

Community News

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9, 2022

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THE TIDEWATER NEWS **B1**



TITUS MOHLER | THE TIDEWATER NEWS

Carrsville Elementary School Art Teacher Hope Kinard, left, and Fifth-Grade Teacher Courtney Berard unveil the Kindness Mural that served as the climax of the "It's Great to be You!" project. Kinard worked with students on the design and painting of this mural that will live on at the school after this fifth-grade class moves on to middle school.

Presenting the 'It's Great to be You!' project

BY TITUS MOHLER
STAFF WRITER

The fifth-graders at Carrsville Elementary School put on an expo Feb. 22 that showcased their work in connection with a project

titled "It's Great to be You!" The project began with teachers posing some key questions to the fifth-grade students led by this question: "Is everyone born good?" Describing the emphasis

of the project, Darnelle Kellison, a fifth-grade teacher at the school, said, "Our focus is on how we are all born good but have life events that affect our perspectives and often affect how we feel about our-

selves and others," she stated. "We took this theme and connected it to text and research as a way to infuse our reading and writing skills." The project branched off into a variety of assign-

ments for students, but each of those assignments was in service of the theme. Students watched a video that detailed an experiment with toddlers in which the toddlers were presented with a puppet show featur-

ing a good puppet and a bad puppet. Afterward, each infant was presented with a choice to play with either the good puppet or

SEE PROJECT, B3



Carrsville Elementary School student Mattox Morris presents the poems that he and his classmates wrote. Fifth-Grade Teacher Darnelle Kellison explained that students wrote their own version of Maya Angelou's poem "Still I Rise," using Angelou's same rhyme scheme, rhythm and tone. Mattox said, "We wrote one stanza for each day, and it took us a week and a half."



From left, Nolan Hove, Carlos Sanchez, Victoria Jones and Ilijah Davis help present some of the quotes on the wall behind them that they and their fellow Carrsville Elementary School fifth-graders analyzed at the beginning of the project.



Carrsville Elementary School students manning the table with "thank you" cards and drafts are, from left, Harper Babb, Mason Bailey, Griffin Yost and Sybaris Pope. Explaining this aspect of the project, Griffin said, "We picked the person who inspired our life and made a difference and wrote them a 'thank you' card, and at the end, we're handing them the 'thank you' cards that we wrote them."



Presenting the Kindness Mural on the wall behind them are a few of the Carrsville Elementary School students who helped create it. They are, from left, Addison Callow, Madison Lacey, Samuel Twiford and Gabreal Lopez. They helped explain the process of creating the mural design and actually painting the chalkboard mural that will live on at the school.

PROJECT: Students had opportunity to show gratitude to those who made a difference

FROM PAGE B1

the bad puppet, and all the infants chose the good puppet.

Two authors students studied for the "It's Great to be You!" project were C.S. Lewis and Maya Angelou. Students analyzed quotes from Angelou and Lewis and shared what those quotes meant to them.

Students compared and contrasted the movie and book versions of Lewis' novel "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe."

The fifth-graders also wrote approximately three-page research papers on Lewis' life.

They learned about Angelou's life and how she overcame an extremely difficult childhood. Then they wrote

their own versions of her poem "Still I Rise," being careful to use Angelou's same rhyme scheme, rhythm and tone.

The project gave students the opportunity to show kindness through making paintings for community members in nursing homes and hospitals. Students also had the opportunity to show gratitude, writing 'thank you' letters to those who have made a difference in their lives.

The project culminated in the unveiling at the expo of a Kindness Mural that students helped design and paint on a prominent wall inside the school.

Kellison noted that the project stemmed from the mind of fellow Fifth-Grade Teacher Courtney Berard.



TITUS MOHLER | THE TIDEWATER NEWS

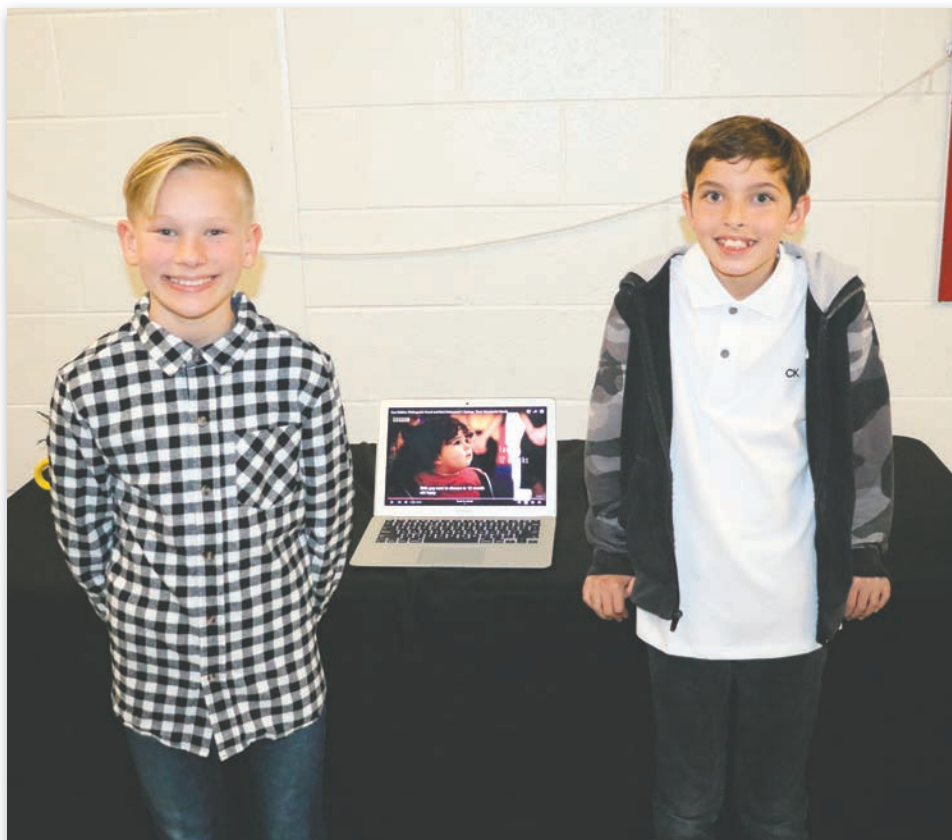
From left, Ja'Nyah Ruffin, Jason Copeland, Caroline Holt and Morgan Brinkley work at the expo's Movie vs. Book station, where they showcased how students compared and contrasted the two versions of C.S. Lewis' "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe."



From left, Rebecca Moore, Keli Square and Oliver Harper discussed various activities they did with the gifted teacher, Brandy Robbins, in connection with the project. Keli said, "We're making paintings for the community members, and we're going to ship them to a company, and they're going to send them to community members, and we're going to make suncatchers and put them in nursing homes and hospitals to make people happy."



Showcasing their class' C.S. Lewis research papers and what went into preparing them are, from left, Nicholas Slaba, Conner Creason and Aislynn Posey. Posey said something that stuck with her from her research was "that 'The Magician's Nephew,' the first book of the series of The Chronicles of Narnia, was based off how (Lewis) couldn't save his mother, but the boy in the book could. (Lewis') mother had grown ill from cancer. She died when he was 10."



Wyatt Hove, left, and Isaiah Kuykendall are manning the "Are you born good?" video station that highlights the question that launched the "It's Great to be You!" project. The video details an experiment that seeks to help answer the question.

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Boykins, VA (Co-Executor)
Brenton Burgess, PLC; Franklin, VA (Co-Executor)

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SATURDAY, MARCH 12, 2022 AT 11:00AM

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Tax Map # 54A 2-7, 6.33 Acres,
Physical Location: 22314 Old Belfield Rd, Drewryville Magisterial District Tax Map # 115-17, Less Than One Acre,
Physical Location: 34660 Monroe Rd, Newsoms Magisterial District Tax Map # 112A 6 BKD-23, Less Than One Acre,
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The Tidewater News

115TH YEAR, NO. 103

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2022

\$1.00

2 of 3

School board meeting marked by division

BY TITUS MOHLER
STAFF WRITER

A striking Franklin City School Board work session Thursday, Oct. 6, featured, at times, pronounced division.

Franklin City Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Tamara Sterling submitted a memo Sept. 23 announcing her resignation from the school system effective Nov. 30. The school board was set to take action regarding her resignation Sept. 29 at a special called

meeting, but the lack of a quorum pushed the board's action on the matter to the Oct. 6 meeting.

During this Oct. 6 meeting, there was disagreement between board members over what constituted permissible meeting procedure; an effort to remove one member as chair; a walkout from three members of the board over concern



Holt

about violation of procedure; an exit from Sterling; stark comments from the public about certain board members, the superintendent, the board as a whole and the status of the school system; an apology from the chair for the behavior of some of his colleagues; and ultimately, after a closed session involving the full board, a 6-0 vote, with one abstention, accept-



Johnson

ing Sterling's resignation.

Ward 2 Board Member Arwen Councill, who was attending the meeting remotely, made the choice to abstain.



Phillips

What led up to the walkout

Ward 1 Board Member and Board Chair Robert Holt summarized in a Monday, Oct. 10, interview what took place in the open-

ing minutes of the Oct. 6 meeting. He said that At-Large Board Member and Board Vice Chair Carrie Johnson called for a board

SEE DIVISION, A6

IWCS receives community input on CIP

BY TITUS MOHLER
STAFF WRITER

Isle of Wight County Schools has received input from the community, largely through an online survey, on what people would like to see in the school division's Capital Improvements Plan.

The first of two community input meetings was held Wednesday, Oct. 5, at Windsor High School. Only one member of the public attended, but IWCS Director of Secondary Education Dr. Marsha Cale confirmed that she had received 87 responses to the school system's online survey as of 4:30 p.m. that afternoon.

An executive summary from IWCS noted that the CIP serves as a planning tool for the Isle of Wight County Board of Supervisors and provides a mechanism for the planning and financing of major non-recurring capital infrastructure needs. The CIP is developed annually to plan for proposed public improvements to be constructed and major equipment to be purchased during the next 10 years.

IWCS Assistant Superintendent for Administration, Finance and Operations Dr. Christopher Coleman gave a brief presentation at the Oct. 5 community input meeting, explaining the criteria that a valid CIP item must meet.

He noted that the projects will span fiscal years 2023-32; they must be only major, non-recurring capital infrastructure needs, like building construction or renovations, etc.; they must exceed an anticipated \$50,000 in expenditures; and they must have an anticipated service life of five or more years.

On posters placed on the walls around the cafeteria where the meeting was held, Cale wrote down the suggestions stemming from the online survey responses that met the criteria for CIP items.

For middle and high school buildings, suggested CIP items included addressing the Windsor High School au-

SEE INPUT, A7



JEN JAQUA | THE TIDEWATER NEWS

9/11 Never Forget Mobile Exhibit

Franklin first responders participated in the 9/11 Never Forget Mobile Exhibit which was on display at the 44th Annual Suffolk Peanut Festival.

Judge: AG lawsuit alleging 'unlawful pattern' by Windsor PD can proceed to trial

BY STEPHEN FALESKI
STAFF WRITER

A state lawsuit alleging an "unlawful pattern" of conduct by Windsor's Police Department can proceed to trial, retired Judge H. Thomas Padrick Jr. ruled Oct. 6.

Padrick's refusal to dismiss the case, as lawyers for the town of Windsor had requested, marks the latest development in Virginia's first-of-its-kind case under a 2021 state law intended to stop systemic civil rights violations by law enforcement. Earlier this year, the case saw a complete turnover in personnel and a near-total rewrite of its original claims.

Former Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring, a Democrat, had alleged in his December complaint that Windsor police had repeatedly engaged in "unlawful race based discrimination" by disproportionately stopping Black motorists. The December filing contended Black drivers had accounted for 42% of the WPD's traffic stops from July 1, 2020, through Sept. 30, 2021, though Black people account for only 21% of the town's population, and just 22% of Isle of Wight County's.

Herring's Republican successor, Jason Miyares, inherited the case in January - assigning assistant at-

torneys general Christine Lambrou Johnson, Todd M. Shockley and Brittany Sadler Berky as the lawsuit's new lawyers over the next several months.

In August, the trio submitted a revised complaint that, in Padrick's words, "took race out of it" by removing Herring's allegation and focusing instead solely on the events leading up to and following the traffic stop of Army 2nd Lt. Caron Nazario. The complaint does, however, still allege "racially-biased traffic enforcement, searches, seizures, detentions, and use of excessive force" in violation of Virginia's systemic civil rights law.

Herring's investigation and subsequent lawsuit had been precipitated by the release of viral video footage showing WPD Officer Daniel Crocker and now ex-officer Joe Gutierrez holding Nazario, a Black and Latino man, at gunpoint on Dec. 5, 2020, while the two shout conflicting commands at him to keep his hands out of his car's window and exit the vehicle.

Crocker, then newly graduated from the police academy, had pulled Nazario over for allegedly lacking a rear license plate. Gutierrez, assigned as Crocker's field training officer, responded to the scene when Crocker reported a "felony traffic stop" to dispatchers.

Nazario had a temporary New York plate taped to the inside of his car's rear window, but the officers said they didn't see it and accused the lieutenant of eluding police for having driven roughly a mile down Route 460 to a BP gas station before stopping.

The footage culminates with Gutierrez repeatedly pepper-spraying Nazario and using knee-strikes to force the lieutenant out of the car and onto the ground, and giving Nazario the choice of being arrested or allowed to leave if he would "let this go."

John Conrad, Windsor's Richmond-based outside counsel, contended at the hearing that the state had "no standing" to bring its suit against the town, arguing that "multiple incidents" would be needed to establish a pattern. Conrad also attempted to argue the Nazario incident shouldn't count, because it happened before the March 1, 2021, date Virginia's systemic civil rights law went into effect.

Johnson, however, contended - and Padrick agreed - that a pattern was evident in Windsor Police Chief Rodney "Dan" Riddle's decisions to hire Gutierrez and promote him to field training officer

SEE LAWSUIT, A3

Parental Rights Resolution adopted

BY TITUS MOHLER
STAFF WRITER

The Southampton County Board of Supervisors voted 5-1 on Sept. 27 to adopt the Resolution in Support of Parental Rights, which some supervisors described as mirroring, in brief form, Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin's 2022 Model Policies on the Privacy, Dignity and Respect for all Students and Parents in Virginia's Public Schools.

These model policies substantially revise those adopted under Gov. Ralph Northam and emphasize parental rights and categorization by sex rather than gender identity.

Under the Guiding Principles section of Youngkin's model policies, it states that parents "have the right to make decisions with respect to their children" and that schools "shall respect parents' values and beliefs."

Later in the same section, it states, "Schools shall defer to parents to make the best decisions with respect to their children: Parents are in the best position to work with their children and, where appropriate, their children's health care providers to determine (a) what names, nicknames, and/or pronouns, if any, shall be used for their child by teachers and school staff while their child is at school, (b) whether their child engages in any counseling or social transition at school that encourages a gender that differs from their child's sex, or (c) whether their child expresses a gender that differs with their child's sex while at school."

In Appendix 1, the new model policies state, "Students shall use bathrooms that correspond to his or her sex, except to the extent that federal law otherwise requires. See Grimm v. Gloucester County School Board, 972 F.3d 586 (2020)."

The next subpoint states, "Single-user bathrooms and facilities should be made available in accessible areas and provided with appropriate signage, indicating accessibility for all students."

SEE RESOLUTION, A5

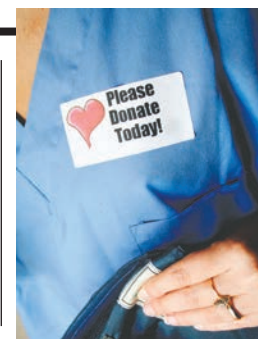
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DEATHS
Francis B. Bunch
William H. Duck
Phyllis A. Majette
Leigh N. Simon
John A. Ward Jr.



BEST BET
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DIVISION: 'I think the board has forgotten their duties,' Phillips said

FROM PAGE A1

vote.

"She made a motion that they remove me from chair, and I immediately said there's no procedure for doing that, and there is none," he said. "I had checked with our school board attorney before that, so you just can't arbitrarily remove the school board chair, and I said that's out of order, so that was kind of the end of that.

"And then they made a motion to eliminate Citizens' Time, and somebody seconded that, and then I also said that the chairman has the authority to add anything to the agenda that he or she feels appropriate," Holt continued. "I knew that a lot of citizens were upset last week when four (board members) didn't show up to accept Dr. Sterling's resignation (on Sept. 29), and I knew that they wanted to come and speak about it, and it kind of makes sense to me, so that's why I allowed them to have Citizens' Time.

"And I guess after the second failure of motion, then that's when they walked out," he said, referring to Johnson, Ward 3 Board Member Tonya Smith and Ward 4 Board Member Marchelle F. Williams. "And Dr. Sterling walked out too, which surprises me."

Sterling's departure came shortly after that of the three board members. She appeared to tell a school employee that she would be back shortly. She did not return to the dais during the meeting.

In a Monday interview, Johnson shared her own perspective of what led up to her leaving the Franklin City Council Chambers on Thursday.

"My concern was the violation of procedure," she stated.

First, she noted that Council was participating in the meeting remotely, and School Board Govern-

ance and Operations policy dictates that the majority of the board must approve the member's remote attendance.

"Chairman Holt disregarded the item on the agenda that called for the vote and said it was unnecessary," she said. "I made a motion to allow the remote attendance."

She said it was seconded by Williams, and Ward 6 Board Member Jerry McCreary offered during discussion that he, too, felt Council should be allowed to attend remotely. The motion passed unanimously.

"Secondly, Chair Holt completely skipped approving the agenda and, instead, called for Citizens' Time which is not on the agenda at a work session," Johnson said.

Policy BDDH in the governance states, "The agenda for regular monthly meetings of the Franklin City School Board will provide for a 'Citizens' Time' from approximately 7:30 p.m. to 7:45 p.m. after the 'Good News' report."

The board governance document found on the FCPS does not directly reference the meeting classification "work session."

Citizens' Time is not an item listed on the Oct. 6 agenda, though item 1.6 is listed as "New Agenda Item" with no additional details.

Johnson stated that the calendar of work sessions and regular sessions are voted on by board members in July, "so to change the format of a meeting would require a vote."

"I agreed that citizens should be allowed to speak — but it should be at the next meeting as that one was our regular meeting," she said. "Having a Citizens' Time at a work session is a violation of policy."

A portion of policy BDDC in the board governance states, "The preparation of the proposed agenda is the responsibility of the school board chair with the assis-

tance of the superintendent. Any member of the school board may submit items for inclusion on the proposed agenda."

Item 1.5 on the Oct. 6 meeting agenda was "Approval of the Agenda," but Johnson said, "It is my understanding that the agenda was never approved, which puts in question the legitimacy of the entire work session."

Johnson highlighted a portion of policy BDDH dealing with rules for Citizens' Time.

The governance states, "The school board will not permit speakers to discuss specific personnel or student concerns during the public session, but may be invited to do so during 'Closed Meeting.' Names, titles or positions which can identify specific individuals will not be allowed during the public session."

Johnson said it was her understanding that there were multiple violations of this allowed by Holt.

"When it was apparent that Chairman Holt was completely disregarding policy, I excused myself from the meeting," Johnson said. "I will not willingly nor knowingly participate in something that goes against policy and procedure."

"Chairman Holt said it was his prerogative to do as he wished as he is the chair," she added.

Then she pointed to part of policy BBAA, which states, "School board members shall have no authority or duties except such as may be assigned to them by the school board as a whole."

"The board chair is one vote," she said. "He or she is a facilitator who presides over meetings according to Robert's Rules of Order and is responsible for upholding our policies and procedures. This did not take place Thursday evening. As such, I chose to leave."

After the departure of Johnson, Smith and Wil-

liams, Holt took inventory at the meeting of the board members that remained.

"We have Ms. Council, we have Mr. McCreary, we have myself and we have (Ward 5 Board Member) Brittany (S. Powell)," he said. "We have a quorum."

Before the meeting proceeded further, Powell asked, "The board can vote for Citizens' Time, correct?"

She was told that this was correct, that during the approval for the agenda, the board can vote to add Citizens' Time.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Clyde Bailey was the first to speak during Citizens' Time.

"I'm going to try to keep it just about the kids, and we just saw just then that it ain't about the kids," he said, referring to the walk-out. "It's about the adults on how they want to continue to try to run the school system with this superintendent."

"I'm just saying and I ain't sugar coating nothing, just being real with everything and everybody that our kids are suffering, and then too many teachers just want to keep leaving and leaving or getting pushed out because of the superintendent," he added. "She already put in her resignation to go. It should be two weeks, and she should be gone and just keep it simple. We don't need to keep going back and forth on who did what, who did this. So that's just my thought on it, and that's it."

Next to speak was Pearlie Banks.

"I'm here tonight representing the Civic Forum that was newly formed, and I'm here to discuss the resignation of the superintendent," she said. "I'm sorry that she stepped out (of the room), but I'd like to commend her for her resignation. I believe that instead of waiting until (November) the 30th, if she feels that her time here is over, then she needs to go.

There's no need to drag it out."

Banks said she would like to commend Sterling for the accomplishments that she stated she has.

"We all know that you can't have any accomplishments without having failures and errors," Banks said. "So we have a lot of errors."

Then she turned her focus to the board members who left the meeting.

"I am distraught to see that those persons who have been selected to sit on the board are so childish that they walked out," she said. "And I do not understand why whoever appointed them would allow them to stay where they are."

She thanked Holt for sharing with the Civic Forum his vision for the board.

"I'm just sorry that this has turned into a circus when it didn't have to be," she said.

Again referencing the walkout, she said, "I'm getting ready to sit down, because this really bothers me when I see adults who are supposed to be leading our children, who are supposed to have the interests of our children, have the audacity to come in here and act like that. How dare they?!"

She concluded her comments by saying, "We aren't that many, y'all, so why can't we all work together for the common good of our children?"

The next speaker was Iasia Ryan, who has a child that attends S.P. Morton Elementary School. Ryan said she was disappointed with the board's disunity.

"I do understand that the pandemic has been hard for everyone, but this is the time where we need to come together and not really do what we've just seen up here," she said. "I just say that myself and all of us need to attend more often. ... I will definitely be sure to attend every single one of you all's meetings to hold my board member accountable for my child!"

Brenda Peterson stepped up next and said, "For the past 34 years I have been an educator — 20 years in middle school, the rest in high school, teaching AP classes, teaching dual enrollment classes — and I have never in my entire life seen the behavior that I've seen here expressed today, walking out, temper tantrums, speaking over each other."

"The whole point of a school board is to act in the best interests of the children," she continued. "The children are the ones that are getting screwed over, period. They are not getting the adequate education they need, they have attendance issues, there's very little support for the parents, there's very little support for the administration and the teachers and the staff, morale is at an all-time low, you have people that are fleeing in droves."

She criticized Johnson, Smith and Williams for walking out.

"Honestly, I think anybody who cannot show up for their board meetings needs to be replaced, and anybody who cannot stay during their board meetings needs to also be replaced," she said.

Peterson also said she thinks Sterling's last day should be Oct. 14, "and she should just have a nice little vacation before she starts her new job in Petersburg on Dec. 1."

It has been announced that Sterling is the new superintendent of Petersburg City Public Schools and that she will start in this role at the beginning of December.

Audrey Lee spoke next and said, "I am utterly appalled at what I've seen tonight. This is one for the books here."

She said that it is Sterling's prerogative to leave if she does not want to be here and that she has already resigned, but she then recommended that Johnson,

SEE DIVISION, A7

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INPUT: Administrators pleased with online input from Windsor side

FROM PAGE A1

ditorium and rebuilding/renovating Smithfield High School.

For elementary school facilities, it was suggested that the CIP address HVAC at Carrollton Elementary School and the Windsor Elementary School bus entrance.

Under the category of

athletic/extracurricular projects, members of the public listed Windsor High School track, Windsor High School tennis courts, George Tyler Middle School track/field and baseball fields in connection with all of the schools in the division.

For division facilities, public input was as follows: expand school size, out-

door classrooms and security upgrades.

In the category of "other," air conditioning on buses was listed.

David Adams, who attended the meeting in person, asked about the A/C item, and Coleman elaborated by noting it was not all the buses, but some of the older models were without A/C.

Existing priorities on the CIP include rebuilding Hardy Elementary School; replacing Smithfield High School's track and football, field hockey and soccer field; building security vestibules for each school; rebuilding Westside Elementary School; renovating Smithfield High School's band/choral room; the IWCS Bus Fleet Garage; and

renovating or building a new IWCS Administration Building.

Referencing the lack of in-person attendance at the Oct. 5 meeting, Coleman said, "A lot of individuals that couldn't get here throughout the week, they have been emailing in on the app that's there."

"We still feel that there was an adequate input

from the Windsor side as we go over to the Smithfield side," he said. "And of course, it's all preliminary information, so once we take it to the school board, we'll decide from there where to go."

The second community input meeting was set to be held Tuesday, Oct. 11, from 6-7 p.m. at Smithfield High School.

DIVISION: Sterling's last day as superintendent will be Oct. 21

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FROM PAGE A1

Smith and Williams hand in their resignations as well "because they are showing that they are really not concerned about our children but more about trying to support somebody that has already handed in her resignation."

Lee said that at the age of 68, she has been an advocate for children for most of her life, and she wants to see the best that Franklin can have in terms of the children's education.

She commended Powell for staying in the meeting, Holt for "speaking out for right" and McCreary for "being a man that stands behind your word and your appointment."

Amy L. Phillips, who departed the school board this summer after serving as the Ward 2 representative and board chair, spoke next.

"I just wanted to step forward and state three things: hire a superintendent, maintain a fiscally sound budget and set policy — that's what the seven individuals that sit on that dais for the school system are challenged with doing," she said. "It seems some people have forgotten that in the last three months.

"I stepped away, and I do not know what has happened since I stepped off on June 30, but I have sat back and watched, and I am appalled," she continued. "I think the board has forgotten their duties."

She emphasized that the three duties she mentioned are written into the Code of Virginia.

"Those that were on the board with me, we achieved Master Board status, as you are very well aware," she said. "You are not operating as a Master Board anymore."

She noted that there has been conversation about letting the superintendent go effective immediately or after two weeks.

"When you have someone that high up in any organization, and I'm even looking at this from the business world, letting someone go that quickly will have a larger ripple effect than a slower transition with someone else taking the helm," she said.

She acknowledged that the school division has had employees leave.

"Y'all know, those that sat on the board with me, turnover is not isolated to this school division," she said. "However, right now, you have the highest staffing of just about any other school division in the state."

Phillips is now an employee of FCPS, and she described the reaction of her fellow staff members when they learned of Sterling's resignation.

"I watched the employees of this school division in complete shock when the announcement came out," she said. "Yes, you've got some that are disgruntled and some that don't like (the superintendent), some because they're held accountable. But I think you're going to see your retention is going to drop dramatically with the exit of the superintendent. So I want you to take that into consideration moving forward."

Seeing things from the staff side now, day in and day out, Phillips said, "I don't think you're seeing what the ripple effect from this is going to be."

Speaking next was Dr. Alvin Harris, who opened by acknowledging the peculiarity of the situation that night.

"This is a somewhat unique circumstance," he said.

He put a spotlight on the importance of education, noting it has been the highlight of his life and is one of the most important tools that each individual can have.

"This is America where the expression of freedom of speech is one of the most important things that any of us could have," he said. "Unfortunately, for some members, I guess they were afraid to hear what other people had to say."

He said that the positive aspect of forming one team "is a vision that all of us desire, and it's the vision that will make Franklin great like it was in the past, like it can be now and like it will be in the future."

"Getting parents involved in their children's education, we can do that," he said. "We don't want to usurp what the board does, but one thing we must do — all must be involved. All must participate. All must have a voice and a vision to make Franklin (City) Public Schools the best school system that these little kids can go through."

Addressing the four board members in attendance, he said, "We will be a team. Now, for those that don't want to participate, let them go. But we will be a team in thought and in deeds, and I want to thank you all for giving us this opportunity to speak."

The final speaker during Citizens' Time was Wydia Bailey.

She greeted the board members present and said it was good to see some Franklin City Council members present, along with former Franklin Mayor Jim Council.

Bailey advocated for the hastening of Sterling's departure because "you cannot fill a seat until it's vacant."

She then turned her attention to school board members and highlighted the word "stealing."

"Stealing is when you take something that you're not supposed to have," she said. "You all get a stipend for your positions or whatever you want to call it. It may not be enough to pay a mortgage, who knows, but it's something. But several members steadily (do) not come to meetings. You should not have that position, you should not be getting a check from our city for doing nothing."

She later added, "Mr. McCreary, Mr. Holt, Ms. Powell, Ms. Council, I want to say 'thank you,' but you're doing your job. But I applaud you for standing up and doing your job when other persons just walk out. They may think they walked out on all of us citizens tonight, they may think they stood in support of the superintendent — they did not. They walked out on the students."

She criticized Johnson for her public back-and-forth with Holt.

"You're the chair," Bailey said to Holt. "If she has a problem with that, your next closed session, that's where it needs to be dealt with, not out here amongst citizens. This is not how we do things. It's not adult, and it's not handling the business for the children."

BOARD RESPONSE TO CITIZENS' TIME

Holt said, "Thank you all for stepping up and having the courage to let us know what you think. We hear you. I want to apologize to



Pearlie Banks speaks emphatically during Citizens' Time on Thursday, Oct. 6, at the Franklin City School Board work session. She was one of several individuals who delivered frank comments.

those of you here in the general community for the behavior of some of my colleagues. These last two weeks have just been unbelievable. But we need to get back to the business of working with kids, educating kids, working on our SOL scores, working on our attendance. We have a lot of work to do, and we all need to do it together, so thank you all for participating."

Council also spoke, expressing gratitude for the chance to join the meeting electronically.

"I'm grateful the technology exists that I could participate in today's meeting, and I wanted to thank the citizens who chose to come out tonight," she said. "I feel like it's important that the board members are able to hear from everybody, and so I appreciate them coming, and Mr. Chair, thank you for allowing Citizens' Time."

COMMENTS FROM PRESENT, FORMER ELECTED OFFICIALS

After the board went into closed session, former Mayor Jim Council asked to be quoted in The Tidewater News, sharing the first thing he thought about as he watched the proceedings during the meeting. He recalled something said by the city's former vice mayor, the late Kent Pope.

"Kent used to always say, 'Remember, the decisions that we make, it's all about the kids,'" Council said.

Current City Council members present at the meeting included Ward 1 Councilman Mark R. Kitchen, Ward 2 Councilman Ray Smith and Ward 5 Councilwoman Wynndolyn H. Copeland.

During the board's closed session, Kitchen told The Tidewater News, "We couldn't speak publicly, but I wish that I could."

THE CLOSED SESSION

Sterling, Johnson, Smith and Williams were present in the school board office conference room when the board convened there in closed session following the initial open session Thursday night.

"When we went in and I saw them sitting there, it was just a normal, business-as-usual kind of session, and there was no argument or anything like that," Holt said. "We just came to fairly quick conclusions on everything."

He noted that Sterling's resignation was not the only topic the board discussed, but it was the main item and the one it dealt with first.

The closed session lasted for nearly two hours.

THE SECOND OPEN SESSION

Members of the public who waited for the board's return to open session were invited to join the board in the school board office conference room. After emerging from closed session, the board voted on several items, the last of which was Sterling's resignation. Johnson made the motion to accept it. McCreary asked for a roll call vote, and everyone voted to accept the resignation except for Arwen Council, who abstained.

After the meeting was adjourned, a member of the public asked Holt for a copy of the policies and procedures for the board.

McCreary and Johnson began to answer, but the citizen insisted that Holt be the one who answered, ultimately telling Johnson to "shut up" when she continued answering. As the citizen continued to raise her voice, Holt asked for her to be removed as others filed out of the room.

Holt had referred the woman to the school system's website, but Johnson said this was not fair because FCPS policy states that the policies and procedures could be provided in writing to anyone who wants them.

WHAT'S NEXT

In his Monday interview, Holt said he is ready to move on from the conflict evident between board members Thursday.

"I think the four board members that were there, that stayed, I feel like they are ready to move on," he said. "I have no idea what the other three will do, but we hope they will come back and do their duty as a board member and we just move on to other things. We have so much to do right now. ... We don't need anymore distractions, and this has been a major distraction for two weeks."

Holt said it was decided in closed session that Sterling's last day as FCPS superintendent will be Friday, Oct. 21.

The next Franklin City School Board meeting will be Thursday, Oct. 20.

At that meeting, "I would hope that we could nominate and accept an interim that would be in charge through the search process until we find and appoint a new superintendent," Holt said. "So I would imagine

that interim would probably be in that role three or four months."

He later added, "I think probably the meeting two weeks after that we might identify the process that we're going to use, and I do know this, that we're going to have some public input sessions, at least one, maybe two during that time before we put out what we're looking for."

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The Tidewater News

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TITUS MOHLER | THE TIDEWATER NEWS

SCPS Superintendent Dr. Gwendolyn P. Shannon said during the school board's special called meeting Monday that the CDC does recommend universal indoor masking by all students ages 2 years old and older, staff, teachers and visitors of K-12 schools regardless of vaccination status.

Southampton, Franklin public schools keep mask mandate

BY TITUS MOHLER
STAFF WRITER

Southampton County Public Schools and Franklin City Public Schools have opted to continue requiring masks for now despite Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin's executive order that repealed Virginia's universal K-12 mask mandate and made parents the arbiter of whether or not their child will wear a mask.

The order went into effect at midnight Monday, Jan. 24.

It was on Youngkin's first day in office Jan. 15 that he signed Executive Order No. 2. The order itself notes it is designed to reaffirm the rights of parents in the upbringing, education and care of their children.

The second directive of the order states, "The parents of any child enrolled in (an) elementary or secondary

school or a school-based early child care and educational program may elect for their children not to be subject to any mask mandate in effect at the child's school or educational program."

In light of the governor's order, the Southampton

SEE MANDATE, A8

Gayle honored for his 24 years of service

BY TITUS MOHLER
STAFF WRITER

The Franklin City Council took a moment at its Jan. 24 meeting to honor recently retired Franklin Police Department Sgt. Brent O. Gayle for his 24 years of service to the department, the public and the city.

The council unanimously adopted a resolution of appreciation for Gayle, which Ward 1 Councilman Mark R. Kitchen read in full at the meeting.

The resolution notes that throughout his career with the FPD, Gayle has shown his dedication to the department and the citizens of the city.

"Sgt. Gayle has main-

tained a high level of professionalism that has gained him great respect with staff, city officials and surrounding agencies," the resolution states. "His personal demeanor has facilitated many accomplishments and has earned for him the respect of his peers."

The document notes Gayle has been awarded multiple times for his excellent service, including acknowledgements from citizens, co-workers and supervisors, letters of recognition dealing with dangerous suspects, victims of crimes and service to the community.

Gayle has received a Star Performer Award for

SEE GAYLE, A7



TITUS MOHLER | THE TIDEWATER NEWS

Recently retired Franklin Police Department Sgt. Brent O. Gayle presents a plaque he received from Franklin Mayor Frank M. Rabil, right. The plaque was from the city, honoring Gayle's 24 years of service.

Shiloh Drive sidewalk mystery may be solved

BY TITUS MOHLER
STAFF WRITER

Windsor Town Manager William Saunders shared some key new information regarding the issue plaguing the Shiloh Drive sidewalk during his capital projects update that he presented to the Town Council at its regular meeting Jan. 11.

In a memo within the council agenda packet that Saunders wrote to the mayor and the council, he stated that Isle of Wight

County Project Manager Jamie Oliver communicated two potential repair scenarios for the Shiloh Drive sidewalk, which has been experiencing water issues. The one likely scenario to move forward includes arming the bank with riprap, which is loose stone used to form a foundation for a breakwater or other structure.

"But future failure could be outside of the warranty period and require maintenance by the town," Saunders wrote.

During the meeting, Councilman George Stubbs said, "This has

SEE MYSTERY, A8

Boykins seeks Public Works supervisor

BY TITUS MOHLER
STAFF WRITER

The Boykins Town Council heard more details Jan. 11 about an issue discovered last month with regard to E-Summons funds, and the council also made progress in its search for a new Public Works supervisor.



EDWARDS

Boykins Town Clerk/Treasurer Victoria Edwards said that Councilwoman Linda Beatty updated her and the Town Council on the ongoing E-Summons funds issue. Beatty serves as the resource for the town on the matter.

E-Summons, or electronic summons, is a program that transitions much of the process of ticketing at traffic stops from paperwork to digital

scanning. This has led to a significant reduction in the length of time for traffic stops, it has eliminated the need to perform data entry for each summons, and it has reduced errors due to illegible handwriting.

There are fees connected to the E-Summons program.

"We are looking into how the E-Summons fees will be paid to the town since we have passed an ordinance that authorizes our town officer to add the additional fee," Beatty said.

When dealing with unfinished business items Jan. 11, the Town Council scheduled interviews to fill the town Public Works supervisor position.

Edwards noted that later in the meeting, the Town Council reviewed applicants for this same posi-

SEE BOYKINS, A3

Drive-through COVID testing event set

BY TITUS MOHLER
STAFF WRITER

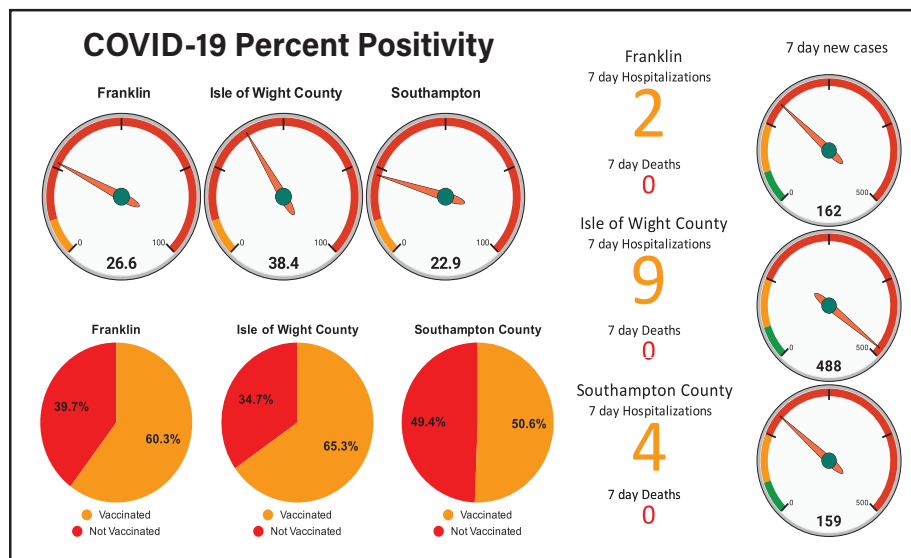
The continued presence of COVID-19 in the community and the rise of cases recently has led the city of Franklin to partner with the Virginia Department of Health on a new, drive-through testing event.

This will be in addition to the walk-in testing event at the Southampton Memorial Hospital - Satellite Lab that is ongoing on Wednesdays.

"We are continuing to see cases rise," Franklin City Manager Amanda C. Jarratt said to the City Council during its meeting Monday, Jan. 24. "Cumulatively, we're now at 2,290 cases — again, that's from March 2020 — 84 hospitalizations, 43 deaths."

She said the city's seven-day average of cases had come down to 19 per day.

"It was close to 30 per day when I checked last week, so that is an improvement," she said. "We



are testing more, so I think that does add to the numbers increasing, and the omicron variant, as has been discussed nationally, is quite contagious.

"But we are partnering with the Virginia Department of Health to do drive-through testing at the Armory Recreation parking lot," she said. "So that's going to start this Wednes-

day, and that'll be from 10 a.m.-1 p.m."

She noted that the tests administered at this event would be polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests.

"It's almost impossible to get rapid tests at this point, but if someone is in need of (PCR) testing, we are going to be doing that in collaboration with the health department," she said.

"You can walk up as well or drive up to be tested."

There is also a free weekly PCR testing event being held in Franklin from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. every Wednesday through the end of February at the Southampton Memorial Hospital - Satellite Lab, which is located at 102 Fairview Drive. For inquiries on this event, call 757-514-4766.

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Grace C. Brock
Roy E. Council
Franklin G. DeLoatch
Glen A. Harrison Sr.

Annie M. Maddrey
James Milian
Luster H. Pittman Jr.
William J. Umphlett
Benjamin E. Webb

BEST BET
Bingo night: The Walters Ruritan Club will have bingo night on Tuesday, Feb. 8, at 7 p.m. There will be food, beverages and pull tabs available for purchase. Doors open at 6 p.m. For more information, call Mike Perry at 757-642-0833.

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MYSTERY: Water is coming across the top

FROM PAGE A1

been going on — this deterioration, washout, whatever you want to call it — ever since the sidewalk was put in. We have encountered issues with that several times. But this says, 'The one likely move includes armoring the bank with riprap, but future failures could be outside of the warranty period...' Why is that? They haven't fixed it yet, and it's been going on now for how long?"

Saunders replied, "Well, we're still within the one-year warranty period, so the next time they fix it, when they stabilize the bank and put the riprap on it, it will still

be within the one-year warranty period. After that's done, it may be outside the warranty period if it fails again."

Stubbs responded, "I don't agree with that — my personal opinion. It's not fixed. Riprap's not going to fix it because the riprap's going to sink. If you want to meet me tomorrow, I'll show you a place that's done that. That ain't going to help, not water coming across that sidewalk like that."

Saunders said, "I was finally able to get some pictures during a rain event that seemed to show that it was water coming across the top of that. I had had that suspi-

cion, but I was able to get pictures of it, and I emailed those to the project manager at the county during that rain event last week to prove that that's (it), because that's one of the things they haven't been able to determine — whether it's water from underneath or water that's coming across the top."

Saunders gave an update on the Windsor Town Center roof replacement and moisture repair in his memo as well.

He noted that the roof replacement project was to conclude by Dec. 4. However, the roofing contractor was granted more time to fully complete the job — until Jan.

3 — due to rain, a change order for work to replace rotten wood and difficulties in securing staff.

"The roof replacement project has now been completed," he wrote. "Interior remediation commenced on Monday, Dec. 6, 2021, and has also been completed. Final inspections on both projects are scheduled for Monday, Jan. 10, 2022."

During the Jan. 11 meeting, he added that he had not yet received the punch list from the final inspections on the town center project.

Mayor Glyn T. Willis said that once the punch list and the finances are taken care of on the project, he and Saun-

ders will be giving a report on the project's status to the Isle of Wight County Board of Supervisors once it partnered with Windsor on it.

Stubbs asked, "So do we have any type of written guarantee of anything on this project that's been done in case 30 days from now the roof cracks or leaks or whatever?"

"Yeah, we should have a one-year warranty from the contractor on the work," Saunders said. "There's going to be a 20-year warranty on the roof. That's part of why the engineer has been doing the inspections along the way and the final inspection, because he's the one that's

going to certify the roof for the manufacturer of the materials so we can be sure to get the full 20-year warranty on the roofing materials."

Saunders also updated the Town Council on the Duke Street and Virginia Avenue water main replacement.

He noted in the memo that easement acquisition packets were sent out to landowners; meetings are being scheduled with those who want more information. Bowman Consulting is reviewing the bid packet to ensure that it will meet Drinking Water State Revolving Fund standards for potential use of American Rescue Plan Act funds.

MANDATE: Continue to follow the CDC's mitigation strategies

Pg 2, 3 of 3

FROM PAGE A1

County School Board held a special called meeting Monday evening to discuss the school division's existing mask policy, which requires masks. The board voted unanimously to leave the policy unchanged for now.

On Wednesday, Jan. 19, FCPS released a statement from Franklin City School Board Chairwoman Amy L. Phillips.

"We are currently reviewing the language of the executive order, are in consultation with local health officials, reviewing (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) guidelines, assessing

current local COVID data, as well as reviewing applicable current state laws to make the best, most informed decision for the health and safety of our staff and students," she said. "Until we are able to come to that decision, we will continue to follow the CDC's mitigation strategies in regard to masks. We will discuss this further at a future board meeting."

"We appreciate your understanding and commitment to the health and well-being of all members of the FCPS community, as well as your patience through this process."

At the Southampton County School Board meet-

ing Monday, SCPS Superintendent Dr. Gwendolyn P. Shannon opened the proceedings by presenting information to the board on the executive order, an existing senate bill, the school system's COVID-19 mitigation plan and current information on rising COVID numbers locally.

"In addition to the governor's mandate, we also have Senate Bill 1303," Shannon said. "Senate Bill 1303 essentially states that each school board is 'to provide such in-person instruction in a manner in which it adheres, to the maximum extent practicable, to any currently applicable mitigation strategies for early childhood care and education programs and elementary and secondary schools to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 that have been provided by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.'"

She added that this bill is in effect until Aug. 1.

"In accordance with Senate Bill 1303, we have firm mitigation strategies in place," she said. "Currently our students are wearing masks in our buildings, in any vehicles and on our buses, and the mask also applies to staff, parents, anyone who enters the building."

She listed a variety of other strategies in place, including highlighting how SCPS has had two successful COVID-19 vaccination clinics.

"We have a clinic scheduled for Feb. 9 and 10 as well as March 2 and 3," she said. "These clinics are open to the community, and it doesn't matter whether you're getting your first shot, your second shot or your booster — you're welcome to attend and participate in our vaccination clinic."

Returning to the subject of masks, Shannon said that the CDC presently recommends the use of N95 or KN95 masks to reduce COVID transmission.

She then pointed to CDC COVID guidelines that she noted were updated Jan. 13.

"The main thing that I want to emphasize is that CDC does recommend universal indoor masking by all students ages 2 years old and older, staff, teachers and visitors of K-12 schools regardless of vaccination status," she said.

Lastly, she discussed local COVID statistics, pointing out that there was a peak of community transmission of the virus in early 2021 and that another peak had been reached in the latter half of December 2021.

"Oct. 31st through Nov. 13th was the only period of moderate transmission this school year," she said.

Board member William Worsham was the first to share his thoughts on what the board should do with regard to the SCPS mask policy.

"A year and a half ago, we took votes as to whether or not we'd go back to school," he said. "At that time the original COVID virus was not affecting children. Within about another year, we came down with the delta variant, and that variant still did not affect children."

He referenced the rising numbers Shannon presented and urged board members to look at them carefully.

"I, in my career, always have done what I thought was best for children first, and in my opinion, and I know this may sound different than what my votes have been, but when I look at figures like I'm looking at now, I find more children being affected by this," he said. "I think as a result of affecting those children, my stand on this would be that we wear masks. I think for the safety of the children, we've got to take into account more than just the governor's resolution or executive order, whichever one you want to call it."

"Does that executive order override the constitution of this state, and does it override the law that came up the past year about wearing masks?" he continued. "I think this week the Supreme Court of the state of Virginia is going to look at this, and we're probably going to get some type of written notice as to where the court stands on it."

He said the current variant of the coronavirus affects children more so than older people.

"I just don't think this board should be held responsible because we didn't take all the necessary steps to protect children and (then) something terrible happens with one of our children," he said.

He emphasized that he was not changing his mind on how schooling should be conducted — in person as opposed to virtually.

"Students need to be in school, and the way we can keep them in school is with masks, and if that's the case, then let's go with that," he said.

He noted that the other part of this issue pertains to school staff, indicating that if the virus spreads more easily due to fewer mitigation measures, like masking, it could significantly increase the school division's staffing challenges.

"We're having a difficult time as it is hiring full-time teachers," he said. "We're not the only ones; many places are. But the point of the matter is (that) when a teacher is out, we have to fill it with a substitute, and substitutes we're not finding."

Florence Reynolds was the next board member to speak, and she opened by

saying she was thinking along the same lines as Worsham.

"I'm sure that all of us here tonight are here because we care about children," she said.

She underscored a recent news report stating that about a million children were hospitalized in America due to COVID-19.

She said that wearing masks mitigates the impact of the virus, giving the school division a way to protect children.

"This mask-wearing is going to protect that child that is coming to school without a mask too, you know?" she said. "We are for our children, and we adults, we are going to have to answer for what we do for our children."

She decried people focused on politics when it comes to this issue.

"We can't go that way," she said. "The political people are for themselves. All they think about are the politics of things. Well, there are no politics when little Johnny is laid to rest."

She also expressed frustration with people making the issue of mask-wearing about rights.

"We've all got rights, and we, as school board members, have to be sure that our children here in Southampton have the right to be protected," she said.

She closed by noting that if some parents do not want their children to wear a mask, they have rights, and they can take their children in their home for virtual learning and even home-school if it is that important to them.

Board member Donna Rountree briefly spoke next, noting that some of Worsham's comments summed up most of how she feels.

"We've got to look at the safety of the kids, and it's been proven that masks do help," she said. "Those numbers don't look good for us, but just imagine what they could be."

Board member Denise Bunn said, "I would agree that when you look at the numbers of where we are right now that this is not a smart time to stop any mitigation strategies that are in place. We're actually at a point in time that we're seeing numbers rise. Just within our community, the spread is rampant right now. You can't talk to anybody without finding out somebody's been quarantined or somebody's positive."

"So to do the right thing by our children, by our staff, by our community, I think it's just unconscionable to even consider taking away something that is a layer of protection — it's already in place," she said, adding that dropping the mandate would not be ethically correct.

Board Vice Chair James Pope III said, "I'm like everybody else. I want to see us get back to normal as soon as possible. What's normal? No longer wearing masks. But right now, with the numbers where they are, I don't see that as an option. In our community, COVID is spreading so rapidly I feel like if we did away with masks, it would go through our staff so quickly, virtual wouldn't even be an option."

"Our job is to provide a quality education, and I feel

like that's in the classroom," he continued. "But we learned last year, virtual was a tool, but it wasn't a good one for anybody. It was the only option we had at the time, but now we've got an option — just wear a mask until the numbers get better. And I think that's what we should do."

He said that any way a board member votes, someone is going to get upset.

"I can live if somebody gets mad because their kid has to wear a mask two or three more months, but I don't think I could live with the fact that somebody passed away — a staff member or a student — because we said you didn't have to wear a mask," he said.

He noted that if the COVID numbers get better, the board can revisit the decision.

Board member Lynn Bradley said she agrees with Pope.

"I think we need to keep what we have in place," she said.

She also expressed empathy for parents who take issue with the continued mask mandate.

"I can also understand, too, the feelings that you feel like, as a parent, that the school is telling you what you can and cannot do, and it's not that we're trying to tell you that," she said. "It's that we're trying to protect your child as well as every other child in the school system."

She said she read over information from the Virginia Department of Health and the CDC in advance of Monday's meeting.

"I'm thinking if my two girls that graduated from here were back in here, I would want them wearing a mask, I would want them protected, I would want them to use every option that they could to stay healthy," she said. "We have a board meeting in two weeks. A lot can change between now and two weeks. We can look at it again in two weeks and see what things are looking like. But as it stands right now, I just feel like we need to keep the masks."

Board member Greg Scott said he agreed with Pope and Bradley.

"I have a senior at Southampton High School, my daughter, and I would want her to take every extent to make sure that she is safe, but not only her — all the other children in the building as well," he said. "So I believe that it's a little too early to take the masks off now."

He noted that as other board members had stated, if things get better, they can always revisit the topic and make adjustments.

"Taking the masks off right now I just don't think would be a wise idea," he said.

Closing out board comments prior to the vote was board member Christopher Smith Sr., who said that he was totally in favor of the board maintaining its current mask policy, with the option of virtual learning for those who cannot wear a mask.

"Wearing a mask is not just for your protection but it's for the protection of others, and that's the main thing about mask-wearing," he said. "So if we just continue the way we're going, that would be my decision."

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