



**Minutes of Open Regular Sessions
Somerset County Board of Education
August 19, 2025**

TIME: 4:30 p.m. Location: Somerset County Board of Education

BOARD AND STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Matthew Lankford, Vice Chairman Andrew Gleason, Mr. William McInturff Jr, Mrs. Mary Beth Bozman, Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Ava Tasker-Mitchell and Mrs. Tracie Bartemy, Director of Schools; Ms. Melissa Tilghman, Recording Secretary and Board Attorney, Mrs. Gordana Schifanelli, Chief Finance Officer, Mrs. Meagan Sneeringer and Director of Human Resources, Mrs. Christina South.

EXECUTIVE MEETING:

Pursuant to the Annotated Code of Maryland, **General Provisions Act**, 3-305(b), on the motion of Vice Chairman Gleason and a second by Mrs. Bozman, the Board voted to enter into an Executive Session at 4:30 p.m. to conduct the following business:

- **Approved April 15, 2025, June 17, 2025 and July 15, 2025 Closed Session Minutes**
- **Discussed Personnel Matters - Section 3-305(b)(1)(i)(ii)**
 - Discussing such matters openly may risk violating privacy, discourage staff from pursuing internal career opportunities, and discourage prospective candidates from applying if sensitive issues are not handled appropriately
 - Discussed other confidential personnel and staffing matters
- ☐ **Received advice and updates on confidential legal matters – Client Attorney Privileged - Section 3-305 (b) (7)**
 - “Open discussion may compromise attorney–client privilege and expose confidential or legal matters.
- ☐ **Discussed negotiated contract agreements - Section 3-305 (b)(9)**
 - Discussing matters related to negotiation in an open session may risk breaching confidentiality and undermining the integrity of the negotiation process. In accordance with the Maryland Open Meetings Act, these discussions are appropriately conducted in closed session to protect sensitive information and preserve the effectiveness of ongoing negotiations."
- ☐ **To discuss confidential administrative matters**
 - The Board noted that discussion of confidential administrative matters may encompass various sensitive subjects, and open discussion could risk breaching confidentiality. Accordingly, these matters are more appropriately addressed in closed session in accordance with the Maryland Open Meetings Act."

CALL TO ORDER - RECONVENED IN OPEN REGULAR SESSION – 6:19 P.M.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ADOPTION OF AMENDED AGENDA - APPROVED

Amendments: Item - 13.4 Unit I Negotiated Update (Removed)

13.4 Board Approved Attorney Fees for Chairman Lankford

13.5 Unit III Negotiations Update

APPROVAL OF BOARD MEETING MINUTES

June 9, 2025 Open Budget Work Session

June 17, 2025 Open Regular Meeting

July 7, 2025 Special Called Meeting

July 15, 2025 Open Regular Meeting

Motion: Vice Chairman Gleason; Second: Mrs. Bozman

Final Resolution: The motion carried 5:0.

Read to Lead Grant

Chairman Lankford reported that the Maryland State Department of Education provided information on the Read to Lead assurances, noting that the grant language no longer includes the non-discriminatory clause.

Civility Policy, 100-21

Chairman Lankford reviewed the Board's Civility Policy, emphasizing that all participants are expected to engage respectfully and maintain a standard of civility throughout the meeting. He highlighted that constructive dialogue and courteous behavior are essential to ensuring productive discussions and effective decision-making.

Public Comments

- Ms. Tammy Truitt addressed the Board to express her concerns regarding the performance of SCPS, specifically noting low graduation rates and low test scores. She emphasized that adherence to closed meeting laws is imperative for the Board to effectively carry out its responsibilities and conduct necessary business. In addition, she referenced the SCPS logo, "Success, Nothing Less," which was originally created by a Somerset County student, and expressed her desire to see the motto and branding remain in place as a reflection of the district's values.
- Ms. Sarah Sudgowski addressed the Board as a parent of an 8th-grade student to share her disappointment that a curriculum has not yet been formally adopted. She emphasized that literacy is a critical component in the academic and personal development of students and urged the Board to prioritize the timely implementation of a structured curriculum to better support student success.
- Ms. Angela Pendry addressed the Board to express her concern that support staff are not adequately compensated for the work they perform. She urged the Board to consider investing in these employees, highlighting that they are essential to the daily operations of the district and play a critical role in supporting students and overall school success.
- Mr. Joe Hylton addressed the Board and attendees to express his concern that the Board may not be adequately considering the input of staff and the community regarding the needs of Somerset County Public Schools students. He also raised concerns about a potential conflict of interest, noting that the newly retained Board Attorneys could be viewed as problematic given that Mrs. Schifanelli had prior associations with several Board members before the Schifanelli Law Firm was retained.

- Mr. Garrett Freeman, addressed the Board, acknowledging the difficulty of balancing competing interests and noting that attempting to satisfy one side while addressing the concerns of another can be challenging. He emphasized that prolonged disagreements hinder progress and stressed the importance of focusing on the students' educational needs. Mr. Garrett encouraged the Board to work collaboratively so that meaningful accomplishments can be achieved, highlighting that the school system is one of the most vital assets in the county.

Superintendent's Monthly Report

- Dr. Tasker-Mitchell presented her monthly report to the Board and welcomed teachers, staff, and attendees and reinforced the district motto — **“We are Small, But Mighty — Stepping into Excellence.”** She thanked students, staff, parents, and the community for their support and highlighted several achievements and preparations for the new school year. She reported that the district saw measurable growth in math and reading. After two grade-level gains in the prior year (English 10 and 5th grade reading), this past year showed growth in eight grade levels, including double-digit gains in two grades. The Superintendent noted that more detailed, grade-level results will be shared once state data embargoes are lifted.
- **Student behavior:** Suspension, extended suspension, and referral rates have decreased, reflecting coordinated efforts by students, families, staff, and community partners.
- **Key accomplishments:** Adoption of the 2025–2029 Strategic Plan, receipt of a state grant, the addition of a new Board member, and the return of HVAC improvements.
- **Back-to-school preparations:**
 - Bus routes have been released; parents are asked to confirm pickup/drop-off information in PowerSchool.
 - A new **Backpack to School Hub** is available with school supplies lists, bell times, first-day information, menus, bus routes, and PowerSchool guidance.
 - School buildings have been cleaned and secured, including completed security checks.
 - A strong group of new teachers has been hired and staff are prepared for the start of school.

The Superintendent closed by reiterating pride in district progress and optimism about continued improvement as the year begins.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

SY25-26 Secondary ELA - Curriculum Adoption - HMM Approved

Mrs. Lily Welch, Supervisor of Reading/World Language/ELA Instructional, provided additional information regarding the proposed ELA curriculum, specifying that the total cost for a five-year contract would be \$250,000. She summarized the fiscal impact for the district and noted that the figure should be considered in the context of the district's multi-year budget and program implementation plans. Chairman Lankford encouraged the Board to review the detailed cost breakdown and any associated recurring expenses prior to making a final selection.

Chairman Lankford made a formal statement regarding the ELA curriculum, relaying his statement of facts based on information he received about the pilot programs. Mrs. Welch responded by presenting a timeline of presentations and documentation previously shared with the Board, noting that the timeline contradicted certain elements of the Chair's statement.

A recess was called at 7:20 p.m.

During the recess, Dr. Tasker-Mitchell provided a detailed justification of the district's timeline for the ELA curriculum review and implementation, and expressed concern that some of the information reported by the Chair appeared to be inaccurate.

Mr. Robertson reported that, after reviewing SAAVAS software and curriculum materials, he was impressed with the SAAVAS program overall and found it to be better written and more user-friendly than the HMH program.

Mr. McInturff advised Board members to rely on the professional guidance of Ms. Welch, district administration, and classroom teachers, stating his confidence in the expertise of the teachers and staff in selecting a curriculum that is best for the students. Ms. Welch further indicated that a teacher survey showed a preference for the SAAVAS program over HMH.

Vice Chairman Gleason made a motion to approve a one year contract using the HMH highly qualified instructional materials and a second was made by Chairman Lankford.

Voting for the Motion: Vice Chairman Gleason, Mrs. Bozman and Chairman Lankford

Voting against the Motion: Mr. Robertson and Mr. McInturff

Final Resolution: The motion carried 3:2.

NEW BUSINESS

FY2026 Educational Facilities Master Plan - First Reader Approved

- Mr. Hill presented the FY2026 Educational Facilities Master Plan to the Board for a First Read Approval. The plan is a comprehensive, long-term strategic plan that guides the development, maintenance, and use of Somerset County Public Schools' facilities. The plan assesses and identifies facility needs based on projected student enrollment and demographic trends, and outlines strategies to address those needs, including construction, renovation, and modernization of SCPS school buildings.

FY2026 SRO MOU Agreement - Approved

- Mr. Hill submitted the contract agreement between the Somerset County Sheriff's Office and the Somerset County Board of Education for the Board's approval.
Motion: Chairman Lankford; Second: Mr. Robertson
Final Resolution: The motion carried 5:0.

Professional Hires

- Cameron Ball- Phys Ed/Health- (WAHS)
- Audrey Brice- Elementary Teacher- (GES)
- Shenika Love- Science Teacher-(WAHS)
- Olivia Owens- Early Childhood Teacher (PAES)
- Christine Weichel- Special Education Teacher (WAHS)
- Charles Conley- Special Education Teacher (WAHS)
- Larry Eberly - Pre-Engineering Teacher (SCTHS)
- Thomas Johnson - Math Teacher (CAHS)

Professional Appointment/Promotion

- Keisha Evans- Dean of Students to Assistant Principal (CAHS)

Professional Resignations

- Dr. William Gray, Supervisor Science/Health/Arts
- Clarissa Cooper- ELA Teacher (WAHS)
- Brittany Derrickson- Early Childhood Teacher (WES)

Professional Retirements

- Traci Schneider- Supervisor Mathematics/GT (9/1/25)

Administrative Personnel Report

- Mrs. South submitted the certificated personnel report to the Board for approval.

Personnel Report A as discussed in closed:

Motion: Chairman Lankford; Second: Vice Chairman Gleason

Voting for the Motion: Mr. McInturff; Mr. Robertson

Voting against the Motion: Vice Chairman Gleason, Mrs. Bozman, Chairman Lankford

Final Resolution: The motion failed 3:2

Personnel Report B as discussed in closed:

Motion: Chairman Lankford; Second: Vice Chairman Gleason

Final Resolution: The motion carried 5:0.

Chairman Lankford's Attorney Payment - Approved

On the motion of Vice Chairman Gleason and a second by Chairman Lankford, the Board voted to approve Chairman Lankford's attorney payment. Mr. Lankford abstained and the motion carried 4:0.

Monthly Financial Reports

- Mrs. Sneeringer, Chief Finance Officer, shared the monthly financial reports to the Board. She reported that there will be an approximate carryover of \$365,000 into next year's budget.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Board will conduct an Open Regular Meeting on Tuesday, September 16, 2025 at 4:30 p.m. to immediately consider voting to convene in a Closed Meeting pursuant to Section 3-305(b) of the General Provisions Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland. The Board will reconvene in the Open Regular Meeting at 6:00 p.m. The meeting will be streamed live to **TownHallStreams** at https://townhallstreams.com/towns/Somerset_County_PS_MD Additional information can be found on the Somerset County Public Schools' website.

Closing:

- With no more business to report, a motion was made by Chairman Lankford and a second by Vice Chairman Gleason to adjourn the meeting at 8:17 p.m. The meeting concluded with a joint acknowledgment from the Board to all attendees.

Dr. Ava Tasker-Mitchell, Superintendent of Schools
Superintendent of Schools
Recorded and Prepared by
Recording Secretary, Melissa Tilghman

Matthew Lankford
Board Chairman