

**BRISTOL VIRGINIA SCHOOL BOARD**  
**REGULAR SESSION**  
**December 4, 2023**

The Bristol Virginia School Board met in Regular Session on Monday, December 4, 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 6:00 p.m. He welcomed all in attendance and opened the meeting with a moment of silence in memory of Mr. Lee Walker and Ms. Kiwana Ledbetter followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Alvis asked for a motion to approve the Agenda. Mr. Frank Goodpasture so moved. Mr. Steve Fletcher seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Alvis addressed Item 2 (A) Presentation of Auditors Report. Mr. Scott Wickman with Robinson, Farmer, Cox Associates, PLLC, explained in detail the audited information for the year end – June 30, 2023. He noted overall it was a clean audit and applauded Mrs. Jones and staff.

Mr. Alvis addressed Item 3 (A) Superintendents Report. Dr. David Scott, Superintendent, presented the following:

Construction at the Intermediate School – In the past week, the crews at the Intermediate School have been installing tile in the restrooms and continuing to work on the overhead work – ductwork, electrical work, overhead plumbing, and gas connections. You can see in this week's pictures some of the kitchen equipment is ready for installation; there are a couple pictures of the ceiling grid and the HVAC and Mechanical, Electrical, and Plumbing features in the ceiling; and you can see, maybe, some of the work on the building exterior.

Tours from Election Day – The teachers seemed to enjoy the tours and commented on the sheer size of the space. Everyone seemed to be encouraged that there will be a lot of room for the Special Education and Related Services.

Existing Van Pelt and Scheduled Renovations – As we compare the development and preparation of the space at the Intermediate School to the vision of what will need to happen at Van Pelt to transform it into the new Primary School for next year, we realize we have a second major project waiting to be initiated. Over the next month, we will be evaluating the summer work that is scheduled for Van Pelt, and we will provide an update as that schedule begins to get a little clearer.

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LETRS Training – In terms of the Virginia Literacy Act (or VLA), our Reading Coaches have been devoting a lot of time and energy to developing our plan for training our teachers in the Science of Reading. Mr. Ritchie, Mrs. Hurt, Dr. Mabe, and Dr. de Nobriga and the Reading Coaches are doing what he would refer to as the architectural work right now—really engaging with the concepts and materials and time lines right now to so that we can put forth a high-quality plan to train our teachers over the next several semesters.

Crisis Training and Meetings and Materials – Dr. Scott has been visiting faculty meetings to discuss our crisis response plans. As he is meeting with school faculties, the feedback has been consistently positive. While no one likes to think about the kinds of events that would call the standard responses into action, there has been a sense of appreciation for the attempt, if nothing else, to put more time into these conversations. Crisis planning and our opportunities to discuss what to do in certain situations, in many ways, gets confined to a few precious moments before the start of the school year, and if you're lucky, it gets refreshed for a few more minutes throughout the year. The visits to the faculty meetings are also giving us more contact with the staff members whose environments need special consideration, so that has been a positive, too. He noted himself and the members of the maintenance department—are still collecting information and upgrading doors and locks. Well, they are doing the work.

Dr. Scott noted he is hopeful that we can continue to upgrade door locks and hardware and other aspects of the physical school environments as we develop the materials and resources for teachers, staff members, and parents. He noted we are getting closer to being able to share materials with our parent groups, and we will announce when those things are ready to go online.

Security Grants – BVPS awarded two security grants – School Equipment Security Grant for \$46,000 will provide upgrades for VMS intercom system where room to room functionality has been limited. This work should rectify that problem. We are also using this funding to purchase AEDs for Van Pelt and Virginia Middle School. The second grant is the COPS grant; this grant is \$500,000 with a local match of approximately \$167,000 over the next three years. These funds will go towards the purchase of the emergency call-button cards that can be worn with our ID badges. The pushbuttons have emergency call out features that will enable staff to push a button and send immediate notification to a variety of response teams. This project will take some time to implement, but we believe that full implementation will allow certain button sequences to send alerts to local staff, to 9-1-1 resources, and straight to the intercom control head, which will allow for automated emergency messages.

#### Recent Events

Adriana Cox and Mr. Ritchie were able to check out the 4-H Reality Store at the Higher Ed Center right before Thanksgiving. Bristol City does not have its own 4-H chapter; however, some of us, including Crystal Peak, from 4-H, and Ms. Cox and Mr. Ritchie have been having discussions about opportunities for our students to participate in 4-H events like the Reality Store with students from Washington County. Four of our Board members and two of our student board members attended the Virginia School Board Association's annual conference in Williamsburg in November. Some of you may be making your own remarks about the conference, he highlighted for his part that it's always beneficial to hear presentations from different school divisions throughout the state. Whether we come away with good ideas based on

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what other school divisions are doing or we come away thankful that we've already solved the problems that other places are now in the grips of, it's good to be part of that exchange of ideas.

**Upcoming Events**

Winter Wonderland Event is happening right now.

B180 – We will be offering B180 services at Van Pelt during the Christmas Break. This is for students who are in Pre-K through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. There will be 8 days for B180: December 18-21 and December 26-29; and those days go from 8:30 to 2:00. Sign-up information will be sent out electronically at the end of the week.

There will be a Band concert on December 10<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 p.m. at Virginia Middle School.

And mark your calendars- We will be hosting a Wellness Event on January 17<sup>th</sup> for all BVPS employees, their spouses and their children. Mrs. Hudson will be—and has been—working in conjunction with the City to pull together this event. There is a flyer attached to the agenda online so you can get a little more detail, but some of the highlights include that there are 27 vendors already signed up, and all employees who attend the event will get some Bearcat merchandise as well as recertification points and staff development credit.

Mr. Alvis thanked Dr. Scott for his report.

Mr. Alvis addressed Item 3 (B) School Board Representative Report. Student Representatives presented a PowerPoint on the following:

- A couple of weeks ago, Katie and Diya attended the state school board conference in Williamsburg, where they attended a workshop with other student representatives. Within the workshop, they heard presentations about individual leadership skills, interior design as it relates to schools, and how to draft policies and present them to the board. At the end of the workshop, they played school board Jeopardy, which really helped them to get to know the other students. Overall, they learned that attitude is everything. It is difficult to represent the interests of the student body if they do not have positive attitudes. They also learned that even though all the student's present were from very different school districts across the state, everyone faces the same issues. Some issues that all districts are dealing with include issues with phone policies, dress codes, and attendance policies.
- The Virginia High swim and dive team had their first meet on Thursday, November 30<sup>th</sup>. Both the swim and dive team traveled to Christiansburg to compete, with the dive team competing on Friday, December 1<sup>st</sup>, and the swim team competing on Saturday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- The Virginia High wrestling team had their first match December 2<sup>nd</sup> at Tennessee High School.
- The Virginia High indoor track team began practicing on Monday, November 27<sup>th</sup>, and will compete in their first meet on Saturday, December 9<sup>th</sup> at the high school.
- The Virginia High scholastic bowl team had their first competition with an out-of-season tournament at Castlewood December 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- As students are settling back in after Thanksgiving break, our Varsity Men's and Women's basketball took the first win of the season. The men's score was 74-41 and the women's score was 49-15.
- This evening, over fifty Bearcats were inducted into our branch of Beta Club.

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- Students are eligible to be in the club if they meet certain GPA requirements and are in good standing with the school.
- The club focuses on community service, and this year the club members are really looking forward to volunteering and helping the community.
- Congratulations to Katie for becoming the President of Beta Club!

Mr. Alvis thanked everyone for their report.

Mr. Alvis addressed Item 3 (C) First Reading and Discussion of Proposed Revisions for Cell Phone Regulation – JFC-R2. Dr. Scott noted board members and several others were able to see the draft of this proposed revision on Friday—maybe far more than that, but as far as he could tell, maybe just very few of us. For those of you who did not read the draft, he noted you had been spared three additional pages of detail, all of which reminds him of the remark attributed sometimes to Mark Twain and sometimes to Cicero: “If I had more time, I would have written a shorter letter.” So, after more time, he was able to shorten the policy to a page. There are still some concerns to speak through, that maybe do not need to occupy space on the page.

For any policy to be effective, there has to be an effort from the policy makers to be fair and reasonable; there has to be an effort from the stakeholders to comply with and not undermine the policy. He added he believed that, if one takes an honest look at what is allowed and what is not allowed, one will see an effort to let students have cell phones for the reasons that were most important to parents—so that, in the event of an emergency, students had access to their cell phones. A secondary reason for the access, beyond use in the event of an emergency, was simply because, as parents, we want to be able to get word to our children via text message, and we want to be able to call and speak to our children when we want to.

For students and parents alike—there is time during the day for students to check for messages or to send a message. Text communication is okay. Dr. Scott noted please, as he asked all stakeholders, let’s refrain from calling students on their cell phones during the school day. If a parent needs to speak to a child, please call the school. If your child needs to speak to you, he or she can get permission to call from the office.

He added he believed teachers will see an honest attempt to keep cell phones from being a distraction during instruction. Under this policy, the default position is that students are not looking at or swiping through content or sending messages or anything of the sort during instructional time. Furthermore, the policy does not say “while the teacher is teaching.” The policy means during the time your child is in class.

Here is where our partnership is very important. As a parent, it is reasonable to want your child’s teacher to be focused on delivering good, meaningful lessons, and to be able to respond to your child when your child needs assistance. When somebody else’s kid’s cell phone is preventing your child’s teacher from helping your child, he wants you to know that, after one warning, he is making that other kid’s parent come to the school because his or her child is interfering with your child’s education.

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Regarding other concerns: Parents should understand that students are not required to bring a cell phone to school. Cell phones are personal property and expensive pieces of personal property at that. Bringing them to school is maybe just a little more practical than bringing your flat screen TV to school, but not very different in terms of what we are trying to do with the policy. If you brought a flat screen TV to school, we'd ask you to keep it turned off, to keep it where it's not bothering others or interfering with instruction. We'd ask you to keep it under wraps, and if you couldn't, we'd say you have to stop having access to it during the day. We wouldn't want to keep it. We wouldn't want our teachers trying to keep up with one flat screen TV, let alone half a dozen or more. We wouldn't want it to break because we all know you or somebody—the parent in all likelihood—paid good money for it. So, we'd put it in a safe place until a parent could pick it up and get it home.

This has always been the case, by the way – when you have something disruptive at school, it can be confiscated. It doesn't matter if it costs \$1,000 or 25 cents. Laser pointers used to get taken all the time. Gum. Bringing your dad's lighter to school. And things of value, whether by dollar amount or sentimental value, get to go home.

In terms of cell phones, it's pretty much the same, except the parents want the children to have those expensive cell phones in the school. And look: he highlighted he understands—he has a child who has a cell phone. He noted he wanted him to have it so he can see where he is on Life 360 and so he could text him to be ready when he was coming through the car-rider line on those days when a practice was canceled. He added it drives him crazy when he sees that he's posted something to his Snap story during the school day.

From the schools' perspective, we do not want cell phones to be distractions, to take away from instruction, to take away from your students' abilities to focus on their classes. He noted he did not want cell phone violations to create a power-struggle between the child and the teacher because that tug of war ends up putting the child and the parent on one end of the rope and the teacher on the other. And that is just a recipe for ruining relationships.

He added he know that there is already some commentary going on about whether the school should take students' phones when there is a violation or whether the school has any right to confiscate personal property. This becomes a bit of a tango, he added he is afraid, and it goes like this: We say don't break the rules; the child breaks the rules; we say, if you're going to break the rules, we're going to take your phone; and the student—or the parent—says you can't take my phone. And, to some degree, the student and the parent are right. We're not going to forcibly take any phones. But we are going to say, if you don't give us your phone—turned off, turned into a paperweight, dead as a doornail, however you'd prefer—if you don't give us your phone after you've violated this policy which is pretty easy to live with, then the child is going to be suspended.

And if you're saying, if you take my child's phone and break it or lose it or get it stolen, then you're going to owe me a new phone. Well, not so fast. We already have a policy that says if you bring your own device, then you are accepting liability for it. We're not going to become suddenly liable for every phone in the city.

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If you give a working phone to, say, a school administrator, you should expect to get back a working phone with no additional cracks or chips out of it. If we damage a phone through bad luck, we'll help to get it repaired. But don't assume that our employees sit around on the rooftop juggling phones and seeing which ones they can catch.

Now, specifically in terms of to whom the phone shall be given—he would like to believe that, if a child has violated the policy, the child, taking responsibility for his actions, would turn off the phone and hand it to the teacher or adult who is right there. Now, this isn't some inmate or vagrant junkie that we've assigned to collect phones. This is an employee hired by consensus of an elected school board, after going through a background check. This is an employee who has chosen to spend some significant portion of his or her life working with children to give them an education, to nurture their dreams, to protect them from harm while they're at school. So, he would like to believe that the people to whom you entrust your children's lives everyday can also be trusted with your children's cell phones for a few moments. He added he would like to believe that a child can take responsibility for his actions, hand the phone to the teacher, and let the teacher get the other students in her care situated. Maybe the teacher can call for an administrator and hand it off minutes later. Maybe the teacher has to wait until the end of the class.

But inevitably, some students are not going to trust enough and are not going to take responsibility for their actions. Some students will not give the teacher their cell phones.

He noted he did not want your child's teacher engaging in a battle of wills over the phone during class. When that happens, we have all essentially let cell phones become more important than the lesson that is being taught in the classroom. So, the teacher will request that the student and the phone are seen by an administrator. And when they are in front of an administrator, they are going to have one more opportunity to comply with the rules. He noted his hope was they would willingly turn over their phones to the administrator. If the student does not, he is going to support the administrator's suspension of the student.

He added he was going to advise principals and assistant principals and office clerical staff to keep the phones safe.

The policy suggests that parents should not retrieve the phones before the end of the school day. The reason for that is we do not want the cell phones right back in the hands of the students who have violated the policy. Personally, if a parent is only able to come between 1 and 2 o'clock, he would love for the parent to wait until the next day.

As far as the actual policy and regulations are concerned—the policy is, he believes, pretty straight forward. Students can have their cell phones at school. During class time, the phones should be concealed in a clothing pocket or in a bookbag, and they should be silent. Students should not be using their phones unless there is specific, direct permission from their teacher.

Students can use them in the hallways before and after school, during class changes, and during lunch.

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There are times when students should not have access to their phones. This is during tests and exams or while the students are in an experiential learning environment, like a lab with heavy machinery or while they are training for certification in a CTE class. He believes it is reasonable to ask students to put their phones in a bookbag and to leave their bag against the wall at the front of the room during a test or during some hands-on learning experience. If there is an emergency, he believes students can retrieve their phones at a moment's notice. He added he wants students to be able to access their phones during a lockdown or during an evacuation. To ask them to be separated from their phones for these few reasons is not unreasonable, particularly given the fact that they will still be within a few steps of the student.

The violations have a progressive discipline approach. The first violation allows the student to stay in class (or return to it, if he has left and hasn't been too difficult on his way out). The student can pick up the phone at the end of the day.

On the second violation, the consequence is only slightly more strict. The student will have in-school suspension and lose the phone until the end of the day, and the parent will be asked to pick up the phone.

The third and any additional violations will result in out-of-school suspensions. His hope is that parents have conversations with their children and tell them they better not be getting called to the office to pick up a cell phone.

Mr. Alvis addressed Item 3 (D) Discussion of Budget Priorities for Fiscal Year 2025.

No one addressed the Board during Public Comment.

Mr. Alvis addressed Item 5 (A) Approval of Consent Agenda. Mrs. Forbes Hubbard moved approval. Mrs. Vanessa Guffey 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 – November 6, 2023

Mr. Alvis addressed Item 6(A) Approval of Granting Superintendent Permission to Hire New Employees Between December 5, 2023, and January 8, 2024, in Consultation with the School Board. Mr. Goodpasture moved approval. Mrs. Guffey seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Alvis addressed Item 6(B) Approval of Contract Purchase Greater than \$50,000.00 – ViewSonic Boards \$122,905.00. Mr. Fletcher moved approval. Mrs. Forbes Hubbard seconded the motion, and the motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Alvis addressed Item 6(C) Approval of Contract Purchase Greater than \$50,000.00 – Camcor Smartboards - \$166,450.00. Mrs. Forbes Hubbard moved approval. Mr. Goodpasture 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.

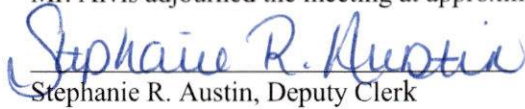
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The Board went into Closed Session at 7:01 p.m.

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