

BRISTOL VIRGINIA SCHOOL BOARD
REGULAR SESSION
November 6, 2023

The Bristol Virginia School Board met in Regular Session on Monday, November 6, 2023, in the Bristol Virginia Public Schools Administration Office, 280 Lee Street, Bristol, Virginia. A quorum was present with the following Board members in attendance:

Mr. Randy Alvis, Chair
Mr. Steve Fletcher
Mrs. Vanessa Guffey

Mrs. Breanne Forbes Hubbard, Vice Chair
Mr. Frank Goodpasture

Also present were:

Dr. David Scott, Superintendent
Mrs. Tammy Jones, Clerk

Mr. Gary Ritchie, Assistant Superintendent
Mrs. Stephanie Austin, Deputy Clerk

Mr. Randy Alvis, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. He welcomed all in attendance and opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Alvis asked for a motion to approve the Agenda. Mr. Frank Goodpasture so moved. Mrs. Breanne Forbes Hubbard seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Alvis addressed Item 2 (A) Superintendents Report. Dr. David Scott, Superintendent, presented the following:

- **Construction at the Intermediate School** –Dr. Scott noted he joked with members of the leadership team last week that in about nine months, our hope will be to begin the Superintendent’s Report without providing an update on the construction. As we have started to see paint on the walls, Mr. Ritchie and Dr. de Nobriga visited the school last week to see how everything was tying together. Mr. Elswick from SKANSKA was perhaps mildly concerned that the pastel-colored accent walls were too light. Mr. Ritchie and Dr. de Nobriga have provided some assurance that the darker tiles that will be going down will help to balance the pastel colors. We really believe the color splashes throughout the corridors and classrooms will have great aesthetic appeal to the students and staff.

We have ordered the kiln for the art classroom and are awaiting its delivery. There has been some concern about an electrical line that was cut during some of the paving work, but that seems to be getting resolved without much hassle. There should be sufficient lighting in the area tomorrow for voters who may turn out before the sun comes up or be voting after sunset.

The Van Pelt campus may be a busy place tomorrow with voting and with the scheduled professional development planned for our elementary teachers tomorrow. He added he will have more of an update on the professional development in just a moment.

- **Playground at Van Pelt** –The playground recently received some new equipment. There has been plenty of discussion about the playground that will be installed at the Intermediate School when it opens next year. The equipment you see on the screen now is at the existing Van Pelt, ready for use right now. In fact, if this were a live shot, we’d probably see kids on it right now. This equipment, of course, will be part of the playground at Virginia Primary School next year.
- **Maintenance Projects** – Virginia High School has also seen some upgrades in recent days. The Maintenance Department has recently renovated and reopened the boys’ and girls’ restrooms on

the first and second floors. Additionally, the Maintenance Department has been working on renovations in the Band Room at the high school where water damage had ruined the floor and created some issues on the walls. Those renovations are wrapping up, and the Maintenance Department will be working through some other similar projects, namely a classroom at Virginia Middle School and the Wrestling Rooms at Virginia High School. The elevator project at Virginia Middle School experienced a setback due to some parts that were damaged in shipping. The timeline for receiving undamaged parts forced us to decide whether to do the work while school was in session or to wait until the Christmas break. If we did the work during school, we would have to take the elevator out of use. We have decided to wait until Christmas break to complete this project. The elevator will remain in use and is fully functional, and we have guarantees that its safety will continue to be certified by the Code Inspector.

- **Connect 4 Event** – In the second week of October, students and staff from our four elementary schools took time out from their normal routines to engage in some fun activities. The special area teachers from the elementary schools—Physical Education, Music, Media, Art—took the lead in organizing this three-day event. Dr. Scott noted he wanted to acknowledge Mrs. Zachlynn Lallande in particular for her effort in this matter. While the vibe after the event was overwhelmingly positive, I know very well that it takes a great deal of courage and confidence and hard work to pull off an event that is designed to comingle people who do not naturally comingle. Bravo to Coach Lallande and all of the staff who made this a wonderful event. Dr. Scott added he believed that we are already looking ahead to ways to replicate some aspects of the event in the upcoming months.
- **Career Fair at Virginia High School** – This past Friday, fourth- and fifth-grade students visited Virginia High School for a Career Fair. Ms. Adriana Cox coordinated with 10 vendors to provide our students with a chance to get some early career exploration. Ms. Cox is also warming up a relationship with the local 4-H chapter for some more career exploration opportunities closer to the time of the Thanksgiving break.
- **Grade-level Assignments for Teachers** – As we continue to make preparations for the upcoming school year, there are a number of organizational steps that we are taking at this time. Some of these steps and some of the progress are behind the scenes. For instance, we are making a division-wide effort to become more uniform in how we appraise teacher instruction and in how we deliver growth-producing feedback to our teachers. Those conversations are intended to lay some groundwork for the upcoming year and really for years to come. We are also doing some behind-the-scenes professional development architectural work, which is to say we are planning for training that is still months away, knowing that there will be foundational pieces that need to be picked up sooner rather than later.

In terms of much more visible steps in our preparation for next year, we have recently shared with teachers their grade-level teaching assignments for next year. To be very honest, all of the attention we pay towards celebrating the progress that we see in the physical building that will be Virginia Intermediate School only tells half of the story. Our teachers, very understandably, have some anxiety, perhaps some sleeplessness, over what next year will look like for them. We are not just guessing at this. We realize that certain unknowns are inevitable, but we also want to share as much information as possible with our teachers and support staff members. To that end, Mr. Ritchie and others—he noted he believed all principals had some input—have been able to share recently with our classroom teachers who will be teaching which grades. We few exceptions, Mr. Ritchie and his team were able to accommodate teacher requests, and in those

instances where those requests could not be perfectly accommodated, a teacher may be one grade level away from her request. For instance, if the request was to teach fourth grade, the teacher may have been placed with fifth-grade students. He highlighted to the best of his knowledge, no one has been placed in a grade level at the opposite end of the pool from what was requested.

Some calculations and some budgetary number crunching must still be completed to determine the placement of some special area teachers and school counselors. We remain hopeful that retirement and attrition will prevent us from having to use a Reduction in Force policy. In other words, the lookout is still positive that we will be able to retain all staff who meet licensure requirements and have proficient evaluations at the end of the year. It is possible that we will have these and other remaining staffing questions ready for a public answer in December.

- **Election Day Professional Development** – Keeping with the theme of elementary staff and our continual effort to keep them happy and engaged and prepared for the tasks ahead of them, our elementary teachers will be participating in both a tour of the Intermediate School and some professional development centered on the launch of the Virginia Literacy Act, or VLA. First, for the tour, teachers will have small group tours of the new facility during the Election Day in-service day tomorrow. Additionally, teachers will be working with Reading Coaches to get more familiar with the Science of Reading, Scarborough’s Reading Rope, and LETRS training, all of which will be extremely important in the lives of early readers for the foreseeable future. The way we will be teaching reading, which will be informed by scientific study of the brain that has never been understood to this degree, will be featured in an upcoming Board meeting. There is, however, a lot of work to be done to get our teachers the training and level of expertise that will be the standard across the state. So, our elementary teachers will be spending some of their day tomorrow touring the new school, some of the day preparing for the major changes associated with the Virginia Literacy Act, and they will also be having discussions about lesson plans and the critical components of daily plans for reading.
- **Crisis Plan Update** – Dr. Scott added he will be visiting Virginia Middle School and Virginia High School tomorrow to provide more information on our Crisis Plan. Just days before our last Board meeting, we suffered significant disruption from a swatting call. Two days after the meeting, he visited with the staff at the high school to make some quick but specific adjustments to our crisis plan, specifically to our terminology and logistics of the Lockdown response. Seemingly right after that, Virginia High School experienced another swatting call. The second time around, although not perfect, our response was much more coordinated and less chaotic. Tomorrow, he will be getting into more detail with the middle and high school staffs and hope to set the table for some upcoming drills. We will communicate to families beforehand, and he wanted to be sure to say this evening that BVPS will never simulate an act of violence or an act of terror for the purpose of conducting an authentic drill. Instead, we will have some unannounced drills, but we will always say very clearly at the onset of a drill that we are conducting a drill. It is a balancing act, for sure, but we do not want to risk the unnecessary trauma of students. At the same time, we need all students and staff to take the drills seriously.
- **Communications** –BVPS will be contracting with Apptegy on a new website and mobile app that will allow us to be a little more nimble and agile with our messaging during a crisis. Crisis communications, while extremely important in the moment, really represents a very small percentage of our overall communication need. Apptegy’s product will help us to develop good protocols for uniform communication from school to school, team to team, and basically across the board. We intend to roll out our new website and parent app over the summer, so there will be

no switching horses mid race. However, we may have some early adopters this spring who help us work through some of the experimental phases.

- **ALL-In VA plan** – Our ALL-In tutoring plan has been approved by the Department of Education. As the Board and the public may recall or be aware, the Department of Education provided school divisions with over \$400 million of one-time funds to be spent over the next three years. Bristol has secured our share of that, which is \$1.2 million. Our plan is available on the Virginia Department of Education webpage, and the plan basically explains how we will spend our funds to address learning loss, preparation for the implementation of the Virginia Literacy Act, and chronic absenteeism. Without getting too far in the weeds, BVPS has directed more funding towards chronic absenteeism that what is recommended by the state. We feel this is justified and aligns perfectly with the School Board’s goals for the current year.
- **Bring Your Legislator to School Month** – And finally, just a reminder that November is Bring Your Legislator to School Month. Delegate Israel O’Quinn will be visiting Stonewall Jackson Elementary School on November 10th at 11:00. He plans to join him on his visit, and he invited the Members of the Board to welcome him if your schedule allows. Dr. Scott noted he had been keeping track of the number of times he has met up with Delegate O’Quinn this year, and he would have to say, four out of the five times have been at a school.
- **Discussion of Update on Cell Phone Policy**
We had 379 parents participate in the survey, half of them indicating that their student is either enrolled at the high school or that they have children in multiple schools.
91% of the responding parents believe their children follow the cell phone policy
Only 46% of parents who responded think their children should have unlimited cell phone access Slightly more than half of the responding parents believe the teachers should have the ability to decide when the student uses the phone – in other words, letting the teachers decide for themselves rather than having an over-arching rule for when students use their phones.

The responding parents indicated that the policy should more explicitly announce the consequences of cell phone violations, but most do not support the idea that a phone should be confiscated if there is a violation of the policy.

The parents were pretty evenly split on the notion of whether access just at lunch time would be enough, and more than half of the parents expressed that they do not have confidence in the school’s ability to get a timely message to their children.

Big themes in the open response question: The parents who responded strongly assert that they want their children to have access to their phones in cases of emergencies and when transportation plans need to be adjusted. Parents generally support the notion that phone usage should not be permitted during instructional times.

There were 215 student responses to the survey, and if you guessed that phones are very important to them, you are right. As a parent of a teenager, Dr. Scott noted he had to roll his eyes at this number: 96% of the responding students say that they are not distracted by their cell phones. As a side note, the average time to complete the survey for parents was just under five minutes. The average time to complete the survey for teachers was around seven minutes. The average time to complete the survey for the student group was 73 minutes and 48 seconds.

Generally speaking, the responding students want great access to their phones and say that they should be given the responsibility to choose appropriate times to use them.

In the open-ended question/response section, the students did provide a diverse range of answers. Some do see cell phone usage during class time as disrespectful, disruptive, and counter intuitive. A lot of the responding students want to see defined times for permissible usage. Almost all students indicated in some way or another that they should have access to their phones at all times even if the usage of their phones is restricted.

And for the teacher survey, only 63 staff members responded. In these results, 57% of responders think the policy works. 54% of responders think the policy needs to be revised. 55% of responders say the policy is not clear, and just under half of the respondents say that the consequences are not applied consistently.

Essentially, only half of the teachers who responded think we have a policy that works. In some of the other questions, those who responded say that there is a relatively small percentage of students who consistently violate the policy. There were, however, 18 survey participants who said that cell phone violations account for 50% or more of the disruptions in their class rooms.

Mr. Alvis thanked Dr. Scott for his report.

Mr. Alvis addressed Item 2 (B) School Board Representative Report. Student Representatives presented a PowerPoint on the following:

- Wilson and Katie attended the City Council meetings on October 10th and October 24th. They heard the Council discuss several new ordinances and policies pertaining to the city. Councilman Jake Holmes informed them of his desire to have us work with the City Planner on their Comprehensive Plan Update. They are looking forward to working with the Council in ensuring that young people have input on the future of the city.
- Middle School students have been advocating for bringing back lockers. A student started a petition and began to collect signatures; there are already roughly 100. Some students have also been researching and creating presentations to create arguments for why lockers should be used again.
- Faculty and staff confirmed that students have been engaging and learning as normal. Students have claimed that they have no concerns regarding the classrooms/classmates. Student activities such as the Scholastic Book Fair have been ongoing at the middle school.
- Student Board Representatives were invited to the middle school on Monday, October 30th to help judge their homecoming door contest. Each decorated door used artwork and fun decorations to warn against the use of drugs. It was a tough competition since there were so many creative designs!
- During October, students had their annual homecoming dance. This year's dance included a live DJ and catering from Stateline Bar and Grill. Tables and heaters were provided, and students were able to socialize freely throughout the dance. Overall, the school's Homecoming was a hit, with students running to the dance floor to show off their moves.

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- Last month, Virginia High hosted our homecoming carnival with a variety of booths representing basketball, drama, cosmetology, etc. Each booth had a different activity to raise money for each group.

Mr. Alvis thanked everyone for their report.

Mr. Alvis addressed Item 2 (C) Discussion of Update on Cell Phone Policy. Dr. Scott reviewed the results of the surveys in detail. Summarizing that 379 parents participated in the survey, half responded that have students enrolled in the high school or multiple schools. 91% of parents believe their students follow the cell phone policy and only 46% of those who responded think their students should have unlimited access to their phones. More than half the parents that responded believe that teachers should have the ability to decide when students are allowed to use their phones. The responding parents indicated that the policy should be more explicit in terms of what kind of consequences result from cellphone violations. However, they did not generally support the idea that a phone should be confiscated if there is a cellphone violation. The parents were evenly lit on the notion of whether access at lunch time would be sufficient. Dr. Scott noted it was really close to being 50/50 on having it at lunch. A lot of parents responded strongly asserted, they want their children to have access to their phones in cases of emergency and when transportation plans change. We received just as much support of the idea that parents said that phones should not be permitted during instructional times. Dr. Scott noted he felt if we were going to really try to summarize where this group of 379 parents falls, it's they want students to have access to the phone, not necessarily unrestricted usage of the phone. Dr. Scott highlighted when reviewing student data, 215 students responded to the survey and if you were going to guess that they felt phones were very important, then you are right. He added, 96% of the responding students said they're not distracted by their cellphones. Generally speaking, the responding students want greater access to their phones and say that they should be given the responsibility to choose appropriate times to use them. In the open-ended questions, the students did provide a diverse range of answers. Some do see cellphone uses during class time as being disrespectful and disruptive. A lot of the responding students want to see a time defined for them to use their phone or a time set aside for permissible usage. Almost all students syndicated in some way or another that they feel they should have access to their phones in case of emergencies. In the teacher survey we had 63 staff members who responded, 57% of the responders feel that that the policy works, 54% feel that the policy needs to be revised, and 55% of the responders say the policy is not clear, with under half of the respondents saying that the consequences are not applied consistently. Dr. Scott noted when we think about what all that means, about half of our teachers who responded think that we have a policy that works. He noted he thinks that's a pretty good indication that from the teacher perspective, we're not exactly where we need to be.

No one addressed the Board during Public Comment.

Mr. Alvis addressed Item 4 (A) Approval of Consent Agenda. Mrs. Guffey moved approval. Mr. Steve Fletcher seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

The Consent Agenda consisted of the following:

- A. Approval of Payment of Bills
- B. Approval of Minutes – Regular Session – October 2, 2023

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Mr. Alvis addressed Item 5(A) Approval of Employee Bonus. Mr. Goodpasture moved approval. Mrs. Guffey seconded the motion. Mr. Fletcher – yes, Mrs. Forbes Hubbard, abstain, Mr. Goodpasture, yes, Mrs. Guffey- yes, Mr. Alvis, yes.

Mr. Alvis addressed Item 5(B) Approval of 2023-2024 School Board Budget Revision #3. Mrs. Forbes Hubbard moved approval. Mr. Fletcher seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

Pursuant to Section 2.2-3711(A)(1) of the Code of Virginia, Mrs. Forbes Hubbard moved that the Board convene a Closed Meeting for the purpose of discussing the following specific matters as authorized by Section 2.2-3711(A)(1) the Code of Virginia, Specifically,

A. Discussion of Certain Personnel and Recommendation for Employment.

Mr. Goodpasture seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

The Board went into Closed Session at 7:01 p.m.

Back in Public Session at 8:17 p.m., Mrs. Forbes Hubbard moved Certification of Closed Meeting as such: the Bristol Virginia School Board certifies that, to the best of each member’s knowledge, only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements by Virginia law were discussed in the closed meeting and only such public matters as were identified in the motion convening the closed meeting were considered. Mr. Goodpasture seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Fletcher moved Approval of Attachment (A) as recommended. Mrs. Guffey seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Alvis adjourned the meeting at approximately 8:19 p.m.


Stephanie R. Austin, Deputy Clerk


Randy Alvis, Chairman