminating it altogether. She emphasized the need to balance concerns about screen time with the reality that students also need to become technologically proficient.

Mr. Beard shared a classroom example from a recent visit to Scottsville, where students were using iPads as part of spelling and writing instruction. He noted that this is one example of how technology is being used in schools.

He also expressed support for using program evaluation data to guide budget decisions, stating that if cuts are necessary, the division should prioritize reducing or eliminating programs that are not working. He specifically referenced the STEP program and said he was surprised it had continued for as long as it had. Mr. Beard emphasized that, wherever possible, budget reductions should be kept away from the classroom. He also added that, having previously worked as a substitute teacher, he would be interested in doing so again.

Dr. Haas responded to the substitute teaching discussion by noting that division services staff regularly support schools by substituting in buildings when needed. He explained that staff on the third floor, at Seminole Place, and in building services are frequently called upon to assist schools when staffing shortages occur.

He expressed concern about creating an “us and them” mentality between school-based employees and central office or division services staff. Dr. Haas emphasized that the work of division services is important to the school system and is intended to support teachers, students, and schools. He also noted that the number of division services positions being discussed represents a small portion of the overall budget, while the majority of the budget, approximately 85%, is dedicated to salaries and benefits for all employees.

Dr. Haas also cautioned against relying on a single annual data point to determine the return on investment in public education or student outcomes. He compared meaningful analysis to long-term investing, noting that performance should be evaluated over time and with attention to multiple variables. He said it would be unfair to hold teachers or schools to a standard based on one point-in-time measure, especially when many factors affect student performance.

He pushed back on the broader narrative that public education does not provide a good return on investment. He stated that Albemarle County Public Schools reflects a wide range of demographic and economic groups and outperforms the state on average, while acknowledging that achievement gaps remain. He said those gaps should be analyzed carefully so the division can determine where improvements are needed.

Dr. Haas also described a new feedback survey being piloted with the leadership team to gather input on division services departments. He said principals had asked how they would provide feedback on the work of those departments, and the survey is intended to help collect that information over time.

He closed by emphasizing that division services staff are part of the same team as school-based staff. While not every employee works in a classroom every day, he said their work is focused on supporting teachers and students, and many division services employees are regularly out in schools providing direct support.

Chair Berlin asked that the Board clearly identify the new programs and investments included in the budget, either by adding them to the presentation deck or stating them aloud, so the public can understand not only what had to be reduced but also what the division was still able to preserve and support. She noted that, as the Board works toward a balanced budget during a difficult financial period, it is important to acknowledge the investments that reflect the values of the school division and the Board.

She highlighted the collective bargaining agreement as one of the major accomplishments included in the budget, noting that it is among the earliest such agreements in the state. She said the agreement provides

additional financial support for teachers, licensed staff, and professional staff, while also including supports requested by employees, such as leave and planning time. Chair Berlin emphasized that these supports are important for employee wellness and for helping staff work effectively in a stressful environment.

Chair Berlin also expressed appreciation to the Board for continuing to support math specialists. She noted that the division has discussed for several years that student achievement requires attention to both literacy and math, and she thanked the Board for making additional cuts elsewhere in order to keep math specialists in the budget.

She also referenced the budget's support for special education. Chair Berlin said the Board has heard from the SEAC team and families of children with delays and disabilities about the need to respond to both the increasing number of students requiring services and the increasing intensity of those needs. She noted that the budget supports student achievement, inclusion, and the wellness and support of teachers and staff.

Chair Berlin closed by thanking the Board and school division staff for working together to protect these priorities while developing the budget.

Ms. Kumazawa, Director of Budget and Planning stated that staff could provide a summary before the budget adoption the following week to highlight the items included in the budget that had not received as much attention during recent discussions. She noted that budget adoption was scheduled for the following Thursday. She said it appeared that the Board had reached consensus on the current balancing scenario. Based on that direction, staff would bring forward the updated budget numbers and related changes for the Board to take action and request appropriation of the funds.

Agenda Item No. 7.3 – Achievement Gap Advisory Committee Charter

[Summary of the Achievement Gap Advisory Committee \(Draft\)](#)

[Achievement Gap Committee Charter \(Draft\)](#)

Dr. Haas said he was encouraged when Mr. Dillenbeck proposed creating an advisory committee focused on achievement gaps. He noted that achievement gaps are a longstanding issue in Albemarle County schools, as well as across Virginia and nationally, but said he believes the problem can be solved if the division continues to keep the issue visible and works on it consistently.

Dr. Haas recommended that the proposed group become a formal advisory committee to the School Board, rather than a short-term or episodic effort. He explained that the Board has both internal committees and advisory committees, and he compared this proposal to standing advisory groups such as the Special Education Advisory Board (SEAC), the School Health Advisory Board (SHAB), and the Advisory Committee for Environmental Sustainability (ACES). He emphasized that the value of making it an advisory committee is that it would provide ongoing attention to the issue instead of responding temporarily when concerns arise and then moving on.

He stated that he had drafted a proposed committee charter and shared it with Chair Berlin and Mr. Dillenbeck for feedback. After incorporating their input, the draft was ready for the full Board to review and provide comments. Dr. Haas said the committee properly belongs with the Board because it would be a School Board advisory committee.

Mr. Dillenbeck explained that the achievement gap has been a longstanding concern and is one of Dr. Haas's top priorities, particularly the gap between white students and students of color. He said the purpose of the proposed committee would be to bring together community members, teachers, principals, parents, students, Board members, and staff to review what has been tried in the past, identify what appears to be

working and may need more time, and consider what should be done differently if current efforts are not producing the desired results.

He also emphasized the importance of learning from other school divisions in Virginia and elsewhere that have made progress in reducing or eliminating achievement gaps, so ACPS does not have to “reinvent the wheel.” Mr. Dillenbeck said the committee would invite a range of community members to participate, with members likely serving two-year terms and the possibility of renewal for a second term.

He clarified that the committee would not make policy decisions. Instead, it would gather information and bring recommendations to the full Board for discussion and possible action.

Dr. Haas added that the timing of the committee’s work should align with other advisory groups, such as SEAC and SHAB, so reports could come forward early in or during the budget season. That timing would allow the Board to consider any funding implications as part of the budget process.

Dr. Acuff referenced the development of the ACES committee and noted that its structure was modeled more formally after long-range planning. She said one element missing from the proposed charter was clarity around appointments. For ACES and long-range planning, each School Board member appoints a representative, with additional appointments by the Superintendent and staff support included in the structure. Dr. Acuff recommended that the Board consider using a similar appointment model, saying it would make the committee more formal and give each Board member a connection to the group’s work through their appointee.

Chair Berlin described the proposed Achievement Gap Committee as a way to help the School Board maintain a sustained focus on improving outcomes for all students, particularly students affected by longstanding gaps in achievement, access, and opportunity. She emphasized that the committee’s work should not be limited to achievement data alone but should also consider access and opportunity gaps.

She explained that the committee would serve in an advisory role to help the Board remain grounded in both data and lived experience. Its work would include reviewing disaggregated student outcome data, identifying systemic barriers, and offering recommendations aligned with the division’s strategic plan.

Chair Berlin noted that the proposed membership is intentionally broad and representative. She emphasized that students would serve as full voting members, not simply observers, and that families, staff, and community members would also be included to ensure that those most impacted by achievement gaps have a voice in the work.

She stated that the purpose is not to create a committee for its own sake, but to strengthen the Board’s ability to monitor progress consistently, elevate community perspectives, and ensure that closing gaps remains a central and ongoing governance priority. She connected the proposal to public comments received earlier in the meeting about the importance of hearing directly from teachers, parents, students, and the broader community.

Chair Berlin also emphasized the importance of timing. She said the committee should be structured so that its work can inform Board decision-making, rather than reporting at a point when action is no longer possible. She noted that an executive committee, working with staff, would begin planning in July so the committee could begin at the start of the school year and provide information early enough to support the next budget cycle.

She then offered three discussion questions for the Board: how the committee can best help the Board keep consistent, actionable attention on achievement gaps in alignment with the strategic plan; whether the proposed membership structure ensures the Board is hearing from the right voices, especially students and families most impacted; and how the committee’s recommendations and updates should be structured so they meaningfully inform Board discussions, priorities, and decisions over time.

The Board discussed the proposed appointment process for the Achievement Gap Committee and how to ensure the committee includes the right voices. It was noted that the draft charter could continue to be revised as needed.

Ms. Osborne expressed support for the committee concept but suggested that, before launching a broader public advisory committee, the Board should first engage in internal equity-related work. She noted that, as the division's demographics have changed, it would be valuable for the Board to examine its own perspectives, assumptions, and possible biases. She referenced previous equity work completed by the Board, describing it as helpful, and asked whether the Board could hold a work session or similar session with members of the equity committee early in the process.

Chair Berlin acknowledged the suggestion and said it should likely take priority over another proposed work session on technology and research. She noted that Board members have joined at different times and may have had different exposure to prior training, information, and equity work. She expressed support for scheduling this as a separate Board learning opportunity rather than adding it directly into the committee charter.

Dr. Haas clarified that the prior equity work had been structured as professional development sessions, not public work sessions. He noted that the sessions were closed meetings because they involved intensive discussion and personal reflection.

Dr. Acuff suggested that, in addition to the points raised by other Board members, the Board would benefit from having a clear "map" of the division's current efforts related to achievement, access, and opportunity gaps before the committee begins its work. She noted that ACPS already has several initiatives in place, including math specialists, increased special education support, Bellwether work, literacy efforts, reading specialists, technology support, and culturally responsive education certifications. She said it would be helpful to see these efforts laid out together in one place so the Board can better understand how they connect, where there may be alignment, where there may be overlap or conflict, and where the division may need to be more sensitive or intentional.

Ms. Osborne suggested that the Board look at the issue longitudinally. Since achievement gaps have existed for many years, she said it may be useful to examine whether there were years when outcomes improved and what the division may have done differently during those periods. She acknowledged that the problem is longstanding and has never been fully resolved but said a clearer understanding of past and current efforts could help inform the proposed committee's work.

The Board discussed whether to pause the proposed Achievement Gap Committee to first complete Board self-reflection, equity professional development, and a mapping of current division efforts. There was agreement that the charter may need to be reconsidered so the Board is fully prepared before launching the committee. At the same time, it was emphasized that pausing the committee structure would not pause the operational work already underway to address achievement, access, and opportunity gaps.

Dr. Haas noted that the Board's role is to provide oversight and policy direction, while staff's work to address gaps will continue. He suggested that the division could also use the summer to identify a specific short-term thematic goal for the next school year. He referenced the division's current focus on improving reading outcomes for Black students and said that staff had been monitoring interim reading results throughout the year. He noted that this focused effort has helped move the work forward and that the division is beginning to see progress.

Dr. Haas also supported the need for ongoing professional development around courageous conversations about race. He said this type of work should be continuous because bias can reemerge when attention to the issue fades.

Chair Berlin summarized the discussion by saying she heard the Board asking staff, particularly Ms. Schmitt or others involved in planning Board work sessions, to bring back recommendations for equity-related professional development. She noted that Board members who had participated in prior professional development could also identify what had been useful so staff could help schedule future sessions, either as work sessions or as professional development opportunities.

Chair Berlin then asked whether the Board also wanted staff to begin developing a “map” of current efforts related to achievement, access, and opportunity gaps.

Dr. Haas said staff would take that direction. Chair Berlin noted that professional development recommendations could come back at a future meeting, possibly the first meeting in May if the following week was too soon. She also acknowledged that the mapping work would likely take longer, especially with the end of the school year and graduation season approaching. She suggested that summer may be a better time for some of the professional development work.

Dr. Haas noted that the committee charter could still be revised separately, including changes to reflect Dr. Acuff’s suggestion about using an appointment structure similar to the ACES committee and other advisory committees. He said staff could revise the draft charter and bring it back for further Board review, given the interest in preparing participants before the next school year.

Ms. Le stated that she did not believe the Board could complete the necessary internal work quickly enough to launch the committee responsibly. She expressed concern about involving community members in a process before the Board had completed its own professional development and mapping work. She recommended placing a firm pause on the committee until that internal work is completed. The Board appeared to agree that, while it would be helpful to have recommendations ready for the next budget cycle, it is more important to be clear, prepared, and intentional before moving forward.

AGENDA ITEM No. 8.0 OTHER BUSINESS

Agenda Item No. 8.1 Other Business by Board Members and/or the Superintendent

Dr. Haas first referenced the grading guidelines discussion and noted that a grading practices survey would be distributed to teachers the following morning through the Compass weekly digest and by email. The survey would also be shared with principals through the Superintendent’s Advisory Bulletin. He said the purpose is to get a current understanding of grading practices across the division and to identify what teachers are already doing that aligns with the broad objectives in Board policy. He emphasized that the division should learn from successful practices already taking place in classrooms, rather than relying only on outside research or published materials.

Dr. Haas then addressed principal transfers and leadership planning. He explained that principal staffing is reviewed annually across the division’s 24 schools, beginning generally in January. Mr. Redding sends an intent survey to principals to learn whether they plan to remain in their current role, retire, seek other opportunities, or consider a transfer. Those responses are followed by individual conversations with each principal so division leadership can understand potential vacancies, interests, and needs before making decisions.

He emphasized that principal transfers are not snap decisions and are made through ongoing conversations, with attention to both stability and the needs of each school. He noted that while long-term tenure is valued, principal tenures have generally become shorter over time because the work is demanding. Dr. Haas said the division wants both stable leadership and the right leadership for each school.

Speaking specifically about Greer, Dr. Haas said he would not discuss confidential personnel conversations involving Dr. Saunders or any other employee. He made clear that personnel decisions involving teachers, custodians, principals, or other staff are not discussed publicly. He then provided historical context, noting that Greer has had several principals over the years, including Matt Landahl, Robin Bowling, Jill Lee, and Dr. Saunders, who transferred to Greer after serving successfully at Baker-Butler.

Dr. Haas also gave examples of other principal transfers, including the transfer of Nancy McCullen to Baker-Butler and Paula Gately to Red Hill. He said those schools are doing well under their current leadership and credited the division's strong bench of leaders, along with outside hires when appropriate, as part of the division's approach to strengthening schools.

He stated that after teachers, the principal is the key factor in a school's success. He noted that there is currently a principal vacancy at Crozet because Dr. England is retiring, and he praised her leadership, including her selection as the division's Leader of the Year. He also said Greer is a strong school with many positive things happening and acknowledged Dr. Saunders' seven years of leadership there, while also noting that new leadership and a fresh perspective can be appropriate.

Dr. Haas expressed disappointment that the Greer interview process did not move forward as planned, though he said the Agnor interview process did proceed. He said Greer has a diverse candidate pool and a diverse interview committee, and based on his conversations with some committee members, there was interest and readiness to begin the process. He said the plan is to move forward with interviews the following week.

He acknowledged the impact that principal changes can have on a school community. Drawing from his own experience as a teacher, he said transitions can be difficult when staff have strong relationships with departing principals, but new leadership can also lead to strong and meaningful relationships over time.

Dr. Haas closed by assuring the Board that principal placement and transfer decisions are made thoughtfully, with the whole school system in mind, and in consultation with colleagues and the principals involved throughout the process.

Dr. Acuff requested a brief update on transportation, noting that she had recently spoken with two bus drivers at separate events who spoke very highly of Ms. Gellner's leadership. She said that, because the Board has not heard about major transportation crises in recent months, it would be appropriate to recognize the work being done by Ms. Gellner and the transportation department.

She noted that transportation has been a significant challenge in the past and said the department's progress should not go unnoticed. She also referenced the department's strong Gallup results and said the Board should acknowledge the work of the transportation staff.

Ms. Schmitt agreed and said she would gladly relay the comments. She also noted that, while there have been many improvements, the department continues to face hiring challenges. She said the division plans to reinstate an employee referral bonus and continue other recruitment efforts. Ms. Schmitt said staff would be glad to provide a public transportation update, likely in June or July.

Agenda Item No. 8.2 Closed Meeting – None.

Agenda Item No. 8.3 Closed Meeting Certification – None.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 10.0 ADJOURNMENT – At 8:50 p.m., hearing no objections, Chair Berlin adjourned the meeting of the Albemarle County School Board.

Clerk

Chair