



BOARD OF VISITORS

THE VIRGINIA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND THE BLIND
P.O. BOX 2069
STAUNTON, VA 24402-2069

Senator John J. Bell
Board Chairperson

September 20, 2022
Minutes of Meeting

Call to Order: Senator Bell called the meeting to order at 10:44am.

Roll Call of Members: Senator Bell welcomed the new members to the Board. A roll call of members was conducted by introductions.

Delegate Kathleen Murphy, Vice-Chair, recently submitted a request to the Governor's office to step down from the Board of Visitors. A new legislator will be appointed by the Governor to fill Delegate Murphy's seat.

Senator Bell declared a quorum.

Members Present: Senator John J. Bell, Senator Ghazala F. Hashmi, Delegate Sally Hudson, Carolyn Berry, Christine Ogden, Daphne Cox, JH Cline Jr., Ron Lanier and Vera Wilson

Members Absent: Mike Asip

Advisors to the BOV Present: Wanda Council/VDOE, Deborah Love/OAG, Adam Kane/OAG, and Pat Trice/Superintendent

Advisors to the BOV Absent: None

Election of Officers: Senator Bell opened the election of officers.

Senator Hashmi recognized Senator John J. Bell's service to the Board as Chairperson and motioned to reappoint Senator Bell to the Chairperson position for a second term. JH Cline, Jr. seconded the motion.

No additional nominations were made for the Chairperson position.

The Board of Visitors, being polled, voted to reappoint Senator John J. Bell as Chairperson for a second term as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------|---------|
| 1. Senator Bell | ABSTAIN |
| 2. Senator Hashmi | AYE |
| 3. Delegate Hudson | AYE |
| 4. Carolyn Berry | AYE |
| 5. Christine Ogden | AYE |
| 6. Daphne Cox | AYE |
| 7. JH Cline, Jr. | AYE |

- | | |
|-----------------|--------|
| 8. Mike Asip | ABSENT |
| 9. Ron Lanier | AYE |
| 10. Vera Wilson | AYE |

The motion carried.

Senator Hashmi proposed to elect Delegate Sally Hudson to the Vice-Chairperson position. Carolyn Berry seconded the motion.

JH Cline, Jr. motioned to close the nominations for Vice-Chairperson. Ron Lanier seconded the motion.

The Board of Visitors, being polled, voted to approve Delegate Sally Hudson as Vice-Chairperson as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------|---------|
| 1. Senator Bell | AYE |
| 2. Senator Hashmi | AYE |
| 3. Delegate Hudson | ABSTAIN |
| 4. Carolyn Berry | AYE |
| 5. Christine Ogden | AYE |
| 6. Daphne Cox | AYE |
| 7. JH Cline, Jr. | AYE |
| 8. Mike Asip | ABSENT |
| 9. Ron Lanier | AYE |
| 10. Vera Wilson | AYE |

The motion carried.

JH Cline, Jr. motioned to elect Vera Wilson to the Secretary position. Christine Ogden seconded the motion.

Senator Hashmi motioned to close the nominations for Secretary. JH Cline, Jr. seconded the motion.

The Board of Visitors, being polled, voted to approve Vera Wilson as Secretary as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------|---------|
| 1. Senator Bell | AYE |
| 2. Senator Hashmi | AYE |
| 3. Delegate Hudson | AYE |
| 4. Carolyn Berry | AYE |
| 5. Christine Ogden | AYE |
| 6. Daphne Cox | AYE |
| 7. JH Cline, Jr. | AYE |
| 8. Mike Asip | ABSENT |
| 9. Ron Lanier | AYE |
| 10. Vera Wilson | ABSTAIN |

The motion carried.

Reading and approval of minutes: There were no objections, additions or deletions noted for the minutes of the March 24, 2022 meeting.

Daphne Cox motioned to approve the meeting minutes from the March 24, 2022 meeting. JH Cline, Jr. seconded the motion.

The Board of Visitors, being polled, voted to approve the March 24, 2022 meeting minutes as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------|--------|
| 1. Senator Bell | AYE |
| 2. Senator Hashmi | AYE |
| 3. Delegate Hudson | AYE |
| 4. Carolyn Berry | AYE |
| 5. Christine Ogden | AYE |
| 6. Daphne Cox | AYE |
| 7. JH Cline, Jr. | AYE |
| 8. Mike Asip | ABSENT |
| 9. Ron Lanier | AYE |
| 10. Vera Wilson | AYE |

The motion carried.

Reading and approval of minutes: There were no objections, additions or deletions noted for the minutes of the June 14, 2022 meeting.

Daphne Cox motioned to approve the meeting minutes from the June 14, 2022 meeting. Vera Wilson seconded the motion.

The Board of Visitors, being polled, voted to approve the June 14, 2022 meeting minutes as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------|--------|
| 1. Senator Bell | AYE |
| 2. Senator Hashmi | AYE |
| 3. Delegate Hudson | AYE |
| 4. Carolyn Berry | AYE |
| 5. Christine Ogden | AYE |
| 6. Daphne Cox | AYE |
| 7. JH Cline, Jr. | AYE |
| 8. Mike Asip | ABSENT |
| 9. Ron Lanier | AYE |
| 10. Vera Wilson | AYE |

The motion carried.

Policy Updates: Ms. Trice shared that since the Board's last meeting, the Office of the Attorney General's counsel transitioned from Interim Assistant Attorney General, Audrey Burges, to Senior Assistant Attorney General, Deb Love, and Assistant Attorney General, Adam Kane. Ms. Love requested to postpone approval for policies G040-Use of Security Metal Detectors and G042-Civil Protest and Demonstrations, until the documents were able to be reviewed by the Attorney General's office. These policies will be voted on at the Board's next meeting.

Ms. Trice requested that a change be made to the agenda to allow Tessy Schlemmer, Director of Human Resources, and Janice Rankin, Director of Operations, to present their reports prior to the Superintendent's Report.

Reports

Human Resources Report: Tessy Schlemmer, Human Resources Director, thanked Ms. Trice for her support. During the past two years, the COVID pandemic caused additional stress and an increased workload for the entire administration team.

VSDB's current employee count totals 154 with 141 full-time and 13 wage staff. Employment numbers are down from pre-COVID numbers.

Nine new teachers started in July. Several sought out the opportunity to work at VSDB and are excited to be here. Ms. Schlemmer provided a brief introduction of the new teachers in the Deaf and Blind Departments.

Senator Bell added that across Virginia, there is a labor shortage across the job market for open positions. COVID provided additional challenges. With the pandemic beginning to turn another page, VSDB is able to look at the compensation rates available in different pay bands. Critical positions in pay bands I-III, are struggling to compete with salaries available in the local market. Human Resources has been working to reduce the number of days that positions are open; however, finding staff with the expertise and educational credentials needed has been extremely challenging. Ms. Trice shared that in addition to the labor shortage nationwide, there is also an ongoing shortage across the country for teachers for the deaf/hard of hearing and blind/visually impaired.

In a previous meeting, the Board discussed reclassifying VSDB's positions from Residential Advisor to a distinctive title such as 'VSDB Level I' based upon the unique skills that are required of the individuals in these positions. Senator Bell shared that he was hoping to keep VSDB ahead of the curve by considering changes to bring to the administration and the General Assembly highlighting the uniqueness of VSDB's positions.

Ms. Cox asked Ms. Schlemmer if she had been able to research the salaries for teachers working in special education in northern Virginia, Roanoke, Charlottesville and Virginia Beach. Ms. Schlemmer shared that she reviewed salary ranges for Faulkner, Fairfax, Loudon and Norfolk counties and found that they did not provide any additional compensation for those working in special education. Ms. Schlemmer also reached out to Richmond City Schools and did not receive a response.

During the Board's last information only meeting, and a proposed 2022-2023 New Hire Teacher Salary Scale was introduced. The salaries listed were based upon a comparison to local school systems in Staunton, Waynesboro, and Augusta county. Each year, the goal of the salary scale is to match the highest salary amount given locally plus an additional \$100.00. As state employees, VSDB's teachers also received a 5% increase in July. Ms. Schlemmer requested the salary scale be voted on by the Board.

JH Cline, Jr. motioned to approve the 2022-2023 New Hire Teacher Salary Scale. Daphne Cox seconded the motion.

The Board of Visitors, being polled, voted as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------|--------|
| 1. Senator Bell | AYE |
| 2. Senator Hashmi | AYE |
| 3. Delegate Hudson | AYE |
| 4. Carolyn Berry | AYE |
| 5. Christine Ogden | AYE |
| 6. Daphne Cox | AYE |
| 7. JH Cline, Jr. | AYE |
| 8. Mike Asip | ABSENT |
| 9. Ron Lanier | AYE |
| 10. Vera Wilson | AYE |

The motion carried.

VSDB's sign-on bonus program offers incentives between \$2,000-\$3,500 for new hires. An individual's sign-on amount is based upon a position's pay grade. Current state employee transferring from another agency are not able to qualify to receive a sign-on bonus. Half of the bonus is distributed after an individual successfully completes three months, with the remainder dispersed after six months. This program is currently being utilized for all open positions. Bonuses are taxed as taxable income. Ms. Schlemmer shared that she was not sure how much longer VSDB's budget would be able to sustain this program; however, it was a nice incentive to offer, particularly for lower pay band positions. When making job offers to applicants, Human Resources has to attempt to persuade an applicant to take a pay cut from their current position in order to accept employment at VSDB. Senator Bell added that the use of hiring bonuses is currently being used agency-wide and stressed the importance of using every resource available to fill VSDB's critical positions.

In addition to the employee sign-on bonus program, an employee referral bonus program also recently went into effect. Current employees can receive \$1,000 for every candidate that they refer. Half of the bonus is paid to the employee after the new hire has worked six months with the remainder dissipated after twelve months.

Eight new full-time employees will be starting next on September 26th. This group of new hires will include Residential Advisors and an Interpreter.

Ms. Schlemmer provided an oral report to the Board with current turnover and demographics information. Human Resources is working to improve the onboarding and orientation process by incorporating VSDB's mission, engaging new employees and adding structure. The Foundation assisted with this endeavor by funding welcome gift bags to share with new hires.

Ms. Schlemmer thanked Ms. Rankin for leading Operations and Human Resources from the legacy software systems to the new Oracle product to Cardinal. Training for this process intensified over the summer and will continue until the program goes into effect. The transition to Cardinal will happen on October 3rd.

The Board's policy approval process will be changing. Moving forward, policies will be sent in the meeting materials packet prior to the quarterly meeting. The Board will be asked to review the policies and contact Training and Policy Manager, Susan Cupp, with any questions. Ms. Cupp will forward the questions or comments to the Policy Proponent for answers. Questions may also be asked to the Policy Proponent during the Board's meeting. Policies will be voted on at the current meeting, rather than the next Board

meeting. This change will facilitate a shorter time to approve the policies and allow for a more efficient process.

Ms. Trice shared that VSDB's HR Generalist recently resigned to join another agency for more pay. Ms. Rankin also recently lost the Accounting Supervisor in her Department to retirement. Despite robust recruitment, both of these positions have not been filled. VSDB faced a month-long hiring freeze beginning July 20th, and was unable to process any background checks. An external system issue put the entire hiring process on hold and put VSDB in the position of suspending the onboarding of new hires. This impacted operations across several departments. Ms. Trice shared appreciation to Ms. Schlemmer and Ms. Rankin for the extra hours that they have worked and applauded their dedication to VSDB.

Budget and Grants Report: Janice Rankin, Director of Operations, presented the budget. VSDB's budget is on track with 17% in general funds. A handout of the Fiscal Year 2023 Budget was provided at the Board's last meeting. Due to quorum not being present, the Board was unable to vote on the proposed budget.

JH Cline, Jr. moved to approve the Fiscal Year 2023 Original Budget. Carolyn Berry seconded the motion.

The Board of Visitors, being polled, voted as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------|--------|
| 1. Senator Bell | AYE |
| 2. Senator Hashmi | AYE |
| 3. Delegate Hudson | AYE |
| 4. Carolyn Berry | AYE |
| 5. Christine Ogden | AYE |
| 6. Daphne Cox | AYE |
| 7. JH Cline, Jr. | AYE |
| 8. Mike Asip | ABSENT |
| 9. Ron Lanier | AYE |
| 10. Vera Wilson | AYE |

The motion carried.

Senator Bell provided a brief overview of VSDB's technology issues to the new members of the Board. The General Assembly approved to move VSDB from under the Secretary of Education to the Governor. This change elevated the school to the same ranking as higher institutions. A plan to transition VSDB's technology infrastructure from Virginia's Information Technologies Agency (VITA) to independence will be submitted to the VSDB Board of Visitors by October 1st.

Senator Hashmi applauded Senator Bell's strong fight to make the transition happen and thanked him for his due diligence in aiding the school.

Ms. Trice thanked Senator Bell and the legislators on the Board for their continued support.

At the Board's last meeting, an estimated \$130,000-\$150,000 was anticipated to be left in the budget at the end of the fiscal year. A portion of the remaining funds was able to be allocated for employee recognition bonuses. The administration team hoped to recognize staff after a challenging two years of the COVID pandemic. The Payroll Services Bureau in Richmond worked past their deadline to process the

bonuses. After the bonuses were distributed to staff, \$46,000 remained. Ms. Rankin hoped to be able to roll over the remaining funds to the current fiscal year. Senator Bell added that Secretary Guidera did not receive administration approval for the recognition bonuses until after the deadline, but worked to make it right. Ms. Trice shared that she was greatly appreciative of Secretary Guidera and the Payroll Services Bureau working with VSDB to process the bonuses.

The Business Office has been busy preparing for the transition of the legacy software systems to Cardinal. This has been a massive undertaking with several hours of training each week and extra assignments to complete. VSDB is one of the final agencies to transition to the new system.

Ms. Rankin shared that VSDB's current general funds total \$1.1 million. The Virginia State Budget has been performing well and is in the second year of a two-year budget cycle. The decision package will be sent to the General Assembly for approval. If approved, this package would assist in remedying some of the current challenges that VSDB is facing with positions and salaries. Proposed salaries were calculated by the number of hours each position works. Each pay band includes a certain percentage of an increase. Pay band I, 20%; Pay band II, 16%; Pay band III, 13.5%; Pay band IV, 11%; Pay band V, 8.5% and Pay band VI, 6%. If approved, this increase in the budget would take effect at the beginning of the next fiscal year, July 1, 2023, would allow VSDB's salaries to be much more competitive. Ms. Wilson asked which positions listed were currently open. Ms. Rankin shared that 21 positions were currently vacant with nine of those positions expected to be filled on Monday. Senator Bell requested that a list of the positions that were currently open be provided to the Board.

Senator Bell thanked Ms. Trice, Ms. Schlemmer and Ms. Rankin for their work on the decision packages.

Continuing Business

Strategic Plan Update - Ms. Trice shared that the Board would hold a work session at the next quarterly meeting in December to update the Five-Year Strategic Plan. The consulting company that helped to develop the initial plan will return to assist with these efforts.

Operating Agreements - At the Board's March meeting, Ms. Trice presented an Operating Agreement on behalf of the Foundation. This document allows for the transfer of the ownership of items from the Foundation to VSDB. The Board previously requested that the dates on the document be updated, as the version presented in March did not have any content change. Warren McKeen, Foundation Chair, updated the dates in the agreement for the review and approval by the Board.

Daphne Cox moved to approve the Operating Agreement between the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind and the Foundation. JH Cline, Jr. seconded the motion.

The Board of Visitors, being polled, voted as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------|-----|
| 1. Senator Bell | AYE |
| 2. Senator Hashmi | AYE |
| 3. Delegate Hudson | AYE |
| 4. Carolyn Berry | AYE |
| 5. Christine Ogden | AYE |
| 6. Daphne Cox | AYE |
| 7. JH Cline, Jr. | AYE |

- | | |
|-----------------|--------|
| 8. Mike Asip | ABSENT |
| 9. Ron Lanier | AYE |
| 10. Vera Wilson | AYE |

The motion carried.

Ms. Cox requested that Ms. Trice invite Foundation Chair, Warren McKeen, to attend the Board's next meeting.

New Business

Code of Ethics - Ms. Trice shared that several years ago VSDB instated a Code of Ethics. A recent audit noted that the Code of Ethics did not align with other state agencies. The language in the document was updated to better reflect VSDB's values. Ms. Trice sent the document to all employees for their input and did not receive any changes. The document was reviewed by the Office of the Attorney General.

JH Cline, Jr. motioned to approve the Code of Ethics. Senator Hashmi seconded the motion.

The Board of Visitors, being polled, voted as follows:

- | | |
|--------------------|--------|
| 1. Senator Bell | AYE |
| 2. Senator Hashmi | AYE |
| 3. Delegate Hudson | AYE |
| 4. Carolyn Berry | AYE |
| 5. Christine Ogden | AYE |
| 6. Daphne Cox | AYE |
| 7. JH Cline, Jr. | AYE |
| 8. Mike Asip | ABSENT |
| 9. Ron Lanier | AYE |
| 10. Vera Wilson | AYE |

The motion carried.

Superintendent's Report: Pat Trice, Superintendent, reported that after two years of the pandemic, VSDB returned to normal operations for the start of the school year. Admissions continues to see an increase in inquiries from prospective families across the state, nation and internationally. Pandemic restrictions limited space in the classrooms and residential halls to half capacity. Several enrollments were placed on hold with incoming students added to a waiting list. Each prospective student is required to participate in the TEMP program. The TEMP program allows a student to stay on campus and attend classes for one to two weeks and provides valuable information to the child's family and VSDB. 12 students enrolled at VSDB in the first month of school with several applications pending. Many families have shared that they moved to Staunton specifically for their child to attend VSDB. The preschool program has been re-established with a surge in students at the Elementary level.

Students will begin SQL testing in the next few weeks. Each test requires three to four staff to help administer the test. The testing process is a burden, as teachers are not able to teach their classes since all students require 1:1 testing. VSDB is unique in that its entire population is comprised of special

education students. VSDB plans to meet with the Department of Education to explore solutions to help ease this process.

Erich Roscher, Director of Facilities and Engineering, shared that the Main Hall Exterior Renovation project is in full swing and gearing up for completion. The building was in a dire state of needing repair. Despite a few unexpected delays, the exterior is beginning to take shape and look outstanding. The next step will be a full renovation of the electrical to prepare for interior restoration. Ms. Trice added that the Main Hall building is the oldest continuing utilized building in the United States, at a school of this kind.

Robin Bliven, Director of Outreach, and Julie Saum, Family Engagement Specialist, have been working together to create events for families and teachers across the state. A handout of the Outreach and Family Engagement events was provided to the Board. CONNECT, a bi-monthly virtual event, allows parents to meet in break-out rooms with an expert to discuss areas of sensory impairments. Outreach is funded through a Department of Education grant.

The Foundation recently approved funding for an Apptegy mobile app. Ms. Trice recently attended a conference where she learned about the product. Apptegy will redesign VSDB's website and create a VSDB's first mobile application which will assist in engaging families and provide an additional communication tool. Most applications on the market are only able to link a user to a website; however, Apptegy can sync with the website and provide information directly in the application. The Foundation has approved funding for the initial startup cost of \$10,000, with VSDB paying the annual fee.

VSDB is leading the development of the National Blind Soccer League, with one of two Blind soccer teams in the country and the only professional Blind soccer pitch in the United States. The first Blind soccer match was played in 2020 against the Maryland School for the Blind. This summer, VSDB hosted the first national education Blind Soccer Summit for coaches from schools for the Blind to teach them how to play the game and start a team at their school. VSDB's students will play their first match of the season, and the second Blind Soccer game in the nation, on Thursday, October 6th at 1:30pm against the Maryland School for the Blind.

Prior to the former Superintendent, Nancy Armstrong's arrival at VSDB, the school operated separately as two schools. The Blind and the Deaf departments were located in different buildings with two separate mascots and colors. Ms. Armstrong worked diligently to integrate the two schools together. Ms. Trice has been working towards completing the last step of the One School Plan to create one mascot and one set of school colors. Consultants that assisted with the creation of the Five-Year Strategic Plan will return to facilitate discussions with staff, alumni and employees to receive input on the One School Plan. This process will begin November 2022 and will finish in February 2023 and will focus on cherishing VSDB's former history while looking towards the future. Ms. Trice has spoken with the Presidents of the Alumni Associations for the Blind and the Deaf and both associations are very supportive of this plan.

On Wednesday, September 28th, Secretary Guidera, Secretary of Education, will travel to VSDB to tour the campus and to learn more about VSDB's special programs and services.

Ms. Cox asked for an update regarding the school's accreditation standing. Ms. Trice shared that COGNIA and CEASD were up for accreditation renewal this year; however, with changes in administration, operations and a return to normalcy after the past two years with the pandemic, a request to postpone the process to next year was approved.

Senator Bell thanked Ms. Trice for her report and shared appreciation to the new Board members for attending the meeting.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 1:24pm.

DRAFT