



## City of Richmond

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

### Minutes

#### Education and Human Services Standing Committee

---

Thursday, October 14, 2021

2:00 PM

Council Chamber, 2nd Floor

---

#### **Committee Members and Staff in Attendance**

The Honorable Stephanie Lynch – Chair  
The Honorable Ellen Robertson – Vice Chair  
The Honorable Katherine Jordan – Committee Member

Debra Bowles, Assistant City Clerk  
Jamie Isley, Boards and Commissions Administrator  
M. Janet Palmer, Deputy City Attorney  
Candice Reid, City Clerk  
RJ Warren, Deputy City Clerk

#### **Call to Order**

Chair Stephanie Lynch called the meeting to order at 2:05 p.m., and presided.

#### **Evacuation Announcement and Citizen Speaker Guidelines**

Upon the Chair's request, Assistant City Clerk Debra Bowles provided information on the appropriate manner in which the Council Chamber is to be evacuated in the event of an emergency along with 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, August 5, 2021 committee meeting, and the committee approved the minutes as presented.

#### **Paper(s) for Consideration**

**The following ordinance was considered:**

#### ORD. 2021-272

To amend and reordain City Code § 2-1105, concerning the Aging and Disabilities Advisory Board, for the purpose of increasing the membership of such Board from nine to 11 members.

**Patrons:** Vice President Robertson

*Vice Chair Ellen Robertson provided an overview of ORD. 2021-272 stating that the paper is requesting an expansion of two additional members. Ms. Robertson also stated that the board is active, and serves the senior and special needs population of the city.*

**There were no further comments or discussions and Vice Chair Ellen Robertson moved to forward ORD. 2021-272 to Council with the recommendation to approve, which was seconded and unanimously approved.**

## **Presentation(s)**

### **Richmond Public Schools Review of First Month**

Jason Kamras, Superintendent of Richmond Public Schools (RPS), provided the committee with information regarding the improved graduation rates within RPS. Superintendent Kamras stated that the graduation rate increased 7.3% overall in the 2020-21 school year and that the Hispanic/Latino graduation rate increased by approximately 25%. Mr. Kamras also stated that the Hispanic/Latino graduation growth is the highest of any school division within the Commonwealth of Virginia and that three high schools were within the top five schools of on-time graduation growth.

Superintendent Kamras stated that the dropout rate of RPS decreased to 15%. Mr. Kamras stated that the rate is still high; however, RPS is working in the right direction to lower its dropout rate. Mr. Kamras stated that RPS recovered 40 dropouts during the 2020-21 school year, and noted that school accreditation was not completed during the 2020-21 school year due to the pandemic; however, using the state's criteria standards, all RPS high schools would have met accreditation standards for graduation based upon the growth that was made.

Mr. Kamras stated that RPS graduation rates are rising based upon the diligent work of teachers, administration, and additional staffing within the schools, and the investments made by the city and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Superintendent Kamras also stated that with the continuation of investments to RPS, the school division will continue to have positive results.

Mr. Kamras informed committee members that RPS has been the fiscal agent for the Virginia Virtual Academy (VAVA) for approximately eight years; therefore, the VAVA students have been counted within the population of the school division. Mr. Kamras noted that RPS has ended its relationship with the academy; therefore, the school division will now have a more accurate prediction for graduation. Superintendent Kamras provided information regarding the impact of growth within subject areas in the Newcomer Academy for Immigrant English Learner students. Mr. Kamras also stated that the discrepancy between the prediction and final count for graduation was based upon many students disengaging from virtual learning at the end of the school year, and that the predictions did not include students at the Richmond Alternative School (RAS). Mr. Kamras stated that steps are being taken to have a more accurate prediction of graduates within the school division.

*Member Katherine Jordan thanked Superintendent Kamras for the presentation and inquired on the decline of graduates at Thomas Jefferson High School (TJHS). Ms. Jordan also congratulated RPS on the recovery of 40 dropouts and inquired on the total number of dropouts for the school division.*

Mr. Kamras responded by stating the drop in graduates at TJHS was not systemic but based on unique cases of a few students. He stated that the total number of active dropouts is between

200 – 300 students, and an accurate count could be provided to Ms. Jordan after consulting with the dropout team.

*Vice Chair Ellen Robertson praised RPS for its success and stated that she was encouraged at the outcome of virtual learning. Ms. Robertson asked if the school division learned alternative processes during virtual learning that could be more beneficial to student learning. Ms. Robertson also requested an official count of the number of students currently being home schooled and the approximate number of students that have been affected by COVID-19.*

Superintendent Kamras stated that RPS did experience a significant amount of unfinished learning during the virtual learning period. Mr. Kamras shared that the Standards of Learning (SOL) scores had declined significantly; however, only a small group of students actually took the SOL's which appeared to be the status throughout all of Virginia. Mr. Kamras informed the committee that RPS made sure that every student had a computer, which helped to leverage the learning capacity. He also stated that there are students who thrived in the virtual environment and RPS is working to offer a continuation of the virtual opportunity. Mr. Kamras stated that through virtual learning, suspended students can continue their learning during their suspension.

Mr. Kamras stated that there are approximately 300 students that have been affected by COVID-19. He also stated that the mitigation strategies regarding COVID-19 are working, and it has been determined that the majority of the virus transmission is happening outside of RPS. He further stated that RPS is working diligently to pursue strategies to increase the vaccination rate; however, there are many individuals who will not take the vaccine.

*Chair Stephanie Lynch asked if there were specific items that contributed to the increase of graduates, and if there will be a shift in the budget request of RPS to maintain successful programs.*

Superintendent Kamras responded that RPS is beginning to see the positive response from a combined payoff of intervention programs that were not in place three years ago. He stated that programs, such as the Newcomer Academy, and an increase of staff for English as a Second Language (ESL), have added to the school division's success. Mr. Kamras also stated that additional funding will be needed to continue positive programs and maintain student investment.

*Chair Lynch inquired on the quickest and safest way to have students back in the classroom, and as the COVID-19 cases decrease within the communities, has RPS revised protocols regarding the virus.*

Superintendent Kamras stated that it is believed that soon there will be a test for those individuals after seven days as opposed to the current fourteen day rule.

*Chair Lynch requested that a presentation regarding violence within RPS be considered by committee members for the November committee meeting.*

*Vice Chair Robertson requested that the presentation also include the impact that violence has on families and students, and include how mental health can impact violent reactions.*

Mr. Kamras stated that a presentation regarding violence within RPS can be prepared for the next committee meeting.

*A copy of the material has been filed.*

## Afterschool Care

Superintendent of Richmond Public Schools (RPS), Jason Kamras, introduced noted partners involved in afterschool care.

Eva Colen, Senior Policy Advisor to the Mayor's Office and Manager, Office of Children and Families, stated that her position oversees and supports the afterschool care programs through RPS, Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities, the YMCA and the Peter Paul Development Center. Ms. Colen stated that it is exciting to see the afterschool program begin and shared that the partners of this program pivoted during the pandemic to offer virtual learning centers and community support for families. Ms. Colen stated that through the program, an extended day literacy plan would serve approximately 5,000 students across the district. Ms. Colen also stated that all the programs receive funding from the city, noting that the YMCA and Peter Paul programs receive funds through the non-departmental grants process, and all programs do receive additional federal funding to help offset the cost.

*Member Katherine Jordan inquired on the staffing needs for the program.*

Ms. Colen stated that the RPS' academic support and partnership team is managing the allocation of staff based on the enrollment of each school.

The individual partnerships spoke regarding staffing at their sites. Raqiyah Cooper, Recreation Services Manager for Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities, stated that more staffing is needed as additional children are in need of services. Ms. Cooper informed the committee that RPS is using an employment agency to help with staffing. Pam Smith with the YMCA of Greater Richmond, stated that their afterschool program is also recruiting for staffing. Ms. Smith stated that individuals need to be trained appropriately and have the background that is necessary to work with children. Executive Director Damon Jiggetts with Peter Paul Development Center, stated that as of Monday, October 18<sup>th</sup>, the center would be fully staffed to meet the existing need, but it will not meet the needs of children on the waiting list. Mr. Jiggetts also commended RPS, Superintendent Kamras and others involved with the program, on behalf of the partners, relaying thanks for their support.

*Chair Stephanie Lynch inquired on the cost and the benchmarks that are being measured.*

Superintendent Kamras responded by stating that he did not have the cost available but would provide the information to the committee. Mr. Kamras further stated that the efficacies of the program would monitor the return through the investment, return on literacy, social and emotional wellbeing of students, and the happiness and success of the students involved. Mr. Kamras also stated that if there is a positive result, then the investment is worthy of continuing; however, if there is a negative result, then it will need to be determined if failure resulted from the program design, implementation or just not the best use of funds.

*Chair Lynch suggested that a sliding scale, based on income, could help to offset the cost.*

Mr. Kamras responded that the majority of students qualify for free programming; however, for long-term sustainability a sliding scale model will need to be considered.

Ms. Colen stated that the value of the program is beyond the social, emotional and literacy benefits. The program offers workforce stability and family support. The extended day program is incredibly valuable in offering children a safe, secure, enriching place to be until after the workday ends.

*Chair Lynch stated that considering continuation of the program and review of budget items*

*involved in the program could be a consideration of the Education Compact.*

*Member Jordan requested the number of families and children that are on the waitlist be provided to the Education Compact in addition to consideration of volunteer opportunities and how the opportunities could help with career development.*

Mr. Kamras informed the committee that one of the limiting factors to take students off the waiting list is not being able to transport students due to a driver shortage.

### **Homelessness Update**

Director of Housing and Community Development Sherrill Hampton, informed the committee that the Greater Richmond Continuum of Care (GRCoC) is charged with the delivery of homeless services and the strategic planning and funding for services provided. Ms. Hampton stated that there are approximately twelve providers within Virginia that are being considered for shelter; however, there is limited space within the shelter system. Ms. Hampton also informed committee members that Virginia is not a *Right to Shelter State*.

Director Hampton stated that pandemic sheltering is offered to individuals that meet one of three criteria: families with children under age 18, individuals that are 62 or over, and persons with specific health conditions. Ms. Hampton further stated that the Commonwealth Catholic Charities (CCC) oversees this program which is funded by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (VDHCD). Ms. Hampton informed the committee that as of September 23, 2021, there were 75 families with children and 34 single adults being served by CCC. Ms. Hampton also stated that the CCC will also oversee the city's inclement weather facility which will open on November 1<sup>st</sup> at the Quality Inn, a temporary location, on Arthur Ashe Boulevard. A permanent location will open in early 2022 with a 24/7 emergency shelter facility.

Ms. Hampton shared with the committee that the information within their handout includes the number of homeless individuals served through the city's federal funding programs and information relating to the Homeless Connection Line.

*Chair Stephanie Lynch expressed her gratitude for the work that is being done to help individuals that are experiencing homelessness within the city, and inquired on the intake process to be allowed into a shelter. Ms. Lynch asked what the capacity is for the non-congregant shelter and which budget line the city is using to fund the shelter program.*

Ms. Hampton explained the intake process and also stated that the city requested that no one be turned away from a facility. Ms. Hampton stated that individuals will receive two meals, access to showers and assistance with transportation as needed. Ms. Hampton further stated that the program uses federal funds, Cares Act funding, and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) funding, for operations funding. Ms. Hampton also stated that the program will come back to Council to request funding for years two and three of the program, and an assessment of the first year will be provided for consideration. Ms. Hampton did inform the committee that \$5,800,000 of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds have been designated to offset expenses or needs of the program; however, the regulations were direct in stating that the ARPA funds cannot be used for operational purposes.

Ms. Hampton noted that Diane Wilmore, Homeless Services Liaison, had included specific information within the report provided regarding the new webpage: <https://www.rva.gov/human-services/homeless-services>, the new Resource Center which will be located at City Hall, and the encampment protocol for which Ms. Wilmore will be the central point of contact.

Ms. Hampton gave praise to the Homelessness Advisory Council for their work in completing an update of recommendations for consideration.

*Member Katherine Jordan stated that she is encouraged that individuals will have shelter and services for the majority of the day; however, during the remainder of the day has the city considered providing public restrooms for these individuals to use.*

Ms. Hampton stated that she will respond to Ms. Jordan’s request after talking with several departments within the city.

*A copy of the material has been filed.*

### Board Vacancies

Jamie Isley, Boards and Commissions Administrator, reviewed board applications for consideration by the committee.

**Vice Chair Ellen Robertson moved to forward the following board appointment application to Council with the recommendation to approve the appointment to the Advisory Board of Recreation and Parks, and to continue the appointment of applicants to the Aging and Disabilities Advisory Board until after the adoption of ORD. 2021-272 by City Council, which was seconded and unanimously approved:**

<u>Board Name</u>	<u>Criteria for Appointment</u>	<u>Applicant Name</u>
<b>Advisory Board of Recreation and Parks</b> (13 members)	1 <sup>st</sup> District Representative  (1 vacancy)	Jackie Merrick 1st District Resident

**Chair Stephanie Lynch moved to forward the following board appointment and reappointment applications to Council with the recommendation to approve, which was seconded and unanimously approved:**

<u>Board Name</u>	<u>Criteria for Appointment</u>	<u>Applicant Name</u>
<b>Community Policy and Management Team</b> (3 members)	Representative of a private organization that serves children and families in the city – Reside or work in the city (1 vacancy)	Erica Mann 2nd District Employment <b>(reappointment)</b>
	Parent Representative – Reside or work in the city (1 vacancy)	Tamika Daniel 7th District Resident
<b>Richmond Behavioral Health Authority</b> (15 members)	Family member of an individual who has received services – Reside or work in the city (1 vacancy)	Joy Bressler 1st District Resident <b>(reappointment)</b>
	Reside or work in the city (1 vacancy)	Eduardo Vidal 2nd District Resident <b>(reappointment)</b>
<b>Social Services Advisory Board</b>	Reside or work in the city (1 vacancy)	Lisa Specter-Dunaway 5 <sup>th</sup> District Resident

*A copy of all material provided has been filed.*

### Discussion Item(s)

*Chair Stephanie Lynch recognized Cheryl Burke, Chair of the Richmond City School Board.*

Ms. Burke gave praise to Superintendent Kamras, administration and staff of Richmond Public Schools (RPS) for their diligence in working toward instructional success during the pandemic and the increase of graduates for RPS. Ms. Burke also requested that Superintendent Kamras provide an update on the construction of the new George Wythe High School (GWHS).

Superintendent Jason Kamras provided an update of the new GWHS and stated that a request for surplus funds that remain with the city following two previous school builds, is needed to offset the cost for the procurement of design services, will be forwarded to Mayor Levar M. Stoney by Chair Burke and Vice Chair Jonathan Young. Mr. Kamras stated that a 2024 date for completion is not realistic and the RPS position, Director of New School Construction, continues to be vacant. Mr. Kamras informed the committee that the deadline of October 31, 2021, that was placed upon RPS by the school board, to complete the request for proposal (RFP) regarding GWHS, Woodville Elementary and the J. Sargeant Reynolds Career Center, would be extremely difficult to meet based upon a procurement team shortage. Mr. Kamras also stated that if Council should approve a transfer of funding from the city, the funds would not be enough to pay for the three design contracts.

*Vice Chair Ellen Robertson stated that providing the best learning environment is most important to students and that students are suffering based upon the lack of funding to offer the best learning environment; however, it is important that the students receive the best education they can regardless of conditions. Ms. Robertson recommended a discussion with the Mayor and his team to resolve the need of funding for RPS. Ms. Robertson also stated that the RPS budget is the largest portion of the city budget, but a major issue within RPS is the lack of continued building maintenance.*

*Chair Lynch emphasized that the students are the priority. Ms. Lynch stated that a discussion with the Mayor and school board during an Education Compact meeting, could help in resolving the needs of RPS students.*

Ms. Burke expressed her appreciation to the Education and Human Services Standing Committee for its support.

#### **Staff Report**

There was no staff report.

#### **Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:28 p.m.