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Henrico County School Board Monthly Meeting, Thursday, February 22, 2024

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[00:00:06] good evening and welcome to the february 22nd 2024 monthly meeting of the henrico county school board we are delighted to have you here today so please get ready to delve into performance highlights learn from informative conversations celebrate achievements and much more the first item on the agenda is the approval of the agenda is there a motion to approve i moved at the school board approve the agenda for today's meeting thank you is there a second second all in favor say aye

[00:00:47] any opposed the eyes have it and the agenda is approved dr cashwell thank you madam chair members of the board good evening and to our visitors good evening as well we will begin our meeting as we always do which will be a student-led pledge of allegiance followed by a performance highlight with visitors from one of our schools.

[00:01:07] We'll begin by introducing the principal of Sanston Elementary School who will come forward and introduce the students from Sanston who will be joining her and leading us in the pledge. So we'll have her come to the podium and make that introduction while the students follow.

[00:01:23] And then following our Pledge of Allegiance, we ask that you remain standing as you're able for our moment of silence. - Good evening, my name is Kim Powell. I am the proud principal of Sanston Elementary School And with me is...

[00:01:38] Stephanie Anderson, Associate Principal. And proud. At Sandson Elementary School, we are three constellations, one galaxy, and always shining stars. With me, I have brought my house leaders. I have Monoceros, Shamaya Wright, and Asher Allen.

[00:01:57] And I also have with me Akilah, Aubrey Hockaday. Unfortunately, Draco was under the weather, so they were not able to come today. I am very pleased to introduce my wonderful House leaders so they can begin the Pledge of Allegiance.

[00:02:14] I pledge of allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

[00:02:40] And if you would please pause for a moment of silence.

[00:02:53] And that concludes our moment of silence. You may be seated. And how about a round of applause for our students from Sanston Elementary School. And we'll be making our way to the audience as well to join you as we watch students from Fairfield Middle School perform.

[00:03:23] All right. Good evening, Madam Chair.

[00:03:39] Thank you. Members of the board, Dr. Cashwell, colleagues and guests. My name is Christopher Mosley. I am the Education Specialist for Performing Arts. It is my pleasure to introduce for our performance highlight this evening the Fairfield Middle School Select Ensemble under the direction of Mr. Zachary Fortune.

[00:03:58] Mr. Fortune is a third year teacher with us, and he's been doing an excellent job working with these students in chorus and drama. The students will perform two selections, J'étends les moulins, had to practice that one, and we have a soloist, Ms. Amir Maupin, who will sing Lift Every Voice and Sing.

[00:04:21] Tonight, we have in attendance their proud principal, Ms. Gina Jones, and assistant principal, Ms. Pam Parker. Please stand so we can recognize you. All right, and now help me welcome

[00:04:36] the wonderful students of Fairfield Middle School.

[00:09:02] - Students and their director, that outstanding performance. Our next items are going to be a series of recognition, so we're gonna transition back to the podium.

[00:09:31] - Good evening, Chair Atkins, members of the board, and Dr. Cashwell. I am Tracy Weston, the Director of Professional Learning and Leadership. This evening, I am proud to announce the Henrico winners of the REB Awards for Teaching Excellence. Established in 1988, the REB Awards for Teaching Excellence recognized public school teachers who distinguished themselves by their inspiring classroom performance.

[00:09:56] The program is based on the belief that a positive educational experience at the elementary, middle, and high school levels helps children form strong, lifelong learning habits. Through a nomination process, teachers representing Chesterfield, Hanover, Henrico, and Richmond City are selected to receive cash grants to support professional learning activities.

[00:10:20] The grants provide opportunities for recipients to pursue adventures of a lifetime where they can collect real-life experiences, stories, and artifacts that renew their passion for teaching and enhance their ability to bring subject matter to life for their students. This year, the Community Foundation

recognized nine teachers from Henrico County, four grant recipients, and five finalists. Three grant recipients are with us this evening.

[00:10:50] Please join me in congratulating each as their names are called and they come forward. Andrew Givens, entrepreneurship teacher at the Advanced Career Education Center at Harmonage. Andy will receive \$12,500 to examine how Young Enterprise Scheme Program in New Zealand supports students from diverse ethnic, economic, and regional backgrounds as they earn entrepreneurial skills and plan community businesses.

[00:11:25] Andrew's principal is Dale King. Amanda Kinsler, Innovative Learning Coach at Tuckahoe Middle School. Amanda will receive \$12,400 to visit Scandinavian schools and learn how they create a culture of student success and teacher happiness by emphasizing student ownership, project-based learning, and innovation.

[00:11:57] Amanda's principal is Anne Green. Chad Lowe, History Teacher at the Academy at Virginia Randolph. Chad will receive \$15,000 to travel to major U.S. and European cities to research governmental differences and observe various instructional approaches to successful inner-city schools.

[00:12:26] Chad's principal is Dr. Eric Armbruster. James Dorton, history teacher at Tucker High School, could not be with us this evening, but I would like to recognize his accomplishment in receiving \$10,500 dollars to travel to England and Austria and research the life, career, and death of his great uncle at B-17 pilot killed in World War II. In addition to the grant recipients, five Henrico teachers were recognized as finalists for the REB awards and each will receive a check for

[00:13:03] \$1,000 from the Community Foundation. Our finalists are not with us tonight, but we would like to Recognize them for this honor. Stacey Daub, fourth grade teacher at Colonial Trail Elementary. Beth Wagner, teacher fellow at Laburnum Elementary.

[00:13:19] Shari West, kindergarten teacher at Tuckahoe Elementary. Megan Goulden, physical education teacher at Ward Elementary. And Amanda Green, fifth grade teacher at Greenwood Elementary. Thank you and congratulations to all our REB winners.

[00:13:53] - Madam Chair, unfortunately our spelling bee district champion could not be with us this evening. So we'll be moving on to our final two recognitions for the evening, which celebrate our school board and school board clerks. So if we could ask the school board members and school board clerk to join us at the front of the dais, please.

[00:14:17] While they're making their way down, I would note that February is National School Board Appreciation and School Board Clerk Appreciation Month. At the seats of our school board members are tokens of appreciation from our students at the ACE centers and Career and Technical Education.

[00:14:36] They created these lovely clocks with the Pocahontas symbol from the school division logo. Also, our school board members received Heart of Henrico ball caps at their seats. In addition to these tokens of appreciation, I'd like to share the governor's proclamation in your honor.

[00:14:55] Whereas school board members are elected to represent the interests of students, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders, and whereas school boards play a vital role in ensuring that students across the commonwealth have access to high quality rigorous education and are best positioned to uphold educational excellence in virginia schools and whereas school boards are the governing bodies

responsible for the oversight success and effectiveness of school systems across the commonwealth and whereas local school board members work with parents businesses education professionals and other community members to create a shared vision of success for students and

[00:15:34] whereas you do a lot of work whereas these decisions affect the present and future lives of children and chart a path to prepare all students to be competitive in local state national and global 21st century knowledge economy and whereas school board appreciation month acknowledges the contributions dedication and service of Virginia's local school boards now therefore I I, Glenn Youngkin, do hereby recognize April 2024 as School Board Appreciation Month in our Commonwealth of Virginia, and I call this observance to the attention of all citizens.

[00:16:12] Madam Chair and members of the board, we're grateful for your commitment, your careful consideration of key issues and policies, and your service to our students, families, and staff of Henrico County Public Schools. Yours is often a thankless job, But tonight, we offer you our heartfelt thanks for all you do to strengthen our schools and community.

[00:16:40] Similarly, we would like to acknowledge and thank Ms. Tiffany Burton, clerk of the school board, for her support of the board, her school leadership support, and all she does for our community. At her seat are flowers from the school board.

[00:16:56] Tiffany, during school board clerk appreciation week and school board appreciation clerk month. We appreciate you these days, but every day also. We value you and are grateful for your attention to detail and your organizational skills. Thank you so much for your professionalism

[00:17:13] and your support of the school board. All by yourself. And so, Ms. Burton, on behalf of the school board, I have a few brief remarks for you. It's our pleasure to celebrate you on this day. And while many of us affectionately refer to you as Tiffany, allow me to utilize your initial

[00:17:53] letters of your name to articulate our gratitude. T, tenacious in your dedication to our mission. I, inspiring countless individuals through your actions. F, fearless. In the face of challenges, you remain steadfast. F, fostering an atmosphere of joy and camaraderie, especially with your smile.

[00:18:22] A, ambitious in your pursuit of excellence. N, nurturing the growth and success of all of those around you. And Y, you epitomize some of the best qualities of leadership. Thank you sincerely for your commitment to the school board, HCPS staff, and our school communities. Thank you.

[00:18:44] All right. And the next item following our recognitions is always our Henrico highlight, a time when we showcase the incredible teaching, learning and innovation that's happening all across Henrico County.

[00:19:10] Students from, oh, the Ray Tate Award. I apologize. I knew the spelling bee wasn't here. I was thinking that was the last one. We have one more important recognition and then I already teed up that Henrico highlight. Thank you, Dr. Cashwell. Madam Chair, members of the board, Dr. Cashwell, colleagues and guests, as we know, February is CTE month, and it's only fitting that we would recognize the Ray Tate award winner as part of the CTE month celebration.

[00:19:43] This year, we have a lot to celebrate, starting with our CTE four-year completion rate of 99.76% to our newly renovated ACE Centers and our new addition at Herbinage ACE Center. The Ray Tate

Memorial Award is given each year to a community member who has gone above and beyond to not only serving their students, but also promoting career and technical education.

[00:20:09] I had the privilege of working with Mr. Tate for many years. He served as the chair of our CTE Advisory Council. He was actually on the original Henrico Education Foundation board and also served as a state CTE Advisory Council on the state CTE Advisory Council.

[00:20:28] He always advocated for students, making sure they had what they need to be prepared for the workplace of the future. He was never bashful when it came to speaking up and promoting CTE, but he also expected dedication and commitment of the individuals that were responsible for getting the work done.

[00:20:49] I know if he were here, he would be praising Henrico Schools for the great work that has been done over the past several years to support career and technical education. but he would also be encouraging us to reach for that next rung of the ladder and not be content with where we are. For this and many other reasons, we consider the Ray Tate Award as the highest honor our Workforce and Career Development Department can give to an individual. I would like to ask

[00:21:19] this year's winner to come forward, Mr. Jeff Lewis. I've got to say a little bit about Jeff because it would be unfair if I didn't because he talks about me all the time.

[00:21:46] Jeff truly has exemplified the same drive that Ray Tate had in providing students with opportunities and promoting in Ryko County and career and technical education. I can hardly believe that it was just a little over two years ago that I met Jeff and he continues to push us to reach for that next rung.

[00:22:09] A year ago, he helped to bring a team of professionals together that would install 261 sprinkler heads in the Regency Mall project. And I must say, he and the American Fire and Sprinkler Association had everything donated.

[00:22:25] He's been instrumental in providing a career fair for our students that last year provided an opportunity for over 200 high school students to find out careers that they didn't even know existed yet. And by the way, our next career fair is next Tuesday, again, sponsored by the American Fire and Sprinkler Association.

[00:22:44] He has arranged for our students to be a part of a summer experience where we will be installing a sprinkler system in the house that we're currently constructing. Now, this will be a state-of-the-art move for our students because there's not many residential homes that have a sprinkler system built into it.

[00:23:03] But you can bet that in the future, this probably will be the code as we look forward. This cutting edge is not only for our students, but for the community. And most recently, he's been instrumental in helping us rethink and design a future program that we will be offering at the ACE at Virginia Randolph next year in fire sprinkler protection, a fire sprinkler protection program.

[00:23:29] It's a matter of fact, and I have to end with this, that when I asked Jeff to be here tonight to promote CTE, he said, sure, I'm coming from Maryland. What time do you need me? This attitude is what makes Jeff Lewis the perfect candidate for the Ray Tate Memorial Award.

[00:23:50] Thank you so much. Congratulations again to all who have been honored in our recognition portion this evening.

[00:24:05] And now, we are ready for our Henrico Highlight. For our feature this time, students from Henrico and Highland Springs High Schools recently attended a college and career fair hosted by local chapters of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity in partnership with St. Paul's Baptist Church.

[00:24:24] Representatives from historically black colleges and universities in southern and eastern states were on hand to discuss course offerings, financial aid, admission requirements, and campus life. They were also there to share their own experiences and pathways into their careers.

[00:24:40] Pay close attention to this video because you may see a familiar face. We had our second annual HBCU College and Career Fair.

[00:24:58] Basically wanted to feature historical black colleges and our fraternity brothers representing career pathways. It's all about uplift for young people, giving them ideas in terms of what they can become. It is important because students need to know that not only is college important, and also apprenticeship program.

[00:25:19] Because every young man or young lady is not going to go to college, but they must prepare for their future. We have close to 60 of our brothers who are representing about 18 career pathways to talk with students.

[00:25:36] Our first one was here at Henrico. I spent five years here. When I came here I had a little bit of hair. I lost my head along the way.

[00:25:52] When you become a part of fraternity, it is certainly for life. I went to Virginia Union University. In a couple years, I've been an Omega man for 50 years. But what was part of the appeal was our cardinal principles of manhood, scholarship, perseverance, and uplift.

[00:26:09] It's just that we give back to the community. We really want young people to prepare for their future. That's why we included our brothers so they can tell the story as to why they selected This particular career pathway, what were some of the benefits, what are some of the challenges, what was the preparation to get ready for that.

[00:26:29] And they just told their story so they can dream themselves in terms of becoming this. And on behalf of the students in our school communities, I want to thank the brothers of the Phi Phi Chapter and Upsilon New Chapter of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity for their leadership and organization of this event.

[00:26:48] It was a wonderful experience for our students. And speaking of fulfilling experiences, tonight's Heart of Henrico segment takes a center court at Tuckahoe Middle School, where students of all abilities came together as part of the school's unified basketball team.

[00:27:07] ESPN recently honored the school as the first unified banner school to celebrate its inclusive and encouraging culture. Take a look.

[00:28:25] So, without a doubt, the heart of Henrico is beating strong at Tuckahoe Middle School.

[00:29:39] That video also highlights many of the attributes of our Henrico learner profile as students demonstrated their character and communication and collaboration skills. Madam Chair, that concludes the highlight portion. Thank you, Dr. Cashwell.

[00:29:54] We will now move forward with the reading of Henrico County Public Schools' mission statement. Mrs. Kinsella. Thank you, Chair Atkins. Henrico County Public Schools, an innovative leader in

educational excellence, will actively engage our students in diverse educational, social, and civic learning experiences that inspire and empower them to become contributing citizens.

[00:30:19] Thank you, Mrs. Concello, for that. The next item on the agenda is the public forum. This is the time when citizens are invited to address the school board on any matter of concern about the school division. Citizens have signed up in advance and will be given three minutes to address the school board.

[00:30:40] Speakers will be called to speak in the order in which they signed up and may not relinquish their spot to someone else. We ask that each speaker come to the microphone and clearly state your name and school affiliation, if applicable, and the subject of your remarks before speaking.

[00:31:01] After stating your name, please place the number you were given in the cart near the podium. Speakers must present their remarks to the school board, not the audience, and may provide copies of their comments to the school board clerk.

[00:31:18] The use of obscenity or defamation is strictly prohibited and will be ruled out of order. To assist you in tracking your time, there is a timekeeping system displaying the elapsed time on the screen.

[00:31:35] Speakers will also receive a notice from me when the time has expired. The school board is here today to hear from you. We will not be responding to speakers' concerns or questions during public forum. However, a Henrico staff member will follow up with speakers.

[00:31:53] Stakeholders have had the opportunity to provide written comments through an online form in advance of the meeting. Those comments are shared with school board members prior to the meeting and posted in board docs.

[00:32:09] Equal consideration and attention will be given to both written and in-person comments. To the contributors of written commentary and speakers assembled here today, thank you in advance for your participation. Your presence, your expertise, your concerns, and acknowledgement of progress and engagement enhance our understanding of our community's diverse perspectives.

[00:32:34] Your time and energy today demonstrate a commitment to the well-being and success of our school communities. We know your voices are crucial in shaping the direction of Henrico County Public Schools, and your input helps us in our decision-making process.

[00:32:53] Once again, thank you. - We will begin with speaker number one. Please proceed to the microphone, speaker number one.

[00:33:18] On this side over here. - My name is Andrea Leggett, and I'm a parent of first grade twins at Pemberton Elementary School, and I'm addressing the board to talk about hiring equity.

[00:33:38] So I'm gonna say a few different things and try to braid them together. My kids are multiracial and they're very observant, and Pemberton Elementary School is a lovely school that has no male teachers, which my son is always pointing out, and no black teachers, no teachers of color. There are staff of color, but very few.

[00:33:55] And my kids are always asking me about that, and I don't have an answer. And I realize that my experience is not everyone's, but it is something that I'm held accountable to by my very, very stubborn children. The second thing I wanna address, or the second thing I wanna say in relation to that, I run a business where I teach adults how to have better relationships with children, and I have a partner who is in the business with me.

[00:34:17] He is a black man who applied for a position Cuyacusun Middle School and went all the way really close to getting hired and he was informed at the last minute after references and everything that he wouldn't be hired because of a misdemeanor that was almost five years ago and so he contacted several people and finally got the answer that he should wait until it's been five years and this gentleman has been working at a private day school that's funded in part to see it by CSA funds through Henrico County Public Schools and actually one of his references was from the parent of a Henrico County student, so we know that he's more than qualified to work with our students. For those of you who don't know what a private

[00:34:55] day setting is, it's an alternative school where children from Henrico County and other locality schools are no longer able to be served in the public setting, so they're placed in a smaller private environment. Young black boys are very much overrepresented in our schools, in our private day schools, and black male staff are underrepresented, and so The questions I have is as we're, or I guess the concern I have is as we're moving toward being more diverse and trying to really embrace letting everyone feel like they belong in our school system, what policies or work groups are there in place to address hiring equity?

[00:35:28] We know that there is implicit bias that begins in preschool, especially when it comes to young black boys, and that follows them all the way up into all the systems that they participate in, and this means that they're more likely to be targeted by the criminal justice system. So when we're talking about hiring, is there anything in place or are there any efforts to make that playing field more even knowing what we know about the likelihood that a young black man who wants to be an educator might have a criminal background for something that I could have done and maybe would not have been in trouble for?

[00:35:56] And that's all I have. Thank you. Thank you. Speaker number two.

[00:36:11] Speaker number two. Speaker number three. Sorry.

[00:36:34] Apparently I have a shadow. My name is Amberlynn Ruth. I have a child at Johnson Elementary School in fourth grade. I would like to discuss the policies of bullying and harassment within at least that school that we've been witness to.

[00:36:57] I have a nine-year-old child that attends Johnson Elementary School. I've had reports from teacher and staff that say my child is so sweet and quick to help others, which is a child that I and his father have raised him to be. Since the beginning of the year, my child has been a target to bullying.

[00:37:13] there's this one specific child who seems to be at the root of all of it. It started off small, name calling, nitpicking at his clothes, making fun of his hair and his teeth, until it started to get physical. Recess and gym were the places this child would physically assault my son.

[00:37:30] Pushing, tripping, hitting and kicking. On 11:30, I got a parent square message from the gym coach saying that my child punched the student in the eye. Turns out he had had enough. On 12:01, I went to the school An admin was unaware of the situation that had happened the day prior.

[00:37:47] I fully supported my child being suspended for his actions as I am a firm believer that hitting somebody should result in the appropriate consequences. All was quiet until I received a call on January 26th stating that there was a physical altercation between my child and two other students.

[00:38:03] Turns out that it was admin jargon for my child being jumped by two other students in the boys' bathroom. One pushed him down and kept him there while the other punched and kicked my child

in his head. arms back and God knows where else. I didn't receive a call until the investigation was complete.

[00:38:19] Their father was never notified and had I not filled him in, he would have never known even though it was his day. Their dad and I had a meeting on the school on January 30th to discuss the issues at hand and we ultimately decided to change his class because the administration was not willing to do anything. The aggressors were never suspended, not even in school suspension.

[00:38:36] My child was forced to sit with his attackers and expected to act as though all is fine and well. After switching his class to ensure my child's safety, he still doesn't feel safe at school because this child now rides his bus. And the first inkling from the school was to suggest that they walk four blocks down Staples Mill from their dad's house to mine.

[00:38:53] And now looking at the other child's comments about sitting in the back of the bus, admin was quick to tell me that this child would be in the back of the bus and my child would have to be in the front, further isolating him from his friends. So my question to Henrico County Schools is that if my child was a girl, would we have taken it so lightly?

[00:39:11] the boys will be boys toxic mindset has got to stop this has to stop the president the precedent that the school has set for these young impressionable children is that they can attack someone premeditated and maliciously with zero true consequences to their actions and instead henrico county might as well be blaming my child for being the victim and punishing him over and over instead of the two children that quite literally jumped my child in the bathroom i hope that after today you have a long meeting with the administration of john

[00:39:42] Thank you. Thank you. Number four. My name is Tiffany Sweetser. I am the parent of a child enrolled at Deep Run High School, and I am here tonight to address the school board with my serious

[00:40:17] concerns regarding Catherine Masala's employment with HCPS, despite her breach of HCPS policy. I did receive the update yesterday that she will not be returning to Deep Run, as well as the acknowledgement that her remarks contradicted guidance provided to all high school history departments, yet she remains employed by the county. This is unacceptable. Last year, my child was a student of Catherine Masala's, and it is important that the school board know that the recorded speech she gave to the class is not an isolated incident, and that this behavior was not a result of the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks.

[00:40:51] She regularly took time away from teaching world history to share her personal beliefs with the class. These were not discussions or debates where differing views were encouraged and shared. These were speeches where she, the person in a position of authority, lectured the students. This left those who disagreed, including my child, with the clear understanding that speaking up could negatively impact their grade as well as their good standing with her.

[00:41:15] HCPS policy clearly states that teaching personnel should exert their most conscientious efforts to present facts objectively and impartially. It also states that the employee may not engage in any activity for political purposes during school hours or on school property. During the 12-minute recording published by the Washington Examiner, we clearly hear Catherine Masala not only espousing her political beliefs, but calling for the students to join her in becoming activists, supporting her causes with no other information to consider.

[00:41:43] This is indoctrination, pure and simple, and HCPS has yet to acknowledge how dangerous this behavior is, especially in a classroom with young, impressionable students, without the knowledge of the school or the parent. And again, I know for a fact that this is not a one-time occurrence as do other parents. While I am happy that she is not returning to Deep Run, this is not enough. If you allow Catherine Masala to enter another classroom or remain anywhere in this HCPS system, you are putting other students at risk of the same indoctrination. Teachers are role models to our children. Allowing a teacher to flout policy sets an example to students that the rules do not matter. And what does flagrant disregard of policy

[00:42:20] communicate to other teachers? And more importantly, where was the oversight from doctor fellows that would have saved these children from losing important learning time our students need and deserve better than that they deserve a dedicated and disciplined role model who will respect school policy teachers that teach the subject matter and teach them how to think and not what to think i would ask the school board take notice of the severity of the situation and that katherine masala be required to leave the school board system or the school system thank

[00:42:50] you. Thank you. Number five. Good evening. My name is Colonel Neal Thompson. I'm following up on number four. In fact, you took half my speech at the best part of it. The radicalization of this teacher involved is beyond belief that this got through the Henrico County process. Hamas is a

[00:43:28] symbol of violence. If you go back and read in the Bible, when we talk about Noah and the flood, they use the term Hamas, which means bad things. So this is unacceptable that this could get through the extreme culture we seem to have developed for the diversity, equity, and inclusion, which is probably why we have the teachers that we have to diversify, but not to teach.

[00:44:05] When you read the outline that this teacher had, it's obvious that she's been radicalized herself, which is tragic and probably should have been caught by some process before hiring. This radicalization that we have with so many different destructions of the common good, is not good for the county. It's not good for the country. This leads to tribalization.

[00:44:33] Tribalization is just, the country cannot survive that. A nation's greatness comes from unity. Remember, our national motto is e pluribus unum, one for many. There's no reason we cannot have diversification, but still all go for the same goals and objectives. In the military, one nice thing about the military we don't have any pronouns so you go by rank and a sergeant is male female black white whatever we learn to work together we have to work together because if you

[00:45:11] don't work together you get people killed so it's very important that we do this in this country and learn to work together subject some of our own personal preferences for the good of the nation so my purpose is to talk to you about let's try to have more things that are that we are dealing with that talk about national good. You've certainly pointed at all the bad things that we've done, but we have not focused on the good. The people come to this country for that opportunity. Although I noticed a lot of the people that come to this country now, when you

[00:45:45] ask them what they come for, they mention the word money. My experience in dealing with government agencies, one of the things that we have in spy world is what they call walk-ins. Walk-ins are the most valuable spies you can have. There are people that are willing to give up their life to come to this country. They're willing to sacrifice everything to come here. These agencies no longer have walk-ins. Nobody in the world now feels that this is the greatest country. Thank you.

[00:46:21] Thank you. Number six. Good evening. My name is Phil Bonney. I'm also going to be speaking like four and five. My name is Phil Bonney. I'm not a Democrat. I'm not a Republican. I'm an American. I am a husband, a father of two, a Henrico taxpayer, and an honorably discharged medically retired Marine Corps veteran who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. After my service, I was

[00:47:01] employed by the DOD and the State Department in various war zones around the world in an intelligence gathering capacity. You would be hard-pressed to find an American who has spent more time outside of the USA cleaning sand out of crevices than myself. You would be hard-pressed to find someone who has sacrificed more for this country and made it home. In today's geopolitical arena and climate, there are feelings and emotions that are being portrayed as facts. There are lies and falsehoods that are being regurgitated with zeal, vigor, and with force. Unfortunately, today,

[00:47:39] it seems that the more evil and repugnant the lie and the louder the voice, it gives more credibility to the falsehoods and the half-truths in order to demonize and villainize certain people and countries. Bullets are power. Bombs are power. Words are power. Carefully spoken, meaningful and articulated words and lies have more power and have further recent consequences than either bullets and bombs because words cannot be stopped. Words filled with hate and lies quickly change into shared ideas. With these ideas, there are emotions and feelings which turn into prejudice

[00:48:14] and policies which manifest into bloodshed, violence, and accepted hate. The Holocaust of the Jews in World War II did not start in the 1940s, but started with an idea, a belief, and a series of carefully crafted speeches in the 1920s, demonizing and blaming them. When you demonize a race of religion with lies and have truths, there's only one outcome which you're hoping for, hate.

[00:48:41] At this point, you're no longer objective. You're no longer a teacher. You are an activist with an agenda who no longer commands the trust of the students in the community of which they served. You have now betrayed the children and accosted them, inflicting harm like a predator. Today I stand before you as a concerned father and a concerned member of this community and a concerned American about where you are headed as a society. Who is there to protect the students that don't agree with her thoughts? Who is there to protest against the inaccuracies and the lies? What about the Jewish students who wake up every morning wondering if they're going to be attacked for being Jewish, especially after a trust teacher who is supposed to protect them is the one leading

[00:49:19] the charge. She failed as a teacher, a shaper of young minds, and as a human being. Holding students hostage while a teacher spouts for 12 minutes anti-Israel, anti-American, Hamas talking points is something I never thought I would witness. By continuing to allow her platform of hate to persist in front of our children's oppressional minds in any capacity within the Henrico County Public Schools, which my tax tellers pay for, is nothing short of a colossal failure,

[00:49:43] and our children deserve better. Thank you. Thank you. Number six. Number seven. May it please the board. I'm John Lucas. I'm a graduate of West Point and a veteran of infantry combat.

[00:50:21] I also enjoyed a 46-year legal career with 30 of those years at Huntington & Williams. I mention this only because it provides my perspective on the issue I wish to address. like the recent speakers, the recent pro-Hamas teaching at Deep Run High School.

[00:50:43] The teacher is no longer at Deep Run, but the incident must still be addressed because this is not just a Deep Run problem. It cannot be solved with just a personnel transfer. The teaching was

unacceptable, not just because it was immoral, although it was, but also because it was an intentional violation of your policies.

[00:51:09] These policies permit teaching about controversial topics, but only subject to specific guidelines. Among others, Policy Statement 8050 commands that such discussions in class shall not be influenced by personal feelings or opinions.

[00:51:32] This teacher ignored that requirement. The same policy requires that students must be provided with credible information that represents, quote, multiple and diverse perspectives. I hasten to add that there can be no valid comparison of Israel's counteroffensive with the with the horrors of October 7.

[00:51:56] In assessing the policy's credibility requirement, consider just this one falsehood. This teacher told her students that Hamas' only weapons were those it got from Israel, not from Iran, from Israel.

[00:52:16] That was a knowing misrepresentation. She falsely told her students that Israel committed war crimes because it bombed hospitals. She did not mention that under international law, hospitals lost their protected status when they were used as military headquarters and storage sites.

[00:52:40] She also did not inform her students that Hamas' strategy is to intentionally increase civilian casualties among their own people by, for example, putting military facilities in hospitals. It does this to generate outrage against Israel over the civilian casualties that inevitably will occur.

[00:53:02] She made no mention of the subhuman atrocities perpetrated by those she calls resistance fighters, multiple rapes, necrophilia, mothers and children roasted alive, or other subhuman atrocities. I will ask.

[00:53:23] May I have a few additional seconds in view of the interruption to wrap up? a couple of sentences. Thank you. No, please pause. I will ask for everyone in this moment to please pause. It is important that we have order, respect, civility. I may call a recess or you may be asked to leave. If you fail to comply with these rules for the public comment

[00:54:01] period, I will be asking my colleagues for their support to suspend public comment policy and any citizen comment, period. This is not something that we want to do, but it is important that everyone is heard.

[00:54:19] Not asking you to like it, love it, but I'm asking for you to be respectful. You have a few additional seconds, as I know I interrupted you. Thank you, Madam Chair. I am hopeful that we will abide by this.

[00:54:37] Thank you. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt. You have a few seconds. Thank you. Please continue. I will just close by saying, Attempting to recruit children to support those who do these things is a pure evil that cannot be tolerated. This cannot be swept under the rug and dealt with as a problem solved.

[00:54:54] I respectfully submit that this board must act with strength and decisiveness to ensure that it never happens again at any school. And I thank the board for your kind attention. Thank you. Number eight.

[00:55:24] My name is Rachel Kulak. I'm a resident and taxpayer of Henrico County. One of my children graduated Deep Run High School last year, and I have a 7th and 11th grader.

[00:55:40] I'm here to discuss the situation with one of your current HCPS employees, a former Deep Run High School history teacher, Ms. Masala, who more than just contradicted guidance, she flouted policies set in place to avoid situations such as this.

[00:55:57] How is it that HCPS is comfortable having someone remain in a job paid for by our tax dollars who flouts the policies put in place to maintain impartial and ethical teaching practices and speaks fallaciously of the United States. For anyone who is unfamiliar with what occurred at the school, I have printed copies of the audio transcription. It would appear that this teacher ignored employee conduct policy, disregarded the policy on controversial subjects, and perhaps even the political activity policy. While she has currently been pulled from the classroom,

[00:56:34] you have chosen to keep this person employed with HCPS. We know from other families, as well as from some of Ms. Masala's colleagues who have shared that this is nothing new and is an ongoing problem. By allowing this teacher to violate policy and in such a way that violates trust with the community and keeping her on, what message are you sending to other teachers who think it worth violating appropriate policy measures?

[00:57:00] For the record, it is the United States that has signed Hamas as a foreign terrorist organization. Since 1997, by the way, part of the criteria to designate a foreign terrorist organization include that, quote, the terrorist activity or terrorism of the organization threatens the security of U.S. nationals or the national security of the United States.

[00:57:21] That is from the U.S. Department of State. To allow a teacher to speak in support of a terrorist organization is anti-American, and there is no place for that in a public school system. What this teacher did and said extends beyond the classroom and serves as a slap in the face to our soldiers and veterans who have fought and continue to fight terrorism, even to the point of losing their lives. One need look no further than the HCPS statement for how this district feels where it mentions that you do not condone her delivery, but you never condemn the anti-American

[00:57:57] sentiment wrapped up in propaganda. To keep this Hamas sympathizer in a job with the county schools, it sends a message to others that flouting policies will simply get you a different job position. What is to put off anyone else from breaking policies? As for the students, if they are internalizing the lies and manipulations she fed them, what is it that Deep Run and Henrico are doing to correct this?

[00:58:21] Heartbreaking to know that this administration is complicit in a teacher trying to mainstream a terrorist organization and speak lies about the United States of America. The problem is far from remedied. thank you thank you number nine good evening dr cashwell members of the board i'm speaking on a very different topic my name is elizabeth broda i'm a teacher and department chair at henrico high

[00:58:59] school i'm also a proud member of the hea and serve as co-chair of the collective bargaining committee and i'm here today to talk about maximizing the accuracy of our information i appreciate the time that all of you have taken to meet with me and other hea leaders over the last few months. I appreciate how seriously you're taking our concerns. I appreciate your thoughtfulness and genuine desire to work together to continue to improve the working conditions of all staff in Henrico County.

[00:59:25] And while meeting with members of the school board and some members of the Board of Supervisors, the discussion about contract negotiations and working conditions often falls back to a lingering concern about whether collective negotiations are actually wanted by staff members. County decision makers, rightfully so, want to be sure that they're acting in the best interest of the whole county, not just the wishes of a noisy few like me. This is why it's supremely important that we ask employees what they want, and I noticed that there were 29 pages of public comment today, nearly all of which focuses on support for collective bargaining. However, please know

[01:00:03] that that number of pages could be much higher. We've also collected over a thousand confirmed digital signatures of hdps staff showing support for collective bargaining through our authorization card process however please know that this number could also be much higher and our data isn't accurate because countless staff members are too scared to participate and i continue to have conversations with staff asking will my supervisor know that i signed this can i be fired for this how will this get me into trouble and i can reassure those who reach out to me and we can continue to push out that message on our end but we really need the county to do the same

[01:00:40] and if you truly want accurate information accurate data that we can use to guide this process in good faith it's time for the county to release a neutrality statement and the statement would acknowledge that the authorization resolution and negotiation process is carried out between employees and the school board and that one's employment at henrico county public schools would never be negatively impacted because of one's participation in this process it has to be a concise statement, it has to be clear, and a statement like this would allow staff to freely choose whether or not to participate in the process and would reassure employees that they are doing nothing wrong by advocating for improvement to working conditions in good

[01:01:18] faith. It's been argued that the county doesn't reaffirm other staff rights, so it would be inappropriate to affirm this one, but I would argue that I've received many county emails over the years just reminding me to exercise my right to vote, especially when there's a ballot measure impacting schools and our budget uh and this statement would be no different as a government teacher it was my great joy to have every single one of my seniors registered to vote in my classroom just last month now they can choose how they want to participate in our our country's democratic process and so now it's time for our staff to have a real protected choice if you want to know what

[01:01:54] they really need provide them with a safe neutral way to tell you without fear of reprisal thank you thank you number 10 good evening my name is martha cohen i live in enrico and my husband and i are strong public supporters of and um public school supporters and the recent incident at deep run high school has worried has us worried about the system there's an understanding between families and the administration and educators that teach our children we entrust our children

[01:02:34] to you for most of the year without our oversight to open the world of knowledge to them to empower them to ask questions and to learn to think critically. They learn to disagree, but not demonize, and that persuasion is the way to have others embrace your thoughts. There's an understanding that those in the public school system, in any capacity, are not going to use their platform and access to accuse America of supporting genocide. But that is what happened. We know this due to the courage of one student that recorded a teacher. Sadly, the father told the Washington Examiner he knew he could not bring the issue to the principal of Deep Run or any member of the school board because they would, quote, "bury it."

[01:03:11] Why did he feel this way? Yesterday we heard that the personnel issue was resolved and that she remains employed but is not returning to Deep Run. The communication said that the school division does not condone the manner in which her comments were delivered. Why is there no clear condemnation of her actions, the deliberate manipulation of those she has been entrusted with, and the lies that were spread?

[01:03:31] It is important to note that she never mentioned the more than 30 Americans that were slaughtered on 10-7 and those that are still being held hostage in Gaza, including a former Richmonder. How can the trust that has obviously been eroded with too many families in the school and in the community, how can that trust begin to be rebuilt while she is still part of the HCPS school system?

[01:03:53] To be clear, the United States designated Hamas as a foreign terrorist organization in 1997. The U.S. designated two of the current Hamas leadership in 2003 as specially designated global terrorists. Hamas is funded by Iran and Qatar. The goal of Iran's genocidal leadership is to destroy America.

[01:04:09] We're the great Satan. Currently, these Hamas leaders, the ones that the teacher referred to as a makeshift government, are running the war from Qatar, where they live as billionaires, partially financed by the humanitarian aid the world gives to help the Gazans. Questions that need to be answered: How can we have confidence that teachers are not using their platforms to influence their students in other Enrico classrooms?

[01:04:30] How many students have been affected with these untruths that will color their viewpoint into the future. How can we ameliorate the situation? What is the plan to develop new relationships of respect and trust between parents, administrators, and teachers? Considering all the lies that have been spread about the Jewish people's ties to the land of Israel, I must end with this.

[01:04:49] Jews are indigenous to the land of Israel. They are called Jews because they are from Judea. Thank you. Thank you, number E. Number 11. Number 11.

[01:05:09] Number 12. Yes, my name is Frank Callahan, and I'm here tonight representing the Henrico NAACP.

[01:05:27] And I want to start out by saying a real change of pace from everything. Thank you. I want to thank the school board members and also the school board administrators because for two years ago, Monica Hutchinson, L. Francis, and I came before you and asked you to help us do something with education because this was Black History Month.

[01:05:48] And for the last two years, we have been working very closely with you and the supervisors and our elected officials. And this past just two weeks ago, we did a pilot program at an elementary school, a junior high and a senior high in the Varina district that was very successful.

[01:06:06] In that, making it successful, we were able to get eight of our state legislators and Congressman Jennifer McCullen to do two-minute videotapes that will be shown to the students about what Black History Month means.

[01:06:22] On the local level, Alicia Adkins, you were there presenting one day for us with the students. And I must admit, 80 fifth graders that you handled for 45 minutes. Thank you. and also Dr. Mann did an excellent job coming in and speaking at one of our high schools and did an excellent job with our students and I could tell when she came in to speak the students were very anxious and very nervous but she told

them about her experiences and by the end of that meeting they all were very cheerful and happy because they saw a pathway that they could succeed in

[01:07:01] so all in all it was a very successful two days exercise. We're still not done and we're going to be expanding into this into next year and I must say that we did also meet with Angela Bennett who did a presentation and she is in charge of the county library system and the library system in this county is excellent not only for books but every month they pick a different cultural group or ethnic group and they actually put displays and workshops on it. And they do that every year for all the

[01:07:37] different groups. So in wrapping things up, I said the most heartfelt thing was the students that we met. I was a classroom teacher for almost 40 years in another state and it was very thrilling and very exciting to see what's going on within the school district. And that's why right now we do have some plaques that we would like to give to Alicia Atkins, Dr. Mann, and Dr. Grant, thanking you very much for what you did and what you continue to do. Thank you.

[01:08:16] Number 13. Thank you. Good evening, Madam Chair, members of the school board. My name is Charles Turner. I represent the Virginia Muslim Civic League, an organization that organizes and advocates on behalf of Muslims in the greater Richmond region. And I'm here this evening at the behest of parents and community members who are concerned for the well-being of Muslim students in Henrico County Public Schools, following the recent decision to remove Ms. Masaha from her

[01:08:51] classroom for speaking about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Palestine. Ms. Masaha spoke from a place of profound grief when she addressed her class about the unprecedented violence occurring in Palestine, and because of that, she was permanently removed from her classroom and from her students. In a letter sent out yesterday, the administration apologized for the pain and distress that students in the school community have experienced, and indeed, great pain and distress has resulted from this decision. The Deep Run High School Muslim Student Association has been left without a faculty sponsor. Muslim students will have to find a

[01:09:31] new place to pray because Ms. Masaha's classroom was their place of prayer prior to this decision. Muslim students have reported harassment since the very beginning of this process, things that many parents here tonight wish that their children didn't have to experience, things that Muslims and our community have experienced for decades, being associated with terrorism, being accused of not caring for innocent lives, being called anti-American.

[01:10:02] We were hoping that our children didn't have to experience this, and yet here we are. For example, I'll give you one example, and this is a concrete example, not an abstract example of someone who may have felt hurt. This is a concrete example of when Muslims have been discriminated against. So for example, the day that Ms. Masalha was put on administrative leave, a student taped a Trump sign to her door. And it read, I am sorry that your political incorrectness was an inconvenience for you. Now, someone might want to argue about the nature of that statement, but those of us here today who are Muslim and who have faced this discrimination before, we know what that means.

[01:10:42] One of the strategic goals of the school board reads to foster an inclusive and safe and supportive climate for all stakeholders. The parents and students deserve to know what is HCPS doing to build a truly inclusive climate in our schools? How does the administration determine what is acceptable self-expression and what is deemed disruptive and controversial? Whose grief is validated and whose grief will lead to disciplinary action? And finally, how can Henrico County residents know whether the

disciplinary process for Ms. Masalha was followed fairly with the due process and without undue pressure from advocacy organizations, such as those that distributed the

[01:11:19] student recording of Ms. Masalha to a politically slanted media outlet? This decision to expel Ms. from her classroom was created great anxiety for muslim students i hope the board will take seriously the task of rebuilding trust with our community and ensure that muslim students are able to express themselves as freely as everyone else thank you madam for the opportunity thank you

[01:11:38] number 14 number 14 number 15 hi my name is sean kasar i've been a resident of henrico county in

[01:12:25] the fairfield district for a few years now and i'm here today in support of miss masala and to speak against the decision to remove her from deep-run high school. I first off want to applaud Ms. Masaha for speaking so clearly on the horrific events unfolding in her familial home of Palestine.

[01:12:42] On America's complicity in Israel's long, well-documented occupation, segregation, and removal of Palestinians from their homeland. On the indiscriminate killing of civilians that has claimed the lives of nearly 30,000 innocent men, women, and children in Gaza as retribution for the killing of nearly 1,200 Israeli civilians in October, and finally on the total destruction of Gazan humanitarian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, which has unleashed famine, starvation, and preventable diseases on the almost 1.9 million refugees. All of these actions are internationally defined as human rights abuses and genocide. To avoid going through a crash course

[01:13:21] on the accuracy of her statement, which seems outside the consideration of your decision, let me just say nothing she said was untruthful I encourage each of you to continue to educate yourselves regarding the long violent colonial history of the Palestinian struggle for sovereignty but more than this I encourage you to reevaluate your decision in the context of Miss Masala's role as a historian and educator it's the duty of a good historian to speak about events in full giving background context no matter how uncomfortable it is to them or to their audience and I think as a teacher of the subject matter she embodied that

[01:13:55] beautifully. This is especially true for indigenous educators who teach about the destruction of their peoples and cultures in America's history. It is true for African-American educators detailing the inhuman conditions enslaved people endured in this country. It is true for Jewish educators who teach the atrocity of the Holocaust and the persecution of their people. And it is true for Ms. Masala as she teaches this generation of students about the ongoing genocide in Palestine.

[01:14:23] As educators, especially history teachers, it is vital to expose students to the unavoidable current events that they see on TV and the social media outside of school. This is true not only because our present day reflects the history they teach, but because it teaches students how to identify the systems and forces that cause and contextualize the events they read about in their textbooks.

[01:14:44] As a student during 9-11 and the height of the War on Terror, I experienced this firsthand and not always by teachers I agreed with. Nonetheless, I am thankful for the experience as it has helped me hone in the necessary tools to think critically about situations and it has deeply informed my ability to curate, examine and challenge my own personal beliefs.

[01:15:03] The removal of Ms. Masala, a teacher with the competency to principally share a diverse perspective on the historic moment with her students directly contradicts the goals and stated mission of

the district and represents an undeniable failure on your part as the stewards of the school system.

[01:15:21] I urge you to reconsider and to make the choice that best serves your students, providing an equitable and diverse education for all. - Thank you.

[01:15:38] Number 16, number 16.

[01:15:56] - My name is Athena Savoji, and I'm a senior at Deep Run High School. I would like to start by thanking you all for taking your time to listen to me, and thank you for this opportunity. I stand before you today to discuss the consequential effects from the situation surrounding Ms. Misalha, which has impacted numerous students, several of whom are among us now.

[01:16:17] The news concerning Ms. Misalha spread rapidly, bringing out swift and, at times, aggressive reactions, notably within the student body of Deep Run. As a visibly Muslim student, who has, oh, sorry, who has openly advocated for Ms. Misalha, which, by the way, the petition that I created for her, got more than 1,000 signatures in four days.

[01:16:38] I have personally encountered individuals who have belittled my efforts, stating that I am wrong for thinking I can make a difference, unquote, unquote. The side I'm supporting is wrong, and I am just as bad as them. I have also been threatened and pushed around in hallways. These remarks barely touch upon the discouraging comments directed not only at me, but also at my peers following Ms. Misalha's investigation.

[01:17:04] While Ms. Misalha's investigation is more closely related to a certain school within the county, the news of her situation seemed to act as a trigger to release bottled up hate and create a barrier throughout our county, destroying our sense of community. Students deserve an educational environment without fear, where the expression of their opinions does not result in inspections or hate. It is imperative that students feel empowered to voice their perspectives without being uneasy. Regrettably, many students have a sense of disconnection from their faculty, scared that the words may expose them to similar investigations or hostility from others.

[01:17:41] Thus, it is an obligation of school administrators to create an environment where discrimination is condemned and students are assured of the availability of support during hard times. It is with sense of utmost necessity that we call for school administrators to remind their students that it is not okay to discriminate against people they don't agree with and that students' well-being is always prioritized and remind the student body of the multiple ways they can be supported in school.

[01:18:09] This calls for immediate action to be carried out in any shape or form because we aren't here to learn in fear, but learn to agree to disagree without consequences. Thank you.

[01:18:28] Number 17. Number 17. Good evening, members of the board, Madam Chair, Dr. Cashwell, My name is Nora Lesko and I am a social studies teacher at Godwin High School in the Tuckahoe District.

[01:19:00] Tonight I'll be discussing the importance of collective bargaining for HCPS employees. I come before you tonight to urge you to recognize that collective bargaining is not simply what HCPS employees want, but what we need. It's my understanding that many of you on the board have yourselves served as teachers before.

[01:19:17] This is good. In my opinion, a school board should be comprised of individuals who have first experience in the classroom. But how many of you? have experience driving a school bus? How many of

you know what it's like to be a member of our nutrition staff?

[01:19:33] How many of you know the unique challenges of serving as an ex-ed teacher? How many of you have been a school counselor guiding a student through a mental health crisis? How many of you have worked in the front office of one of our schools or as a school security officer?

[01:19:49] How many of you have had to perform the grueling and often thankless work of mopping and sanitizing our hallways, bathrooms, offices, and classrooms to make sure our students have learning environments that are clean and most importantly, safe. All these jobs come with their own unique challenges that many of us, even within education, don't understand.

[01:20:06] And so it is imperative that the people who perform all of these jobs have a seat at the table in order to advocate for themselves and for their working conditions. Tonight, I brought my notebook, gifted to me by one of my students last year. She and her parents took the time to decorate it with the words that the problem with history teachers is that they're always bringing up the past.

[01:20:28] So if you'll indulge me, I'm going to do that now. The history of the ban on collective bargaining for public sector workers in Virginia is rooted in the disenfranchisement of black workers. It is long overdue that we rectify this by allowing public sector workers a seat at the table in Henrico County, including teachers and all school employees and support staff.

[01:20:49] There is absolutely no reason that public sector workers should not enjoy the same rights as those in the private sector. We have had many positive policy changes in recent years, but all of this can be taken away without a contract. As HCPS employees, we should not have to rely on whether future administrations and school boards will see fit to allow us to keep these gains.

[01:21:07] We should be able to enshrine these gains in a contract so that the successes you have all made as a school board can be secured for future generations of educators and staff. On behalf of the growing number of employees at Godwin and in HCPS who desire a say in our contracts, I implore you to look to the many people who make the schools in this county function.

[01:21:26] I urge you to look at us as experts in our lines of work and as such as eager participants in the important responsibility of determining the terms of our employment contracts. As members of the school board, you are at a crossroads. By moving forward in the process towards collective bargaining for HCPS employees, you have the ability to make a historic step in in Ryko County.

[01:21:45] We stand not only to improve the livelihoods and working conditions of all HCPS employees, but to attract and retain talented educators and make HCPS one of the most appealing school systems and employers in our state. Let that be your legacy. - Thank you. - Thank you all very much. - Thank you.

[01:22:05] Number 18. - Good evening, my name is Anne Forrester. I am a Richmond Public Schools teacher and also the Vice President of the Richmond Education Association, as well as a member of the Virginia Caucus of Rank and File Educators.

[01:22:22] However, tonight I'm here as an individual to encourage you all to do what Richmond did and grant collective bargaining rights to your workers. As the last speaker alluded to this, the history of the ban on public sector bargaining stems from a court case in the 1970s, and the ruling against the workers in question led to the stifling of the voices and organizing efforts of the orderlies of UVA Hospital, who were almost entirely black women.

[01:22:50] Further, prior to the ban being repealed in 2020, Virginia was one of, I think, four states that doesn't allow public sector workers to collectively bargain their contracts, all of those states are in the South. In terms of the benefits of collective bargaining, I'm in the process of reaping those myself and enforcing our contract in Richmond, but there's the process of mutual accountability.

[01:23:14] It gives the workers and the employees a mechanism to hold an agreement accountable on all ends, and that goes both ways. Further, in terms of staff retention, we've seen our retention data improve. I know just from talking to my coworkers that having a contract that, you know, honors their planning time, is guaranteeing raises, specifically for some of our support staff, really monumental raises and huge cost of living and quality of life adjustments.

[01:23:46] You know, it really, it speaks for itself. Additionally, like, you know, the people that work with your students and do our jobs are the people who know those jobs and that work best. And so why not give them a seat at the table to hammer out an agreement that makes the most sense for them and the work that they do.

[01:24:03] In the process, they're gonna end up advocating for students due because that's what we do. None of us are in this for the money, obviously. And then lastly, I just wanna point out that the labor movement has been responsible for some of the greatest advancements for working people in this country, including the weekend, the 40-hour work week, and ending child labor.

[01:24:24] And so I think the question for this board is, Will they be an ally of the labor movement or a hindrance or even enemy to it? And I just want to close with a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. that I think speaks to both the need for workers' rights as well as the ongoing war in Gaza and the conflict that occurred at Deep Run High School.

[01:24:49] If peace means accepting second-class citizenship, I don't want it. If peace means keeping my mouth shut in the midst of injustice and evil, I don't want it. If peace means being complacently adjusted to a deadening status quo, I don't want it.

[01:25:05] If peace means a willingness to be exploited economically, dominated politically, humiliated and segregated, I don't want peace. In a passive nonviolent matter, we must revolt against this peace. Thank you. - Thank you.

[01:25:25] - Number 19, all right, number 19. - Hi, my name is Sarah Jamal.

[01:25:40] I'm a parent of three children at HCPS school in the Three Chop and Tuckahoe District. I have watched with dismay and astonishment at the response of the HCPS school division and the subsequent punishment meted out to Ms. Masala from Deep Run High School.

[01:25:56] I would request some clarity on the consistency or lack thereof in the application of HCPS rules and policies concerning the training of teachers on the curriculum and the repercussions for failing to adhere to it. How is the determination made regarding who receives a mere reprimand and who is subjected to heavy handedness in addition to the threats and vilification from other sources?

[01:26:19] My high schooler in one of her class was tasked with writing a few expository paragraphs on a controversial topic without any guidance on what topics are considered controversial. This has led me to ponder whether teachers provided any direction on what constitutes divisive concepts.

[01:26:36] Are we teaching our children to shy away from conversations about difficult or complicated topics? How does this reluctance to engage in discussions about issues that impact some Henrico County families align with cultural responsiveness? To what extent does this avoidance impede the integration of real-life experiences to enrich the curriculum?

[01:26:59] How is HCPS creating a school culture that fosters a sense of belonging for our marginalized Muslim students, avoiding the tendency to other them and their lived experiences, and encouraging them to confide interested individuals within the school community, particularly concerning instances of bullying and discrimination?

[01:27:21] In addition, what specific guidance was employed to police students, for example at Glen Island High School, on their right to express themselves and distribute flyers? Furthermore, how are we actively reaching out to immigrant communities that have, for a multitude of reasons, been excluded from the decision-making process at HCPS?

[01:27:40] For a school system that prides itself on a robust equity focus in its strategic vision, we are falling considerably short in acknowledging, addressing, and dismantling the structures that perpetuate some of these microaggressions within our school culture.

[01:27:56] Just to give you an example of a microaggression, the security at the desk and in this room told some people in our group that anyone with signs has to sit in the back rows. Yet, we have other individuals here in this building who were clearly not given the same instructions. It is imperative that we do better for our diverse student population, thereby ensuring that all students and staff feel not only safe, but also respected and valued. Oh, and I also support negotiating contracts with HCPS staff, and I stand in solidarity with educators. Thank you.

[01:28:28] Thank you. Number 20.

[01:28:51] Thank you to the board for this opportunity to speak. My name is Ark Masson, and I live a couple of miles down the street, right behind Highland Springs High School. I was raised by parents that have PhDs, and the importance of education was instilled in me early in my life.

[01:29:09] They were very particular about the sources of my education and put me in a school that would be conducive to a healthy worldview. I'm here to speak about the dismissal of Ms. Catherine Masala, a teacher of social studies at Deep Run High School.

[01:29:28] I'm upset with the Henrico County school system for taking a political position when the teacher in question did her job in a difficult political climate. What was her crime? She didn't threaten children with violence, and she didn't lie.

[01:29:45] She stayed within her lane and encouraged students to look at society thoughtfully, to question our government's actions, and to engage with their elected representatives, which is her job as a social studies teacher.

[01:30:04] The accusations against her of being anti-Semitic are as baseless as you accusing me of being, or as baseless of me accusing you of being homophobic because you disagree with my position. Systems of violence do not get to claim religious exemption.

[01:30:25] The accusations of terrorism are as substantial as calling Nelson Mandela a terrorist or calling Martin Luther King Jr. a terrorist. Calling a political party a terrorist organization is like calling the

Democrats terrorists for sponsoring a genocide.

[01:30:45] Now, I want all of y'all who came here from the West End to consider if they had to go through a checkpoint to enter Richmond City. And what if they had to exit through a checkpoint to get to eastern Henrico? That would be a system called apartheid, where freedom of movement is restricted.

[01:31:02] We've already experienced segregation in Virginia. And when these systems come back to Henrico, would these realities be ignored like the genocide in Gaza? Is that the position of the Henrico County School Board? Should we continue to ignore apartheid and segregation?

[01:31:25] This is why we need good teachers like Ms. Basalha to educate the children and ourselves. and the integrity of education must be honored thank you thank you this thank you for your comments this concludes our public forum dr cashwell the next item on the agenda is the

[01:32:02] approval of the recommended annual financial plan for fiscal year 2025 and our prior work session preceding this evening's monthly meeting the board received an overview as well as announcement related to compensation within our transportation ranks, we've, upon your approval, which I'm seeking this evening, it will now go to the Board of Supervisors for consideration, and we'll be again in the spring considering a final budget once we've had the opportunity to also include employee compensation. So seeking your approval. Thank you, Dr. Cashwell. Colleagues, the

[01:32:38] superintendent has recommended approval of the annual financial plan. Is there a motion? I move that the school board approve the fiscal year 2025 recommended annual financial plan as presented. Is there a second? Second. All in favor say aye. Aye. Aye. Any opposed? The ayes have it.

[01:32:59] The annual financial plan is approved. Dr. Cashwell? The next items are consent items and they can be taken in a block. Thank you, Dr. Cashwell. Colleagues, is there a motion? I move that the school board accept, adopt, approve, and or award items 10.01 through 10.09 on the consent agenda as presented. Is there a second? Second. All in favor say aye. Aye. Any opposed? The ayes

[01:33:35] have it. They have been awarded, granted, or approved. Dr. Cashflow. That concludes items from May. Thank you. The next item on our agenda is unfinished business. Colleagues, do we have any unfinished business. The next item on the agenda is new business, and we do have new business

[01:34:07] from Mrs. Kinsella and Mrs. Shea. Thank you, Chair Atkins. I'd like to begin this evening by bringing you highlights from our business advisory committee meeting. We last met February the 13th, and it was very exciting as the group finally got to gather instead of at Hermitage in the original Hermitage building, the Culinary Department for ACE, we got to gather in our new expanded ACE space at Hermitage.

[01:34:42] We spent the night talking about entrepreneurship and the current skills challenge that students have going on there. The group received a career rodeo update from January 23rd, which I've already presented here publicly.

[01:35:01] Just an update there though, in case anyone's wondering, it's the career rodeo is where our CTE students show what they know. Over 101 business partners participated, represented by 360 people.

[01:35:20] We had 480 seniors participate in the event, demonstrating what they know. Over 59, about 593 resumes were handed out and at least 10 students were hired on the spot. Now the students are practicing their interviewing skills for our Career Signing Day event on April the 24th, 2024.

[01:35:46] And that sums up the career, and then Dr. Cashwell, if we may, yesterday the board had the pleasure of celebrating our expansion and renovation at Highland Springs High School ACE. And then on February 27th, next week, the board will have the pleasure of celebrating the brand new space at ACE Hermitage.

[01:36:08] So if in March, please, could the board please have a Henrico highlight so that we can share it with the community? - We'll certainly look for ways to exude our excitement about both new ACE centers. And I think we've captured some photographs and footage of the ceremony at Highland Springs and we'll do the same at Hermitage.

[01:36:30] - Fantastic, so far it was a well-spent, if I may say a well-spent \$53 million that will benefit our students for years to come. And then next this evening is a brief update highlighting the last Student Advisory Committee, Superintendent Student Advisory Committee meeting.

[01:36:48] We last met February 1st and this was a virtual meeting which proved to be more official for the students, that way they didn't have to travel, though we do appreciate meeting in person too, to have dialogue in person. The students gave valuable feedback on the strategic plan.

[01:37:08] As you may or may not know, we're approaching destination 2025, the end of our current strategic plan and beginning work on our next one. So the students gave valuable insight to that. And then lastly, our next meeting is April the 29th, and the topic for the students to consider will be the Student Code of Conduct.

[01:37:29] Madam Chair, that's all I have. - Thank you, Ms. Isha. - Thank you. Just a brief update on two committees since we've run long this evening. First, the Gifted Education Advisory Committee. Just really pleased to share that our middle school referrals have more than doubled this year.

[01:37:45] We've also seen a significant increase in gifted referrals for our English as a Second Language learner students as well as students in our Title I schools. So, a lot of the efforts in really digging into trying to identify all students who may meet gifted criteria. They're really paying off in spades. Additionally, there's a Rubik's Cube competition on Thursday, March 21st, and so I'm sure they're looking for more judges and proctors if anyone is interested in helping with that and then the last update i want to give is about code rva regional high school

[01:38:24] so code rva has signed on as the first lab school in the state and so i wanted to provide some brief context about what that means since there's a lot of misinformation going out around that so this does not change the governance model of code rva it is still going to be governed by the 15 school divisions that send their students to CodeRBA, Henrico being one of them. Each school division sends one school board member. I have the honor of representing Henrico and also serving as the chair of that collective regional board for CodeRBA. Dr. Cashwell heads up the superintendent

[01:39:00] advisory group as well. Basically, CodeRBA has been in a unique position without access to funding from the state, unlike the governor's school that has some direct funds from the state or localities that get funds from the state, the way the funding model for Code RBA was set up, they did not have access to funds for the state.

[01:39:21] So this is a way to try to tap in and leverage some funds. It will also increase access to the VCU teacher pipeline with a teacher residency program. Additionally, any Code RBA students that meet the admission criteria will be guaranteed admission to VCU as undergraduates and you know furthermore it

will allow additional training for teachers in computer science integration to be able to serve in different parts of the state and that is all from me madam chair thank you mrs shea and the last item on our agenda is the

[01:39:58] announcement of the meeting dates the school board's next meeting will be a work session scheduled on Thursday, March 14th at 3 p.m. at Newbridge Learning Center Auditorium. This meeting time may be adjusted as needed. This meeting is adjourned.



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