



Board-to-Board, September 2019

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

ACPS Superintendent, Dr. Matthew Haas, Focuses Priorities for the New Year—While welcoming faculty and staff to the new school year, Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) Superintendent, Dr. Matthew Haas, told the division’s nearly 1,400 teachers that priorities this year include establishing multiple career pathways at each high school and student center; engaging the community in conversations on modernizing a “broken grading system”; bringing principals together to develop strategies and practices that will improve student performance on such measures as the state’s Standards of Learning (SOL) tests; and a new approach that will reduce out-of-school suspensions of middle schools students.

Among specific goals, he said this year the school division is committed to:

- Making greater strides toward closing disparities in student opportunities and achievement;
- Establishing division-wide professional learning communities at the elementary, middle, and high school levels that will bring together principals, teachers, and academic coaches to review student performance data and develop strategies to meet the division’s expectations of high achievement for all students;
- Involving the community on planning to repair an inconsistent and imprecise grading system not oriented to the acquisition of lifelong skills; and
- Developing multiple career pathways at each high school and student center that are aligned with career clusters. Students would take special courses in their preferred field and add a related work-based learning experience, such as a capstone project, in their senior year. The Virginia Department of Education identifies 16 career clusters, which it defines as “groupings of occupations and broad industries based on commonalities.”

Pertaining to his plan for continuing to narrow achievement gaps among students, Haas pointed to two pilot programs that are unfolding this year at the division’s six middle schools. One requires students to put away their cell phones during the school day, either storing phones in their lockers or not bringing phones to school at all.

The second program reduces out-of-school suspensions for students who violate the division’s policy on drug or alcohol possession. Previously, these students were subject to a 10-day out-of-school suspension. This year, they will be suspended in school for three days. During this time, they will focus on their academic work and participate in a Region 10 substance abuse prevention counseling program, Teen Intervene. Both of these pilots, the superintendent said,

will be monitored closely for their impact and could lead to future expansion to students at the high school level.

Cale Advisory Committee Recommends Changing the Name of Cale Elementary School—The Cale Advisory Committee has recommended to ACPS Superintendent Dr. Matthew Haas that the name of Cale Elementary School be changed in accordance with a new School Board policy on the naming and renaming of schools, adopted earlier this year.

The community advisory committee, which began its review on May 28, was directed by the Superintendent to determine if the name of the school meets the standards set by the School Board in its policy. Those standards call for school names to be consistent with the Board's currently adopted vision, mission, goals and values. The advisory committee includes parents of Cale students and residents of the Cale community, administrators and teachers from the school, and the Assistant Superintendent for School Community Empowerment. Dennis Rooker, a former chair and three-term member of the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors, chairs the advisory committee.

In its review of Cale's tenure as Superintendent from 1947 to 1969, the committee's research included an extensive review of School Board and Board of Supervisors meeting minutes from those years; newspaper archives from that era; interviews of students, teachers and administrators who were in county schools during that period; materials submitted by members of the Cale family and acquaintances; and emails and letters sent to the committee. The committee also heard from members of the community, including the Cale family.

Rooker said that the committee saw no evidence that Mr. Cale ever spoke publicly against segregation, nor that he ever pushed to have integration occur faster. In 1963, for example, when it became apparent that some form of integration of county schools was inevitable, the School Board voted unanimously to eliminate athletics and social functions in county schools to prevent the social mixing of the races. The Board of Supervisors later ordered the School Board to repeal that decision. When the School Board refused, the Board of Supervisors fired four School Board members. The Committee saw no evidence that Mr. Cale ever took a public position on this issue one way or the other.

Regarding the 1956 article in *Commentary Magazine* that led to the committee's formation, the committee found no evidence that a correction or retraction of Cale's comments were ever requested, nor did they find any public comments by Cale that were inconsistent with the views that were attributed to him in the article. The committee's research revealed that the writer of the article, James Rorty, was an accomplished author; had produced hundreds of articles, poems, essays and books; and was the recipient of national and international awards for his work. *Commentary Magazine* remains a reputable publication.

Rooker said the article itself and the continued segregation of county schools long after the Supreme Court decision and after Charlottesville City's integration of schools made the continued use of the name of Cale Elementary School controversial.

Haas said he will consider the committee's recommendation and anticipates making his recommendation to the School Board during a School Board meeting next month.

If the School Board ultimately decides to change the name of Cale Elementary School, the advisory committee, as directed by policy, will reconvene to recommend to the Superintendent a new name for the school. The committee will have 90 days to complete its work, which will include a public meeting to gather input from the community.

More Options for Being Heard at School Board Meetings—The School Board has expanded opportunities for members of the community to participate in their meetings by offering multiple options to sign up for public comment. Beginning with the Board's work session on Thursday, September 26, people wishing to speak at Board meetings can sign up in advance, either online or by phone.

The school division will now publish a link on its homepage (www.k12albemarle.org) that will be active every Monday in the week of board meetings, starting at 8 a.m. Members of the public also can sign up in advance of meetings by calling the School Board Clerk, Ms. Jennifer Johnston, at 434-972-4055.

Both online sign-ups and sign-ups that are done by phone must be completed by noon on the day of the meeting. As is current practice, anyone who attends a School Board meeting can sign up to speak beginning at 6 p.m. and continuing right up until the public comment period on the meeting agenda.

In its public comment guidelines, the Board says it "invites and actively seeks the public's input in matters relevant to School Board governance or school division operations." Speakers are called to address the Board in the order in which they sign up with the exception of students, who have priority. This practice is in consideration of students often having to complete homework in preparing for the next school day. The Board allows each speaker up to three minutes to complete their remarks. This time may be reduced to two minutes if there is a large number of speakers signed up to speak at the meeting that evening.

When the School Board adopted the new practice on September 12, it described online and telephonic sign-up options as being a pilot program. Board members will evaluate how well the new approach is working in the first quarter of 2020 before determining if it should be revised or made permanent.

ACPS Teachers Honored—On Thursday, September 19, Madeline Michel was recognized at the Virginia Board of Education meeting in Richmond for her outstanding contribution to the arts in ACPS. Michel, the Theater Director at Monticello High School, was awarded the 2019 Excellence in Theatre Education Award from the Tony Awards and Carnegie Mellon University. This is a huge honor for K-12 drama teachers who champion arts programs in their schools. Michel accepted the award, which comes with a \$10,000 grant for the Monticello drama program as well as two scholarships for Michel's students to attend Carnegie Mellon's pre-college summer program, at the Tony Awards on Sunday, June 9, in New York City.

Additionally, Elizabeth Mulcahy, a teacher at Western Albemarle High School, is one of only 114 teachers selected for a National History Day program titled *Legacies of World War I*. This program is a partnership between the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission and National History Day. Mulcahy will collaborate with educators from around the world in a variety of ways via internet to learn more about World War I and its lasting impact. As one of the selected teachers, Mulcahy receives free tuition, graduate credits, and materials for the online program.

ACPS Enrollment—ACPS took its annual ten-day enrollment report for the 2019/20 school year based on attendance numbers as of September 4, 2019. In total, ACPS has 13,972 K-12 students enrolled in 25 schools, which represents 336 more students than last year and 239 more students than projected. Some of the schools that factor heavily into this number are Cale Elementary School, which has more than 90 more students than anticipated and 83 more than last year, and Stone-Robinson Elementary, where there are 70 more students than last year and 60 more than projected. The state enrollment report is usually done on September 30, so the ten-day count is a good indication of how many students are in ACPS schools from year to year.

Visit to Murray High School by Warner's Staff—Two members of Senator Mark Warner's staff, Lauren Marshall and Hayley Brower, spent the morning of August 30 at Murray High School in order to gain better understanding of the diverse ways that charter schools operate in the Commonwealth. Marshall, Senior Policy Advisor, and Brower, Legislative Correspondent, both specialize in educational initiatives at Warner's office. Murray's principal, Chad Ratliff, explained the unique role that the school holds in the county as a lab school in coordination with the University of Virginia. Albemarle County School Board Chair Jonno Alcaro was at the meeting to represent ACPS, as were Superintendent Matt Haas and ACPS Legislative & Public Affairs Officer Helen Dunn.