

The work session meeting of the Petersburg City Council was held on Tuesday, April 23, 2025, at the Petersburg Public Library. Mayor Parham called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m. The meeting video link is <https://petersburgva.new.swagit.com/videos/341019>

1. ROLL CALL:

Present:

Samuel Parham, Mayor – Ward 3
Darrin Hill, Vice Mayor – Ward 2
Marlow Jones, Councilor – Ward 1
Charles Cuthbert, Jr., Councilor – Ward 4
W. Howard Myers, Councilor – Ward 5
Annette Smith-Lee, Councilor – Ward 6
Arnold Westbrook, Jr., Councilor – Ward 7

Absent:

Present from Petersburg City Public Schools Board:

Adrian Dance, Sr. – Ward 7
Taccarri Tucker – Ward 4
Bernard Lundy – Ward 6
Steven Pierce – Ward 1
Kenneth Pritchett – Ward 3

Absent:

Hal Miles, Sr. – Ward 2
Joyce Proctor – Ward 5

Present from City Council Administration:

City Manager John “March” Altman, Jr.
City Attorney Anthony C. Williams
City Clerk Tangi R. Hill

Present from Petersburg City Public Schools Administration:

Yolonda Brown, Superintendent
Paul W. Brown, Chief Academic Officer
Dr. Matthias Greywoode, Chief Financial Officer
Dr. John Wallingford, Business and Finance Consultant
Tearia Davis, Clerk to the School Board

2. PRAYER:

Vice Mayor Hill led the Council meeting in prayer.

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Mayor Parham led the Council and the citizens in the pledge of allegiance.

4. DETERMINATION OF THE PRESENCE OF A QUORUM:

A quorum was present.

5. NEW BUSINESS

Petersburg City Public Schools FY26 Budget Presentation and Approval Request

Yolonda Brown, Superintendent of Petersburg Public Schools, expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to present the Fiscal Year 2026 Petersburg City Public Schools budget. She acknowledged the collaborative efforts between the School Board and the Superintendent in developing this budget. She emphasized that this budget represents significant improvements in their budget development process. She stated that they are just getting started, but they will continue to refine their budget process for FY27 to make it even better.

Ms. Brown said that she would like to highlight a few key points. This FY26 budget was developed with input from the School Board's priorities, department input across the school division, and the Superintendent's priorities, which will be outlined in their presentation. Although it is not yet a fully needs-based budget as required by the Code of Virginia, this budget represents great progress in their school division for this year. The budget process included public hearings from February 26 and March 5, with School Board approval on March 19. She reiterated that this year's budget is aligned to specific priorities outlined by the School Board and identified through their community input.

Dr. John Wallingford introduced himself to City Council. He stated that he had retired from Prince William County Public Schools about a year ago, where he had served as the Chief Financial Officer. He had joined Petersburg City Public Schools in early April of last year, and Dr. Greywoode had joined them four months ago. He had been working closely with Dr. Greywoode to transition him into his current role. He explained that he was the one who had substantially built the budget he would be presenting to the Council tonight, and that was why he was making this presentation.

Dr. Wallingford stated that tonight's agenda included a brief presentation on planning and budget priorities, followed by a discussion of technical budget adjustments and their implications. They would then review Fiscal Year 26 revenues and expenditures. As they approached the end of this presentation, he would discuss a couple of specific items, including the FY26 budget initiatives that had been added to the Petersburg City Public Schools budget for FY26.

Dr. Wallingford explained that in a typical budget process, a strategic planning session occurred prior to or in conjunction with budget development. However, due to the transition period they had been experiencing at Petersburg City Public Schools over the past year and a half, they did not have a full strategic planning process this year. Nevertheless, they had planning discussions, which were led by Ms. Brown and involved various stakeholders. The budget priorities outlined on this slide reflected the collective efforts of staff, stakeholders, and senior staff.

Dr. Wallingford stated that he would like to briefly walk Council through their budget priorities, which would be discussed in more detail later in the presentation. The first priority listed was talent and recruitment. This was a crucial aspect of the school division, as it involved the staffing of teachers and instructors who provided instruction to students. This was a challenging task, regardless of the location in the United States. In Petersburg, they faced a significant need for talent improvement, particularly in areas such as teacher quality and academic infrastructure. Over the past several months, they have received budget requests that addressed some of these issues, which would be further discussed in the initiatives that followed.

Dr. Wallingford noted that the third item on the list was the improvement of teacher licensure, instructional frameworks, and other related initiatives. These efforts began with the arrival of Ms. Brown and Mr. Brown. The next priority was building a strong division financial infrastructure, which included budget processes and other related areas. The Council may recall the presentation by Alvarez and Marsal, who had investigated and provided suggestions for changes to their infrastructure. One of the

most pressing recommendations was to get staffing in place, an issue they had faced over the past year. The arrival of Dr. Greywoode four months ago was a welcome addition to their staff.

Dr. Wallingford stated that every school division in Virginia, and likely across the country, struggled with chronic absenteeism. They addressed this issue in their budget. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 had significantly exacerbated this problem. Finally, they prioritized student social-emotional learning, mental health, and wellness. As he had mentioned, in a typical budget and planning process, they would develop a strategic plan. For the FY27 budget, this process was already underway, as Ms. Brown had noted, and they would continue to support it as they moved forward.

Dr. Wallingford stated that technical adjustments referred to items that the school division or any organization had limited control over. These typically involved budgetary considerations, such as the 3% salary increase provided by the General Assembly. As a result, they would be providing a 3% increase for all employees. Health insurance rates were also expected to rise by 8%, a result of conversations with their insurance consultants. Liability insurance was budgeted for an additional \$48,000. Fuel costs, including both electric and diesel, as well as other fuels for powering schools and buses, were anticipated to increase by approximately \$300,000.

Dr. Wallingford stated that additionally, non-salary budgets, or flex budgets, were projected to increase by an average of about 2%. The next slide provided a breakdown of the budget initiatives developed as part of their planning process. The left-hand column noted each priority discussed earlier. He said that the chart provided was divided into three groups: non-personnel related, which includes a \$2.4 million addition to funding a capital improvement project.

Dr. Wallingford stated that the next 12 items were additions to full-time equivalent positions, including various types of roles. He said that the final grouping at the bottom included additional seats for their specialty schools, Appomattox and CodeRVA. He said that the next slide provides a breakdown of the Governor's introduced budget, the funding available to them based on his late December release, the Senate and House budgets, and the conference budget.

Dr. Wallingford said that the conference budget was based on information shared by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) with Petersburg City Public Schools in early March, specifically on March 6. He said that he wanted to highlight a few points. Firstly, at the bottom of the slide, the "local required share" was an amount identified in the state's spreadsheet, which provided detailed information about revenue streams to school divisions across the state and separated out the local shares of funding from the state's shares of funding.

Dr. Wallingford stated that the local share number, \$12.7 million, was a calculation suggested by VDOE, representing the local required share. He said that the second grouping included \$211,000 associated with the addition of an assistant athletic director and additional seats at Appomattox and CodeVA. He said that examining the first row, the conference budget of \$12.97 million was approximately a \$600,000 increase over the \$12.3 million built into the budget for a transfer from the City to the schools this year.

Dr. Wallingford noted that the state had funded a bonus of about \$400,000 for Standards of Quality (SOQ)-covered positions, which would cost around \$800,000 due to equalization through the Local Composite Index (LCI). He said that next, he would like to briefly discuss operating fund revenues, and the next slide would present expected revenues for their Food Service Fund and Grants Fund. The first column on this table showed funding for Fiscal Year 25, which was their forecast revenues. The state number was \$52 million. He said that the City transfer was \$12,361,000, as previously mentioned. Other revenues included approximately \$440,000.

Dr. Wallingford stated that they also had \$55,000 in federal revenue, with almost all of it running through their Grants Fund, fund seven. He said that this number would remain the same for both this year and next year and would approach zero by Fiscal Year 27 as they reorganized their accounting for

these amounts. He said that he would like to highlight the year-over-year change column, where one could see the federal revenues at the top.

Dr. Wallingford stated that as previously mentioned, there was no change year-over-year. He said that state funding increased by \$5.2 million this year, which was part of the reason they could implement a \$2 million and \$2.4 million Capital Improvement and Technology Improvement Plans. He said that the City transfer increased by approximately \$600,000, which was the increase over the required contribution plus the \$211,000 mentioned earlier.

Dr. Wallingford stated that the other category showed a decrease of \$250,000, resulting in a total increase of \$5.6 million. He noted that the 2024 to 2025 increase was also \$5 million, similar to the 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 increases for Petersburg City Public Schools, which saw a substantial increase in revenues primarily from the state and City transfers. He said that the table at the top showed their Food Service Fund, and the bottom showed their Grants Fund. He said that the Food Service Fund was a relatively stable fund, with an annual budget of approximately \$3 million.

Dr. Wallingford stated that this year, they expected it to increase to \$3.3 million, a \$250,000 increase over the current fiscal year budget. He said that he would like to highlight one aspect of the Grants Fund. Over the past four years, the Grants Fund fluctuated, peaking at \$30 million to \$40 million in 2020, primarily due to COVID-related funding. He said that the current \$15 million figure was a significant number, especially when considered in relative historical terms. However, over the past two or three years, the Grants Fund had returned to a more normal range, similar to what was seen in 2018 and 2019.

Dr. Wallingford stated that the next was a breakdown of their General Fund, their operating fund, on a categorical basis. As Council was aware, the categories were defined by the Code of Virginia, and here were the categories that existed in their General Fund. He said that for example, food service was not included in the General Fund, as it was accounted for separately. He said that the Food Service Fund had a budget of approximately \$3 million.

Dr. Wallingford stated that in contrast, the General Fund's categorical breakdown included instruction, admin, transportation, facilities, and technology, totaling around \$70.5 million. Notably, their instructional numbers were slightly above the 65% benchmark set by VDOE, which preferred more than 60% of the budget to go towards instruction. This benchmark originated in Texas around 20-25 years ago and was used by VDOE as a guideline. While it was not a perfect benchmark, especially when large capital projects were being funded, he wanted to bring it to Council's attention. He said that the instructional budget of \$46 million was a good figure.

Dr. Wallingford stated that next there were several key initiatives they were working on at Petersburg to improve their financial operations. He said that the first item was maintaining a \$3 million fund balance. This was not meant to be a hard and fast rule, but rather a benchmark to help them manage their finances more effectively. Having a smaller fund balance, such as \$1 million or \$2 million, would make it easier to manage their finances and avoid having to make difficult decisions at the end of the year.

Dr. Wallingford stated that the next bullet point suggested that any remaining net income at the end of the year should be returned to the fund balance, allowing them to build and maintain a stable fund balance. This could be capped at a specific amount that they could agree upon. The third item was implementing a fully funded capital improvement plan, technology plan, and capital plan. They had already made progress on this by leveraging the increase in revenues over the past two budget cycles.

Dr. Wallingford stated that the fourth item was implementing a needs-based budget, which they had started to move towards by adding the athletic director, additional seats at CodeRVA and Appomattox. He said that the final item was implementing a capital projects fund, which was primarily an accounting issue but would become more relevant as their capital project expenditures increased in the coming years. He said that the final slide provided a clear summary of their ask, and the table showed the

City's transfer year-over-year. He said that the current Fiscal Year 2025 was \$12,361,000, as shown in the second column.

Dr. Wallingford said that this amount included the required contribution identified in the state calculation, the extra seats at CodeRVA, Appomattox, and the additional cost for the assistant athletic director, totaling approximately \$13,000,000, or \$12.97 million, in City transfers. He said that the second table broke down the total budget, including all funds: General Fund, Food Service Fund, and Grants Fund, totaling just under \$90 million at \$89,016,000. He said that after today's presentation to City Council, the next and final step in the schools' budget process was for City Council to approve the School Board's budget on May 15.

Mayor Parham thanked Dr. Wallingford for the presentation. Before they began their discussion, he wanted to confirm that the City Council intended to fully fund the schools' request of \$12.97 million. He said that he did have a concern about the health insurance costs, considering an 8% increase was very high. He noted that the City had been able to keep health insurance costs flat over the past two budget years. He asked about the possibility of their schools accessing the same insurance plan that County employees had, which had been a stable option for them.

Mayor Parham said that this would help mitigate the rising cost of healthcare, which was a significant concern for their employees. He said that if their teachers received a 3% raise, he did not want them to lose that raise due to the 8% healthcare cost increase. He said that he would like to discuss potential options for their schools to access a similar insurance plan.

Ms. Brown stated that prior to her arrival, Petersburg City Public Schools were in the process of adopting a new healthcare provider. She said that Dr. Wallingford could provide more information regarding the selection process and the duration of their agreement with this provider. She understood that they were currently working with HR, and she knew that the Board had requested that they gather feedback from their teachers and staff on the current provider. She said that they had received a significant amount of feedback, and it appeared that there was a strong desire to change providers.

Mayor Parham reiterated that it was essential to work on keeping the healthcare costs low in order to recruit and retain employees. Additionally, he wanted to discuss chronic absenteeism. He asked if they had identified the source of the issue. He expressed concern about the long-term effects it would have on their children.

Ms. Brown replied that as she had mentioned in many previous meetings, Petersburg had a significant number of students who were chronically absent every single day. The absentee rates were particularly high at the elementary school level, especially at the kindergarten and first-grade levels, and they continued to stay high in middle and high school. To address this issue, they had set a goal of reducing chronic absenteeism by 3% this year.

Ms. Brown said that their team had been working on this goal, and she would like to highlight a few key initiatives they had undertaken. She said that they began by examining their level of engagement in classrooms, recognizing that students attended school because they were excited about what was happening. They then developed an attendance plan that involved the division, school leadership, and teachers sharing ownership and responsibility.

Ms. Brown stated that to support this effort, they had expanded the usage of their PowerSchool system, which provided principals and teachers with real-time data on chronically absent students. This included information on who was absent, how often they were absent, and what actions they could take to support them. She said that they had also established a database for attendance tracking. Additionally, each individual school had an individual attendance plan in place, as their principals were leading these schools and implementing strategies to celebrate students who were not chronically absent.

Ms. Brown stated that they were acknowledging and recognizing those students who were not absent, and while they still had much work to do, they had started the process. She added that they had also recently partnered with Virginia State University, and they were excited to announce that they had received a grant from the Cameron Foundation to work on a model that VSU had implemented in other school districts, including Richmond and some districts in the north. Virginia State had brought them an opportunity to partner with them, allowing them to work with parents to specifically target absenteeism.

Ms. Brown said that they were excited about this partnership, as Virginia State was also supporting their work in this area. She said that during Board meetings, they must provide updates on their progress with chronic absenteeism, which was currently at the monitoring stage. She noted that they had already met their goal of reducing chronic absenteeism by 3.16%, exceeding the target of 3%. They were not yet where they needed to be, and they were revamping their processes and procedures to hold people accountable and put in place supports to prevent absenteeism.

Ms. Brown stated that to achieve this, they were assigning two parent liaison positions to schools, which would be in addition to the parent engagement specialists currently based at the central office. She said that these new liaison positions would work with parents daily to provide support and help them address chronic attendance issues. They were seeking funding to support these positions, which would enable them to put more boots on the ground to specifically address attendance. She said that they had met their goal so far, but they still had a month left in the school year.

Ms. Brown said that they had a target in mind, but they had started working towards it. She said that it was not perfect, and people might say that they now had data on attendance, but they were not utilizing it effectively. However, they were focusing on the students they had, rather than waiting for truancy officers to step in. She noted that truancy was defined as being absent for 20 days or more, and they were taking a more proactive approach by focusing on students who had been absent for fewer days. However, if they continued to be absent, they would take more intensive measures, including involving truancy officers and taking parents to court.

Ms. Brown reiterated that this was still a work in progress, as they were about to change the role of truancy officers to start addressing attendance issues sooner, at 10 or 15 days of absence, rather than waiting until 20 days. They were working to move more quickly in addressing attendance issues. Additionally, the overall division task force would meet monthly to discuss attendance at the division level and identify areas for improvement. She noted that School Board Member Tucker would be a part of this task force, and she believed it would be an effective way to ensure they were working together to address attendance issues.

Mayor Parham asked if Mr. Pritchett could discuss the “truancy van,” which they drove to pick up kids who were attempting to leave the school property.

Mr. Pritchett said that Mayor Parham referred to it as the “truancy van,” but he personally called it Officer Cuba. He said that he usually would contact the School Resource Officers (SRO) if they saw students walking from the school, particularly those crossing the bridge or heading to the corner store near Legends Park. He said that this way, they could have the officers retrieve the students and escort them back to school. However, it was certainly a challenge when students were leaving the school premises, which was where their security and SROs must ensure they monitored the doors to prevent their children from leaving the school.

Mayor Parham said that it was great that they were funding more positions at the Governor's School, as their kids were truly excelling at all levels. He said that they had attended several events and had performed exceptionally well, surpassing their Richmond and Chesterfield peers in all areas. However, there was a major issue with their transportation, as kids had to wait an hour and a half on most days for the Petersburg bus to arrive. This had been a persistent complaint from parents, who were frustrated with the lack of reliable transportation to and from the Appomattox Governor's School.

Mr. Pritchett said that he had served on the Appomattox Regional Governor's School Board, and this was the first he had heard of any students not being picked up on time. He said that they could certainly look into this matter further. He noted that there was a nationwide shortage of bus drivers, and unfortunately, they were experiencing this issue in Petersburg as well.

Vice Mayor Hill said that he would like to clarify their policy regarding activity buses in the evening. He asked if they had buses available to take kids home after late practices.

Mr. Pritchett replied that it was his understanding that they did have buses for their after-school tutoring programs, and all students could use those buses. He said that he would have to verify the latest times they had buses available, so he would follow up with that information.

Vice Mayor Hill stated that he wanted to make sure kids did not have to walk home after football practice.

Ms. Brown confirmed that they would double check to make sure the activity buses were available for all their after school activities.

Vice Mayor Hill said that it would be helpful if they could coordinate with the coaches to ensure that the scheduled practice times allowed children to take the bus home.

Council Member Jones noted that recruitment was one of the first priorities listed in the School Board's budget, but retention of existing staff was not mentioned until page 5 of the document. This was related to teacher quality, and he would like to ask how the school division planned to improve teacher quality. As the Mayor had mentioned previously, helping teachers with their healthcare costs could be part of the solution. He asked if there were any other plans for improving teacher quality.

Ms. Brown answered that improving teacher quality was indeed a priority, and providing an additional option that saved teachers and staff money was one way to achieve this. She said that in Petersburg City Public Schools, they were focused on certification and licensure. Currently, about 20% to 25% of their elementary teachers were fully licensed, while the rest were day-to-day subs, long-term subs, or provisionally licensed teachers. She emphasized that it was essential that their teachers were licensed, as this ensured they understood the standards of learning and could teach at higher levels.

Ms. Brown said that while their teachers were doing their best, they needed to implement a strategy to bring more certified teachers to Petersburg who understood the teaching and learning process. As part of this priority, their budget included a \$7,500 stipend for the first 50 certified teachers if the budget was approved. This stipend was an intentional effort to be competitive and provide more financial incentives for individuals interested in teaching in Petersburg City Public Schools.

Ms. Brown stated that, additionally, professional development was a crucial aspect of high-quality teaching. To address this, they would be presenting two years of school calendars, FY25-26 and FY26-27, at a special School Board meeting next Wednesday. These calendars included a survey to gather feedback from the community, which would inform their decisions on wellness days, professional learning opportunities, and other aspects of their teacher support system.

Ms. Brown explained that when examining other localities, it was clear that investing in professional learning days, where teachers learned how to teach and understand the curriculum, was a key factor in their success. This was one of the initiatives they would be presenting to the Board during a work session, focusing on the budget and calendar for providing professional learning opportunities. The budget would support this effort.

Ms. Brown stated that the calendar, which was expected to be approved by the Board in May, would include more focused professional learning days for teachers, ultimately enhancing their capacity to deliver higher-quality instruction.

Council Member Jones replied that that was great news. He asked how they would retain these teachers. He said that once they invested time and effort into them, like they did with their Fire and Police departments, other localities seemed to be vying for them, and money would be a factor in keeping them. He stated that he would like to know if there was an existing plan in place to support the hardworking teachers who were already putting in the effort. He said that it would not be fair for them to simply sit back, and watch others receive bonuses while they receive nothing. He wanted to know how they would balance this out to ensure the teachers were fairly compensated.

Ms. Brown stated that in their savings this year, the Board had approved in their recent meeting in February an opportunity for them to have a compensation and class study. As she looked across Petersburg City Public Schools, they examined all the salaries with teachers, and in 2023, the Board had approved an increase for teachers who had been in the school division for ten consecutive years. They also recently got approved to do the same thing with their maintenance staff and operations staff.

Ms. Brown stated that they were trying to do a couple of different things, but she would highlight that they had already been approved to have a compensation and class study for a company that had been working across Virginia to examine how they paid teachers and staff members. When competing with other localities, they considered starting pay and also looked at whether a teacher or staff member with a certain number of years of experience would receive more money.

Ms. Brown stated that they were looking at all positions to retain the talent they had, not just their teachers, but also their bus drivers, custodial staff, and teacher assistants. The recommendations for the compensation and class study would be made to the Board on how to revamp their pay system in Petersburg City Public Schools.

Ms. Brown stated that another consideration was about resetting the culture. She explained that they could strategize all they wanted, but ultimately, if the culture was not right, people would not stay. This was about creating an environment where individuals felt valued and supported. They were actively working on this, although they were not yet there. However, she believed that people were starting to notice a shift. She noted that as Superintendent, it could be challenging for her to see the impact from a daily perspective, but she hoped that everyone was beginning to feel the shift in momentum towards establishing a positive culture in Petersburg.

Ms. Brown stated that they were focusing on building a strengths-based organization, taking from Gallup's research on creating engaging environments that focused on employees' strengths rather than their weaknesses. The leadership team had already completed this training, and they would be rolling it out to principals, assistant principals, and directors over the next few weeks.

Ms. Brown stated that this would help ensure that everyone understood their strengths and could leverage them to contribute to their collective success. They had a lot of work to do in Petersburg, but with the right approach, she was confident they could make a meaningful impact. By leveraging the talents and abilities of their staff, they could achieve great things and make a positive difference in their community.

Council Member Jones stated they had talked about chronic absenteeism, student social-emotional learning, and mental health, and one of the key points he noted was what Ms. Brown had just mentioned, which was the importance of culture. He said that they needed to consider what was best for the students, and he believed that culture was a crucial factor. He said that they needed to undergo a significant transformation, and Ms. Brown mentioned the winds were shifting, which was the responsibility of Council and the School Board. He noted that although their hard work would go unrecognized, there was certainly movement in the right direction.

Council Member Jones emphasized that they must not lose the momentum and continue to improve on addressing the many needs and concerns of their youth. As soon as they were born, children were already being shaped by the world around them, and it was their responsibility to capitalize on this. He

suggested that similar to the Mayor's suggestion that they centralize their healthcare insurance, they could also share in their transportation departments and CDL drivers to fill in the gaps.

Council Member Jones noted that they needed school resource officers at every single school because students often turned to officers for support, especially in difficult situations. He said that building relationships with officers was essential. He asked the City Manager to consider the need to explore the possibility of adding more officers, not just for schools that already had them, but for every school.

Council Member Jones added that many people wanted to use the school facilities after school hours, and he wanted to explore the idea of every school serving as a community center in the neighborhood it was in. He said that he recalled a past policy that every school should serve as a community center, although he could not find the original documentation. He reiterated that there were many community groups that were eager to use the school facilities, such as little league teams.

Council Member Jones expressed concern that the schools had a wariness around Council Members visiting the facilities, citing a specific example of when he had a prolonged check-in at a high school while other people were allowed to walk in without signing in. He wanted to ensure the schools trusted the Council Members to not be overly critical or intrusive but to make their own assessments of how the school facilities were operating.

Council Member Jones asked what fund the Food Service Fund was sourced from. He noted that there had been past food quality issues stemming from lack of maintenance.

Dr. Wallingford stated that the Food Service Fund was one of the tables he disclosed. He said that the current fiscal year's food service budget was \$3.1 million, and for Fiscal Year 26, it was \$3.3 million. He said that this fund was separate from the General Fund. There were several grant-related and regulatory requirements from VDOE that necessitated this separation. He said that Council Member Jones had noted the past challenges the school division faced with food quality and infrastructure, which was one of the issues they had presented to the City Council this year to seek additional budget authority. To alleviate any concerns, he wanted to assure the City Council and the audience that there was no intention of reducing the Food Service Fund.

Council Member Jones said that he had a question regarding the \$3 million fund balance that was mentioned on page 10. He asked how the schools would maintain a fund balance with money that was intended to be returned to the City if it was not used. He emphasized that he believed the schools should be using every dollar given to them so they would be able to accurately assess whether they needed to ask for more.

Dr. Wallingford acknowledged it was a very valid question. He explained that the Code of Virginia presented several legal issues related to that statement. The \$3 million figure was merely a number, and it could be \$2 million, \$1.5 million, or any other amount. In larger localities, it was common to maintain fund balance, where excess revenue was set aside and reprogrammed for future years. In his previous experience, in Prince William County, they would maintain fund balance if he had more revenue than expenditure in a given year. This excess money would be placed on the balance sheet and reprogrammed for future years. Attorneys could discuss the legality of this approach. He would be open to any conversation about it. However, the issue of sweeping fund balance back created a problem, as it forced the school division to budget and hit actuals to zero.

Dr. Wallingford agreed with Council Member Jones that the most ideal approach would be to spend every single penny every year. The challenge lay in actually managing this, as City budgets and school divisions often faced similar issues with revenues and expenditures varying from year to year. When the City swept back any remaining fund balance at the end of a given year, they would always be at zero. In a situation where they would over-forecast revenue and therefore lose money, it was not a budgetary issue, but rather a matter of net income.

Dr. Wallingford said that if they lost money, the only way to recover was to reduce operations in the current year. The concept of retaining a million dollars was not about preserving a specific amount, but rather about managing the imperfections in their forecasting process by maintaining a cushion on their balance sheet.

Council Member Jones said that if the schools did not have enough money because they had spent it on what they needed to, he did not see a problem with them requesting more to cover any future deficit.

Vice Mayor Hill suggested the City schools consider year-round schooling in order to prevent their students from falling behind in their educational progress.

Council Member Westbrook asked if they could first identify the positive aspects of year-round schooling before discussing the negatives.

Vice Mayor Hill asked if studies had been performed to assess the feasibility of implementing year-round schooling.

Ms. Brown noted that there had previously been a year-round model in Petersburg schools. Additionally, as a lifelong educator in another city, she had had the opportunity to observe and participate in year-round school models. In that school district, some of the schools utilized year-round schooling, and there was a lot of work done to determine whether it was an appropriate model to serve students.

Ms. Brown explained that in her experience, one of the key factors that made it successful was the flexibility in the calendar. She said that when implemented, year-round schools often included built-in time for intersession. She said that this might have been six weeks of intersession, with a schedule that allowed students to attend school for a set period, followed by a break.

Ms. Brown said that the calendar would typically start in July and continue year-round. While it worked well, it was essential to have a clear plan for implementing this model, as well as a way to ensure that students were engaged and motivated. She noted that kids did not want to be in school year-round, and she saw that students may not want to come to intersession when it was not required. She said that they had found that when done correctly, year-round schools could be effective, but it was also crucial to consider the challenges that came with managing two different school calendars, particularly when it came to transportation, food service, and other logistical concerns.

Ms. Brown stated that to answer the Vice Mayor's question about Petersburg, they had not considered implementing year-round schools during her nine months in the school district. She said that she had learned that Hopewell, as a locality, had implemented year-round schools, but Petersburg had not brought it up as an option. They were still working on identifying what they needed to do differently in Petersburg.

Ms. Brown added that they had already applied to the VDOE for a grant to study and implement an extended school year, which was not the same as year-round schools, but would add 20 additional days to the school year. This grant allowed them to work in School Year 2025-2026 with the Pleasants Lane community to gain buy-in from teachers, parents, and the greater community, as changing the calendar could have a significant impact on the school's operations.

Ms. Brown said that with the extended school year, some students would start school in July and the rest of the students would begin in August. The VDOE had supported their approach because they wanted to begin with a year of planning and then next year implement it with a school. She stated that she is a firm believer in starting small and scaling up to understand the potential pitfalls and make necessary adjustments without creating chaos.

Ms. Brown said that this approach would allow them to test the waters before implementing it on a

larger scale. She said that in 2025 and 2026, they would be launching this initiative, and Council Member Westbrook would likely be involved in the conversation about adding additional days to the calendar at Pleasants Lane. She reiterated that this would result in an extended school calendar, but not a year-round school schedule.

Mr. Pritchett noted that this was the model Richmond City was using, which included an additional 20 days. He said that they had been following Richmond City's progress over the past year, and their results had started to show improvement. He said that Richmond City had experienced positive outcomes with this extended model. He said that he recently spoke with the City Manager about Hopewell implementing a year-round school schedule, but they both confirmed they had not received any information on their results or the impact it was having on that locality. In contrast, Richmond City had released their results from the additional 20 days, so they knew for certain there had been positive impacts.

Ms. Brown stated that in her experience in another school district, there was no significant difference in student performance between the year-round school and traditional calendar schools. She said that it was more about what they did with those days, and she believed that adding 20 more days could provide a lot more time for kids to get more educational time.

Ms. Brown stated that she would be open to considering a year-round model in the future, but she thought they should start by extending the time students spent in school and then reassess. She said that this was a positive step for Petersburg, and as Mr. Pritchett mentioned, Richmond was already exploring this option. She said that Council Member Westbrook's feedback was looked forward to as they began this planning year for Pleasants Lane.

Vice Mayor Hill clarified that he was not advocating any specific approach but was interested in what available information they had on year-round school scheduling. He agreed they should not change everything at all at once. He also agreed with the Mayor that the schools should consider using the same health insurance provider as the City government did.

Council Member Westbrook recalled that when he was a student in Petersburg City schools, they had a brand identity of Petersburg being a City of readers. However, he had concerns about the current literacy level of their students. He asked if the School Board and Superintendent had any ideas about branding to promote their school district and create a sense of camaraderie.

Ms. Brown agreed that brand identity was important for focusing on success and making people happy to be a part of their school system. She explained that when she joined Petersburg City Public Schools, they had a new moniker of "A new day, a new way together," which was meant to convey they were in a new moment of doing business differently and that they would be doing it together. However, that meant the parents to understand they were turning the tide and moving forward, rather than something for the students. They had recently hired a new Chief Communications Officer, and they would be working together to expand on their branding, including student morale and the recruitment of teachers.

Ms. Brown noted that Council Member Westbrook had mentioned being a community of readers, and to that end, they were in the midst of creating a consistent reading curriculum across the City schools. She agreed brand identity was important, but they were focusing on opportunities to provide their children in order for them to feel the difference, and the branding would follow that.

Council Member Westbrook thanked Ms. Brown for elaborating on that point. He noted that the school district had identified a truancy goal, and he wondered if they had a literacy goal for their students as well.

Ms. Brown stated that they did not have a literacy goal. They currently did not have comprehensive data on children's literacy rates; they only had access to state SOL scores. She noted that they just recently re-implemented the MAP assessment to evaluate students' performance using national data.

This would provide their teachers with the necessary information to help students in the specific subjects they were having difficulty. Once they received data from their newest assessments, they would be able to set literacy goals. Furthermore, the literacy goals would be part of their greater strategic goal objectives.

Mayor Parham noted that it was essential to ensure they had licensed teachers in their classrooms in order to improve their students' reading levels. He agreed the \$7,500 bonus for 50 new teachers would certainly help. He asked if they would be providing opportunities for unlicensed teachers to receive certification with help from the school division, such as reimbursement for schooling costs.

Ms. Brown stated that the Mayor had raised a crucial point. They did have some people who had provisional licenses for more than five years, which indicated they had not gone back to get their certification. She noted that their HR Department was working to improve the issue. Furthermore, they had many partnerships with community organizations, such as the Cameron Foundation. The Foundation had provided a grant to Petersburg to pay for the costs of taking the praxis exams and tutoring for provisionally-licensed teachers so they had a better chance of passing their exams.

Ms. Brown stated that additionally, Virginia State University's Heroes Program provided educational support to provisionally-licensed teachers who were actively working towards their licenses. She noted that she was impressed when she first came to Petersburg and saw how much support the school district gives to provisionally-licensed teachers in order to help them succeed in achieving licensure. However, even with their multiple avenues of support, some of their provisionally-licensed teachers were not following through. She explained that one of the line items in the School Board's requested budget was for an additional HR position that specifically would address the licensure process for their teachers.

Council Member Westbrook asked if there was funding budgeted for field trips so that their students could get out and see the world outside of Petersburg.

Ms. Brown acknowledged they had limited field trips, but their Chief Academic Officer was currently working on expanding their capacity for field trips. She agreed that it was essential for their students to get outside of the schools, and they were certainly working to increase the frequency of field trips in the school system. She noted that a lot of planning was required for field trips to ensure the trips intentionally enhanced the curriculum the students were already learning.

Council Member Westbrook stated that the dual enrollment program was essential for their high school students to be on good footing for their college education. He asked how they were encouraging their juniors and seniors to go through that program and how successful it had been.

Paul Brown, Chief Academic Officer, stated that he would like to discuss a couple of things to give context to the dual enrollment program. One area of focus for their curriculum team was how to offer more advanced courses to their students starting at the elementary level and progressing through middle school and high school. As part of this effort, they were developing pathways to include more advanced courses, which would enable more students to enroll in dual enrollment by the time they reached their 11th grade year. Recently, they met with Richard Bland College and representatives from several colleges to explore ways to increase student enrollment. They had secured funding from the state and federal sources, including state funding and some federal funds.

Mr. Brown stated that, however, their main challenge was preparing their students and making them aware of these opportunities. They were working with the Career and Technical Education (CTE) program to inform parents about these opportunities. The key was to start this conversation early, rather than waiting until high school. To address this, they were developing advanced courses, which would be available to students starting in fifth grade. He said that these courses would lead to advanced placement, ultimately paving the way for dual enrollment.

Mayor Parham noted that the casino would be providing a large amount of well-paying jobs for Petersburg citizens, along with a dealer school at Richard Bland. He encouraged the school district work with Live Casino and Richard Bland to ensure their students would be first in line for those jobs.

Mr. Brown acknowledged that the school district had been working collaboratively to give more opportunities for their students in advanced placement courses to explore career options, throughout all grade levels. This included job fairs, training, and field trips. He reiterated that opportunities and exposure to the world were essential in helping children engage in their education and see the potential pathways for their lives.

Ms. Brown noted that on May 1, there would be a job fair for their students, and one of the vendors would be Live Casino. This would be a great opportunity for their students to learn more about career opportunities in the community. She also would like to thank Richard Bland College for being such an amazing partner and resource for their children to participate in dual enrollment courses. She believed that Richard Bland was a very supportive institution for their children, and PCPS's role was to prepare students for attending college so that they could thrive in the dual enrollment program.

Mayor Parham emphasized that Petersburg's young people were eager for career opportunities, although not all of them were interested in school. He noted that this partially was because it helped them avoid hunger and poverty, and they were able to help their families and younger siblings by having paying jobs. He asked if the schools could help support their working students in additional ways.

Mr. Pritchett replied that yes, Ms. Babette Hammond wanted to meet with City Council and School Board in order to expand the internship program into the schools.

Council Member Westbrook expressed his concern that his six-year-old daughter did not want to attend Pleasants Lane Elementary School, even though she was only in kindergarten. He explained that she had learned to read and speak Spanish in her daycare program, but the progress stopped once she began attending public schools. He asked how they could engage their students and make them look forward to attending school every day. He asked how they could provide alternative educational opportunities outside of the traditional curriculum for kids who may not be performing well in specific subjects, so that they could focus on what they were interested in. He also asked about how they were prioritizing the arts in their school budget.

Ms. Brown acknowledged that they still had work to do in terms of student engagement, but she would encourage Council Member Westbrook to work with their leadership at Pleasants Lane. She knew Dr. Rodriguez was working to change the culture there to be as supportive as possible to their teachers and students, and he was open to ideas for the structures he was implementing. She noted that the School Board's budget priorities this year were not focused on their arts programs, but they planned to prioritize their arts programs in the FY27 budget. There were organizational improvements to make and planning to do before they could create a budget to fund the future of arts programs.

Council Member Westbrook stated that he would like to discuss the current federal landscape and its implications for their education system. With the federal Department of Education being abolished and other changes happening under the new administration, the responsibility of education was shifting to the states. He asked how the school district planned to work with VDOE to proactively address their future needs.

Ms. Brown acknowledged that they were aware of the executive orders coming from the federal administration. She noted that there was a new Superintendent of Public Instruction at the state level, so all superintendents in Virginia had the opportunity to meet with the new state superintendent. All of them agreed they needed a VDOE portal to centralize the information about executive orders as they related to their educational system. She stated that she and Mr. Pritchett had regular meetings with VDOE because of their memorandum of understanding (MOU), and the new state superintendent had

committed to providing updates on how these higher-level changes would affect them.

Ms. Brown clarified that the state did not yet have a plan on how the funding processes would change due to the federal funding. She noted that 17% of Petersburg City Public Schools' funding came from federal sources, so if the U.S. Department of Education ended, that funding would be the state's responsibility. The state would then decide how that funding was distributed, and that potentially could be different from what the federal government had disbursed. However, they did not have that information at this time. She emphasized that local funding may be required to supplement any reductions in federal and state funding.

Mayor Parham noted that the currently proposed budget would be funded.

Ms. Brown confirmed they already had funding for this upcoming year, and any changes at the federal level would be communicated to Council.

Mr. Pritchett added that the School Board chairs had a meeting with Congresswoman Jennifer McClellan yesterday, along with some Superintendents. Congresswoman McClellan requested the Board chairs return to each locality and prepare a report detailing every line item of federal dollars they were using; she wanted to know the exact amount of federal money Petersburg was using.

Mr. Pritchett said that he also brought up the concern about the potential elimination of Head Start and the significant cost it would impose on the City and local government to fund it, and other Board chairs expressed the same concerns. He noted that Congresswoman McClellan was working on gathering additional information from her localities, so she would be returning to Petersburg soon to learn about their concerns.

Council Member Jones emphasized that the School Board and Council Members were all a team; even more importantly, they were family and must stand in solidarity with one another.

Mayor Parham thanked the School Board and Superintendent for all their hard work and for their engaging dialogue with Council at tonight's meeting. He reiterated that the City would be fully funding their schools and he wanted to ensure everyone knew that. He looked forward to more discussions in the future and he encouraged everyone to continue to do great things for the City of Petersburg.

6. **ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Parham made a motion to adjourn. All members of the Council present voted in the affirmative. Meeting adjourned.

The City Council adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Adopted: 05/06/2025

APPROVED:



Mayor

ATTEST:



City Clerk