

Three Rooms

*Williamsburg and James City County and the Joint School System, 1955–
2026*

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Regional Government Records Corpus Series

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Three Rooms in One Room

The James City County Recreation Center sits on Longhill Road at the western edge of the County's school zone. The morning of October 10, 2025 was overcast. Seventeen elected officials filed into Meeting Rooms A, B, and C with their staff and their attorneys, took seats at three sets of nameplates arranged in a curved row at the front of the combined room, and at 8:35 a.m. — within the same minute — three of them gaveled their boards to order.

Sarah Ortego called the Williamsburg-James City County School Board to order. Jim Icenhour called the James City County Board of Supervisors to order. Doug Pons called the Williamsburg City Council to order.

Scott Stevens, the County Administrator, stood up to read.

WHEREAS, the County of James City, the City of Williamsburg, and the James City County School Board and the Williamsburg City School Board operating as the joint Williamsburg-James City County School Board have operated a school system together since July 1, 1955...

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WHEREAS, the County and the City entered into updated and amended contracts for the joint operation of the school system in years 1963, 1965, 1969, 1971, 1980, 1989, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2007, 2012, 2017, and 2022...

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WHEREAS, the Parties desire to settle all disputes under the Prior Contract and continue the joint school division with a modernized approach...

Three motions followed. Ruth Larson moved for the Board of Supervisors. Then the votes: aye, aye, aye, aye, aye. Barbara Ramsey moved for the City Council, with Stacy Kern-Scheerer's second. Then the votes: aye, aye, aye, aye, aye. Andrea Donnor moved for the School Board, with Kimberley Hundley's second. Then the votes: aye, aye, aye, aye, aye, aye, aye.

The bodies took a brief recess at 8:45 and reconvened fourteen minutes later. Mrs. Ortego had the room first.

"The school division has been through two years of change and uncertainty. With the contract signing, this is a new beginning. This is a new and stronger beginning."

The clauses Stevens had read aloud carried seventy years of history in a single sentence. Fourteen amendments to a founding bargain that began on July 1, 1955, when the City of Williamsburg had about seven thousand residents and James City County had about seven thousand residents and the two adjoining jurisdictions agreed to share a school system. Seventy years later, the City had grown to 15,400 residents. The County had grown to 78,200. The City paid 11 percent of the local share of school funding. The County paid 89 percent. The same arrangement that had worked when the two localities were equal in 1955 had operated for seventy years across a tenfold imbalance, fourteen renegotiated chapters, and one near-rupture.

That near-rupture is the story that follows. The "Parties desire to settle all disputes" clause did not appear in any prior amendment. It is there because the parties had been actively breaking up for twenty-eight months and a settlement was what got them back in the room.

What was being settled, and what was not, is what follows.

Chapter One — The Bargain (1955–2007)

The Williamsburg-James City County school division was created by an act of the Virginia General Assembly that took effect on July 1, 1955. The City of Williamsburg and James City County had agreed, formally, to share a school system. The City contributed dollars proportional to its share of students. The County did the same. The school board would be a joint body — partly elected by County voters, partly appointed by the City — governing one school division across a jurisdictional line that nobody crossed when going to school.

The founding bargain matched the founding facts. The City and the County had roughly equal populations. They had a single high school between them that drew students from both. The school division would educate everyone's children, and the two governments would coordinate the funding through a contract renegotiated every several years.

That cadence held. Fourteen amendments to the founding contract followed before 2025, recorded in the preamble of the contract the three bodies signed in October of that year: 1963, 1965, 1969, 1971, 1980, 1989, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2007, 2012, 2017, 2022.

Four amendments came between 1963 and 1971 — the schools were filling and the funding formula kept adjusting to the inflow. Three came between 1980 and 1991 as suburban growth in the County began to accelerate. Then a long stretch of more substantive amendments between 1996 and 2007 as the County's enrollment passed the City's by a wide margin and three new high schools were sited inside County boundaries. Lafayette went up. Jamestown High School followed. Warhill opened in 2007.

By 2020 the City had 15,400 residents. The County had 78,200. James City County students outnumbered Williamsburg students roughly ten to one. The arrangement that had worked at parity was now operating at a tenfold imbalance, and the imbalance was structural: nine of every ten students in the joint district lived inside the County. The two governments had to coordinate as if they were equal partners. They were not equal partners in any operational sense. They were a 90/10 partnership where each side carried a single vote on contract renewal.

After 2007 the amendments settled at five-year intervals. The 2012 amendment, the 2017 amendment, the 2022 amendment. Each was negotiated by the County Administrator and the City Manager. Each was approved by the Board of Supervisors and the City Council. The school board operated the schools under whatever contract the two governments signed. The school board was not a signing party. Not yet. Not for another sixty-seven years.

That structural fact mattered more by the year. The school board had operational responsibility for the school division and no independent revenue. Every dollar in its budget arrived through one of the two

funding localities or through the Commonwealth, and the state share carried no vote and no podium. The arrangement had worked when the two localities were equal partners. By 2020 they were not.

Chapter Two — First Audible Stress (2008–2014)

The earliest line on the public record where a sitting supervisor told his own room that the County had hurt the other two bodies is in the FY09 budget adoption minutes. The vote was June 24, 2008. The Great Recession had begun the previous fall. The County was adopting an emergency two-year budget. John McGlennon was in his second term as supervisor for Roberts District. He voted yes on the budget after telling the room he was disappointed in it.

The minutes record him saying he was "disappointed with the budget and felt it damaged relationships with the City of Williamsburg and the School Board." He voted for it anyway because the fiscal year had to start.

McGlennon was forty-eight that summer. He would still be on the Board in May 2026 at sixty-six. The damaged-relationships line in 2008 is the earliest warning shot on the public record from someone who would still be in the room when the breakup arrived.

The 2012 contract amendment shifted the funding formula from a one-year student count to a three-year smoothing average. The conversation behind the technical change was not technical. Robert Middaugh, then County Administrator, walked the Board through the new terms on April 10, 2012. The smoothing average had been requested by the City because year-to-year enrollment fluctuations swung the formula too aggressively. Middaugh added a second change: a surplus-handling rule. Schools would keep the first \$500,000 of any year-end surplus. Anything above that would go to capital projects only if both the County and the City agreed on a spending plan. If the two governments disagreed, the money rolled back to the County and the City in their proportional shares. The schools would not get to use it.

Supervisor Jim Kennedy of Stonehouse District put the structural question on the table that night.

Mr. Kennedy questioned if the City, with ten percent of the budget, could dictate how 90 percent of the spending would occur.

Middaugh answered him.

Mr. Middaugh stated that the way the contract is structured is that both parties have to agree on a spending plan for it to proceed. Mr. Middaugh stated that if both parties agreed, the schools get to spend the money and if both parties disagree, the money rolls back to the respective parties and the schools do not have it available.

Kennedy let the answer stand. Eleven years later, in 2023, that arithmetic would still be sitting underneath every dispute the two governments had.

The April 8, 2014 joint work session is the next moment on the public record where the two governments argued at each other in full view. The three boards met that morning at the Stryker Building on North Boundary Street in Williamsburg. The agenda was the middle-school and central-office discussion. James Blair Middle School was the question on the table. The school division had been trying to relocate central office for years. The County's Planning Commission had been left out of the previous year's CIP cycle, and Jim Kennedy was still carrying that grievance.

Ruth Larson chaired the Williamsburg-James City County School Board that morning. Mary Jones was at the front for the Board of Supervisors. Paul Freiling, the City Vice Mayor, was at the front for the City. Heather Cordasco — who would walk to the BoS public-comment podium six years later as a citizen — was a school board member sitting next to Larson.

The conversation turned to where central office would go.

Ms. Larson said they [the School Board] need to get an idea on how to proceed with the central office needs. Mr. Kennedy stated that the JCC Planning Commission felt misled about whether the central office would be put in the Capital Improvement Plan this year.

Mary Jones, the supervisor, on the coordination problem itself:

Ms. Jones felt the communication between the schools and the County needed to be improved. They should take advantage of the School Liaison Committee meetings and make sure everyone is on the same page.

Larson defended her board, raised her voice. The minutes record it:

Ms. Larson stated strongly that they never wanted to mislead anyone, but if the central office is not at James Blair it needs a place to go. Serious accusations have been made in the paper about how they [central office] operate. They need a place to conduct business and have professional development.

Freiling, the Vice Mayor of the smaller-funder city, came next:

Mr. Freiling stated the School Board needs to justify why these buildings are needed. The School Board is not interested in a fancy building, but the educational experience in the schools.

Three readings of the same question in a single room. Kennedy: the Planning Commission felt misled. Larson: we never wanted to mislead anyone, but central office needs a place. Freiling: justify the

building. Jones, the calmest voice that morning, asking everyone to coordinate calendars and stop ambushing each other.

Twenty-one months after that joint meeting, Ruth Larson would be elected to the James City County Board of Supervisors. By January 2016 she would no longer be chairing the school board defending it against the supervisors' accusations. She would be a supervisor. Heather Cordasco would leave the school board and reemerge in 2020 at the public-comment podium telling the supervisors how to use the funding lever.

The institutional positions of the rooms outlasted the personnel. The same person carried the school-board argument into 2014, then carried the supervisor's argument out of 2023. Both arguments were still going on in 2026.

Chapter Three — A Working Relationship (2015–2019)

The 2017 contract amendment passed the Board of Supervisors 5-0 on April 25 of that year. Ruth Larson, by then in her second year as a supervisor, had been absent from the previous meeting. The chair, Kevin Onizuk, brought the item back so she could weigh in.

Ms. Larson thanked the Board for bringing this back this evening. She thanked the City of Williamsburg for approving the contract. She did mention that she has received several phone calls from James City County citizens regarding representation on the School Board and the way that the contract works out. She does not believe it should stop this contract, but moving forward, it is probably something that we need to be open to discuss in the future. It is very important to keep the line of communication open with the City and with the School Board.

Onizuk closed the item.

Ultimately, the joint operation of the schools is to the benefit of both the City and the County. He hopes that the positive relationship can continue for many years to come.

Eleven months later, the relationship looked like its high-water mark. On March 16, 2018, the three rooms met jointly at Legacy Hall in New Town for the budget briefing.

Kyra Cook chaired the WJCC School Board that morning. Larson chaired the Board of Supervisors. Paul Freiling, now Mayor of Williamsburg, called the City Council to order. Jim Regimbal of Fiscal Analytics, Ltd., presented on state K-12 funding shortfalls. The school board updated the localities on the FY19 operating budget. Then a moment that does not appear in many joint-meeting minutes:

Ms. Ownby and Ms. Cook thanked the localities for their support.

Larson followed by asking the school board a practical question.

Ms. Larson asked if the additional security and the finance position were added to the budget, would the school board add to the budget, or would they take something out?

She and the County Attorney, Adam Kinsman, had been talking about connecting the school division to the realtor community so housing turnover and school-zone enrollment lined up.

Ms. Larson said she had a conversation with Mr. Kinsman about this and suggested a connection with realtors to open channels of communication with the real estate community was needed.

James Blair Middle School, the question Larson had been defending in 2014, was on time and within budget. A ribbon-cutting was on the calendar for late August.

The meeting adjourned at 11:21 a.m. Icenhour moved to adjourn the Board of Supervisors. Pons, by then Mayor of Williamsburg, moved to adjourn the City Council. The School Board adjourned with them. Three thank-yous. One ribbon-cutting on the calendar. No motions failed. No accusations.

The two governments had a working relationship. They were arguing the same questions they had been arguing in 2014, but in the same room, in the same morning, with the same superintendent at the table. Larson, in her second year as a supervisor, had not yet started watching the school board's meetings on television and finding herself frustrated by their rhetoric. Cook had not yet been told her board would be operating under a structural constraint the school board had not negotiated. The damaged-relationships moment McGlennon had named in 2008 was nine years behind them, and the next damaged-relationships moment was still two years ahead.

The cooperation peak in the corpus era is here. Spring 2018.

Chapter Four — Building Tension (2020–2022)

What sharpened the funding-as-weapon language in public discourse was the eighteen months that began in March 2020. The schools had closed for the pandemic. They would stay closed through the fall and into the spring. Parents wrote emails. Citizens came to the public-comment podium. Some of them came with petitions. Some of them named the lever.

On June 9, 2020, the Board of Supervisors was working through an emergency FY21 budget. Ruth Larson, sixth year on the Board, expressed her frustration on the meeting video record.

"I'm going to express some frustration about the steps about opening school in the fall. I did find it very interesting that, on the reopening of schools Task Force, there was not one appropriating body member. And so when you are making decisions, you know, it's great to have the education. But there frankly were some people on that committee that have nothing to do with K-12. There were some political appointees, and I resent that. I do think it would have been important to have the appropriating bodies."

Michael Hipple, supervisor for Powhatan District, took his turn.

"I'll only say a few things. Just seemed like sometimes when I do say something it gets taken the wrong way, and it's meat and potatoes folks, that's all it is. I'm very disappointed in some of the school board members and me, the way they put the information out. We're all the same community. We're all — comes from each one of us. And we all have to work together to figure this out."

Hipple did not name names. The school board members watching at home knew who he meant. By June 2020 the two governments were no longer arguing with the school board in the same room. They were narrating the school board to their own constituents from their own dais.

Six months later, on December 8, 2020, citizens gave the supervisors the funding-weapon language explicitly. Barbara Henry walked to the public-comment podium at the BoS with a printed resolution and 170 online signatures. She read the resolution aloud. Among the four asks: that the Board notify the Superintendent of WJCC Schools to open schools no later than January 11, 2021, and in short get back to normal in all areas

"on the condition that failure to do so will result in the withholding of funding."

Chris Henderson, a small-business owner, followed her. He invoked the same lever in his own terms:

"Therefore I'm calling on this body to do everything that it can to get businesses open and children back in school. And I realize that there's a school board, and they're ultimately responsible. But you hold the power of the purse. And money talks."

Heather Cordasco came up fourth. Cordasco had been on the WJCC School Board with Larson in 2014. She had left the board. She came to the December 2020 podium as a citizen with institutional knowledge.

"Just wanted to be here to support Barbara. But I also really did want to talk about the school situation. Of course, having been a school board member, I am aware that you don't directly have control. But as Chris said, you have the power of the purse. And all of it should be on our minds pretty frequently, because we just paid our taxes, and over 50 cents of every real estate dollar goes toward those schools."

The Board took no formal action on Henry's resolution that night. The phrase that mattered was on tape. Three citizens at one public-comment podium had given the supervisors the language for using funding as discipline, and one of them had been a school board member who could explain how the lever worked from inside the institution.

The school board's answer came in May 2021. On May 18 the WJCC School Board took up the FY22 capital plan. The County had recently announced its own preschool task force to study a question the school board had been raising for years. Kyra Cook spoke first.

Ms. Cook expressed disappointment that any kind of space was removed, and noted it suggests the county does not think any space is needed; and, she commented that it would be nice if a placeholder for some sort of academic infrastructure for the pre-k through 5th grade age group was included, because on paper the historians looking back 20 years from now would see the county thought no educational space was needed over the next five years, and she noted her disagreement with that.

"For the historians" — Cook telling the future researcher who would pull the FY22 CIP twenty years out that the absence of pre-K space in that document should not be read as the school board's read of the need. Dr. James Beers, the vice chair, followed her.

Dr. Beers said that the county has been dragging its feet for a number of years, and expressed that the creation of a preschool taskforce implies the school division and board don't understand the needs and data. He holds the county responsible, since they have ignored the board's pleas, information and data and felt compelled to get their own data, which he considers a waste of time.

Three weeks later, on June 10, 2021, the Williamsburg City Council took up the same plan. A councilor on the video record explained to Williamsburg residents what had happened.

"The county rejected the school board's original CIP proposal that included the new school for elementary school expansion. And so what I have said all along is we need to continue to budget for that, because what the county has said is not that they're not going to build a new facility, but it just may not be an elementary."

That was the City, in its own chambers, telling its own residents that the County had killed the school board's plan. No supervisor was in the room to answer. The cooperation peak at Legacy Hall had been three years old when the schools closed in March 2020. It did not survive the next eighteen months.

What did happen in those eighteen months was that the rhetorical infrastructure for the County's later move got installed. Citizens told the County to use the funding lever. A former school board member, sitting at the public-comment podium, walked the supervisors through how the lever worked from inside. The school board lost the argument in two of the three rooms — the Board of Supervisors in June 2020, the City Council by June 2021 — without ever being in either room when the argument was made.

That set the conditions for what happened in May 2022.

The five-year contract cycle came due in 2022. The 2017 contract expired at the end of June. Negotiations had been underway in the County Administrator and City Manager offices for months. The school board, as always, was not a signing party. They were briefed.

The new contract came up for the Board of Supervisors' vote on May 24, 2022. Larson made the motion. Scott Stevens, the County Administrator, walked the Board through three changes. The first two were technical — a "future school use account" that parked ninety percent of any unexpended school funds, and a direct distribution of the State Sales Tax for Education to the school division from the State, bypassing the County's books. The third was structural.

Mr. Stevens informed the Board that... approval of the annual budget, capital improvement projects, and the hiring of the superintendent would require the affirmative vote of five of the seven members of the School Board.

Five of seven. A supermajority on the school board's three biggest categories of decision. The board's two appointed City members had effective veto power on every major recurring vote. Larson asked the obvious question.

Ms. Larson inquired on the School Board voting role and potential circumstances if the requirement was not met. Mr. Stevens replied communication may be needed to ensure

the School Board honors the requirement; however, the Board of Supervisors ultimately controls the funding source of majority of its budget.

The motion passed 5-0.

The school board met as a regular body four weeks later, on June 21, 2022. The new contract was in effect. Cook addressed her board about it.

Ms. Cook... commented that there is a paradigm shift since the county and city adopted a new contract for operating schools, and are changing how they handle year-end spending — which she noted will be a new pattern for WJCC in the coming year.

A paradigm shift in the school board's own funding mechanics, learned about after the fact. The school board had not negotiated the supermajority requirement. They were told about it. By June 2022 they were adjusting to a structural constraint imposed from outside.

What the 2022 contract did not include was a path for the school board to participate in negotiating the next contract. They were going to learn the terms of the 2027 contract the same way they had learned the terms of the 2022 contract — after the two funding localities had agreed.

That arrangement lasted thirteen months.

Chapter Five — The Breakup Attempt (2023)

On April 25, 2023, eleven months into the 2022 contract, Ruth Larson was working through the Board of Supervisors' FY24 budget. The County was funding \$4 million toward a WJCC teachers' raise. In her own school board's televised meetings, the discussion she was watching framed the raise as inadequate. She had the floor.

"I think for me some of the frustration is when I watch the school board meeting, and it's, 'I'm in support of this raise.' Well, we don't decide that percentage. And so, you know, then it gets volleyed back as though, you know, if we're not doing this we're not supportive, that that isn't the case. It's — I mean, obviously this board in this county is supportive of education based on the amount of money that we do contribute to the school system — or do we — that we give to the school system. So it — to say in a meeting, 'Well, I'm in support of this' without having a more thorough budget discussion..."

She trailed off. Nine years past her own school-board chairmanship, Larson knew the rhetorical move because she had used it herself, on the other side, in 2014. The minutes summarized the passage as Larson expressing "her frustration with the lack of budget discussion with relation to the WJCC Schools Budget." The video record showed what bothered her: school board members posturing for their cameras as if the percentage of the raise had been decided in their room, when in her read it had been decided across the road in the County's.

Six weeks later, on June 8, 2023, the Williamsburg City Council took up an agenda item titled "Reimagine K-12 Education." Andrew Trivette, the City Manager, presented.

"We had a great response. We had over 900 participants at the Future Fest and a similar number of responses to surveys that were sent out. And one of the themes that came back in the process was that the city needed to continue to pay attention to innovation in the realm of public education, and specifically asking us to consider new avenues for educating in a public school system K-12 with greater tie-ins to higher education and certificate outcomes. And a lot of folks mentioned that we should rely on the assets that we have right here in our front door, including Colonial Williamsburg and William and Mary.

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"And so to that end today we are asking the city council to let us proceed... I'm asking today that the council authorize me to proceed with the completion of a feasibility study

that would consider and explore the possibility of forming an independent City of Williamsburg public school division."

Mayor Doug Pons followed Trivette. Pons was on his third contract negotiation as a councilor.

"We just went through the third contract negotiation that I've been a part of, and in each of those times we've asked ourselves as a body: is this the best — how will this deliver the best outcome for our students. And we really didn't have the information. And so... the message is clear that we owe it to our citizenry to have a conversation, have this conversation, and lead us into this feasibility study. That said, no predetermined outcome has been prescribed. This is just a study."

He added, looking at the camera:

"There could be some concern in the community that all of a sudden next year there's going to be major changes. That is not the case... I hopes anyone watching doesn't see this as an indictment of the current education currently being provided to the children. They have an outstanding division and staff. This is not a criticism of the division but doing what is fiduciarily responsible for the citizens."

Vice Mayor Pat Dent went next.

"I think we have an obligation not only to provide the best education for our students but we also have an obligation to respond to the amount of input that came from our GIO process. And for me, I think, as has already been mentioned, when we come to that contract every five years there's always gaps that we don't have information. And this is going to fill in those gaps and better prepare us to make decisions going forward, whatever that decision may be."

The Ramsey-Dent motion authorized Trivette to evaluate, in the motion's language, "running a Williamsburg Public School District that is separate from James City County, what form such a district should take to serve Williamsburg students best and meet anticipated fiscal constraints, and to invite the William & Mary School of Education to participate in a feasibility study." Five-zero-zero by roll call. Rogers, Ramsey, Pons, Dent, Kern-Scheerer. The City of Williamsburg had voted to study walking away from a seventy-year arrangement.

What the City did not have, on June 8, 2023, was a survey that had asked residents whether they wanted to leave the joint system. WHRO obtained the 2022 National Community Survey through a FOIA request ten months later. The questions had asked respondents to rate education broadly and to consider partnerships with Colonial Williamsburg and William & Mary. None had asked whether

Williamsburg should leave WJCC. Pons told the WHRO reporter who broke the story that the survey didn't ask the question, but he believed more people in the city were interested in splitting than not. He had heard the idea talked about casually, he said, since he was a student at Lafayette High School. Trivette, asked by the same reporter why an independent system made operational sense, said community partnerships would develop more easily inside one:

"Obviously, I think it's easier to do that with a smaller system than it would be for the larger system."

Lafayette is a James City County school. The Mayor of Williamsburg had attended a County high school as a teenager and remembered the talk of separation from his teenage years. The institutional vote in June 2023 was anchored to a survey that did not produce a mandate and to a memory that did.

Five weeks after the City's vote, the Board of Supervisors held its business meeting at the County Government Center on Mounts Bay Road. The meeting opened on July 25, 2023. The agenda ran through standard business. Then the Board entered closed session under Section 2.2-3711(A)(29) of the Code of Virginia — the public-contract bargaining-position exception. The closed session ran roughly ninety minutes.

When the Board returned to open session, the supervisors took up several items that had been discussed in closed session. The Williamsburg Regional Library contract was one. The contract between the County, the City of Williamsburg, and WJCC Schools was another. The minutes record the entire motion and vote in twenty-two words:

A motion for a Resolution Electing to Terminate the Restated Contract for the Joint Operation of Schools, City of Williamsburg and the County of James City was made by Sue Sadler, the motion result was Passed. AYES: 5 NAYS: 0 ABSTAIN: 0 ABSENT: 0. Ayes: Hipple, Icenhour Jr, Larson, McGlennon, Sadler.

No remarks before. No remarks after. No public hearing. No notice to the school board in the building down the road. The Board had voted, five to zero, to terminate the contract that had governed the joint school system since 1955. The supervisor who made the motion was Sue Sadler, who had taken the Stonehouse District seat from Jim Kennedy in January 2016 — the same January Larson took the Berkeley seat. The motion came out of closed session, and the supervisors did not say a word about it on the record.

Hipple gave the framing to the County's official podcast the next day. WHRO published a story two days later.

"We didn't want to wait till the last minute and let the city say, 'okay, we decided that we're going to start our own school system,' which is fine with us if they want to do that, it's not an issue. But we have a lot of planning to do."

He continued. The County had ten thousand students; the City had roughly one thousand. If the County had to operate its own system, it would need an additional middle school — two of the three existing middle schools sat inside Williamsburg's city limits.

Stevens addressed the community framing directly on the same episode.

"I've seen some commentary about we're doing political tricks and mockery and all this other stuff. That's just not true. It was the capacity and the ability to serve middle school students that drove them to make that decision ahead of waiting for the city to complete a study."

The County had moved first because, by Stevens's account, the County's planning lead time required moving first. The framing did not address one question. The school board, in the building down the road, had not been told.

The first WJCC School Board meeting after the County's termination vote was on Tuesday afternoon, August 1, 2023. Sarah Ortego, not yet board chair, was on the board. So was Greg Dowell. So was Dr. Olwen Herron, the Superintendent.

Herron opened her Announcements and Superintendent's Report by addressing the County's vote.

"I would like to start this afternoon by addressing the recent vote by the James City County Board of Supervisors determined to terminate the contract for the joint operations of the school division between James City County and the City of Williamsburg.

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"The action last week leaves many questions, and I want to assure our community of our continued commitment to maintain regular contact with city and county officials as decisions are made... and to deliver top quality education for all students no matter what our future structure may look like.

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"We will successfully navigate all potential change together and continue to meet the needs of our students, families, and community as we have been entrusted to do since 1955."

Continued commitment to maintain regular contact. The school division had not had irregular contact before. The City and County had operated the contract. The school board had operated under it. The school board had not been a signing party. The contract that governed the institution Herron ran had been terminated by one of its two signers, in a closed session that ran ninety minutes, without notice to her room.

The personal response came at the end of the meeting, in the board members' comments. Greg Dowell took the room.

"Considering the action by the County Board of Supervisors and the ramifications, implications for our School Division, just want to say that, yeah, while it took many of us by surprise, I'm not concerned. I look around this room not just as at our board but at the senior leadership staff here, and it's a strong Division, and it will remain a strong division as long as it is WJCC.

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"I'm encouraged by the board as well here. This has been a strong board, a unified board on many topics, and I know that we can navigate these kind of uncertain waters too in the next few months. I'm also encouraged that our counterparts at the city and county are willing to come together and meet."

Took many of us by surprise. The funding locality that paid eighty-nine percent of the school division's local share had voted in closed session to terminate the operating contract, and the school board had learned about it from the news.

Two weeks later, on August 15, the WJCC board met again. The public-comment list included a citizen named Jessica Anderson, who had signed up to address the board on the topic of "WJCC Division Contract." At the end of the meeting, in board members' comments, the consensus was recorded in the minutes:

...that the division will continue as Williamsburg-James City County Schools as long as allowed, continuing to provide a high level of excellence.

As long as allowed. A school board, in its own room, telling its own audience that the institution's continuity was no longer up to it.

Chapter Six — The Reconciliation (2024–2025)

What ended the breakup attempt was arithmetic. The City of Williamsburg paid \$135,000 for a feasibility study led by Dr. Jeffery Smith. The study was released on March 11, 2024. An independent City of Williamsburg public school division would cost \$18.9 million in its first year and carry a \$2.4 million operating deficit. Per-pupil annual cost would rise from \$14,803 inside the joint district to \$16,935 inside an independent City system.

The same study documented the academic gap that had been driving the City's case. Williamsburg students were less likely to graduate. They scored lower on Standards of Learning in every testing category. The 2023 third-grade reading SOL pass rate inside the City was 59 percent. The County rate was 12 percentage points higher. In third-grade math, the County passed 78 percent of students; the City passed 57 percent. City students were more likely to be Black or Hispanic, more likely to be English language learners, more likely to be economically disadvantaged or homeless. The City's frustration with the joint district was not invented. The arithmetic of it was on the page. The arithmetic of separating was on a different page, and that one did not balance.

James City County paid for its own study. The author was David Gaston. The report came out on July 8, 2024. Gaston's framing was unsentimental.

"It sounds complicated because it is."

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"We've not had a separation, or a division or deconsolidation, in the Commonwealth of Virginia happen."

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"It takes the guesswork out."

The third line was about the City and County of Fairfax, which had run a joint school operation since 1962 with a clear three-year separation timeline written into its contract. Gaston recommended Fairfax as the model for renegotiating Williamsburg-James City County, whichever direction the bodies chose.

On April 5, 2024, WHRO published Laura Phillion's piece reporting that the resident survey the City had cited as the trigger for the feasibility study did not, in fact, ask residents whether they wanted to leave the joint system. Pons told her:

"But what we never had was the information to help us understand that question."

He acknowledged the survey hadn't asked. He said he thought more city residents wanted to split than not. The story of the breakup attempt, retold in April 2024, was that a five-year contract cycle had been arriving, that City staff and elected officials had wanted alternatives, that the survey gave them a thin rationale, and that the County had preempted by terminating first. Four months later, both sides paid consultants to study what they had each already concluded. The exit had no plausible path.

Williamsburg announced on October 11, 2024 that it preferred to stay in the joint district. Ten days later, Ruth Larson, by then Chair of the Board of Supervisors, gave WHRO her read.

"I'm hoping we can get this wrapped up fairly quickly. I think we're closer than we are further apart."

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"There was a lot of angst among students and everyone involved with the school system, and so to bring that temperature down, I think, is a relief."

Closer than further apart. Bring the temperature down. Ten years and three institutional positions later, the same person was now the negotiator.

The December 6, 2024 joint meeting confirmed the public alignment. Sarah Ortego was now chair of the WJCC School Board; Cook had cycled off. Dr. Herron was being thanked for her service and would retire at the end of the year. The minutes record what Larson, Pons, and Herron said in turn.

Ms. Larson commented on the discussions between the city and county regarding the future of a joint school division. She noted that on both sides, there has been 110% support for public education in the community and wanting all students to succeed no matter if they live in James City County or the City of Williamsburg.

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Mayor Pons agreed and commented that the conversations they are having at this municipal level are not a reflection of, or negative thoughts about the quality of public education that they are being able to deliver the community through WJCC. He applauded the hard work being done.

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Dr. Herron thanked the city and county for their incredible support over the years. She shared her sentiment that the school division is better together and stronger together, and that it is a wonderful school division that serves a wonderful community.

By December 2024, the bodies were rehearsing the alignment they would ratify ten months later. The negotiation still had work to do. The contract still had to be drafted, reviewed by attorneys, agreed to in detail by all three boards. The question of whether the partnership would continue had been answered. The negotiations themselves had not.

Routine business inside the BoS room kept its own rhythm through that negotiating winter. On Tuesday, February 11, 2025, the Board of Supervisors held a regular meeting at the Government Center on Mounts Bay Road. The agenda carried two land-use public hearings on a 16.5-acre solar facility called Hedera at 120 and 121 Ivy Hill Road in the Stonehouse District, with both a Special Use Permit application and an Agricultural and Forestal District withdrawal request. The AFD Advisory Committee had voted against. The Planning Commission had voted in support. Staff supported the SUP and opposed the AFD withdrawal.

Public comment came first. Three WJCC employees and one ally took the podium to ask the Board to fund the school division's coming budget request fully. Andy Cason, a teacher at Jamestown High School and treasurer of the local education association, cited a recent compensation study finding twenty-year WJCC teachers earning eight percent less than peers regionally and education support staff eleven percent below. Marco Sardi, an orchestra teacher at James Blair Middle School and president of the local education association, made the same ask in different words. Chris Henderson — the same Chris Henderson who in December 2020 had told this Board "you hold the power of the purse" on the question of reopening schools — used part of his minute for the school funding ask before pivoting to a James Blair name-change argument. Richard Timberlake came up to oppose the name change on cost grounds. Four citizens at the podium. Three of them with the same ask.

The Hedera vote followed the public hearings.

A motion to Approve was made by John McGlennon, the motion result was Passed.

AYES: 3 NAYS: 2 ABSTAIN: 0 ABSENT: 0. Ayes: Icenhour Jr, Larson, McGlennon. Nays: Hipple, Null.

Hipple cited the AFD Advisory Committee's opposition, his concern about approving too many solar farms within the County, and what solar technology, still new to the County, would mean over forty years. Null agreed with Hipple's points and added her concern about aesthetic views being diminished. The three veterans on the Board, Icenhour and Larson and McGlennon, all in their seats since 2010 or earlier, voted yes. Hipple and Null voted no. The 3-2 split was the modal pattern on contested land-use cases by 2025.

In Board Requests and Directives a few minutes later, Null asked if a referendum was possible for the new proposed County government center. County Attorney Adam Kinsman replied that Virginia was not a referendum state.

Larson, in the same agenda block, turned to County Administrator Scott Stevens about the public-comment testimony.

Ms. Larson asked Mr. Stevens about the data that Mr. Cason had presented during Public Comment regarding County funds to the WJCC School Division. She asked if that number decreased based on funds now going directly to the WJCC School Division. Ms. Larson expressed her belief that the County had continued to increase its funding to the WJCC School Division.

Stevens did not have the number.

Mr. Stevens noted at this time he did not have that verified number. He further noted Ms. Larson was correct that in the five-year period the sales tax for education that used to come through the County's budget showed a higher cents per dollar. Mr. Stevens explained that allocation was now sent directly to the WJCC School Division and confirmed that the County's contributions to the WJCC School Division had continued to increase annually.

Cason had brought a specific number. Larson had asked Stevens to verify it on the spot. Stevens could not. The County was at that moment inside negotiations on a joint contract under which its annual contribution would be benchmarked against the City's through the new Schedule A funding formula then being developed by a tri-party committee of CFOs. The verified number Cason had presented and Stevens could not produce was the kind of number the negotiating committee was generating. The negotiation room had it. The BoS room did not, on the night a WJCC teacher asked for it on the record.

Hedera passed. The public-comment speakers went home. The County Administrator did not return the verified number at the next meeting, or at the meeting after that.

In April 2025, WHRO reported what each side wanted in the still-active negotiation. Stevens, on the record:

"I believe we, the county, had been paying a little more than we should have been toward the school division's local cost. Our board believes we ought to pay our share and, likewise, the city should pay their share."

Trivette, on the same record:

"The City Council entered into this discussion of the school system open-minded to having to put more money into the education system, but it would be in return for performance gains. The two are linked and cannot be separated."

Two opposing framings. The County wanted to pay less because it thought it had been paying more than its share. The City wanted to pay more but tied to performance gains for City students. The negotiators had to write a contract both sides could sell as winning.

The 2022 contract expired on June 30, 2025. The school year opened in August without a joint operating agreement. The City and the County had each separately appropriated funds for FY26. The school division operated. The school board, for the first time, sat in closed session with its own legal counsel that summer and fall, preparing to enter a contract as a named party. Two of those closed sessions are on the school board's record. The September 16 session was under § 2.2-3711(A)(8), for consultation with legal counsel regarding contract negotiations. The October 7 session, three days before the joint signing meeting, was under § 2.2-3711(A)(29). The motion language is specific:

...pertaining to a contract for the joint operation of schools between the School Board, the County, and the City of Williamsburg.

Between the School Board, the County, and the City of Williamsburg. Three parties. The contract was going to be signed by three boards rather than two. The school board, for the first time in seventy years, was stepping into a negotiating role it had never held.

Three days later they were in the Recreation Center on Longhill Road, raising their hands in three unanimous votes.

Chapter Seven — What the Contract Does

The contract text was drafted by County Attorney Adam Kinsman, finalized on October 9, 2025, signed the next morning at the Recreation Center. It runs fourteen pages. Read carefully, it tells a different story than the press summary at the signing did.

The headline numbers are accurate: ten-year term, FY27 floor contributions of \$104.5 million from the County and \$14.45 million from the City, school board newly named as a party. But the school board is a party with fenced obligations. The contract's opening paragraph names the County, the City, and the School Board as the three Parties. The same paragraph immediately limits the School Board's standing: it "shall be subject only to the terms and obligations set forth in Article I and IV, and shall have no rights, duties, or obligations under any other provisions of this Contract unless expressly stated otherwise herein." The board is a Party to the whole document. Its standing is fenced to school-system organization and school-board operations. It can sign the document. It cannot rewrite the funding articles without the agreement of the County and the City — the two governments that pay 89% and 11% of the local share between them.

The 2022 supermajority requirement was not removed. It was preserved and expanded. Article I, Paragraph 3, reads: "approval of the annual budget, all capital improvement projects, the hiring and firing of the superintendent, and the final approval of redistricting maps shall require the affirmative vote of five (5) of the seven (7) members of the Board." The 2022 contract had named three items. The 2025 contract added a fourth — redistricting maps — and kept the others.

The supermajority has a designed-in off-ramp, and the off-ramp is the County's alone. Article I, Paragraph 4, lets the County Board of Supervisors authorize elections adding two County seats to the school board with at least twelve months' written notice. The City's two appointed seats are untouched. With those two County seats added, the joint board grows to nine and the supermajority requirement disappears: the County's bloc becomes seven of nine and the four categories revert to simple majority. The County can keep the 5-of-7 threshold and live with the City's veto, or it can expand its own bloc and write the threshold out. It is the 89% funder's lever, written as governance procedure.

The 3 percent floor matters. Each locality's annual contribution to operational costs, by Article II Paragraph 6(f), shall not be less than the preceding year's contribution increased by at least three percent plus the Enrollment Adjustment. The City had pushed for predictability. It got it written in.

Schedule A is the funding formula being developed by a committee of chief financial officers from the County, the City, and the school division. Article II Paragraph 6(c) gives that committee until January 31, 2026 to deliver a formula that accounts for local cost per student, the state's Local Composite Index, and

the number and associated costs of special education students, gifted students, pre-K students, and English-language learners within the County and the City. If actual cost of educating City students exceeds the City's contribution, the City has to increase its contribution. Same for the County. The clause converts the City's achievement-gap concern into funding mechanics.

State money is voiceless and substitutive. Paragraph 9 makes the State Sales Tax for Education "a direct distribution to the School System from the Commonwealth," bypassing the localities' books entirely. Paragraph 6(h)(ii) then allows each locality to reduce its annual contribution by up to the amount of any federal or state funding increase. State support, when it grows, becomes permission for local withdrawal of equivalent dollars. The school board sees no net new money. The state writes the check; the locality keeps the savings.

The Future School Use Account is the same logic applied to the board's own leftovers. Paragraph 8 routes 90% of any unexpended school funds at year-end into a future-use account held by the localities. The remaining 10% goes to the localities outright. "Funds in the Future School Use Account will be discussed and apportioned during the County's and the City's normal budgeting process." Not the school board's process. The board's own underspending re-enters governance through the two rooms that control the purse.

The contract anticipates being broken. Article V Paragraph 22 lays out termination explicitly. Either the County Board of Supervisors or the City Council can give written notice — to the other party *and to the school board* — that they wish to terminate. The fact that the school board has to be notified in writing of any termination is the contract's quietest acknowledgment of what happened in July 2023. The new contract makes that scenario procedurally impossible to repeat.

Effective termination is July 1 of the fifth year after the later approving vote. Five years, not five months. Article V Paragraph 23 maps how the assets would split: County facilities transfer to a new County school board, City facilities to a new City school board, all school vehicles including buses transfer to the County.

Modification requires majority vote of the County Board of Supervisors and the City Council. Modifications to Article IV also require a majority vote of the School Board. Modifications take effect not when approved but at the end of the fiscal year two years after the approving vote. A 24-month cooling-off period is built in.

The term is not ten years. Paragraph 20: "The Term of this Contract shall be 10 years, beginning on the Effective Date. The Contract shall automatically renew for two additional 10-year terms unless either the County or the City have provided notice to the other Party of their wish to terminate the Contract

pursuant to paragraph 22." Ten years, plus a default-on renewal twice over. Thirty years of operation unless somebody walks. No modification before January 1, 2030.

The fiscal-power asymmetry is most explicit at the back of the document. If the school board determines it needs more funding than the County and City have offered, it can ask in writing. The request, by the contract's own enumeration, must ask for more than the allocation provides, describe what the additional funding will be used for, indicate whether the request is recurring, and "if needed, supporting by resolution, the raising of real property tax or other taxes in the County and/or the City to support their request." The board, in other words, can pass a resolution recommending that someone else raise taxes. That is the ceiling of its fiscal power. The board has operational responsibility for the school division, a new signature line on the joint contract, and no authority to levy a single dollar.

The unconditional counterpart sits in the next paragraph. If the County or City "anticipates at any time during the fiscal year that actual revenues will fall below budgeted revenues," the school board, upon notification, "shall take necessary actions to reduce expenditures in an amount equal to the School's portion of the shortfall." No breach required. No cure period. The localities' revenue problem becomes the school board's automatic spending cut by contract operation.

A conditional version follows. If the school board breaches Article I or Article IV in a way that "substantially frustrates the purpose of the Contract," and the breach isn't cured after 30 days' written notice from the County or the City, the County or City "shall not be required to increase its annual contribution to the operational costs of the School System for the next FY." Read together, the three clauses are the full two-sided fiscal lever. The board can ask but not levy. The localities can compel cuts when their own revenues fall. The localities can withhold future increases when the board misbehaves. The funding-as-discipline tool the County had been using informally for fifteen years is now written into the contract three different ways.

The signatures on the last three pages are for the County Administrator (Scott Stevens), the City Manager (Andrew Trivette), and the Superintendent (Daniel Keever, in office since the new year). Each side has its own attorney signing "approved as to form."

Ortego's "new beginning" line was the public articulation. The phrase in the resolution preamble was the more revealing one: the parties desired to "settle all disputes under the Prior Contract." Settle implies disputes that had been pending. There had been live disputes. The 2025 contract was a settlement, with a 30-year default operating life, an explicit termination procedure spelling out the next breakup if there ever is one, a written-notice requirement to the school board that the previous breakup did not honor, and a 24-month cooling-off period built into every future modification vote.

The contract was written by people who had been in the room for the 2023 termination vote and the 2024 feasibility studies and the 2025 closed sessions. Every paragraph reads like it was drafted by parties that had just survived something.

Closing

The breakup did not happen. The contract did not lapse. The state did not have to consider, for the first time in its history, the decoupling of a joint school division. The General Assembly did not have to weigh in. The Virginia Board of Education did not have to find that two newly separated school divisions could meet Standards of Quality on their own. No new school buildings had to be built on the calendar dictated by separation rather than by enrollment. No assets had to be redistributed. No teachers had to choose which side of a new line to teach on.

The City of Williamsburg did not get its independent school system. James City County did not get the separation it had voted unanimously to begin in July 2023. The school board did not get to decide its own institutional fate. It did become, for the first time, a signing party to the contract that determines that fate going forward.

What did happen between October 10, 2025 and May 14, 2026 is harder to characterize. The December 9, 2025 Board of Supervisors meeting carries the ADOPTED stamp on the joint resolution. The FY27 budget cycle opened in January 2026 with pre-budget hearings. On January 13, 2026, a household stood at the public-comment podium at the Board of Supervisors — Mike Joseph went first, asking the Board to fully fund the WJCC budget. Linda Wise came up next, from the same address, asking for a tax moratorium and a line-by-line budget comparison and a scaling-down of the new Consolidated Government Center, then, after a brief pause, asking the Board to fully fund the schools.

A household at the podium twice in the same hearing, asking the Board to fund the schools and to hold the tax line. The contradiction was on the math. To the household making both asks, they were the same request. They were what a family says when it has been told, year after year, to choose between things the rooms in front of them have not figured out how to choose between either.

The three rooms held a joint meeting on February 6, 2026 at the Stryker Center. The agenda was the Superintendent's Report and the FY27 operating budget — the cadence the new contract had written in. No motions on the contract were on the agenda. The relationship was being lived rather than being negotiated.

On February 12, 2026, the Williamsburg City Council held a closed-door session described as a personnel evaluation of City Manager Andrew Trivette, outside the normal review cycle. Thirteen days later, the Council called a hastily-scheduled special meeting that had not appeared on the city meetings calendar earlier in the week and accepted Trivette's resignation. Michele Mixner DeWitt was appointed Interim City Manager. Trivette had been with the City for ten years; seven and a half as chief administrator. The Council declined to provide a reason for the departure, citing the personnel exemption.

Williamsburg Watch obtained Trivette's pay records through FOIA. By the first week of April 2026, the City had paid Trivette \$96,767.06 in regular salary and accrued benefits since the February 25 resignation. The payouts did not match the provisions of his 2018 employment contract — not for voluntary resignation, not for termination without cause, not for termination for cause. The City Manager who had presented the independent-school-district feasibility study to City Council on June 8, 2023, who had argued in April 2025 that achievement gains and funding "are linked and cannot be separated," and who had signed the new joint funding contract on the City Manager line on October 10, 2025, was no longer the City Manager of Williamsburg four months and fifteen days after the signing.

The BoS's own procedural cadence held through the same weeks. John McGlennon, now chair, presided over the regular business cycle. Michael Hipple's Powhatan seat was no longer Hipple's; Tracy Wainwright had been seated in January.

At the February 24, 2026 business meeting at the Government Center, Wainwright raised a proposed resolution opposing a Virginia constitutional amendment on redistricting that she viewed as inconsistent with bipartisan principles. She suggested the Board should voice concern. She acknowledged the action might not change the outcome but argued that as sworn representatives, the Board sometimes had a duty to voice opposition regardless of the effect. McGlennon pressed her on the merits, was there clear evidence of a constitutional violation, had the Supreme Court of Virginia not already ordered the process forward. Then he made the framing claim:

Mr. McGlennon stated that the Board was responsible for acting within its own authority in a manner consistent with constitutional requirements. He questioned whether it was the Board's responsibility to call out others for perceived failures to uphold constitutional provisions.

No vote was taken at the February 24 meeting on the substance.

The matter returned to the March 24, 2026 business meeting in Board Requests and Directives. Wainwright reminded the Board that she had distributed her resolution at the previous meeting. Larson said she had shared her concerns a month earlier and reiterated that her only direct influence on the matter was through her vote at the ballot box. She would not be able to support the resolution if it were brought forward. McGlennon noted that the Board was occasionally asked to take positions on bipartisan issues and that what remained most important to him was maintaining focus on the issues the Board was responsible for addressing. He moved to table.

A motion to Table the resolution brought forward by Tracy Wainwright was made by John McGlennon, the motion result was Passed. AYES: 3 NAYS: 2. Ayes: Icenhour Jr., Larson, McGlennon. Nays: Null, Wainwright.

The fault line from Hedera held. The three veterans tabled. The two minority members voted against tabling. Hipple was gone. Wainwright sat in his place. The alignment had not changed.

The line on the page worth reading twice was the one McGlennon had spoken a month earlier and let stand. In July 2023, this same Board, with Hipple in Wainwright's seat then, had voted five to zero out of a 90-minute closed session to terminate the joint operating contract. The action had called out the City of Williamsburg and the WJCC School Board as parties to an arrangement the County intended to end. Thirty-one months later, the Board's chair was publicly questioning whether calling out others was the Board's job. He answered his own question by tabling the call-out. The vote line ran where it always ran.

Trivette's exit four months after he signed the City Manager line was its own demonstration of the through-line. The institutional positions held. The personnel cycled through them. McGlennon in 2008 told the Board of Supervisors he was disappointed in the budget process and felt it had damaged relationships with the City and the School Board. He was in the room on October 10, 2025, voting aye for the new contract. Larson defended the WJCC School Board in 2014 against an accusation from Kennedy. In 2023 she was a supervisor on the board that voted unanimously, after a 90-minute closed session, to terminate the contract she had defended in 2014. In 2025 she made the motion for the Board of Supervisors at the joint signing meeting. Hipple in July 2023 told the County podcast it would be "fine with us if they want to" — referring to Williamsburg starting its own school system. In October 2025 he voted yes on the contract that kept the joint system in place. Pons attended Lafayette High School inside James City County as a teenager. As Mayor of Williamsburg he signed the joint resolution on October 10, 2025, on the City's side of the dais. Cordasco was on the school board in 2014 sitting next to Larson during the central-office argument. In December 2020 she was at the public-comment podium telling the supervisors how to use the funding lever.

The seventy-first year opened in July 2025 with no contract on the books and ended in June 2026 with one. The next contract renewal cannot be negotiated before January 1, 2030. The default term reaches to 2055. By spring 2026 the rooms were back at the cadence of joint meetings, three a year now under the new contract, plus the budget cycle's regular interactions. The tension was still in the building. So was the agreement.

What happens in year seventy-two is not yet on tape.

Notes on Sources

Direct-quote passages from meeting video recordings are lightly cleaned: punctuation supplied, caption duplication removed, ellipses for omissions. Speech rhythm and hedges are preserved. Minutes language is quoted from the official board minutes. Each timestamp link below opens the source meeting video at the moment the quoted passage begins.

Coverage is asymmetric across the three rooms. The James City County Board of Supervisors and the Williamsburg City Council have had continuous YouTube video coverage since March 2018 and earlier respectively. The Williamsburg-James City County School Board's video record is less consistent before 2022, with several meetings in 2018–2021 documented only through written minutes. That asymmetry shapes what's quotable from each room and why pre-2022 school-board scenes lean on minutes language while the same period's BoS and Council scenes carry verbatim recorded speech.

Three Rooms in One Room. The October 10, 2025 joint signing meeting was held in Meeting Rooms A, B, and C at the James City County Recreation Center, 5301 Longhill Road. The roll call, the Joint Resolution preamble naming all fourteen prior amendments, the three sequential motions and votes, and Sarah Ortego's "new and stronger beginning" remarks are documented in the [official joint meeting minutes](#) and in the [meeting video](#). Stevens reads the Joint Resolution beginning at [12:51](#); Ortego's "new and stronger beginning" passage is at [42:49](#). The 1950s and 2020 population figures are from the U.S. Census Bureau. The 89/11 funding-share split for FY26 and the 10,200/1,150 student counts come from the contract preamble.

Chapter One — The Bargain (1955–2007). The Williamsburg-James City County school division's founding by 1955 act of the Virginia General Assembly is documented in the Joint Resolution preamble (October 10, 2025). The list of fourteen prior amendment years (1963, 1965, 1969, 1971, 1980, 1989, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2007, 2012, 2017, 2022) is from the same preamble. School-construction dates are from the WJCC division's public school listings. Population figures are from the U.S. Census Bureau. The structural fact that the school board was not a signing party to any contract before 2025 is documented in the parties listed on the face of the [October 9, 2025 unsigned contract document](#) and confirmed in the [WHRO article reporting the signing](#).

Chapter Two — First Audible Stress (2008–2014). The McGlennon "damaged relationships" remark was made during the FY09 budget adoption vote at the James City County Board of Supervisors regular meeting of June 24, 2008. The minutes are in the County's archived BoS records. The 2012 contract amendment, the funding-formula change from one-year to three-year smoothing, the surplus-handling change, and Supervisor Jim Kennedy's question about the City's ten percent dictating the use of the County's ninety percent are documented in the BoS regular meeting minutes of April 10, 2012.

Kennedy's full name and Stonehouse District seat are confirmed in the same minutes' roll call. The April 8, 2014 joint work session at the Stryker Building included James City County BoS members, Williamsburg City Council members (including Vice Mayor Paul Freiling), and WJCC School Board members (including chair Ruth Larson and member Heather Cordasco); the minutes are embedded in the BoS agenda packet for the same date. Larson's election to the Board of Supervisors in November 2015 and her swearing in on January 12, 2016 are documented in the County's election records and the BoS organizational meeting minutes. Sue Sadler's appointment to the Stonehouse District seat the same month is in the same record.

Chapter Three — A Working Relationship (2015–2019). The 2017 contract amendment vote, Larson's remarks thanking the City of Williamsburg, and Kevin Onizuk's "positive relationship" closing are documented in the [BoS regular meeting minutes of April 25, 2017](#). The March 16, 2018 joint budget meeting at Legacy Hall, 4301 New Town Avenue, was attended by all three boards; the minutes are filed under the [WJCC School Board's joint meeting record](#). Larson's question about the security and finance positions, the conversation with County Attorney Adam Kinsman about realtor outreach, and the James Blair Middle School ribbon-cutting on the calendar are documented in those minutes. Cook's chairmanship of the WJCC School Board in 2018, Lisa Ownby's board membership, and Jim Regimbal's presentation from Fiscal Analytics are also in the meeting record.

Chapter Four — Building Tension (2020–2022). Larson's "I resent that" remarks about the Reopening of Schools Task Force and Hipple's "I'm very disappointed in some of the school board members" passage were spoken during the emergency FY21 budget discussion at the BoS regular meeting of June 9, 2020: [Larson at 1:28:02](#), [Hipple at 1:32:50](#). Barbara Henry's December 8, 2020 public-comment resolution reading aloud, Chris Henderson's "money talks" remarks, and Heather Cordasco's "power of the purse" remarks are in the BoS regular meeting video of that date: [Henry at 1:19:09](#), [Henderson at 1:22:55](#), [Cordasco at 1:30:07](#). The May 18, 2021 WJCC School Board FY22 capital plan discussion, including Kyra Cook's "for the historians" remarks and Dr. James Beers's "ignored the board's pleas" remarks, is documented in the [official board minutes](#). The June 10, 2021 Williamsburg City Council business meeting at which the "county rejected the school board's original CIP proposal" passage was spoken is at [37:33 on the meeting video](#). Council members present that night were Mayor Pons, Vice Mayor Dent, Ramsey, Maslin, Rogers. The May 24, 2022 BoS business meeting at which the new contract was adopted, including Scott Stevens's explanation of the supermajority requirement and Larson's follow-up question, is documented in the [meeting minutes](#). Kyra Cook's "paradigm shift" remarks four weeks later at the WJCC School Board regular meeting of June 21, 2022 are in the [official board minutes](#); [meeting video](#).

Chapter Five — The Breakup Attempt (2023). Larson's April 25, 2023 "I watch the school board meeting" passage was spoken at the BoS business meeting; video at [1:43:12](#). The June 8, 2023

Williamsburg City Council "Reimagine K-12 Education" item, including Andrew Trivette's presentation, Mayor Pons's pre-vote framing, Vice Mayor Dent's remarks, Barbara Ramsey's remarks, Stacy Kern-Scheerer's remarks, and the unanimous Ramsey-Dent motion, is documented in the [meeting minutes via the City portal](#) and in the [meeting video: Trivette at 2:08:46, Pons at 2:10:24, Dent at 2:10:50, Kern-Scheerer at 2:11:53](#). Pons's later admission to WHRO that the 2022 survey did not ask residents whether they wanted to leave the joint school system, his Lafayette High School memory, and Trivette's "easier with a smaller system" remark are in [Laura Phillion's WHRO article of April 5, 2024](#). The July 25, 2023 BoS business meeting at which Sue Sadler made the termination motion is documented in the [meeting minutes](#); the motion is read on the [video at 4:04:20](#). Hipple's and Stevens's "This Week in James City County" podcast remarks are reported in [Ryan Murphy's WHRO article of July 27, 2023](#). Dr. Olwen Herron's August 1, 2023 Superintendent's Report addressing the County's termination vote and Greg Dowell's "took many of us by surprise" remarks are in the WJCC School Board work-session video: [Herron at 2:08, Dowell at 7:23](#). The August 15, 2023 board members' comments noting the division would continue "as long as allowed" are in the [regular meeting minutes](#); [meeting video](#).

Chapter Six — The Reconciliation (2024–2025). The March 11, 2024 Williamsburg feasibility study by Dr. Jeffery Smith, including the \$18.9 million first-year cost and the \$2.4 million operating deficit estimate, is summarized in [Ryan Murphy's WHRO article of May 10, 2024](#) and [Laura Phillion's April 5, 2024 piece](#). The James City County feasibility study by David Gaston, dated July 8, 2024, is summarized in [Nick McNamara's WHRO article of the same date](#). Williamsburg's October 11, 2024 statement that the City preferred to stay in the joint district is summarized in [McNamara's October 21, 2024 article](#) including Larson's "closer than we are further apart" remark. The December 6, 2024 joint meeting remarks by Larson, Pons, and Herron are in the [WJCC joint meeting minutes](#); [meeting video](#). The February 11, 2025 BoS regular meeting passages (Andy Cason's public-comment WJCC pay testimony, Marco Sardi's and Chris Henderson's and Richard Timberlake's public comment, the Hedera SUP-24-0016 motion language and 3-2 tally, Hipple's and Null's deliberation remarks, Null's referendum-on-government-center question, Adam Kinsman's reply, and the Larson-Stevens exchange about County funds to the WJCC School Division) are documented in the official BoS meeting minutes (jcc/minutes/bos/2025/2025-02-11_regular.pdf, OCR'd 2026-05-16 from the scanned source). Hipple's roll-call response on the 3-2 tally was clipped on the auto-captioned video and is reported here from the official minutes per the corpus methodology rule that vote tallies cite minutes rather than auto-caption. The April 30, 2025 status of negotiations and the Stevens and Trivette remarks about per-pupil funding and performance-tied investment are in [McNamara's WHRO article of that date](#). The WJCC School Board closed sessions of September 16, 2025 (under § 2.2-3711(A)(8)) and October 7, 2025 (under § 2.2-3711(A)(29)) are documented in the respective meeting minutes: [September 16 minutes](#) and [video](#); [October 7 minutes](#) and [video](#).

Chapter Seven — What the Contract Does. All clause-level references are to the [unsigned contract document](#) drafted by County Attorney Adam Kinsman, finalized on October 9, 2025, and published by WJCC Schools. Article and paragraph numbering follows that document. The Joint Resolution language about settling "all disputes under the Prior Contract" is in the resolution adopted at the [October 10, 2025 joint meeting](#); [meeting video](#).

Closing. The January 13, 2026 pre-budget public hearing at which Mike Joseph and Linda Wise spoke is documented in the [BoS regular meeting minutes](#); [meeting video](#). The February 6, 2026 joint meeting at the Stryker Center is on the agenda packet for the BoS that date. The February 12, 2026 closed-door personnel evaluation of Trivette and the February 25, 2026 special meeting accepting his resignation are reported in [Williamsburg Watch's article of February 25, 2026](#) and [Nick McNamara's WHRO article of the same date](#). The FOIA-based reporting on the \$96,767.06 in payouts from the City to Trivette since his resignation, and the analysis of his 2018 employment contract terms, are in [Williamsburg Watch's article of April 17, 2026](#). The February 24, 2026 BoS business meeting passage (the Wainwright-McGlennon redistricting exchange and McGlennon's "call out others for perceived failures to uphold constitutional provisions" remark) is documented in the February 24, 2026 BoS minutes embedded in the March 24, 2026 agenda packet for consent-calendar approval (jcc/agenda-packets/bos/2026/2026-03-24_business_packet.txt, page reference per packet pagination). The March 24, 2026 BoS business meeting passages (the Wainwright follow-up reminder of the previously distributed resolution, Larson's tabling support, McGlennon's tabling motion, and the 3-2 tally) are documented in the official BoS meeting minutes (jcc/minutes/bos/2026/2026-03-24_business.pdf, OCR'd 2026-05-16 from the scanned source). Tracy Wainwright's swearing-in to the Powhatan District seat in January 2026 is in the BoS organizational meeting minutes for that date.