



Call it an initiation rite. Birmingham's new school superintendent, [Craig Witherspoon](#), sat quietly through his first school board meeting Tuesday. Mostly, he just watched. He watched as board members [Virginia Volker](#) and [Emanuel Ford](#) grilled the child nutrition director on a \$57,702 bid for sliced meat. Ford requested that the meats be housed in a variety of breads. You know, something other than the standard bun. Spencer Taylor, the child nutrition director, agreed. There would be wraps and flatbreads, he said. Volker had another concern. "Can we go easy on the salami?"

Taylor assured her that the board has historically used turkey salami. Volker's face lit up, clearly surprised. The item passed.

Recent articles by *The Birmingham News* have noted that [no school district in the state has shelled out as much dough as the Birmingham system-\\$1.5 million last year-on legal fees](#). The board retains two law firms, and let's just say that at the board meetings, attorneys take up substantial real estate near the dais.

Board member [April Williams](#) said that while there may be a small army of lawyers in attendance at each meeting, the board pays for only one attorney from one firm each meeting. The board meets twice a month. Tom Stewart, of the firm Waldrep, Stewart & Kendrick, said that his firm, one of the two representing the board, doesn't attend committee meetings unless asked by the board. Then only the firm that was invited bills the board. As for [the new superintendent's welcome reception last night](#), where revelers grumbled that the attorneys present were getting paid, Stewart corrected, "We did not get paid." They attended, he said, because they wanted to.