



**Board-to-Board, September, 2023**

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

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**Collective bargaining**—On Tuesday, September 12, the Albemarle County School Board sent the following statement to all Albemarle County Public Schools employees:

On Thursday afternoon, September 7, shortly after the fourth regularly scheduled negotiation session between the School Board and the Albemarle Education Association (AEA) began, the AEA representatives terminated the discussions and walked out of the meeting. The School Board representatives remained at the negotiating table for another 30 minutes, but the AEA representatives did not return.

Progress toward the School Board's adoption of a mutually agreed-upon collective bargaining agreement was being made. In a process that has been in place for nine weeks, both parties reached agreement on nearly 70 separate items and agreed in concept to several more. The AEA's unilateral action last week interrupted this process and brought the progress toward adoption of a collective bargaining agreement to a stop.

The School Board remains committed in good faith to this negotiation process. And, we recognize that this draft resolution is still a draft and, in fact, many important provisions were tabled and remain to be negotiated. But, negotiations require the presence of both parties. The School Board negotiating team stands ready, willing and able to restart negotiations if the AEA chooses to do so.

The sooner this occurs, the sooner the parties will come to agreement on a collective bargaining resolution and the sooner an election can be held to determine if employees wish to have the AEA represent them as their bargaining agent. Following the certification of an election that would take place as soon as possible, the School Board and the employee bargaining agent will negotiate a collective bargaining agreement.

The School Board's draft resolution would provide for collective bargaining for approximately 95 percent of school division employees, including, among others, teachers, nurses, school bus drivers, teaching assistants, and custodial and child nutrition staff. The draft resolution would exempt supervisory employees and those who assist them in a confidential capacity.

The School Board and the AEA each appointed representatives to a negotiating committee to work together to create a final resolution. Starting in June, this committee met regularly to reach agreement on how collective bargaining will work in the school division.

Importantly, the School Board and the AEA unanimously agreed on a negotiation protocol. It provided that a draft resolution be addressed item by item and discussed until agreement was reached. If a particular item discussion ended in impasse, it would be tabled and revisited at a later time. Last Thursday, the AEA did not adhere to the negotiation protocol.

On March 2, the School Board voted to move forward with collective bargaining. We did so in good faith, in recognition and support of the value of employee participation in decisions as well as the role of the school division in the future and enduring success of our community.

We stand ready to negotiate. The next scheduled negotiation session is scheduled for September 26 with an additional session on October 17.

***Instructional audit updates***—ACPS is taking steps to implement the recommendations made by Bellwether Education Partners, an outside consulting firm, to address the root causes of persistent achievement gaps.

In the most recent results from Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOL) tests, released in early September, pass rates for students in specific demographic groups were below those for all students in the division, continuing a trend, both in the county and across the state, that has persisted for decades.

Last fall, in response to this trend, the division issued a Request for Proposals for outside firms to audit the division's instructional policies, practices and resources and ultimately selected Bellwether.

Bellwether presented five broad recommendations, each supported by key initiatives and specific actions, to address deficiencies in the areas of instructional tasks, adult learning, curricular resources, strategic alignment, and stakeholder engagement:

1. **Organize instruction around rigorous tasks** that allow all students to deeply engage with challenging, standards-aligned content and demonstrate learning in authentic ways.
2. **Develop a systematic approach to adult learning** that combines workshop-based professional development, job-embedded coaching, and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to support staff, at all levels, to develop the skills to continuously improve instruction.
3. **Invest in high-quality instructional materials to fill gaps in content**, including a consistent math curriculum for Algebra 1 and middle grades, a comprehensive system of interventions, and a state-recommended literacy program.

4. **Clarify how division actions lead to student outcomes;** articulate and communicate beliefs about both why and how each role within the division is designed to contribute to strengthening the instructional core.
5. **Strengthen systems for input and feedback** and processes for communicating decisions at all levels to ensure the full spectrum of stakeholders across ACPS are authentically engaged, including students, families, teachers, school leaders, central office staff, and community members.

In response to the audit findings, the school division is moving forward with a series of initiatives to put these recommendations in place. For example:

- School administrators will use their quarterly school improvement plan updates to bolster their focus on instruction, professional development for staff, assessments and data analysis, and school climate.
- Beginning next month, every school in the division will host four meetings per year to engage community members in discussions around reading and math programs, overall curricula, academic support structures for students, multiculturalism, and the social and emotional wellness of students.
- The division will offer two opportunities in October for educators, administrators, support staff, students, parents and guardians, and community members to contribute to the development of a unifying “Theory of Change” document for ACPS that links strategies, activities and resources to student outcomes.

Other initiatives include the development of a strategic communications plan by each school; the formation of teams to update curricula; and the institution of quarterly assessments to measure student academic performance. Further, the division has made improvements to its classroom observation tool for use by principals and assistant principals, as well as its coaching model for teachers. ACPS has also launched a new partnership with the University of Virginia centered around leadership and the development of instructional staff.

Also in support of the audit recommendations, the division has identified more than 20 project proposals that address areas such as professional development in reading, math and Responsive Classroom; additional assessment programs and classroom resources in reading and math; and staffing that will enhance data coaching capabilities and the expansion of staff and student mentors. The proposals total \$600,000 and will be funded from the current budget. Assistant superintendents will serve as project sponsors, supporting the recruitment of stakeholder participation and input and providing guidance for the projects and their strategic alignment.

Each proposal will be tracked carefully to ensure it is having the desired impact and to provide opportunities for continuous improvement. Ultimately, the assistant superintendent said the division will expand these improvements to all of the division’s schools and students.

Division-level administrators have been divided into teams to plan, implement and monitor one or more of Bellwether’s five recommendations. To broaden input on how best to implement the recommendations, the division is forming several steering teams of teachers, parents and administrators, with particular focus on reading, math, professional development, and

community outreach. The division is also organizing an adoption committee that will have similar representation.

Community members can learn more about the Bellwether audit on the division's [Instructional Practices Audit web page](#).

***New reading curriculum selection process begins***—More than 60 teachers, administrators, academic coaches, parents, and community partners from across the school division will comprise an adoption committee to lead the way to the selection of the division's next K-5 reading curriculum. A 2022 state law required all school divisions in the Commonwealth to improve literacy outcomes for students, beginning with a newly-adopted curriculum for the 2024-25 school year.

ACPS is working to ensure that the selection process is transparent to staff, families, and community partners. In an effort to ensure the division gets feedback from diverse members of the ACPS community, it will give every stakeholder in the division the opportunity to be involved in the analysis of the curricula approved by the state's department of education. The emphasis will be on a rigorous evaluation of each program's evidence-based track record.

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

The six programs approved by the state are [Benchmark Advance](#); [Bookworms Reading and Writing](#); [Core Knowledge Language Arts 2e](#); [HMH Into Reading Virginia](#); [Imagine Learning EL Education](#); and [Open Court Reading](#).

An adoption committee will vet each program according to its quality, relevance and fit, and by the end of October, it is expected that two programs will be semi-finalists. The materials for these two programs will be sent to all 15 of the division's elementary schools for further review by teachers, staff, families, and community partners. A set of materials will also be housed at the division's Center I facility. Representatives from the semi-finalists will meet with the committee to make a presentation and respond to questions.

The Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Dr. Chandra Hayes, will make a presentation on January 11 to the school board on the recommended program in hopes of a school board decision by February. This would allow for ACPS to begin the necessary professional development and training programs teachers will need prior to the start of the 2024-25 school year.

Prior to the school board's approval of a reading curriculum for next school year, program information and materials will be available for public review and comment for 30 days.