

# School Board “Mini-Minutes” for Charlottesville City Schools



Key Takeaways  
from 8/3/2023

## PUBLIC COMMENT.....

- A number of speakers addressed the Board of topics related to cell phones, differentiation, and student transportation. Ms. Sandra Aviles Poe of CUPE reminded viewers that there will be a transportation forum on Thursday, August 10, at 6:30pm via Zoom. [Link to register.](#)

## RECOGNITION.....

- Dr. Gurley recognized a number of recent hires (or recent changes in role): Mr. Jason Bennett, assistant principal at CHS; Dr. Kathleen Gentry, assistant principal at Walker Upper Elementary; Ms. Georgette Mickens, principal of Johnson Elementary; Matthew Resnick, dean of students at Walker Upper Elementary; Mr. Lamont Trotter, administrator of Lugo-McGinness Academy; and Ms. Yumeca Webb-Jordan, assistant principal at CHS.
- Mr. Andy Jones recognized Girls' Track Coach Ronald Green and Boys' Soccer Coach Martin Braun, the Central Virginia Coaches of the Year in their respective sports. In addition, Mr. Jones brought the state championship trophy collectively won by CHS academic competition teams (in areas such as debate, film, and theater).

## ACTION ITEMS.....

- The Board unanimously approved the five-year [strategic plan](#), which operationalizes the divisions' equity framework. The next step of development is an online dashboard to show status updates on the metrics indicating progress.

## DISCUSSION ITEMS.....

- Ms. Kim Powell presented several [student transportation updates](#). The school bus driver shortage continues, but the City hopes that school bus driver staffing numbers at the start of the school year will be equal to the end of the year (when waitlists were reduced). Another development is the current use of consultants to develop fall routes, owing to a key staff member being on leave at the City. Discussion followed about the possibility of bringing some or all of the management of pupil transportation back to the schools instead of the City.
- Ms. Powell spoke about [middle school modernization](#), including a new visitor entrance on the top level of the school. Foundational work is being completed, including land surveys, tree removal, and modifications to the existing building to assure student safety and smooth operations during construction of the new building. The division holds biweekly update meetings, and the environmental graphics team meets regularly to discuss signage and the interior finishes of the school (stay tuned for public engagement).
- Mr. Carlton Jones, coordinator of nutrition, spoke about the expansion of [free student meals to ALL Cville Schools students](#) as part of the USDA's Community Eligibility Provision. Families do not need to apply for free meals this year. The CCS participation in this program began at two schools in 2019. Student participation in school meals was up by 30% last year as this program expanded to additional CCS schools. The free meals program eliminates the stigma of free meals, the accrual of student debt (which was covered by donations), and the need for schools to handle meal money. Parents can call their school to request a refund if they have a positive balance that they do not want to leave on the

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account (although at Buford and CHS, some a la carte items can still be purchased with the meal balance).

- Ms. Beth Cheuk gave an update on the [adoption of ParentSquare](#), which includes the roll-out of the new communications program and website. These tools include both broadcast communications (such as email blasts) and two-way classroom communications (replacing Remind). The IT department is resolving an issue that has delayed new students from getting accounts on ParentSquare.
- Dr. Gurley and Ms. Powell reviewed [safety updates](#), including completed and upcoming facilities upgrades. They also reviewed pre-week safety training and routines (including a checklist for teachers to complete to make sure their door locks are fully functional, etc.) The care and safety assistant (CSA) staffing is expanding with an extra person at CHS and Buford, as well as two at Walker. In addition to staff training, discussions are underway about the best ways to make sure that students have age-appropriate ways to be aware of safety routines and mental health supports.
- Dr. Gurley spoke about the [cell phone policy](#) at Buford and CHS. After convening a committee of teachers, parents, students, and others to discuss possible approaches to eliminate cell phone use during class time, the committee did not find consensus about the best path forward. (Across the nation, there is a wide variety of approaches to this issue, and there has been no singular “best practice” identified.) In addition, widespread buy-in is key to any change. In light of that, Dr. Gurley’s recommendation is to continue this conversation while maintaining and accentuating the policy that was in place last year (cell phones should be “off and away” during instructional time; in addition, wifi will now be limited to school-issued devices). Dr. Gurley noted that work will continue to support staff and to also help students understand both the academic and mental wellness benefits of limiting access to cell phones and social media. During closing comments, several staff members expressed their concern that even with greater supports, last year’s “off and away” policy would not be effective, and that the division should consider buying Yondr pouches (magnetic pouches) to store student cellphones during school hours. This approach was considered by the committee in various forms. Several School Board members expressed openness to exploring a roll-out of Yondr pouches, and the division will pursue this.

## BOARD STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF TRANSGENDER AND NONBINARY STUDENTS.....

- At the conclusion of the meeting, Mr. Bryant read the following statement on behalf of the Board and Dr. Gurley: Since we last met, new state guidance has been issued about the treatment of transgender students. As a Board, we want to be clear that we will continue to honor, support, and protect our transgender and nonbinary students, staff, and family members. Our policies have been carefully crafted to both support our students and to partner with our families, and we intend to maintain our current policies and procedures. As we have said before, when we take steps to support one group of students, we make our schools better for all of our students.

## UPCOMING EVENTS.....

- Thursday 9/7 - 5pm, School Board Meeting, CHS Media Center
- Saturday 9/16 - 8:30am, School Board Quarterly Advance, Walker Upper Elementary School Cafeteria