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Chesterfield County School Board Business Meeting, Wednesday, November 12, 2025

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[00:00:00] Good evening, everyone. I'd like to call the November 12th, 2025 school board business meeting to order. Before we begin the meeting this evening, I would like to thank everyone for attending the November 12th school board business meeting and remind the audience that comments to this board may only be made at the podium during the public comment period. Comments from the audience are prohibited and in violation of section 18.2-415 of the Code of Virginia, Disorderly Conduct and public places in school board policy 6141. I appreciate everyone's patience and understanding

[00:00:38] so that we can conduct the business meeting in an orderly fashion. We will now have the presentation of colors by the Thomas Dale High School Army JROTC unit, followed by an invocation

[00:00:52] by Mrs. Hudgens and flag salute led by Mr. Peronto. Heavenly Father, we come before you tonight with

[00:01:39] grateful hearts for the opportunity to serve our community and its children. Thank you for the many blessings you've given our schools, dedicated teachers and staff, supportive families, and the students who remind us daily why our work matters. Grant us wisdom and discernment in the decisions we make this evening. Help us to listen with patience, speak with kindness, and act with fairness. May

everything we do reflect integrity, compassion, and a shared commitment to those we serve. We ask your continued blessing on our schools, that they may be places of learning,

[00:02:18] growth, and hope for all. In your holy name we pray, amen. Please be seated. Tonight's consent

[00:03:29] agenda includes agenda adoption, approval of the minutes from our October 14th, 2025 work session, October 14th, 2025, business meeting, October 17th, 2025, special meeting, and October 31st, 2025, special meeting.

[00:03:48] Memo number 149-25, recommended personnel actions, memo number 150-25, acceptance of new grants, and memo number 151-25, reappropriation of reserves for the Appomattox Regional Governor's School.

[00:04:07] Are there any additions or corrections to the consent agenda? Madam Chair, there are no additions or corrections to the consent agenda. Are there any requests from a school board member to separate an item from the consent agenda for discussion and individual action? Hearing none, may I have a motion to approve the consent agenda as presented.

[00:04:30] I make a motion to approve the consent agenda as presented. Is there a second? Second. Madam Clerk, would you please call roll on the motion? Dominique Chatters. Aye. Stephen Branca. Aye. Lisa Hudgens. Aye. Ann Cooker. The motion carries. Before we move on to the awards and recognitions part of our agenda, we would like to once again invite the Thomas Dale High School

[00:04:55] Army JROTC to come forward to be recognized. What an honor it is to have our JROTC cadets here this evening. Thank you so much for starting our meeting off the way you did.

[00:05:27] fabulous job and to all of our veterans out there and current military if you would please rise so we can recognize you as well anyone in the audience or on the dais thank you for your service greatly appreciate it and again thank you to the students I don't know if you would like to say a few words about your fabulous cadets that you have up here first of all I want to thank these young men and

[00:06:06] Women, it's just been a pleasure working at Thomasdale as the JROTC instructor. We have a lot of fine cadets. This year we have like 157 cadets enrolling in our program. But these are our dedicated cadets calling anytime, and they're always ready to go.

[00:06:26] And I really appreciate them taking time out of their busy schedule because JROTC is not all they do. They're involved in the school activities, sports and everything, but they're always here when we need them. And thank the school board for this visit. I really appreciate it, and may God bless you all.

[00:06:44] Thank you so much. Another round. Thank you. Oh, yes. Dr. McLaurin.

[00:07:08] So next we have awards and recognitions. Mr. Smith. Thank you, Madam Chairman, board members.

[00:07:38] If I could first call up our National Merit Semifinalists. Seven Cheshire County Public School students have been named National Merit Semifinalists this year.

[00:08:08] From Colorado High School, Lydia Jo, from Cosby High, Tom Leo, from Maggie L. Walker Governor's School, Lilith Holmes, David Lenz, Joel Pritchard, Helen Teague, and T.M. Vinva. About 16,000 high school seniors across the country were selected as National Merit Semifinalists this year.

[00:08:26] They rose to the top of the 1.3 million students and about 20,000 high schools who entered the program by taking the PSAT in their junior year. Please show me congratulating these National Merit Semifinalists.

[00:08:46] You said 20,000 schools? 20,000 high schools. Absolutely phenomenal job. I'm smiling because you make us all proud to be a part of CCPS. Your dedication to your academics will obviously pave a very bright future for you as you continue to move forward. And so is there anything that you want to share or say in regards to your accomplishment or where you're going after this? Anybody? No? That's fine too. That's fine too.

[00:09:19] But we do want to take a moment and just recognize how outstanding you are. I know we're acknowledging you for your academics. But if your academics say anything about you, I'm sure all the other areas in your life are going extremely well. And you work diligently towards those goals as well.

[00:09:36] So on behalf of the Chester County School Board, congratulations. Can we give them a round of applause? Next up, we have our publication awards.

[00:10:02] if I could ask our Colorado High School Literary Magazine and the yearbook teams from Matoka High School, Melothian High School, and Thomas Dale to come forward this time.

[00:10:35] Three Cheshire County high schools won top awards for their yearbooks and one high school won a top award for its Literary Magazine and the Virginia High School League competition.

[00:10:51] These four publications won trophy class designations equivalent to a state championship. Colorado High's Literary Magazine Passive Clover, advisor Dan Wadlick. Tomsdale High School's yearbook, Reflector, advisor Aaron White. Watoka High's yearbook, The Arrow, advisor Nicole Eshelman.

[00:11:08] Militian High's yearbook, Trojan, advisor Brian Fisher, formerly Tim Johnson. Additionally, the Militian High School yearbook won two other big awards. Varsity yearbook judged the 2023-24 addition of the Trojan to be in the top 1% nationally, making the top yearbook in Central Virginia.

[00:11:26] Virginia High School League also notified my life in high school on October 1st. That is among just six of the 2025 winners of the Colonel Charles E. Savage Award for Sustained Excellence in Scholastic Journalism. Please join me in congratulating these students. Congratulations, you guys.

[00:11:51] So we have yearbook, literary magazine, yearbook, and yearbook, okay. And big yearbook team, way to go. So I used to be a yearbook advisor, So I know all the pain and suffering and tears and sweat that go into what you guys produce is a humongous deal.

[00:12:12] Y'all think, y'all see a yearbook and you think, oh, well, I'm sure they started with the template. I'm sure it, you know, was already pre-done somehow. No, ma'am, it is a blank page. And the ideas all come from their head. And they're all strung together with themes and, right? I mean, it's pretty, it's pretty amazing.

[00:12:28] So what you guys do is incredible. And at the end, you know, when you open it and you're so excited and it's amazing and you're like, yes, we did it. And then somebody lets you know about the mistake on page 45. So that's fine.

[00:12:44] And then we have the literary magazine that is an amalgamation of all the kids' stuff. So well done, you guys. This is like states for literary stuff. So this is a big deal, guys. We are so proud. Congratulations to you all. Midlothian has something special.

[00:13:01] So they have done this five years in a row, no, in a period of seven years, right, five times, and it's this special Savage Award. So it's an incredible, incredible deal. Their former Tim Johnson was your, back when I was a yearbook person, he was a colleague.

[00:13:23] So he, you guys did a great, he did a great job, you guys did a great job, congratulations. It's a big, big, big deal. So there's a lot of people here. Does anyone want to, is dying to say something? Something about, I don't know. How about, who's the editor-in-chief?

[00:13:40] There you go. I just wanted to say thank you so much for recognizing us. And this wouldn't happen without a great staff that's really great at collaborating together and a great school that has great stories to tell. Anybody?

[00:13:56] Yeah, come on. I'd say thank you for this award and the recognition. Our LitMag has been sweat and tears and effort upon effort of many people, not just our staff, but everyone in the school.

[00:14:14] So frankly, the awards deserved, but thank you. Hey, everybody. So with the LitMag, while we were at the VHSL Media Championships in October, the other thing that is not kind of mentioned here is that there is a live writing contest judged on site, and one of the categories was poetry, and you're looking at the number one winner, Stella Jones, next to me.

[00:14:37] And Dylan, on her other side, was given an honorable mention. This is a category of about 45 students from around the state. And these two were right there at the top. When we got our award later that day, it was basically us and 10 or 12 schools from northern Virginia.

[00:14:56] Some students behind us in the bleachers, I overheard them say, who is Clover Hill? And took all the professionalism I had inside me to be like, we are. The last thing is that next year, our longtime editor-in-chief is graduating, but we have these two stepping into the co-editor-in-chief role.

[00:15:14] We could not be in better hands. And we're only one away, by the way, from the state record at Clover Hill for the National Guard Cup, I believe. So we're going to do that for you, too. Just thank you for the recognition for the award.

[00:15:35] My staff works really hard, and they went through a lot of challenges last year with portraits and life touch. So I'm very proud of them for all their hard work and dedication. And thank you to our advisor, Ms. Eshelman, and our principal, Ms. Baber, is here, too. They both support us so much, and this book wouldn't be possible without either of them.

[00:15:53] All right. Thanks, guys. Congrats. Next up, we have our Denim Drive Award winners.

[00:16:13] If you come forward to this time, the annual Denim Drive is a partnership on Goodwill,

[00:17:01] Cheshwain County Council PTAs, Cheshwain Public Schools, that turns genes into jobs while helping schools. Working to make a difference, schools from across the district this year collected and donated 3,708 pieces of used denim clothing, a 43% increase from last year's total. Goodwill repurposed the donated denim for use by Central Virginia residents. Congratulations to all the schools that participated in Denim Drive, and here are the top award winners. Elementary schools,

[00:17:28] first place, Grange Hall Elementary, 432 pieces of denim. Middle schools, first place, Midlothian Middle School, 200 pieces of denim. And first place for high schools, Cosby High School,

[00:17:56] 609 pieces of denim. So we get a lot of emails, right, as families at CCPS, and it's easy to overlook some of them, but I am thankful that we have not overlooked this particular opportunity that we have to not only give back to our community through denim, but also teaching our

[00:18:28] students what we can do when we work together. And Goodwill does a lot of many great things in our community, especially when it comes to jobs and employing people. And so we greatly appreciate your partnership with Chesterfield County Public Schools. So on behalf of the Chesterfield County School Board, thank you all very much for your dedication to this drive. And as far as being one of our partners, would you like to share anything? Just echo your words, a sincere thank you to everyone who participated in this year's Denim Drive. As we said, it was a huge increase over

[00:19:02] previous years each of those pairs of denim stays local it's so sold locally and then goes back to helping individuals with barriers to employment right here in central and coastal virginia some of those are your parents your neighbors your friends and we couldn't be more proud of this partnership so look forward to continuing it in the future thank you and one more thing to add and i'm just going to toot the district's horn here we have two of our two schools from the Matooka District, which is Cosby and Grange Hall. And I'm not diminishing you at all, Midlerothian. Not at all. I'm just saying we have two. So, you know, maybe we get three next year.

[00:19:38] We'll see. But again, congratulations. Thank you all very much. Next up, if I could ask our friends

[00:20:05] from TowneBank to come forward this time. Tonight, we recognize TowneBank, which has long been a dedicated partner investing time, resources, and expertise to strengthen financial literacy and community connection. Through the bank's Making Money Count initiative, TowneBank instructors, all of whom are experienced classroom teachers, deliver a free one-hour enrichment lesson

[00:20:44] that helps second graders learn healthy money habits by covering more than 20 Virginia standards of learning. Since launching in 2010, Making Money Count has provided an engaging, impactful financial education experience to more than 100,000 students across the Richmond region, including almost 50,000 students in Chester County Public Schools.

[00:21:04] Please join in thanking Towne Bank. So I've often said that it takes a village to raise children. and that the community is part of that village and town bank is working that every day for our children and i did hear you say sean that they're teachers experienced teachers i mean i'm just saying since you're doing it so well already if you want to come on back i know there's openings

[00:21:41] but seriously the financial literacy training that you're giving them at a young age helps them understand what money is really about and i appreciate all the work that you're doing and it's making a difference because children will go home and start talking about i want to save or this is not enough for my allowance right because of you so thank you for that um but i just want to know does anybody have a story they want to share about something that happened with one of their students that was you look like you want to share oh to me i do want to say that this is a fabulous program many of us are retired teachers from chesterfield county schools and it just sort

[00:22:20] That helps us keep our finger in the pot and have the joy of being back in the classroom again. It's just a great program. We're happy to be part of it. I just want to thank you all for this recognition. Chesterfield County let us pilot this program back in 2010, and we have had just a wonderful partnership.

[00:22:41] As you heard, over half of the students that we've taught have come from Chesterfield, and it's just been awesome. Five out of the six of us did teach in Chesterfield County before we started this job, and no, thank you. But we love what we do, and we love getting to support the classroom teachers and make a difference.

[00:23:04] So we say the town bank mantra is serving others and enriching lives, and we feel very blessed to be able to do that every day. So thank you for your partnership. I had to try. Thank you. Let's give them another round of applause. Next, we have our recognition of outstanding drivers, Dr. Fry.

[00:23:35] Good evening, Madam Chair, board members, Mr. Roberts. It's my pleasure this evening to present to you our Drivers of the Month.

[00:23:51] There are many drivers who could be recognized this month, but each transportation area manager had to make the tough decision of selecting a single driver who exemplified excellence and dedication to represent their area. We'd like to recognize and honor the following drivers.

[00:24:09] Irene Allen, Area 1, bus 804, two years of service. Irene has taken on the role of a floater this school year and has excelled in it. She enjoys the variety of routes she drives each day and ensures that every student in her care is transported to and from school safely, treating them as if they were her own.

[00:24:33] Nancy Andres, Area 2, bus 28, six years of service. Nancy's students and their parents quickly are aware of her dedication to her students' well-being and safety. They know they can count on her to look after them while they are in her care.

[00:24:53] She is a true team player who is always willing to help whenever needed. Janet Rodger, Area 3, bus 801, 14 years of service. Janet says she loves driving the bus for her children.

[00:25:10] She loves them like they're her own and loves watching them grow. Brittany Keats, Area 4, bus 221, one year of service. Brittany is unable to join us tonight in her stead and accepting the award as her assistant manager, Alexis.

[00:25:30] Brittany is a dedicated bus driver. She knows her students and is a great building relationships with them. She's always very attentive to their needs and is quick to alert the school staff to anything out of the norm. Denise Alexander, Area 5, bus 878, eight years of service.

[00:25:54] Denise states she loves being a positive influence on her students' lives and takes pride in brightening their school days with kindness and joy. Above all, she is devoted to making sure every child gets to school safely. Thank you.

[00:26:15] Thank you all for what you do. I heard bringing joy and safety and all of these things that we, first of all, safety, right? We get them there safely and get them home safely, number one. Number two, the joy.

[00:26:31] I'm not saying that's not a bad thing. Y'all are the first people they see in the morning and the last that they see in the afternoon. Y'all set the tone. You can perk them up and you can, you know, y'all know what you do.

[00:26:46] You know what you do and the little sweet smiles that you get are precious. So as a, you know, a bus rider for 12 years, I rode the bus. I just want to thank you all for what you do. It's really, really special and amazing.

[00:27:02] And does anybody have a great story or just a halfway okay story? I want to say that I work for one of the greatest areas, Area 5, and I thank them for selecting me for this. Good afternoon, everyone, school board members.

[00:27:31] It is indeed a shock for me. Actually, when my area manager, Candace, came to the bus one afternoon and said to me, did they tell you? Did they tell you? And I said, tell me what? And they said, you're our driver of the month. And I said, yeah, right. Still didn't believe it, but I guess it's true. I'm standing here with you guys. Thank you guys so much for honoring me tonight with this award. I appreciate it. And as always, when I do my job, I try to do the best that I can. And the children are our

[00:28:02] precious cargo, as always. Thank you all again. Congratulations. Next, we have recognition of outstanding food service employees with mr dunbrack good evening madam chair board members dr murray mr roberts thank you as always for the opportunity to recognize some of our outstanding

[00:28:41] food nutrition services team members food service is a very fickle creature it can go from your best friend to your worst enemy instantly and without warning as such our managers are trained to follow the old scout mantra of always be prepared this preparedness often shows itself in specific areas such as food ordering. Each year when discussing this topic with our managers, I repeat another mantra that I was given almost 20 years ago when I placed my first order, never put lunch on the truck, meaning that you never want to be reliant on a timely delivery on any given day for service.

[00:29:15] I was reminded of this topic on a recent visit to A.M. Davis Elementary. While I was there, our manager, Karen Anderson, who was our manager of the month this month, was receiving her weekly delivery of commercial food items. As I watched the driver bringing everything in, I became a little concern that Ms. Anderson had ordered a bit too much food. When I approached Ms. Anderson and asked why she had ordered so much food, she smiled and she kindly reminded me that she would not be receiving a commercial delivery during the week of November 3rd because her school would be closed due to the election. Not only was I empowered to see that a real-world impact of the training that

[00:29:55] our managers receive within our department, but it reinforced the endless confidence that I have and our team to take care of our hungry students every single day. Our honorees this month, our food service associate of the month is Teresa Brown. Ms. Brown is a food service associate at Falling Creek Middle School, and she's been with the county for two years. Ms. Brown's nomination states, Teresa is patient, kind, dependable, and always ready to help others. She takes the initiative in starting new tasks and in helping others. She's the first one to ask, what else can

[00:30:30] I do. She is extremely kind and pleasant to our staff and students, a well-rounded person who comes ready to work. Ms. Brown says, it's an honor and a privilege to be of service to CCPS Food Nutrition Services and to work alongside such a wonderful group of people and an excellent manager, Ms. Montgomery. And then our manager of the month is Karen Anderson. Ms. Anderson is our cafeteria manager at AM Davis Elementary School, and she's been with us for 10 years. Her nomination states, Karen was very excited to be opening a new school building this year. Little did she know that it would come with a lot of challenges. She's conquered all of these challenges with

[00:31:06] a positive attitude and has kept her team in a positive mood as well. Karen not only puts her students first, but she cares about her staff. Ms. Anderson says, a great kitchen runs on teamwork, respect, and consistency. A kitchen manager, my job is to keep that fire burning, to lead by example, and make sure our team succeeds together.

[00:31:27] Well, on behalf of the Chesterford County School Board, congratulations. I know what was just shared is a snapshot of what you do every single day. As a parent, you know, we look at the lunch menu and I'll ask my kids, hey, do you want this for lunch? You want to pack a lunch? And we don't give it a lot of thought as to how that's being provided to them. But all the work that goes on behind the scenes to make sure that the temperatures are correct and that the countertops are sanitized and the ovens are clean. And there's so many things that you have to make sure on a

[00:32:03] daily basis go on just for our kids to be able to eat is a thankless job that I don't think a lot of folks really understand all the intricacies behind the counter and so we are just very grateful for you and for what you do for our students each and every day is there a story or something you'd like to share this evening no that's fine too not a problem at all well again thank you so much and it's very well deserved congratulations next we have thank you to our

[00:32:42] for Team Chesterfield Week, Sean Smith. The goal of Thank You Team Chesterfield Week is to encourage and uplift all teachers and all employees of Chesterfield County Public Schools. Unlike days or weeks that focus on one group or another, this Week of Gratitude covers everyone working in Chesterfield County Public Schools, teachers, cafeteria staff, office workers, bus drivers, skilled tradespeople, custodians, technology employees, and all the other people working in our schools and central offices. There was an enthusiastic response to this initiative from students, families, PTAs, and PTOs, businesses, community groups, and CCFS employees. Among the

[00:33:20] many ways people expressed their gratitude were providing lunches, writing notes, nominating people for Game Changer Awards, and sharing tasty snacks and posting on social media. Just a note, the third annual Thank You Team Chesterfield Week is centrally scheduled for October 26th through 30th, 2026. So one of the things we wanted to say is we wanted to thank our superintendent for coming up with this idea for Team Chesterfield Week.

[00:33:48] It is an opportunity for us to continue to show love and love on our schools, our staff, because Teacher Appreciation Week is just one time, but they're doing a great job every day in the classrooms, at the bus stops, after school, on road trips, on field trips.

[00:34:06] They're doing all the things. So an opportunity to say thank you to them more often, officially, was important. And we thank Dr. Murray for coming up with Team Chesterfield. So if you want to participate, you know the dates. So let's get ready. Black Friday is coming. We can start buying stuff now and get ready for Team Chesterfield week for next year. Thank you. Next, we have our oath of office for Dr. Jennifer Darby, administered by Ms. Amanda Pohl, circuit court clerk.

[00:36:20] I just wanted to take a moment before we move on to the next agenda item is just to say

[00:37:47] congratulations dr darby um and welcome and we look forward to working with you thank you next we have public comment for this meeting citizens were given the option of submitting their comments online or in person comments submitted via the online form were sent to the board prior to the start of tonight's meeting posted to the board doc site and will be included in full as an addendum to the meeting minutes in-person comments will be summarized by the board clerk and included in the official meeting minutes documents submitted along with along with in-person comments will upon

[00:38:25] request be distributed to the board but not included as a part of the board's official minutes madam clerk would you please announce this evening's in-person speakers madam chair we have 13

speakers this evening. They are Christopher Coffey, Suchit Gandhi, Toril Patel, Ankur Patel, Divij Patel, Benny Desai, Anvi Gandhi, Todd Starkweather, Shannon Murray, Nathan Amos,

[00:38:59] Arun Sharon Gupta, Madeline Lippard, and Atali Doyle. Each speaker will have four minutes to address the board. There's a timer set up on top of the podium that will turn green when you begin speaking, yellow when you have 30 seconds remaining, and red when your time has expired. As a reminder, no personal belongings other than a cell phone and speaker notes are allowed at the podium. Please have your materials organized in a manner that as you arrive at the podium, you are prepared to start speaking. Please note that comments equivalent to campaigning for any public office are in violation of school board policy 1110 and are prohibited. May we have

[00:39:37] christopher coffee all right so thank you very much for providing me the opportunity to speak tonight um it is budget season in chesterfield county so i chose to come speak to the school board and to anybody is out there that's watching me hopefully my students are watching me right now

[00:40:11] um i'm i want to talk about stipends i want to talk about stipends that are paid to coaches sponsors department chairs and chesterfield county seems to be in a stalemate um i have put these comments out there before through the axe platform i have spoken before about this um a lot of times although i am thanked for the things that i do and the things that i contribute to the community and to my school james river high school um a lot of times i am told that

[00:40:47] my compensation, my colleagues' compensation is equal to what is in surrounding districts. I'm here to tell you that is not true. I'm a Chesterfield County cross-country coach with 20 plus years of experience. If I were to jump ship and go to Henrico County, my salary would jump almost 400 percent, my stipend, not my salary. I could choose to take up a new coaching opportunity in Henrico County Public Schools, I could be an e-sports sponsor with zero years of experience

[00:41:21] because I don't really play video games, but I would double my compensation for any of my current stipends. A number of years, although this is a very depressing activity, I track all of my hours, all of my hours at community events, all of my hours at practice, all of my hours at competitions, all my hours at invitationals, participating in summer camps, basically being what a coach is supposed to be that's mandated by both the VHSL, James River High School, and Chesterfield County

[00:41:55] Public Schools. When I add up all those hours and I divide it by the stipend I get, I become an employee that is making less than four dollars an hour, okay? I choose to do what I do because I'm passionate about it. And if I was only concerned with the money, I could only work as a TWA, which I make almost \$17 an hour. Or I could, with my years of experience, go to Costco and make \$23 an hour. Honestly, I think I'm worth more than less than \$4 an hour. So I can see the

[00:42:30] countdown is running down. And I could talk a lot about this, but I will end with this. Imagine that you are at a restaurant. You have the most amazing server ever. They attend to your needs. They know all the menu items. They make recommendations. They make sure everything goes perfectly. At the end of the meal, you've spent good money on that. You thank them for their excellent service, and you pay them a dollar. Imagine how that feels to that server that has given everything they have to that job, done everything above and beyond, and they receive a dollar. The next thing I'll end with

[00:43:07] this. Imagine if all of you, as you are leaving tonight, you get an email that says, hey, due to something else or something whatever, we need you to stay after and do all these jobs that nobody else

seems to be able to do. Imagine that after that, you are said, oh, by the way, we need you to do something on Saturday. Then as you're preparing the budget, you get a mandate that says we are \$20 million, \$30 million, \$50 million short. To fund Chesterfield County Schools, we now

[00:43:42] want you to individually, on your own time, raise the money, which is exactly what coaches now have to do in Chesterfield County. We have to find fundraising efforts to fund our programs. Thank

[00:43:56] you very much for your time. Thank you. Suchit Gandhi. Chair Coker, members of the board, good

[00:44:23] Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Suchet Gandhi and I'm a proud parent here in Chesterfield County. I'm here tonight on behalf of the change.org petition that I started titled Make Diwali a School Holiday in Chesterfield County Public Schools. I'm humbled that many supporters, parents and students are here this evening and many more have signed online. They represent not just the Hindu community, but also families of Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh and other faiths, all united by one belief.

[00:44:53] Every child deserves equal recognition and inclusion. Every year, my daughter, Anvi Gandhi, and hundreds of children across Chesterfield County face a painful choice. Celebrate Diwali fully with their families or attend school and risk absences and missed work.

[00:45:11] Anvi, would you please stand up? And if there are any other students, would you please stand with her? These are the faces this petition is for. And that's a choice no child should ever have to make. Thank you.

[00:45:27] If you ask Anvi what her favorite holiday is, she'll say Christmas. And if you ask why, she'll say it's because she loves the feeling of sharing, of people coming together, and of being included. We love that for her because those same values of joy, community, and belonging are at the heart of Diwali too.

[00:45:47] We're not asking that her favorite holiday become Diwali, only that she and others like her can celebrate it fully. Diwali, the festival of lights, symbolizes light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and good over evil. It's celebrated by Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists, and it's even celebrated by the President of the United States at the White House as a reflection of our nation's value of peace, unity, and diversity.

[00:46:14] My request tonight is simple. For the sake of equity and inclusion, I respectfully ask this board to recognize Diwali as a student and teacher holiday starting in the 26-27 academic year. This isn't about elevating one religion above another.

[00:46:30] It's about parity, making sure our calendar reflects the families we serve. Our South Asian community, families of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali, and Sri Lankan heritage is one of the fastest growing in our county. Census data shows Chesterfield's Asian population has grown by more than 70% in the past decade, and that trend continues.

[00:46:53] These are your students, your teachers, your neighbors, and they deserve to see themselves reflected in the calendar that shapes their lives. Neighboring districts, Henrico, Richmond, and Maggie L. Walker Governor's School already recognized Diwali.

[00:47:09] They did it by banking instructional time and adjusting professional learning days, fully meeting the 180-day requirement without extending the school year, and being consistent with VDOE

guidance on equity and inclusion. CCPS can adopt that same model.

[00:47:28] Your own priorities already point the way. Chair Coker, your leadership has emphasized stability and service to all students. Ms. Hudgens, as a veteran educator, you understand how belonging and representation drive engagement. Ms. Chatters, Mr. Parando, your work supporting equity, special education, and community service shows your shared commitment to students who are too often overlooked.

[00:47:51] And Dr. Darby, congratulations on your appointment as interim Clover Hill representative. Your long experience in education brings valuable perspective to this decision as well. And through your Imagine Beyond Tomorrow plan and your Office of Equity, you have already pledged to make our schools inclusive and culturally responsive, exactly what this request embodies.

[00:48:15] So tonight, I ask the board to honor your commitments to equity and inclusion by recognizing Diwali as a school holiday. Thank you. Toral Patel. Toral Patel.

[00:48:45] Ankara Patel. Good evening, Chairman Koker, members of the board, and community members.

[00:49:09] Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak tonight. My name is Ankur Patel, and I'm here as a parent and someone who deeply believes in the values our school stands for, inclusion, understanding, and respect. I want to share why making Diwali a school holiday is deeply personal to me and my family.

[00:49:27] Diwali, Festival of Lights, is one of the most widely celebrated holidays in the world. It's a time when families come together, home glows with candles and diyas, which are lamps made out of clay, and we celebrate the triumph of good over evil, light over darkness, and knowledge over ignorance.

[00:49:47] The same values we teach our children every day in school. But here's the challenge. When Diwali falls on a weekday, which happened multiple times in the past several years, many families like mine face a painful challenge, like my dear friend Suchit also mentioned, the painful choice between education and tradition.

[00:50:08] My children wake up excited, but instead of helping me and their grandparents, who also live with us, decorate the house with rangoli, lights, they are rushed to school. By the time they return, they are tired, so what should be a full, joyful day of prayers, food, connection, becomes just a couple of rushed evening hours.

[00:50:30] As a mom, that breaks my heart because those moments of belongingness and pride are what help shape our children's identity and confidence. I have a twin sister who lives in New Jersey, and every year her kids get the day off for Diwali.

[00:50:46] They spend the morning helping with family prayers, the afternoon celebrating with friends, evening lighting fireworks. Meanwhile, my children, their cousins, hear about it later that night after finishing their homework and dinner. It's hard not to see the disappointment in their eyes.

[00:51:02] They feel left out even though we're part of the same family celebrating the same values. And even here, when I try to help my kids celebrate with friends, there's still disparity. Some nearby school systems like Henrico and Chesterfield already give the students the day off.

[00:51:19] So while their friends are in those districts spend the day celebrating, my kids are sitting in class wondering why their community doesn't recognize the same joy and meaning. That inconsistency sends a powerful message and not the one we want our children to hear.

[00:51:35] As others have said and will tonight, this isn't about adding just one more day off. It's about fairness, equity, and representation. When students see their culture acknowledged alongside others, they feel seen and valued.

[00:51:50] That sense of inclusion strengthens engagement, confidence, and connection to school, and that benefits every child, not just the one who celebrates Diwali. So tonight, I respectfully ask the board to recognize Diwali as a school's holiday starting 2026-2027 calendar year so that students can celebrate without having to choose between education and their traditions.

[00:52:12] Recognizing Diwali as a school holiday would send a clear message that every child's background matters and that Chesterfield County truly practices the inclusivity it teaches. So, Chairman Coker and members of the board, I ask you today to take this small but very meaningful step forward.

[00:52:31] Let's show our children that inclusion isn't just something we talk about, but it's something we live by. Let's light that dia that I talked about earlier of understanding and making Diwali a holiday, one that shines brightly for every student, every family, every home in our district.

[00:52:47] Thank you. Thank you. Dabaj Patel.

[00:53:08] Good evening, members of the board. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak tonight. My name is Dvij, and I'm here as a student supporting to make Diwali a holiday in Chesterfield County Public Schools.

[00:53:24] A few years ago, I had woken up on the day of Diwali. I could feel the excitement in the air as decorations such as divas were set. However, that day, I had to go to school. I even had a test that day in math. I came home exhausted and was barely able to celebrate.

[00:53:41] While others in Henrico and the city of Richmond were getting the day off, I still have to carry the burden of going to school on the divine day of Diwali. Students in Chesterfield should be able to get the day of Diwali off without missing class two. Diwali is the celebration of light, as most people know it.

[00:53:59] It shows the strength of good over evil. We celebrate by putting up decorations, holding gatherings with family and friends, and participating in various activities such as prayer and fireworks. It is a significant day every year that brings loads of joy and tradition.

[00:54:17] Here's my case, though. I used to be a Chesterfield student and never got a day off for Diwali. But now I go to Maggie L. Walker Governor's School, which has Diwali as a day off. At Maggie Walker, we even have a special lunch where students can bring in Indian food to serve and celebrate.

[00:54:36] It is phenomenal that my culture is represented so much at the school and that I can also peacefully honor Diwali at home without missing any education. However, the same does not apply for my brother, who still goes to a Chesterfield school. I feel it is very unfair that I get to stay home making Rangoli while he cannot miss school.

[00:54:56] If other counties within Virginia, such as Henrico and Richmond, have Diwali off, why can't Chesterfield? Similarly, Chesterfield has been getting more and more school holidays on unique religious

holidays through the course of the past few years. Holidays such as Yom Kippur and Eid have been given off.

[00:55:16] They have been a pleasure to learn about and observe, and viewing these rich traditions and events from many different cultures has been fantastic. Though, why can we not have Diwali off as well? It is another deep, meaningful tradition that should be recognized.

[00:55:32] Having Diwali as a school holiday will allow for more learning opportunities about the Indian culture. I respectfully ask the board to recognize Diwali as a school holiday starting in the 2026 to 2027 academic year, so that all students can celebrate without choosing between education and tradition.

[00:55:51] Thank you. Thank you. May we have Benny Desai. Good evening, Chairman Coker, members of the board, and everyone present.

[00:56:15] My name is Benny Desai, and I'm a proud mom of an amazing 11-year-old daughter, Anbi Gandhi. We all know why we are here tonight. Many speakers before me have beautifully explained what Diwali is and why the Indian community is asking for it to be recognized as a school holiday starting in 2026-27 school year.

[00:56:35] So instead of repeating those details, I want to share why this request is deeply personal to me as a mother. My daughter has grown up in a wonderful community, one filled with kind neighbors, incredible teachers, and some of the best schools anyone could ask for.

[00:56:51] Yet, despite being surrounded by love and inclusion, she has often felt different. When she was little, she would ask me why she looked different from her friends, why our food smelled and tasted different, or why we did certain rituals no one else at school seemed to understand.

[00:57:09] And as a mom, I wanted to protect her, to make her feel like she belonged. So I gave in. I let her eat what her friends ate. I let her join in on all their holidays and activities. I pushed her to fit in, even if it meant setting aside parts of who we are.

[00:57:25] But as she's growing up, something beautiful is happening. She's starting to rediscover her roots. She's beginning to love Indian food again. She proudly wears her cultural outfits. And for the first time, she and a few friends even performed a Bollywood dance for a Diwali celebration this year.

[00:57:42] For me, that moment was everything. It showed me that she's finally embracing both parts of her identity, American and Indian, and realizing she doesn't have to choose between them. That's why Diwali matters. It's not just a festival of lights.

[00:57:59] It's a celebration of hope, renewal, and victory of good over evil. For families like mine, it's the one day when we come together from morning prayers to evening fireworks to reflect on gratitude and start anew. Recognizing Diwali as a school holiday isn't about asking for special treatment.

[00:58:16] It's about representation. It's about giving children like my daughter the space to celebrate who they are, just as children from other faiths and cultures do during their holidays. Just like Christmas, Diwali holds deep meaning for thousands of families in this county. When students can celebrate without missing school, without feeling like they have to choose between learning and their faith, it tells them they truly belong.

[00:58:41] So tonight, I respectfully ask you to consider making Diwali a recognized school holiday starting 26-27 academic year. Let's give our children the message that every culture, every light, and every

story matters in Chesterfield County. Thank you for your time, for listening, and for a continued commitment to making every child feel seen, valued, and included.

[00:59:03] Thank you. Thank you. Anvi Gandhi. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

[00:59:35] I'm Anvi Gandhi, child of Suchit Gandhi and Bini Gandhi. As you already know, I am here to support our petition to make Diwali a school holiday starting from the 2026 through 2027 school year. I've always loved Diwali and all the happiness it brings every year. In the last few years, we started hosting a Diwali party at our house to show our culture to our neighbors and friends.

[00:59:57] This was our third year hosting, and it made me proud and good about myself and my culture, when everyone showed interest and excitement when talking about it. It especially made me feel amazing when one of our neighbors, Dani, who is six years old, made me a card showing how much fun she has in our Diwali party each year.

[01:00:15] As a student in CCPS, I know there are a lot of Indians in our communities and schools that would love extra time to celebrate with our families. By the time I'm back from school, it is too late to decorate and light diya, so I miss out on everything that connects me to my culture. Morning prayers turn into rushing up to school, and evening activities have already been done while I was gone.

[01:00:36] I shouldn't have to pick between my culture and school, especially when lots of other cultures don't have to. In my school, and other schools in my county, we have morning announcements that show us special holidays or events happening on that day. Diwali has made it onto the announcements for over four years.

[01:00:52] So why doesn't it have a holiday? India is where my parents grew up. They were able to celebrate Diwali and other Indian festivals without having a problem of missing school because it was a country holiday. When they moved here and had me, I wasn't able to celebrate as much as them. Having school on Diwali causes me and other kids to have to miss out on Diwali fun when I don't even get to celebrate as much as my parents as a kid.

[01:01:14] Being in fifth grade, I already get lots of work, but missing a day can make the work pile up even more. So, I am requesting you to consider making Devali a county-wide holiday starting from the 2026 through 2027 school year. Thank you for your time.

[01:01:32] Thank you. And we have Todd Starkweather. Good evening. My name is Todd Starkweather, and I'm a member of the Executive Board of Chesterfield Education Association and a teacher at Midlothian High School.

[01:02:02] I appreciate this opportunity to speak on behalf of CEA about the good work that our CCPS staff and union are doing. Last week, teachers at all our schools enjoyed parent-teacher conferences. Speaking for myself, I enjoyed seeing and speaking with parents of my students.

[01:02:18] I enjoyed telling those parents how well their students were doing and how much I enjoyed having them in class, as well as providing feedback on how students might improve and continue to succeed. These sentiments of mine are shared widely by CEA members, as well as all of CCPS teachers and staff.

[01:02:39] It is no secret that teachers have to juggle many and various work-related responsibilities, which often makes it difficult for them, myself included, to individually contact every parent-guardian and

get to know them, their child, and their families. So parent-teacher conferences create and provide the time and space for those valuable experiences.

[01:03:01] CEA is again happy to report that the CPR classes that President Rob Hamill discussed in previous meetings, we are still offering those at our office. We have one scheduled for tomorrow, 13th of November. And we have once again reached the maximum capacity with many others signed up on a waiting list.

[01:03:22] Our current plan is to continue offering CPR classes as long as interest remains high. And I'll reiterate what Rob Hamill said at the last meeting, that given the amount of interest shown in classes thus far, we would be happy to partner with the district in using our union meeting room for future classes or in scheduling classes with our CPR instructor.

[01:03:46] CEA is proud to help provide this licensing requirement to our staff across the district. I'm also aware that during last month's school board meeting, President Rob Hamill discussed concerns about lunch breaks or lack thereof at Bellwood and Bensley Elementary.

[01:04:04] CEA did a further dive on the reports we received from members, And based upon a CEA's examination, there did not appear to be a pattern of missed breaks from the findings. One person did lose their lunch break on two occasions. That was the worst incident that CEA uncovered.

[01:04:22] And while that isn't acceptable, we did not find any overall pattern of teachers in greater numbers not receiving breaks or being denied lunch. CEA will continue to collect data around these issues and respond to member concerns as they arise.

[01:04:39] And since it was mentioned Team Chesterfield Week and the gifts and Thanksgiving, I'll mention just personally that I was the recipient of a gift card. I won for the Midlothian Faculty Halloween Costume Contest.

[01:04:57] I dressed up as Creepy Edgar Allan Poe and won a gift card. So I appreciated that. So thank you once again for this opportunity to speak as a representative of Chesterfield Education Association. Thank you. Shannon Murray, Nathan Amos.

[01:05:32] My name is Natalia Amos. I am a nurse at VCU, and I'm a volunteer coach for cheerleading here in Chesterfield County for a year.

[01:05:51] And I am here to also add my voice to the community members who would like to see Diwali added to the list of holidays celebrated here. My family and I moved to Chesterfield five years ago specifically to be in this school district, and I think it would be a missed opportunity to show our students an example of inclusion and making every voice heard, and I would really like to see that change made to the next school year.

[01:06:22] Thank you. Ariane Sharon Gupta. Good evening, Chair Coker and members of the board.

[01:06:46] My name is Ariane Sharon Gupta, and I'm 13 years old. I was born right here in Chesterfield County, and I go to Midlothian Middle School. I'm an American citizen, and my parents were born in India. I'm speaking tonight in support of adding Diwali as a school holiday starting in the 2026-27 school year.

[01:07:04] Diwali is a very special holiday that celebrates the victory of good over evil and light over darkness. On Diwali, families light tiyas and candles, decorate their homes, and celebrate with fireworks.

It's a time for happiness, family, and reflection. When I was little, I always understood what Christmas meant.

[01:07:21] celebrate the birth of Jesus. But I never really understood my own religion or traditions. It's not because I didn't care, it's because I never had the chance to care. Diwali always falls on a school day, and by the time I finish my homework and assignments, it's usually around 8 p.m. Then after dinner, it's 9, and there's almost no time left to celebrate properly without either staying up too late or not finishing schoolwork. It also feels unfair that so many American holidays like Presidents Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Thanksgiving, the day after Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day are recognized as holidays. Christmas even gets

[01:07:59] a whole week off, but one of the biggest Indian holidays doesn't get a single day. It's not about wanting extra time off, it's about wanting equal respect for all cultures. Diwali is celebrated by over a billion people around the world and by millions of Indian Americans in the U.S., even though our community is a small percentage of the population, we still deserve to feel represented.

[01:08:22] A lot of other places in the U.S. already recognize Diwali as a school holiday. Here in Virginia, Fairfax County Public Schools lists October 20th as a holiday for Diwali. Henrico County Public Schools also gives students and teachers that day off, and Prince William County Public Schools shows October 21st as a day when schools and offices are closed for Diwali. Outside Virginia, even more areas are doing the same. New York City made the valley an official school holiday starting in 2023, and many schools in New Jersey have already been closing for the valley for years.

[01:08:58] The states of Pennsylvania and Connecticut both made the valley a state holiday or official observance, and California recently passed a law that will make the valley an official state holiday starting January 1, 2026, which means schools and state offices can close that day. Now that I'm older, I understand how important it is to pass down traditions and values. But many parents in my community are struggling to do that because they don't get time to teach their kids about their religion or celebrate it together. It's stressful knowing your family's most meaningful holiday is treated like any regular school day. That's why I'm asking the board to make the Vadi

[01:09:36] a school holiday. It would be one small change, but it would have a huge impact for Indian American families and future generations. I also know that all of my friends here with Ashtray Patel, Arna Patel, Arian Patel, Anvi, and all the uncle, all of my uncles that presented before me feel the

[01:09:57] same way. Thank you for listening. Thank you. Madeline Lippard. Greetings school board and audience members. My name is Madeline Lippard and I am in seventh grade at Tomahawk Creek Middle School. You know how we have days off for Christmas? We've also added days off for

[01:10:36] Rosh Hashanah and Eid, which is a great step toward fairness and recognizing our diverse county. But there's still a large important group of people in our community. Our neighbors, our classmates, our teachers, and their most important holiday is still missing from the school calendar. Diwali. The Festival of Lights is celebrated by over a billion people around the world. For many Hindu, Jain, and Sikh families right here in Chesterfield County, it is the single most important day of the year. It's about the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil. Families gather for five days to reflect, light lamps, ordeas, eat delicious food, and come

[01:11:13] together. It's about celebrating the inner light in all of us. When we have school on Diwali, students are forced to make a choice. They can either miss instructions or they can skip essential family traditions to define their cultural identity. That's a tough choice to put on a kid, and it's not fair that we ask them to make it when other major holidays are honored without question. I respectfully ask the school board to recognize Diwali as a school holiday for of the 2026 and 2027 school year.

[01:11:40] If we want Chesterfield County Public Schools to be a place where everyone feels like they truly belong, where every student feels like their heritage is valued and respected, then we need to make this change. This is all about inclusivity and acceptance. Recognizing Diwali officially sends a powerful message that we see and value all the cultures that make our schools great.

[01:12:00] We shouldn't leave anyone out. Nearby districts like Henrico County have already figured this out, so why are we behind? Making Diwali a school holiday isn't just about having a day off. It's about making sure that everyone feels included and celebrated. Let's make our schools a better, brighter place for everyone by embracing the diversity that defines us.

[01:12:22] I urge the school board to lead with vision and make Diwali an official school holiday. Thank you for your time. Thank you. Atali Doyle. Madam Chair, that concludes this evening's public comment.

[01:12:48] Thank you, Madam Clerk. Next, we have this evening's superintendent's report, Dr. Murray. Thank you, Madam Chair. Tonight's Meaningful Moments segment highlights how our school celebrated National School Lunch Week with visits to Reams Road Elementary and Monacan High School.

[01:13:06] National School Lunch Week shines a spotlight on the important role that nutritious, well-balanced meals play in supporting student learning, focus, and overall well-being. Each day, our dedicated food service team helped fuel success for thousands of students across Chesterfield Public Schools.

[01:13:28] This year's theme, Taste the World, Your School Lunch Passport, invited students to explore global flavors, try new foods, and experience a sense of adventure right in their own cafeterias. Enjoy this month's meaningful moments.

[01:13:44] This week is National School Lunch Week, and the theme is Taste the World.

[01:14:10] So this week, our students will have the opportunity to taste different flavors from around the world. So countries like Mexico, Italy, Spain, Cuba, Japan, the United Kingdom. And even better, these are items that are on our menu year-round, so it's not just a feature this week.

[01:14:29] One of the great things about National School Lunch Week is it's a great reminder that the cafeteria is more than just a place to eat. It's a part of the learning environment. I think it's good because it encourages kids, even if it's twice a year for breakfast and lunch, to entice them to come in, check out the line, oh, while I'm here, I'm going to grab a lunch.

[01:14:55] And usually that's what happens. Meal participation, like I said, does go up. I think last year it went up over 100 meals then versus the year before. At our elementary schools, each student will receive a really fun passport.

[01:15:26] So each day they come through the lunch line, they'll get their passport stamped, just like if they were traveling internationally, as they try different flavors. This week at our elementary schools, we have teriyaki chicken with romaine. We're doing fish and chips, empanadas, various tacos.

[01:15:47] And then at our secondary levels, you'll see some of those same items. But one of our grand features is the ramen bar at our high schools, which would feature Japan this week. We have some kids that say, oh, I like this so much, I'm going to eat it again.

[01:16:03] And then we have others that's like, I didn't like it before, I still don't like it. You know, with elementary, they're very honest.

[01:16:22] Thank you, Dr. Murray.

[01:16:37] Board members, is there any discussion other than that was a great presentation and the passport idea? so cute so cute so glad that our students are getting that exposure to other foods that maybe parents are trying at home and not getting that success either so glad glad we're able to do that uh so next we have uh college and career readiness month uh with miss voice miss stokes and dr

[01:17:11] macklin sorry mr macklin i gave you a promotion good evening i'm chair i'm as chair board members cast of characters here let's start the evening with um i'm dressed in one of our most popular courses which is culinary arts which i think you've got to enjoy this evening didn't know there's gonna be a video about it as well too so it's a fantastic because this is college of careers month but we've noticed a lot of people at the at the mic and even some of you aren't wearing your

[01:17:47] traditional attire. So if we could go around and figure out who's wearing what and why, that would be great. Mr. Pronto, can we start with you? Absolutely. I am sporting the Liberty University Flames hoodie because, shout out to my wife, who in May was hooded. And so she's officially Dr. Pronto and received that degree from Liberty. So that's where my money's going or our money's going right now. So I figured I would just, you know, give them a shout out.

[01:18:22] Good evening. I am wearing Virginia State University, Hale State. My husband is a full-time student there. I am an HBCU product myself from Morgan State University, so I thought I would wear some Trojan love today. I am not representing my college, and I should be, but I am representing what I do every day.

[01:18:47] I am a director of Project Cost Accounting and Business Systems, and this is my attire. So if you're going into career, this is what you would look like if you were an accountant. So I'm a little incognito.

[01:19:06] You'll notice it's yellow and black, yellow and black, VCU. Come on, it's here. I didn't, I don't have the, just because it's, anyway. I'm two for one here. I am yellow and black for VCU.

[01:19:22] Go Rams. I also, I personally had a different path. um i went out of high school and went straight into the workforce and i worked in an office and i had to wear office attire as an 18 year old and act like a grown-up and so that's also a nod to that so you can be anything you want children that's it was that good wonderful uh good evening i'm wearing the black and red from northeastern university and uh i'm a graduate of

[01:19:56] northeastern university where I got my law degree. Dr. High? So I am representing the University of Virginia which is where I got my master's and a place that I love. There's a motto you're going to hear later and you can't be what you can't see and sometimes dawning what we have been in our past and where we started in the past we took to get where we are is all important for our students to see.

So I'm going to going to push it on to the better people to talk the rest of the night. We have Katie Stokes you're going to hear from. She is our workplace learning coordinator

[01:20:32] And then you have Audrey Lancaster Boyce, our school counseling coordinator, and they're going to take it from here for the rest of the year. So while this month is about college and career in Chesterfield County, we celebrate college and career all year round. And I truly feel that a picture really tells the story.

[01:20:50] And so I wanted to share with you guys tonight and our audience this picture that is up here on the screen of the students. And I want you to note the young lady that's in the front with the black shirt and the black hat. She is a recent grad of Chesterfield County Public Schools and just graduated from Virginia Tech with her master's degree in engineering.

[01:21:07] And I want to talk a little bit about her because in her middle school here in Chesterfield, she was in a career investigations class like all of our middle school students take. And in that class, a female engineer came in because part of the curriculum in this class is we bring guest speakers in to talk about all different curric clusters. And she had a female engineer come into the class.

[01:21:25] she'd never met a female engineer before. She really liked math and science and didn't really know what kind of think about with that being in seventh grade or eighth grade excuse me and so it was kind of nice for her to see that and kind of learn about it. Fast forward a couple years later in high school she's had several different touch points with this engineer because they both kind of started the conversation had some connection points with some job shadows some workplace tours in high school while she was at Clover Hill High School she got to go do an internship with progressive design engineering firm. They loved her so much she came back several different times to do interns, and they actually offered her a scholarship to go to Virginia Tech to pay for some of her engineering.

[01:21:59] While she was at Virginia Tech, she came back during all of her breaks to do internships at Progressive Design. And this picture is so proud to me and talks about what we do because she graduated from Virginia Tech. Progressive Design offered her a job. She now works for them. And this past summer, she took some of our Clover Hill interns this year as their lead to go back on their internship.

[01:22:19] So talk about a full circle moment where he or she is now giving back to our students based on what she received while she was here in school. us and that's why we do what we do and that's why we have all these activities for our students throughout the year so I just really wanted to share that moment in that story because I think it's worth telling also our motto in Chesterfield we follow with Mary and Edelman we believe that kids can't be what they can't see so how do we create opportunities and this is a great month for us to showcase all the different things that we're doing again some of the pictures down here you'll see in the left corner here these students that are at the flying squirrels these are Thomas Dale students that are in the landscaping program a really cool fact is the very last game that was played at

[01:22:56] the Diamond, the entire field crew that was there were interns from Thomas Dale High School. So every student that was on that field, every person that was out there working that field that night getting it ready and keeping it up for the whole game was all Thomas Dale students doing an internship. And the middle here is pictures of our students during Camp Epic. So every year in the summertime we offer a Camp Epic for some of our raising middle schoolers and high school students to come in and explore at the Tech Center different career pathways. This just shows some of the students that are in the biotechnology classroom. And then the last picture is Gilbane, which is one of our other partners that we

have they do tours every single year for our engineering students bird high school's engineering program gets to go out and do tours with them throughout the year and get to

[01:23:33] learn about all different project management so just again showing you some of the examples of things that we do during this month and then year round to help our students really affirm their career pathways and have opportunities to see what's right for them as they're getting ready to make these next steps audra's going to go into some really great detail about a lot of the stuff that we do but just kind of wanted to give that second good evening i'm excited to be here and celebrate this this is work that we do all year long and we'll talk a little bit about that one of the things that we kick off in October is our college and career fair that which we do every year this is really born you know we've we've had fairs year-round we know what they look like it's a big opportunity to see

[01:24:11] colleges and typically that would be the focus here in Chesterfield we've done something different born out of the idea of bringing everyone together right so we should be looking at all different types of careers and pathways and seeing ourselves and opportunities so a few years ago we joined forces together Katie and I had some brainpower and thought partnership and said why don't we just all do one big event instead of having all these many little events with the idea that a child should be able to see all the different pathways in one place we're bringing up 140 vendors college reps work-based partners and

[01:24:49] bringing even our community resources in so that when families come it's a true experience of what's there in our community so this year we had that on October 22nd we had over 1,700 estimated participants in that and one of our biggest ones yet and it it's become quite a bang in our our area for that we have that at Thomasdale so they get to shine tonight with being our hosts for this year it's an all-hands-on-deck experience we had all of our schools middle and high represented there through our staff and those that

[01:25:24] participated so it was a really cool experience for us those that participated we can estimate that they had over like 2,000 or so connections between the vendors using the different apps and partnerships that we have so it's a wonderful experience for us we again say we do this all year long and so it starts at the very top of the school year and working on applications college readiness elementary and high schools are also engaged in major clarity and doing some work there throughout the month of September we move into different testing and aptitude testing working with our

[01:26:04] different partners to bring some opportunities to our students Virginia College Week is something that we celebrate all over all over the district to make sure that students can apply for free to their location.

[01:26:20] So we are tired but excited to be done with October because it's a very busy time for us and we get to move into celebrating this month and really gaining some exposure through classroom lessons, different opportunities, looking at our tech center, a lot of different ways that we just want to continue to build that exposure and that palette for students.

[01:26:40] Major Clarity is one of the different tools that we use as we encourage towards graduation and life beyond that. And so December, we continue to sow into that, and then building off of those conversations that kind of launch into their scheduling process for our students.

[01:26:57] So connecting that pathway into the classroom selections and courses that they're taking, continued planning throughout the year, and then we kind of get to celebrate with graduation and all the

amazing things and accomplishments that our students do throughout the year, whether that be job fairs, signings, and different opportunities like that.

[01:27:19] And so, again, this just talks about a lot of the different events that we're doing. We just wrapped up Mission Tomorrow. It was the 10th year that we've done it. There's been 125,000 students across the Commonwealth that have gone through this event every year. It is targeted towards all of our 8th grade students. Chesterfield County Public Schools alone sends about 5,000 students every year to go to this event.

[01:27:37] And it's a day where it's like a large career fair with hands-on activities, all the touch-a-truck medical IT things you could possibly think of. the kids get to go touch to and see and say this is a student here with dominion energy and getting to like look what it looks like to climb a pole as a lineman and then in the middle we've got talking about just our work-based learning that we do all year long last year in the 24 25 school year we had 31 000 work-based learning experiences in our students sixth through 12th grade and that runs the full gamut of career fairs guest speaking job shadows internships clinicals apprenticeships so that that whole metrics of it i do want to point out the picture in the middle with the girl with the pink hat that's where i got my pink hat from we just hosted

[01:28:14] a girl power event that is put on by dominion energy i'm in the virginia education workforce consortium they do it every year it's a job shadow day where they invite girls across the commonwealth to come in and learn about jobs in engineering jobs and electrical companies so they can kind of figure it out so we had a couple students go and do that and i was really graciously allowed to borrow the pink cap for this and then it all culminates in the end for our job fair that we do for our seniors every year in the spring we have a job fair that is just for seniors that are looking to go straight into employment after high school we invite all of our work-based learning partners, we're going to move about 100 to come out to the school. Last year, I think we had about 300 students come out. And so every year they're getting hired on the spot at these events. My

[01:28:51] favorite story to tell about it last year is we had a student, she did our IT program here in Chesterfield at the Technical Center, earned a ton of certifications. She walked out that night with three job offers. So they were going to go home and talk about what had the best benefits, what had the best pay, and what had the best trajectory for moving forward. So just a really quick snapshot of all of the cool things that we're doing all year long that help our students from elementary school all the way up to high school to really affirm their career pathways.

[01:29:16] And our tech centers are doing awesome things, not only this month, but all year round as well. Every year in October, they go and they present to all of our sophomores across the division in their health and PE classes to learn about what careers or what courses are available at the tech center for them to apply to. And then we just had our Opportunities Day this past week where two days, the students get to come out and tour the tech center.

[01:29:37] They get to go in every class. They get to sign up for two and kind of go figure out, what do I like? What do I think I want to do? this was this year we had more students apply to come do this than we've ever had in the years past so definitely it's growing there's definitely an interest and then we come later that with our open house on the weekend that is open to families and students to come out to see both campuses to really look at what's out there and what's available for our students as they're going into their junior and their senior year we are super excited too about our program expansions you can see here

on the screen these are all the different programs that we're looking to expand in the Tech Center within this coming school year with the next school year and the one the following after that so really excited about all the different opportunities that our students have whether it's in their technical centers their comprehensive high schools to

[01:30:17] figure out what that career is because regardless of where they're going the end goal is going to be career doesn't matter if they go to school if they're going straight to work if they're going to a trade school the goal is what is the career going to be so our goal and our opportunities here in Chesterfield are how do we help them affirm what's right for them and what's not well they've got our support so that we can then help them on that further trajectory so they're making the right time the right commitment to what their career futures are going to be. So that's us in a snapshot of what we've got going on and what we're doing and how we continue to support our students here in Testifone County Public Schools.

[01:30:48] Wonderful. Thank you all so much. Board members, is there any discussion? We might have a few comments or questions. Mr. Barando. Absolutely. Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to recognize the college and career fair that took place at Thomas Dell. So I have two twins or sophomores.

[01:31:12] And so that question of what are we doing next, what does that look like for you? Do you want to go to college, go straight into the workforce? So we attended. It was packed. It was packed. And just hats off to your team for putting on that, because through that, we learned about Top Sale University, and I had no idea what that was, or should be Full Sale.

[01:31:34] Thank you, Full Sale. Top Sale, I'm on vacation. Full Sale, which, you know, is a performing arts and production, which is what my son is all about. And so he found his group, right, which was exciting. Had we not attended that, that may not be the case.

[01:31:50] And so I'm sure many families would probably repeat the same thing I am. But just greatly appreciate everything that was done in particular for that evening. So thank you. Thank you. Okay. Thank you very much.

[01:32:09] Next, we have action items. Dr. Pope. Good evening, board chair, vice chair members, and Dr. Murray. Before you this evening is memo 158-25, entitled Adjustment to Elementary School CBG Sites for the School Year 2026-27.

[01:32:29] With the board's approval on October 14th of Option 1 for the Deep Creek Elementary School Redistricting, attendance zones were finalized and that prompted adjustment to center-based gifted sites. Reference to CBG site changes connected to this redistricting work were brought forward in September and October, school board presentations, and memo, including the October 14th Gifted Education Update presentation.

[01:32:57] The CBG site adjustments previously presented are as follows. Alberta Smith Elementary School, Crenshaw Elementary School, Swift Creek Elementary School, and Spring Run Elementary School students will attend the CBG site at Alberta Smith Elementary School beginning in 26-27.

[01:33:15] Grange Hall Elementary School, Deep Creek Elementary School, Moseley Elementary School, and Winterpock Elementary School students will attend the new CBG sites at Grange Hall Elementary School in 2627, and Crenshaw Elementary School will no longer be a CBG site in 2627.

[01:33:33] The opening of Deep Creek Elementary provides a great opportunity to align elementary CBG sites along our Western 360 corridor. It opens capacity at Grange Hall and allows us to provide full-time gifted services closer to more of our students' homes.

[01:33:53] With this summary, and I know it's late, that's why I went fast, and I know this has all been presented previously, I can certainly take any questions you may have, and on behalf of staff, recommend the school board approve this Action Memo 158-25. Thank you, Dr. Pope.

[01:34:09] Board members, may I have a motion to approve Memo 158-25 as presented? So moved. Is there a second? Second. Board members, is there any discussion? Mrs. Chatters? Thank you, Madam Chair. It's not a question for you.

[01:34:26] Dr. Pope is just stating what I've stated before about our CBG sites. So just as we continue to expand in the county and we offer these opportunities for our children, I look forward to the conversation with my board members regarding budgeting so that we can resource the Gifted Education Office and that team as needed for the growth that we continue to place upon them so thank you for the presentation and just looking forward to that budget discussion i'm sure we would all appreciate and look forward to that as well thank you miss shatters uh for the next action item or uh before you is memo 159

[01:35:05] we have to finish yes we have to finish this one there has been a motion in a second madam clerk would you please call roll on the motion Dominique Chatters. Aye. Stephen Pronto. Aye. Lisa Hudgens. Aye. Anne Cooker. Aye. The motion carries. Next we have memo number 159-25 from Dr. Pope. Thank you for that prompt. All right.

[01:35:28] Before you is memo 159-25 entitled Approval of Programs of Study that specifically draws your attention to propose new course offerings for the 2026-27 school year. Per policy 3010, the division annually reviews its course offerings, solicits changes, and proposes substantive changes to the school board for approval. Attachment A in the memo outlines new courses for your consideration. Three middle school elective courses in which we recognize student need with additional math support through the course entitled Ignite Math 6.

[01:36:06] We also recognize student talent with the course entitled Advanced Guitar 8, and we recognize student ability with the course entitled Spanish for Fluent Speakers 2. This elective world language offering may serve our dual language immersion students as they move into middle school, as well as any fluent speaker ready to reach for the mid and high proficiency levels across CCPS.

[01:36:34] This attachment also lists five high school courses that will expand our IAP, IB, and Specialty Center offerings in the areas of AP Business and Personal Finance, AB Cybersecurity, Engineering, IB Film, and International Relationships.

[01:36:53] Also listed are six specific CTE electives that range from turf grass to biomedical and patient care that can be offered at the comprehensive honors or even dual enrollment levels. Beyond the courses that I just summarized, there's also mention in this memo, of course, how we share out the program of studies each year, a reminder about technical edits that we bring to you from time to time, sunset courses, and the flexibility of co- and prerequisites that we wanted to just note in the memo.

[01:37:30] So with all of those details and with the courses that I tried to summarize quickly, I'm happy to take any questions you may have, and of course, on behalf of staff, we recommend your approval of Memo 159-25. Thank you, Dr. Pope.

[01:37:47] Board members, may I have a motion to approve Memo 159-25 as presented? So moved. Is there a second? Second. Board members, is there any discussion? Mrs. Chatters? Thank you, Dr. Pope. I just wanted to acknowledge the Spanish Fluency II course that is being added.

[01:38:05] I know that having a school that has the immersion program, it is very important to that community that we do something about it, and I appreciate the effort that went in to acknowledge that level of learners that we do have, to give them an opportunity to continue that in middle school, so I appreciate the effort that went into that, and I just wanted to say thank you.

[01:38:27] And I will ditto that. Thank you, the community members of the Bermuda District. Thank you for offering that additional course. It is something that they have been asking for, so I'm glad we're able to move forward in that regard. Any other comments?

[01:38:48] Is French next? Pardon me? French. We'll see. We actually have a process, and we do take recommendations from our schools. Oh, well, there you go, friends. It's always possible. There you go. Great. There has been a motion and a second. Madam Clerk, would you please call roll on the motion?

[01:39:09] Dominique Chatters. Aye. Stephen Prata. Aye. Lisa Hudgens. Aye. Ann Coker. Aye. The motion carries. Thank you. Thank you. Next, we have the discussion agenda. Mr. Smith. Madam Chair, Madam Board Members, as a result of its meeting on October 23rd, 2025, the Superintendent's Advisory Policy Review Committee, known as the PRC, recommends revisions to current policies and regulations as follows.

[01:39:41] Revisions of Policy 4190, Student Wellness. Revisions reflect the current practice and intent with regard to recess. It is recommended that the school board consider these proposed revisions. It is further recommended that the school board schedule these proposed revisions to current policies and regulations for the second reading and adoption at the school board's next regular school board meeting.

[01:40:02] Thank you, Mr. Smith. Board members, is there any discussion? Mrs. Shatters? So regarding this policy, regarding the recess, I just wanted to speak to the Dale District Elementary Schools that had concerns regarding what was happening at recess.

[01:40:21] And we appreciated the conversation, the dialogue that was shared. Appreciate you reaching out to the principal and myself to address your concerns, because that is the proper way to go about it. I also just wanted to say that there are times in our schools where we have to give our children opportunity to handle their big emotions.

[01:40:41] right? And it's not supposed to be punitive, and it's supposed to be restorative. And I just wanted to make sure everybody understood that the purpose of the change was just to clarify the language so that people understood what the reason was. So, for example, you know, Dominique and Steve are not sharing. I take the ball from him. I take the pencil, sorry. I take the pencil from him in class. The teacher has to correct my action because I took something that I wasn't supposed to have, right? So, I might have a big emotion. I get pulled to the side. We have a discussion, and then I get to go back to class.

[01:41:14] But in the process of me having that big emotion, I might need to walk while we talk about my big emotions. And that's okay. What's not okay is Dominic takes the pencil in first block, and then at recess, I have to walk. So that's what we were trying to clarify. But if the action happens at recess, if I'm not being friendly at recess, then the action, the behavior needs to be addressed at recess.

[01:41:38] So I hope that clarifies a little bit of what we were trying to go for with clarifying the language in the policy, And I hope that assuages some concerns that were raised to us from the district. Thank you, Sean. Next, we have memo number 161-25 from Mr. Smith.

[01:41:59] As a result of its meeting on October 23, 2025, the Superintendent's Advisory Policy Review Committee, known as PRC, also recommends additional revisions to current policy and regulations as follows. Revisions to policy 3170-R, requirements for a waiver of the 140 clock hour rule, and a draft new policy 3176 awarded credit by assessment. More frequently school systems are leveraging opportunities to allow students to earn units of credit required for graduation through non-traditional paths such as completion of acceptable credentials, division-approved assessments, or other identified means as allowed by external agencies such as community college

[01:42:37] partnerships, the board of education, and as selected by the school division. These awarded units of credit would be waived from traditional 140 o'clock hours of actual classroom instruction per credit. For CCPS to bring this opportunity to eligible students, a broadening of CCPS policy 3170-R and approval of a new policy is recommended. Two current areas of opportunity are in rural language and career technical education, but more are anticipated as the Virginia Department of Education encourages seat time flexibility in Virginia. It is recommended the school board to consider the above-named reference new policy and proposed revisions to current policy regulations.

[01:43:17] It is further recommended that the school board schedule these for second reading and adoption at the school board's next regular meeting. Thank you, Mr. Smith. Board members, is there any discussion? Thank you. Next, we have items for board review.

[01:43:35] Madam Clerk, would you please read the items for this evening? Madam Chair, tonight's agenda includes the following items for board review. Number one, Magisterial District Improvement Funds, FY 2026. Number two, FY 2026, September Expenditures vs. Appropriations.

[01:43:52] Number three, budget change request summary across categories, September 2025. Number four, board committee reports. Number five, pre-K update, September 2025. Number six, draft 2026 school board meeting calendar.

[01:44:08] Number seven, report on the supplemental retirement program for employees of Chesterville County Schools. And number eight, FY 2027 budget calendar. Thank you, Madam Clerk. Next, we have this evening's superintendent's remarks, Dr. Murray. Thank you, Madam Chair. I could have a much longer list of things to celebrate and mention. I'll limit myself to just a few. As per usual, I want to thank all the speakers that took their time to come and share their thoughtful feedback with us this evening.

[01:44:43] It does help inform our work, but I think I speak for all of us when I say that when kids get up here and talk to us. Not only are we proud of the courage that it took, but it hits a little different and we're very appreciative of those young people coming up this evening. Continuing to celebrate college and career, I definitely want to reiterate thanking our culinary students for

[01:45:14] providing uh tonight's dinner it was overly delicious and and uh overly um plenty um so thanks to them and the great work that that they do uh that was our whole street campus i understand in february we'll get to sample and maybe uh start up a little competition between the courthouse campus and the whole street campus i also want to echo uh a little bit of how we uh kicked off this evening by celebrating all of our veterans, in particular our two board members, Ms. Chatters

[01:45:50] and Mr. Paranto, for your service. To anybody watching that served or is currently serving, we thank you as well, and especially anybody on our staff proper who made and gave the ultimate service. Our budget process is well underway, but that doesn't come with great uncertainty.

[01:46:17] I think this year will be one of the more interesting budget cycles that we go through with a gubernatorial change, as well as with the uncertainty with federal funding through certain titles. So our commitment remains steadfast in raising compensation among a host of other important areas, but I want our staff to hear me say that compensation continues to be top of mind and that will be a very big point of emphasis, if not the centerpiece in this year's budget.

[01:46:58] Kim and her team in HR got some good news from Participate, who we already love our partnership with, that they are expanding to secondary math. So, Ms. Chatters, I know you're excited about that and what that may mean for getting some fully licensed math teachers in front of our kids where they're currently learning through virtual means.

[01:47:26] Other exciting news, the Board of Supervisors at a recent meeting approved the purchase of a parcel of land that will be the new home to the replacement Grange Hall.

[01:47:41] and at the same time have offered a property in the Dale District, and we're excited that our initial analysis of that elementary site would remove all 67 Dale Elementary trailers.

[01:48:02] We've got a few years before we get to that point. I probably stole some of Reed's Thunder. He might even be upset with me. I'm not going to look over my shoulder, That's great news for our community. It will also get rid of many trailers in your district, sir, where that grain shawl replacement will go.

[01:48:25] There's been a lot of talk, especially in the media, certainly in our world and spaces, about the DOE raising cut scores and what that's going to mean for reputations of school divisions around the Commonwealth if they move forward with that.

[01:48:43] superintendents all across the commonwealth across every region including myself said if we're going to move forward and we have to acknowledge that we are in a teacher crisis a pipeline crisis and so we are choosing to raise achievement standards for the first time since its impetus over 30 years ago when we're asking people to switch careers get licensed

[01:49:15] as an annual substitute, I would be remiss not to say how negligent and reckless I believe it to be. However, our request was, if you're going to move forward, please do it in a phased-in, multi-year approach.

[01:49:35] Further, the initial plan says that seniors will be held harmless and held to the current cut scorers. That actually goes against what is codified because once you start your ninth grade year, we can't move the goalposts on you and change graduation requirements.

[01:49:57] So we've asked that they extend to all current high schoolers that holding harmless. And then lastly, we've asked that this year be the preparatory year. So essentially year zero and that the phase in approach would begin the year following.

[01:50:17] We feel very confident that those asks, if they choose to move forward with establishing a higher threshold for cut scores, that these asks will, in fact, occur.

[01:50:33] There will be a vote by the Board of Ed very soon and we are eagerly awaiting what occurs there. Two last things uh our bravo awards are tomorrow evening where we get to celebrate some pretty cool uh doing awesome things uh alumni to Chesterfield County Public Schools I like to say that it's my annual reminder that I haven't uh done enough yet uh accomplished enough yet uh as a graduate of the school division so Sean you either you know you and I like yeah and then lastly because this

[01:51:13] will be the last meeting before the Thanksgiving holiday and appreciating that we just wrapped up thank you team Chesterfield week I just want to extend the warmest Thanksgiving to our families our staff, but also just express how grateful I continue to be to serve this remarkable community in this role that you've trusted me in. So that's all I have, Madam Chair. Thank you.

[01:51:46] Thank you, Dr. Murray. Next, we have announcements, communications, and school board comments. School board members, are there any announcements or comments? Mrs. Chatters? I just wanted to take this opportunity to say congratulations to Dr. Laquan Hilton.

[01:52:02] He was sworn in this evening during our meeting for Interim Dale District Supervisor. I look forward to working with him for the remainder of his time. And we are going to continue to follow in Mr. Holland's footsteps and continue to keep Dale District at the top of mind.

[01:52:23] Thank you. Mr. Baranto. Thank you, Madam Chair. Greatly appreciate Dr. Murray's recognition of our students that came up to speak tonight. Avige, Anvi, Arian, and Madeline, I can imagine being their age, it's intimidating to come up with a crowd behind you and board members in front of you to speak about anything.

[01:52:51] And so I greatly appreciate the eloquence in which they delivered their message, as respectful as they could be while delivering their respected intent. So I do appreciate that. I also wanted to comment, one of our speakers had mentioned that they invite their neighbors in their neighborhood over to experience that culture.

[01:53:15] I think that's fantastic and greatly appreciate that outreach that they do. Outside of that, I want to thank the CEA for the CPR classes that are offered. We have to make sure that our staff is equipped to handle any situation that might happen in the classroom.

[01:53:32] And so for those that may not be CPR certified, I would highly recommend that you take the time to do that so that in the event you were faced with that situation, you would potentially be available to save a life instead of standing back not knowing what to do.

[01:53:49] So we greatly appreciate that as well. Outside of that, Madam Chair, happy Thanksgiving to all. Mrs. Hutchins. Thank you. So first of all, I want to thank the culinary students for that delightful dinner.

[01:54:06] Unbelievable. Everything was delicious. And in these cute little packages, so it was like a gift to open every single one. You didn't know what it was. Delightful. Thank you. We love you. Wouldn't say no every time, but you know, it's fine. Second, I want to echo Dr. Murray and Mr.

[01:54:28] Paranto with anytime our students come up and speak at that mic, I can imagine how scary it is. And I see the courage, and I see the eloquence, and it really makes me miss teaching. I just, I don't know.

[01:54:44] I see them, and it just melts my heart. I really admire also their families. I loved it when the parents came up and supported. It's going to make me tear up. I love that support, and it was really

precious to see.

[01:55:03] Well done to the students. Y'all were adorable. And finally, congratulations to Dr. Darby. We are looking forward to beginning to work with you on January the 1st, and we congratulate you on becoming our new interim colleague.

[01:55:22] And happy Thanksgiving, all. And, of course, being last, my colleagues have said everything I would like to say, except thank you to Dr. Murray. Thank you for your leadership. You turn and thank your staff and thank us, So I want to take this moment to thank you for everything that you do and will continue to do for Chesterfield County Public Schools.

[01:55:45] So thank you. The school board will hold a work session on Tuesday, December 9th, 2025 at 4 p.m. here in the public meeting room. It will be followed by a business meeting at 6.30 p.m. If there's no further business, we need a motion to adjourn.

[01:56:02] I make a motion to adjourn. Madam Clerk, would you please call roll on the motion? Dominique Chatters. Aye. Stephen Bronto. Aye. Lisa Hudgens. Aye. Ann Cooker. Aye. The motion carries.

[01:56:18] The November 12, 2025 School Board Business Meeting is adjourned.



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