



MINUTES
CHARLOTTESVILLE CITY SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
Wednesday, March 11, 2026 (5:00 PM)
Walker Upper Elementary School Cafeteria
1562 Dairy Road, Charlottesville, VA
[Video Link](#)

1.1 Call to Order: The School Board Chair called the public meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

2.1 Roll Call of Board Members: Roll call was conducted to confirm attendance.

Board Members Present: Ms. Zyahna Bryant, Ms. Amanda Burns, Ms. Shymora Cooper, Ms. Emily Dooley, Mr. Chris Meyer, Ms. Nicole Richardson, and Ms. Lisa Torres

Board Members Absent: None

Executive Leadership Team & Staff Present: Dr. Royal A. Gurley, Jr. (Superintendent), Dr. Anna Isley (Chief Academic Officer), Ms. Kim Powell (Chief Operations Officer), Ms. Maria Lewis (Director of Human Resources), Ms. Renee Hoover (Director of Finance), Mr. Pat Cuomo (Director of Technology), Ms. Rachel Rasnake (Director of Student Services), Ms. Carolyn Swift (Director of Assessment and Accountability), Dr. T. Denise Johnson (Supervisor of Strategic Initiatives), Ms. Beth Cheuk (Community Relations Supervisor), Ms. Julia Green (Board Deputy Clerk), and Ms. Leslie Thacker (Board Clerk).

Executive Leadership Team & Staff Absent: None

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

Items for Discussion

4.1 Black Student Achievement: Dr. Gurley opened the session with a call to action titled "What We Face, We Can Change," emphasizing that collective work and naming specific challenges are required for lasting change. The presentation centered on several key Strategic Plan Targets for the 2026-2027 cycle, including:

- Matching AP/Dual Enrollment completion rates to racial demographic percentages.
- Reaching at least 75% proficiency in reading and 70% in math across all student groups.
- Reducing SOL failure rates for African American students and students with disabilities by 10% annually.

Enrollment Data

The Board reviewed declining enrollment trends. Black student enrollment has decreased by 11.3% since the 22-23 school year, significantly outpacing the total division enrollment decrease of 3%. As of January 30, 2026, Black students represent 25% of the total student population (1,114 students).

Achievement Data and Instructional Supports

The team detailed the "Installation Phase" of instructional leadership, including common structures for data analysis and professional learning for administrators.

State Assessment (SOL) Trends (Grades 3-8)

- Reading: The overall pass rate for Black students rose to 40% in 24-25, up from 32% in 21-22.
- Math: The overall pass rate for Black students increased to 33% in 24-25, up from 18% in 21-22.
- High School: At Charlottesville High School (CHS), the 24-25 Reading EOC pass rate for Black students was 54%, and the Algebra 1 EOC pass rate was 80%.

Early Literacy and Readiness (VKRP/VALLSS/MAP)

- Kindergarten Readiness: Black students showed the largest gains across all groups in Literacy (VALLSS), Math (EMAS), and Self-Regulation (CBRS) from Fall 2024 to Fall 2025.
- Preschool Impact: Students attending VPI or locally funded preschools showed gains of over 20 percentage points in literacy readiness.
- Growth Measures: MAP Growth data for Fall 2025-2026 indicates that 51% of Black students are performing "at or above" the 31st percentile benchmark in Reading, and 38% in Math.

School-Level Responses

Individual school leaders presented targeted strategies:

- Tall Oaks Elementary (Ms. Mickens): Shifting focus to student mastery ("Who's doing the work?"), utilizing the SCOP model for active engagement, and performing a schoolwide study of The Joyful Classroom to foster belonging.
- Walker Upper Elementary (Dr. Thompson): Implementing individual goal-setting via student planners, regular disaggregated data analysis in PLCs, and the "Snapshots" program, which uses Black American artists to bridge reading and art.
- CTE/CATEC (Dr. Heltz): Expanding career pathways based on local labor market trends, introducing hands-on "GOTEC" modules in middle school, and pursuing LPN and Patient Care Technician credentials for high school students.
- Charlottesville High School (Dr. Malone): Auditing AP/Dual Enrollment enrollment to ensure representation, utilizing student "ambassadors" to share lived experiences, and disaggregating grade data to identify narrow versus wide achievement gaps.

Special Education and Discipline

- Special Education: While the division was identified for disproportionate representation of Black students in certain disability categories, audits confirmed that inappropriate identification was not a contributing factor. Graduation for students with IEPs is at 86.11%.
- Discipline: Data shows 90.13% of Black students had 0-1 office referrals. New state requirements (HB298) will mandate restorative practices before exclusionary discipline.

Community Schools

The division continues to build infrastructure for neighborhood "Literacy Hubs" at locations like First Baptist and the Boys & Girls Club. Key pillars include integrated student supports and collaborative leadership.

Leading Forward: Next Steps

The session concluded with a commitment to:

1. Protect instructional time for consistent learning.
2. Ensure Tier I instruction is culturally relevant and engaging.

3. Implement Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) with fidelity as an alternative to suspension.
4. Evaluate outcome data from community partners to ensure alignment with achievement goals.

Questions/Discussion:

- Ms. Burns inquired if the enrollment data pertained exclusively to Black students; Dr. Gurley confirmed the data represents students identifying as Black/African-American only. He attributed the 11.3% decline—compared to a 3% decline in the total student population—to community challenges such as access to housing, transportation, and high-wage employment.
- Ms. Bryant requested data on the number of students transitioning to private schools. Dr. Gurley confirmed the division can pull this data and, along with Ms. Swift, clarified that while some students enroll in private schools, the majority are relocating from Charlottesville to surrounding districts, including Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS), Fluvanna, and Waynesboro.
- Ms. Cooper asked if the enrollment decline correlated with dropout numbers. Dr. Gurley affirmed that these figures are not dropout numbers, but rather reflect residential relocation outside the city to counties like Fluvanna and Waynesboro.
- Ms. Burns confirmed that the strategic goal of 75% proficiency is a mandate across all student groups.
- Ms. Bryant requested contextual data on how long achievement gaps have persisted. Dr. Gurley explained that historical data, shared in June 2025, showed a long-standing lag, noting a trend where state assessments change entirely right as Black students begin to approach the proficiency target.
- Ms. Cooper highlighted a performance dip occurring in the fifth grade cohort. Dr. Gurley attributed this to school transitions, noting that the upcoming reconfiguration, which returns fifth graders to elementary school, should create greater instructional continuity and a seamless transition.
- Ms. Bryant requested an explanation for the decline in Grade 7 mathematics proficiency for Black students between 2023, 2024, and 2025.
- Ms. Dooley questioned if the Grade 6 SOL data included students enrolled in Algebra 1 during middle school. Ms. Swift confirmed this.
- Ms. Burns asked for the timing of the Kindergarten readiness assessment (VKRP); Dr. Isley stated it is administered during the fourth week of the school year, in September.
- Ms. Burns requested information about the division's work with community preschool partners.
- Ms. Bryant asked if the division could identify the preschools students attended before Kindergarten. Ms. Rasnake explained that this data is parent-reported, making it less accurate than state reports, as students may have only attended for a short time.
- Ms. Burns inquired about preschool capacity and funding flexibility for three-year-old versus four-year-old programs. Ms. Rasnake clarified that funding is primarily driven by state formulas and is part of the division's continual work through the annual VPI grant application process.
- Ms. Bryant questioned the exclusion of certain students from the data set. Dr. Isley noted that only a couple of students were excluded, emphasizing that with small overall numbers, it is important to see the instructional impact.
- Ms. Dooley asked if the end-of-year results are expected to show composite scores reaching proficiency. Dr. Isley responded that achieving these targets involves making up significant instructional ground over time.
- Ms. Bryant inquired how the fluency "pull-out tests" integrate with the broader data set. Dr. Isley described the approach as assessing everybody as a check.
- Dr. Gurley stated that the primary takeaway was the intentional work done this school year in extracting detailed, triangulated data. This level of detail moves beyond generalizations that might be made when only looking at composite scores or SOL tests.
- Ms. Cooper asked if the assessments specifically measure comprehension. Dr. Isley confirmed that comprehension is a component, as students must meet a specific accuracy percentage to meet the benchmarks.

- Ms. Bryant requested historical comparison data. Dr. Isley responded that this data can be seen in the composite scores, noting that while targets have not been met, the division is focused on addressing foundational gaps.
- Ms. Bryant inquired about the ideal number of intervention specialists needed to meet proficiency goals. Dr. Gurley confirmed that additional staff would be ideal to make groups smaller and reduce caseloads, but the immediate focus remains on strengthening Tier 1 instruction.
- Ms. Dooley emphasized the need to better support parents in their ability to support their children's home-based instruction.
- Ms. Cooper questioned the support strategies for students in the high-risk band with low cognitive skills who are receiving services but still struggling. Dr. Gurley responded that reading plans are customized to individual students and follow a resource-supported, linear path.
- Ms. Burns asked for the composition of the student planning groups. Dr. Isley identified the team as including herself, literacy coordinators, and principals. Ms. Rasnake added that the team gathers and verifies data across screenings to adapt student supports.
- Ms. Bryant asked about the frequency of reports and the parent response rate. Ms. Rasnake stated that progress is monitored through solid, repetitive, and ongoing conversations with families, particularly utilizing the Community Schools model to gather anecdotal information.
- Dr. Gurley stated that a required component of maintaining collaboration is ensuring that community partners formally provide student outcome data.
- Ms. Burns urged the division to ensure that letters sent home are in a digestible and accessible format that all parents can read and comprehend.
- Ms. Bryant inquired about student-centered feedback. Dr. Thompson noted efforts to capture what students observe that adults might miss, such as bullying or different treatment by teachers.
- Ms. Burns expressed concern to Dr. Heltz about students who do not qualify for certain programs and are leaving the division without being fully prepared for post-secondary life.
- Dr. Gurley stated that a new academic advising platform will aid in creating a better educational progression for all students.
- Dr. Heltz emphasized that the division must be comfortable facilitating career-focused dialogue, ensuring students graduate as productive community contributors regardless of their college enrollment status.
- Ms. Bryant and Dr. Heltz discussed how motivated students often demonstrate higher performance at CATEC than at their base schools. They emphasized the need to inform students about wage potential and advanced education opportunities, suggesting a model similar to AVID for Career and Technical Education (CTE).
- Dr. Gurley advocated for removing generational stigmas attached to certain technical careers as one of the two factors needed to increase Black student participation in CATEC programs.
- Ms. Burns asked for an update on the Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program. Dr. Heltz reported that applications have been submitted and paid to the Board of Nursing, with a program request pending with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) since December. A teacher for the program has been identified.
- Ms. Burns inquired about the GPA requirement for PVCC undergraduate (UGS) courses. Dr. Malone confirmed the minimum threshold is 3.3.
- Ms. Bryant questioned the current status of the Black Student Union (BSU).
- Ms. Cooper asked if students at alternative sites (Knight School/LMA) could access dual enrollment (DE) courses, and if those numbers were tied into the data presented. Dr. Gurley explained that DE courses are held at Charlottesville High School (CHS), require teachers to have a master's degree with 18 graduate hours in the content area, and the division provides transportation for students as appropriate.
- Ms. Bryant raised a question about continuing the conversation at another time, expressing concern that the serious issue of the achievement gap should not be rushed and required a thorough discussion, especially since it seemed some attendees were ready to conclude. Ms. Torres acknowledged the importance of the remaining information and proposed an informal poll to gauge the board's preference, noting that the calendar indicated the work session was scheduled until 7:30 PM.

- The consensus was that it would be best to pause the discussion to ensure full attention later. Ms. Bryant suggested that a Saturday session, similar to the longer board development sessions, would be more suitable for the topic of the achievement gap and Black achievement issues.
- Dr. Gurley sought clarification on the understanding of meeting end times, noting that school board meetings typically do not have a hard stop. Ms. Bryant maintained that if full engagement was not possible, the topic should be tabled.
- Mr. Meyer stated his desire to continue the conversation, specifically wanting time for a policy discussion, but also requested that future presentations be more structured to allow the board to provide feedback rather than solely receive information.

Ms. Burns made a motion, seconded by Ms. Bryant, to table the remainder of the presentation (at slide 41) to be revisited at a date mutually agreeable to the Board and Dr. Gurley's team. Upon a roll-call vote, the motion passed with Ms. Bryant, Ms. Burns, Ms. Cooper, Ms. Dooley, Mr. Meyer, and Ms. Torres voting aye. 6 ayes, 0 nays. The motion carried. Ms. Richardson was not present for this vote.

5.1 Work Session Wrap-Up: There were no requests from the Board.

6.1 Comments from Members of the Community:

- Tanesha Hudson addressed the Board regarding the quality of educational improvements and the oversight of classroom materials. She spoke about the need to monitor how technology is being used and to study the specific materials students interact with daily. During her comments, she requested specific data regarding student numbers and the percentage of children on specialized plans. Ms. Hudson concluded by stating that student data should not be manipulated by any human being and emphasized the importance of the integrity of the information provided.

7.1 Upcoming Meetings: Ms. Torres read the list of upcoming meetings.

8.1 Adjourn: The meeting adjourned at 7:51 pm.

Lisa Torres, School Board Chair

Leslie Thacker, School Board Clerk