



Board-to-Board, November, 2023

A monthly report from the Albemarle County School Board to the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors

English Language Arts Adoption Committee updates—Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) is closer to choosing its new reading curriculum for K-5 students by reducing the number of state-approved options from six programs to two. The Albemarle County School Board is expected to approve the program that will be in use for the 2024-25 school year in January of next year. The programs remaining under consideration are *Benchmark Advance* and *HMH Into Reading*.

The selection of a new curriculum follows a 2022 state law requiring all school divisions in Virginia to improve literacy outcomes for students. In meeting this commitment, more than 60 teachers, administrators, academic coaches, parents, and community partners from across the division came together as an English Language Arts Adoption Committee.

More information about each program is available to families at the following links:

- [Benchmark Advance](#)
- [HMH Into Reading](#)

Programs were judged on how effectively they could be utilized by teachers to develop language comprehension, including vocabulary, language structure and verbal reasoning, word recognition involving phonological awareness, decoding (spelling-sound connections), and sight recognition of familiar words.

All parents, teachers, and community partners are encouraged to examine the two programs at their local elementary school and to provide their comments in a feedback survey at the school. Visitors should notify the school ahead of time of their plans to review the programs. Community members are welcome to review the materials at Center I, located at 1180 Seminole Trail in Charlottesville.

Comments also can be submitted through the online [ELA Adoption Caregiver/Community Survey](#). The survey is available in English, Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic, Pashto and Dari. The survey deadline is Friday, December 8.

The adoption committee is expected to make a recommendation to the school board during the month of January. Program information materials will be available for public inspection and comment for 30 days prior to the school board's approval.

The board is expected to approve a curriculum early in the new year, providing extensive opportunities for teacher professional development with the new curriculum in time for the start of the new school year next August.

Updates on proposed Middle School Facilities Master Plan—Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) hosted a gallery walk on Tuesday, November 28, to enable the community to review and provide feedback on a phased approach to the division’s Middle School Facilities Master Plan.

This past spring, ACPS partnered with VMDO Architects, a local architectural firm specializing in K-12 education, to develop a 20-year master plan to address, improve and resolve capacity challenges and renovation needs at the division’s five comprehensive middle schools and one charter school that serves students in grades 6-12. Following a months-long comprehensive study, during which they toured and assessed the division’s middle school facilities and collected input from middle school students, staff and families, VMDO recommended a phased approach to addressing the division’s middle school capacity and equity needs. The project management team agreed to advance VMDO’s proposals for public review.

VMDO’s recommendations include four phases of improvements that consider looming overcrowding issues at Henley Middle School in Crozet and at Journey Middle School on Lambs Lane in Charlottesville, along with factors such as projected enrollment growth, the age and condition of the division’s middle school facilities, environmental sustainability, unique school and community needs, and the ability of ACPS facilities to support current and future educational programming. The four proposed phases, which are intended to overlap rather than be implemented sequentially, include a middle school redistricting study, expanding or replacing Community Lab School, building a new middle school, and renovating all of the division’s existing middle schools to meet identified standards, ranging from basic maintenance to major facility improvements to high-performance upgrades.

Phase 1: Middle School Redistricting Study recommends reviewing current middle school attendance boundaries and evaluating the potential to address enrollment and capacity challenges through redistricting and possibly increasing enrollment at Walton Middle School. Should the study determine that redistricting and expanding Walton’s enrollment would be in the best interest of students and the community, this phase also would include moderate renovations at Walton.

In *Phase 2: Lab School Expansion*, VMDO proposes expanding and renovating, or replacing, Community Lab School. Beyond much-needed facility improvements, the goal is to increase enrollment to help address short-term capacity challenges while also increasing access to the charter school for students across the division. VMDO recommends renovations to double Lab School enrollment from 200 to 400 students, including 100 additional middle school students and 100 more high school students.

Phase 3: Build a New Middle School recommends that the division construct a new comprehensive middle school in the northwestern portion of the county to help alleviate overcrowding at Henley, Jouett and Lakeside middle schools. This phase would require redrawing existing attendance boundaries and redistricting up to 600 students across three schools.

The final phase, *Phase 4: Renovate and Improve All Middle Schools*, is aimed at creating equitable, sustainable, flexible and adaptable facilities that support high-quality learning for all students. In this phase, all middle schools will undergo alterations and renovations through a tiered approach to improvements, ranging from basic repairs and maintenance to major programming enhancements and improvements that ensure the highest level of equity in school learning spaces.

Each of the four phases of improvements has been developed and evaluated based on eight criteria that align with the division’s strategic plan, Virginia Department of Education guidelines, educational best practices, and community feedback. Those criteria include instruction, equity, cost, staffing, disruption, transportation, community priorities, and flexibility and adaptability.

In addition to asking questions and providing feedback during the November 28 gallery walk, community members are welcome to submit questions and comments to the project team via email at msmasterplan@k12albemarle.org. VMDO will incorporate community feedback into their final report, which will be delivered to the project steering committee in December. A summary of the final plan will be presented to the Albemarle County School Board and provided to the Long-Range Planning Advisory Committee and other groups in early 2024. The final report also will be made available to the public at that time.

More information about the Middle School Facilities Master Plan, including an overview, a project timeline, survey results, and presentations, can be found on the project website at k12albemarle.org/msmasterplan.

2023-24 Golden Apple Award Nominations Open—Nominations are now open for the 2023-24 Golden Apple Awards, a program designed to honor outstanding teachers in public and private schools in Albemarle County and Charlottesville City. Each Golden Apple recipient will receive a \$500 grant, which can be used for classroom materials or to support the recipient's professional development.

The Golden Apple Award program is sponsored by Better Living Building Supply and Cabinetry. Teachers from preschool through grade 12, in any discipline, are eligible for the award based upon demonstrated excellence in teaching and community involvement. Nomination criteria include creating a love of learning among all students, stimulating thought and dialogue in the classroom, raising student expectations for success, understanding and providing for individual student needs, and involving families in the education process.

Mr. Steve Koleszar, retired Albemarle County School Board member, will chair the selection committee. The committee includes representatives from the county and city school divisions as well as representatives from the Virginia Association of Independent Schools and Blue Ridge UniServ.

Nomination forms are available at individual schools or online at k12albemarle.org/golden-apple. The deadline for school principals to receive nominations from students, parents, school staff, and community members is January 22, 2024. Golden Apple winners will be announced in May.