



Board-to-Board, February, 2023

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

Albemarle County School Board Approves Resolution on the Importance of Safe Firearm Storage—

At the conclusion of the Albemarle County School Board meeting on January 25, 2024, At-Large representative Allison Spillman noted that gun violence is the leading cause of death in children in the U.S. and advocated that the school division should be working in partnership with families, guardians, caregivers, and community members to “avoid the harm and tragedy that shootings of any kind...”

The resolution, which aims to educate community members on preventative measures to increase student and school safety, was unanimously approved by the school board during their meeting on February 8, 2024. The resolution directs the superintendent to send an informational letter to families stressing the importance of safe firearm storage around children and teens.

This work joins the Virginia General Assembly, where [House Bill No. 498](#) (School board policies; parental notification; safe storage of firearms in the household) would require firearm owners to store weapons and ammunition in a locked container or face a Class 4 misdemeanor charge. In addition, President Joe Biden announced on January 25, 2024, a set of legislative actions directing the Education Department and the Justice Department to share firearm storage safety with their respective communities.

Albemarle County School Board Resolution Concerning Secure Storage of Firearms

February 8, 2024

WHEREAS, an estimated 4.6 million American children live in households with at least one loaded, unlocked firearm; and

WHEREAS, every year, roughly 350 children under the age of 18 unintentionally shoot themselves or someone else. That’s nearly one unintentional shooting per day, and 70 percent of these incidents take place inside a home; and

WHEREAS, another 1,200 children and teens die by gun suicide each year, most often using guns belonging to a family member; and

WHEREAS, in incidents of gun violence on school grounds, 75 percent of active shooters were current students or recent graduates; and

WHEREAS, evidence strongly suggests that secure firearm storage is an essential component to any effective strategy to keep schools and students safe; and

WHEREAS, research shows that secure firearm storage practices are associated with up to an 85 percent reduction in the risk of self-inflicted and unintentional firearm injuries among children and teens; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center emphasizes the importance of appropriate storage of firearms because 76 percent of school shooters use firearms acquired from the homes of parents or close relatives; and

WHEREAS, across the country, lawmakers, community members, and local leaders are working together to implement public awareness campaigns, such as the Be SMART program that is being introduced in Albemarle County Public Schools (“ACPS”) this month, which is endorsed by the National PTA, and which encourages secure gun storage practices and highlights the public safety risks of unsecured guns; and

WHEREAS, school districts across the country have begun proactively to send materials home to parents and guardians informing them of applicable firearm storage laws and firearm secure storage best practices; and

WHEREAS, keeping students, teachers, and staff safe from gun accidents and gun violence should be the responsibility of all adult stakeholders at each of our school sites; and

WHEREAS, Virginia law requires adults to securely store their firearms to prevent a child from having unauthorized access to a firearm; and

WHEREAS, in order to continue with preventative measures to increase student and school safety we must act now.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Albemarle County School Board directs the Superintendent and Members of the Superintendent’s Cabinet to take such actions as are necessary to increase awareness among ACPS students, families, and staff about the importance of secure gun storage, the legal requirements of parents and guardians to securely store their firearms, and the best practice of keeping all guns unloaded, locked up, and stored separately from ammunition; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Albemarle County School Board directs the Superintendent to create an appropriate letter, in English and other languages spoken by ACPS families and staff, to parents and guardians that explains the importance of secure gun storage in preventing minors from accessing guns, the legal requirements of parents and guardians to securely store their firearms, and the best practice of keeping all guns unloaded, locked up, and stored separately from ammunition, which letter shall also be included in annual registration materials at each school site.

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED, on this 8th day of February 2024, that the Albemarle County School Board and the Superintendent will continue to work with local law enforcement agencies, health

agencies, and non-profits to collaborate and increase efforts to inform ACPS families of their obligations regarding secure storage of firearms in their homes.

Albemarle County School Board Approves New Reading Curriculum for the 2024-25 School Year—At its meeting last week, the Albemarle County School Board approved a new reading curriculum for its kindergarten through fifth-grade students. The new program, [HMH Into Reading Virginia](#), will be implemented in ACPS in time for the 2024-25 school year.

This decision follows the January recommendation of an adoption committee made up of more than 60 ACPS teachers, administrators, academic coaches, parents, and community partners from across the school division with diverse backgrounds and experiences. The next steps for this process will include a major focus on professional learning for elementary-level teachers, teacher assistants, and administrators.

Beyond the state requirement for choosing a new reading curriculum, ACPS will implement HMH Into Reading Virginia with achievement gaps in mind. The division's most recent Standards of Learning tests yielded an overall pass rate in reading for the division of 74%, slightly above the state average, with lower pass rates for Black and Hispanic students, students with disabilities, students from economically disadvantaged homes, and English Learners.

ACPS is currently procuring programmatic materials and related professional learning materials. Those will be delivered for instructional staff in time to prepare for the 2024-25 school year.

Albemarle County Public Schools Partners with Madison House, University of Virginia Students to Pilot Tutoring Program—ACPS and Madison House, the volunteer center for students who attend the University of Virginia (UVA), have partnered to pilot a new tutoring program throughout the county.

The initiative aims to overcome the transportation obstacle many UVA students face when volunteering over a large geographical area like Albemarle County. Two ACPS buses pick up UVA students daily from the Madison House location on Rugby Road, transport them to the schools at which they volunteer, and bring them back in the afternoon. One bus travels through the southern portion of the county while the other transports tutors around the urban ring.

Of the more than 250 Madison House volunteers currently working with schools throughout Charlottesville City and Albemarle County, about 125 are using the volunteer bus, and the program hopes to recruit more volunteers in the coming weeks. Tutors can assist students with a variety of subjects in several elementary, middle and high schools throughout the county.

The Madison House volunteer program helps ACPS fill tutoring spots at high-priority schools in the division. UVA students who are available on weekdays from 9:15 a.m. to noon and are interested in tutoring ACPS students can visit the [Madison House website](#) to learn more.

Albemarle County Public Schools Crowns Elementary & Middle School Level ACPS Spelling Champions—On Tuesday, January 30, 15 elementary school spellers and six middle school spellers took to the stage to compete for the title of ACPS Spelling Champion. Enoch Lyu of Hollymead Elementary School was named the elementary school level champion after correctly spelling

“supersonic” at the end of the ninth round of words, and Claire Meng of Lakeside Middle School was named the middle school level champion after correctly spelling “extemporaneous” at the end of the fourth round of words.

Elementary School Spelling Bee Winners:

- Hesham Mawlood, Agnor-Hurt
- Dhiya Nagappan, Baker-Butler
- Samuel Pryse, Broadus Wood
- Hadley Viele, Brownsville
- Nehir Celebi, Crozet
- Alexander Kalergis, Greer
- Enoch Lyu, Hollymead, *ACPS Elementary Spelling Bee Champion*
- Felix Dong, Ivy
- Keagan McElroy, Mountain View
- William Gilbert, Murray
- Charlotte Meyer, Red Hill
- Ulric Ordendorff, Scottsville
- Terina Opoku, Stone-Robinson
- Bryce Hartman, Stony Point
- Logan Paparella, Woodbrook

Middle School Spelling Bee Winners:

- Sebastian Carlock, Burley
- Samuel Dalimonte, Community Lab
- Finnian Lodge, Community Lab (runner up, competed in ACPS Middle School Spelling Bee)
- Saurish Srimath Tirumala, Henley
- Ian Hirst, Journey
- Claire Meng, Lakeside, *ACPS Middle School Spelling Bee Champion*
- Lyla Thiede, Walton

WinterSongs Concert Returns for 10th Annual Show to Raise Funds—The annual WinterSongs Concert, which raises funds for Shelter for Help in Emergency, returned for its 10th concert on February 24 in the Monticello High School Auditorium. It brought together eight women’s ensembles from Albemarle County Public Schools and Charlottesville City Schools for a program that centers around empowering women and bolstering self-esteem. Since the program’s start in 2015, WinterSongs has raised around \$33,000 for local charities that help women in need.

An exciting addition to this year’s program is a donation match by the Albemarle Foundation for Education (AFE) and the Public Education Foundation of Charlottesville-Albemarle (PEFCA). Working together, the AFE and PEFCA have committed to matching the first \$2,000 in donations.

For more information on the performance or how to make donations to the cause, visit the WinterSongs website at WinterSongs.org.