



City of Richmond

Minutes

900 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219
www.rva.gov/office-city-clerk

Education and Human Services Standing Committee

Thursday, August 5, 2021

2:00 PM

Council Chamber, 2nd Floor – Virtual Meeting

Committee Members and Staff in Attendance

The Honorable Stephanie Lynch – Chair
The Honorable Katherine Jordan – Committee Member

Samson Anderson, Council Budget Analyst
M. Janet Palmer, Deputy City Attorney
Candice Reid, City Clerk
Dominique J. Thaxton, Assistant City Clerk
RJ Warren, Deputy City Clerk

Absent

The Honorable Ellen Robertson – Vice Chair

Call to Order

Chair Stephanie Lynch called the meeting to order at 2:01 p.m., and presided.

Electronic Meeting Announcement

Assistant City Clerk Dominique J. Thaxton, in accordance with Ordinance No. 2020-093, adopted April 9, 2020, as most recently amended by Ordinance No. 2021-181, adopted June 28, 2021, announced the meeting would be held through electronic communication means. Assistant City Clerk Thaxton stated notice of the meeting was provided to the public through a revised public information advisory issued on July 29, 2021, and through Legistar on the city website in accordance with usual practice. She also stated members of the public were encouraged to provide comments in writing prior to the meeting and all comments received prior to 10:00 a.m., on Thursday, August 5, 2021, were provided to committee members. Ms. Thaxton indicated that members of the public who signed up to speak and provide comment would be called to speak at the appropriate time.

Citizen Speaker Guidelines

Upon the Chair's request, Assistant City Clerk Dominique J. Thaxton provided citizen speaker guidelines.

Public Comment

There were no public comment speakers.

Approval of Minutes

There were no amendments or corrections to the minutes of the Thursday, July 8, 2021

committee meeting, and the committee approved the minutes as presented.

Board Vacancies

There were no board applications for consideration.

Paper for Consideration

The following resolution was considered:

RES. 2021-R049

To declare the existence of a climate and ecological emergency that threatens the city of Richmond, the surrounding region, the Commonwealth of Virginia, civilization, humanity, and the natural world.

Patrons: City Council

Member Katherine Jordan provided an overview of RES. 2021-R049.

Chair Stephanie Lynch expressed support for RES. 2021-R049 and stated the importance of the city seeking out opportunities for environmentally friendly alternatives.

There were no further comments or discussions and Chair Stephanie Lynch moved to forward RES. 2021-R049 to Council with the recommendation to approve, which was seconded and approved: Ayes 2, Lynch, Jordan. Noes None.

Chair Stephanie Lynch shared information on the newly announced regulations requiring that state and city of Richmond employees receive a COVID-19 vaccination.

Discussion Items

Richmond Public Schools Update

Jason Kamras, Superintendent of Richmond Public Schools, provided the committee with an overview of the Richmond Public Schools (RPS) "Reopen with Love 2.0" plan that outlines protocols for a fall school reopening amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chair Stephanie Lynch asked if there has been information distributed regarding the period of time between receiving a COVID-19 vaccination and when the vaccine actually becomes fully effective.

Mr. Kamras advised that there has been ample information distributed to students and staff regarding the time it takes to build immunity after COVID-19 vaccination.

Member Katherine Jordan shared that the Richmond City Health District (RCHD) has also been distributing helpful information about the time required to be considered fully vaccinated. Member Jordan inquired if RPS has been receiving sufficient support from health care partners on informing the public about resources.

Mr. Kamras advised that the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and RCHD have been instrumental in assisting with access to information on COVID-19 vaccines. Mr. Kamras shared that the greatest challenge that RPS is facing, is combating myths and misconceptions surrounding vaccines.

Chair Lynch inquired if RPS is tracking vaccination rates of students and staff. Chair Lynch

also inquired when RPS plans to mandate vaccinations for staff.

Superintendent Jason Kamras stated that information on vaccination status is stored by VDH and outside of a vaccine mandate, RPS cannot request this information. Mr. Kamras stated that RPS plans to announce a decision on a vaccine mandate imminently.

The committee expressed support for a vaccine mandate for RPS teachers and support staff.

Chair Stephanie Lynch asked for information on how RPS plans to respond to positive COVID-19 cases and alert individuals that had potential exposure.

Mr. Kamras shared guidelines for how RPS plans to respond to COVID-19 positive cases and contact tracing for potential exposure. Mr. Kamras expanded that RPS is developing an informational video on the process to share with students and staff.

Member Katherine Jordan asked if there was an option for parents who opted for in-person learning to change to participating virtually.

Mr. Kamras advised that RPS currently does not have the operational capacity for students to change from in-person to a virtual setting, but options are being explored.

Member Jordan asked for information on RPS' plans for after school programs.

Mr. Kamras provided an overview of recent changes made to after school programming and shared how the adjusted start and end times for the primary and secondary school day impacts said programs.

Member Jordan asked, given the new school day structure, how RPS plans to support families who relied on the childcare support of high schoolers being released from school prior to elementary and middle schoolers. Member Jordan requested that appropriate information on the time gap between the school day's end and the beginning of the extended day after school program be provided to families.

Mr. Kamras shared that the extended day programming offers support for families who need assistance with after school care. Mr. Kamras stated that the time gap for the extended day after school program will be widely publicized.

Chair Lynch asked about enrollment projections for the extended day program and if enrollment is limited to elementary school students.

Mr. Kamras confirmed that the extended day program is only for elementary school students and shared that roughly 20 percent of elementary school students have enrolled at this point, but that there is open space for all eligible students who wish to enroll.

Member Jordan inquired about the funding source for the various RPS after school programs. Member Jordan also asked if there is programming available for Spanish speaking students.

Mr. Kamras shared that the main source of funding for the after school programs has been the COVID-19 pandemic relief funds. Mr. Kamras confirmed that programs for Spanish speaking students are available.

Chair Lynch asked if there are any anticipated staffing issues for the after school programs and if RPS is leveraging community partnerships for staffing support needs. Chair Lynch inquired about what is needed to ensure that funding for the extended day program can be included in future city budget cycles.

Superintendent Jason Kamras shared that major community partners have already been offering support and that there are no staffing issues anticipated. Mr. Kamras advised that once the extended day programs are active, RPS will have a better grasp on the true operational budget needs for potential inclusion in future RPS budget requests.

Chair Stephanie Lynch underscored the importance of school sponsored sports and other extracurricular activities to community cohesion and asked if there are plans for strengthening RPS' school activities.

Mr. Kamras stated that RPS is in the process of setting up a "Whole Child Office" that aims to provide physical, mental and emotional support to students to include athletics.

Chair Lynch inquired if there has been any thought for aligning the Whole Child Office with the various city departments that are currently providing similar assistance.

Mr. Kamras shared that the goal is to connect with city entities to ensure that efforts are expanded upon rather than duplicated.

Chair Lynch requested an overview of the forecasted budget needs for the newly implemented programs and initiatives beyond COVID-19 relief funds.

Mr. Kamras shared that until the programs and initiatives are rolled out, it is difficult to grasp the true long-term operational cost. Mr. Kamras stated that once there is a better understanding of the long-term sustainability needs for the programs, RPS will present information to both the state and city of Richmond regarding budget needs.

Chair Lynch requested information and metrics on the wraparound support services being provided to families experiencing homelessness. Chair Lynch requested information on the families and students that are receiving support funds from the McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987.

Mr. Kamras stated that up to 25 percent of RPS school students experience some level of housing insecurity. Mr. Kamras provided information on local partners that provide wraparound support and resources to students and families experiencing housing insecurity and plans to increase support ahead of the end of the eviction moratorium.

Member Katherine Jordan asked if there are methods to provide consistent support to students who are not homeless but whose families tend to move around frequently.

Mr. Kamras stated that there are transportation assistance programs available to students in efforts of providing a consistent schooling experience regardless of if they have moved out of the district bounds for said school. Mr. Kamras expressed that students who are transient, but not experiencing housing insecurity, are not able to receive funding assistance from the McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987.

The committee expressed gratitude for the initiative that RPS has displayed in providing support to families throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Member Jordan requested information on how members of the public can participate in the backpack drive.

Mr. Kamras stated that he will coordinate with the appropriate staff to provide the members of the committee with information on the backpack drive. Mr. Kamras also provided information on feminine hygiene product availability in all RPS restrooms.

A copy of all material provided has been filed.

Staff Report

Chair Stephanie Lynch led the committee in an overview of the action and follow-up items discussed during the course of the August meeting.

Member Katherine Jordan requested an update on plans for year-round school instruction at a future meeting of the committee.

Eva Colen, Senior Policy Advisor and Manager, Office of Children and Families, provided information on the mission of the Office of Children and Families, and she expressed the desire to work with Richmond Public School's Whole Child Office when it becomes operational.

Chair Lynch requested follow-up on the operation of the RPS Whole Child Office in conjunction with the Office of Children and Families.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:06 p.m.