



Board-to-Board, September 2022

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

All schools accredited, four with conditions—The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) reported recently that all 24 schools in Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) have been accredited for the 2022-23 school year, based on results from the state’s Standards of Learning (SOL) examinations in reading and writing, math, science, and social studies earlier this year. Four schools in the division were accredited with conditions, meaning their overall pass rates in one or more student demographic groups did not meet state standards. Each year, SOL examinations are administered to students in grades 3-12.

Superintendent Dr. Matthew Haas has commented that while in-person instructional time lost to the pandemic may have contributed to lower scores, there is no question this year’s results are similar to those ACPS saw prior to the pandemic. He has also stated that this shows that ACPS is not providing all the necessary resources to empower Black and Hispanic students, students with disabilities, students for whom English is not their primary language, and students who are economically disadvantaged to achieve at the highest levels of their potential.

To illustrate the point, in English, which denotes a combination of reading and writing tests, the unadjusted SOL pass rate for all students in the division was 75%, compared to a state average of 73%, but the pass rate for Black students was 50%, which is 10% below the state average for Black students. Nearly the same was true for Hispanic students, who had a pass rate of 51%. Among economically disadvantaged students, the division-wide pass rate also was 51%, eight percentage points under the state average for this demographic group. While the pass rate for students with disabilities compared favorably to the state average for this demographic group, it still was far below the pass rate for all students in the division.

Similar results were reflected on math tests, in which the average for all students in the division matched the state pass rate of 66%, but pass rates for our Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students, and our English Learners, ranged from eight to 11 percentage points below the state averages for these demographic groups.

One of the division’s three goals in its strategic plan is to facilitate thriving students by providing students with learning experiences that are grounded in high expectations and networks of care that ensure academic and social-emotional development for all students while eliminating opportunity, access and achievement gaps.

Earlier this year, the state department of education reported unadjusted SOL pass rates, which are the pass and fail percentages in each student demographic group for each school. For accreditation purposes, the report from the state is based upon adjusted pass rate results. These

percentages, calculated by the VDOE, take into account improvements in test scores, even if the improved scores remain below the state's pass rate.

Haas said the state report showed that, for several demographic groups, the VDOE adjusted pass rates have improved compared to 2018-19 adjusted pass rates (the last full year before the pandemic), but were still below state averages. The superintendent also said the division is seeing some incremental benefits from its teacher professional development around culturally responsive teaching, recent instructional programming based on the science of reading, and other improved assessment and intervention programming.

Haas has elaborated that, while encouraging, this modest performance growth is insufficient. He believes that the key to closing achievement gaps based on race, language-learner status, special capacities, and socioeconomics is for the entire division, together with our community partners, to develop plans and take actions with fidelity to ensure we are creating positive changes with a greater sense of urgency.

Accordingly, Haas announced that the school division will be developing and issuing a request for proposal (RFP) within the next 30 days to engage an outside organization to conduct an independent audit of the division's reading instructional program, its classroom practices, and its intervention and support models, as well as staffing. The audit, Haas explained, will lead to specific recommendations and actions for improvements. Further, the superintendent said he is appointing a task force of teachers, specialists, central office staff, and community partners to offer counsel in developing the scope of the RFP and, later, to review the results of the audit and offer recommendations for short- and long-term improvements.

Haas said that strengthening the reading skills of all students is foundational to their success in all academic areas. Accordingly, based on the findings of the audit, ACPS will devote resources in the next school budget to such areas as professional development and assessments to measure how well the division is providing the resources and support that all of our students in all demographic groups deserve.

Dr. Daphne Keiser, the division's Assistant Superintendent for School Community Engagement, said in her turn that she believes connecting with families, businesses, and community partners is critical to improving these scores. One example is the division's streamlined volunteer recruitment process, which allows both schools and members of the broader community to more easily identify needs and opportunities for service. As of the beginning of this school year, ACPS had over 600 registered volunteers.

Every student demographic group met the state standard for SOL pass rates in 12 of our schools, including eight elementary schools: Baker-Butler, Broadus Wood, Brownsville, Crozet, Hollymead, Meriwether Lewis, Murray, and Stone-Robinson. Joining these eight schools are three middle schools, Henley, Lakeside and Walton, and our Community Lab School, which serves students in grades 6-12.

Eight other schools were accredited, although they had at least one demographic group that did not meet the state standard. They received a waiver because they previously met the standard for

three consecutive years. In this category are three elementary schools, Agnor-Hurt, Scottsville, and Stony Point; two middle schools, Burley and Journey; and three high schools, Albemarle, Monticello, and Western Albemarle.

The four schools accredited with conditions include Greer, Mountain View, Red Hill, and Woodbrook elementary schools. These schools also had at least one student demographic group that did not meet state standards, and they had not yet met the standard for all demographic groups for three consecutive years and were not eligible for a waiver.

Results for the division and for each school, across all demographic groups, will be available on the VDOE's [School Quality Profiles](#) website; however, the site is currently down for maintenance.

Of these results, Haas has said that they are unacceptable and do not in any way reflect the efforts or abilities of our students, families and educators and that, conversely, they do reflect the inability of our current systems to produce the results we are seeking and clearly demonstrate the need for these systems to immediately change.

Superintendent announces Meriwether Lewis Elementary School as next school to undergo naming review—Albemarle County Public Schools Superintendent, Dr. Matthew Haas, announced at the September 8 meeting of the Albemarle County School Board that the next school to conduct a naming review will be Meriwether Lewis Elementary School (MLES). The school, named for Meriwether Lewis, an early-American explorer, soldier, politician, and public administrator born in Albemarle County, annually has an enrollment of over 300 students.

The name review process will be overseen by Ms. Karen C. Waters, the ACPS Director of Community Education. In addition to managing the name review process, Waters also runs the Open Doors, Driver Education, and Motorcycle Safety programs and manages the ACPS Student Equity Advisory Team (SEAT) through the Office of Community Engagement.

Cheryl Wetmore-Simpson, a teacher at MLES, has been named the chair of the community advisory committee that will review the school's name and make a recommendation to Dr. Haas on whether the name should be retained or the school should have a new name. The advisory committee will also include Jennifer Underwood, the school's principal; at least three teachers and/or staff; at least three parents of Meriwether Lewis students; and two residents of the school community who do not presently have children enrolled in the school. Underwood will also involve students in the review process.

Committee membership will include participation in all committee meetings, of which there will be three, and two public meetings. Those interested in serving on the advisory committee were asked to email SchoolNamingReview@k12albemarle.org by September 23, 2022, with the following information: why they would like to serve, their affiliation with the school, and their contact information. Committee members were announced by Friday, September 30, and the committee is expected to hold their organizational meeting the following week.

As required by school board policy, the Meriwether Lewis naming advisory committee will conduct two online surveys to gather suggestions for the school's name, including keeping the current name. Those surveys will be the subject of as many as two public forums, in which community members can provide feedback on survey results. Following these public engagement sessions, the committee will make a recommendation to Dr. Haas.

Meriwether Lewis was born in 1774 in the present-day community of Ivy. He is best known for his role as the leader, along with William Clark, of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, which was commissioned by Thomas Jefferson just after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Jefferson named Lewis governor of Upper Louisiana in 1806. He died in 1809.

Meriwether Lewis will be the eighth school in the division to have its name reviewed. In all, there were 14 schools in the division named for individuals when the naming review policy went into effect in October 2018. In that policy, the school board directed that all 14 have their name evaluated by a community advisory committee to ensure that schools are named for individuals whose professional and community service records represent the school division's values of excellence, equity, family and community, and wellness. Information on the naming review policy, process, and all of the current and completed reviews can be found on the division's [School Naming Review](#) website.

Division appoints two new directors to lead its outreach—The school division's strategic plan, *Learning for All*, includes among its four values an increased commitment this year to working with families and community partners in sharing responsibility for student success.

Affirming and empowering communities is among its three goals for the 2022-23 school year. Examples of how the division will achieve this goal include "removing barriers for participation in programs, implementing social-emotional curriculum, and identifying community partners to help increase adult education enrollment."

To help lead the division's community outreach, the Office of Community Engagement recently announced the appointments of Dr. Eric Irizarry as its new Director of Equity, Family, School and Community Relations, and Ms. Ayanna Mitchell as its new Director of Equity Education.

Irizarry, who most recently served as principal of Charlottesville High School (CHS), will be supporting Albemarle County schools as they increase their efforts to build effective relationships with family and community partners. This includes joining with principals in using culturally responsive teaching strategies to build strong connections with families; developing relationships with community partners; collaborating with schools on improvement plans; and innovating outreach to families and residents that increases opportunities for feedback, particularly in historically underserved communities.

As principal at CHS, Irizarry made trust within and outside the school a priority, implementing data-driven initiatives to close opportunity gaps and to create a culturally responsive learning environment for students. During Irizarry's time as principal, the school earned recognition for the academic performance of its students and their on-time graduation rates.

Mitchell, who was an elementary teacher in Manassas Park from 2005-2016 and then a school administrator in ACPS from 2016 until 2019, has served as an Equity Specialist since 2019. She will now lead the division's team of equity education specialists in promoting equity of educational opportunities for all students. Her role will include the oversight of initiatives that promote a culturally responsive school and community culture by celebrating and benefitting from a school community inclusive of race, ethnicity, language, gender, cultural values, and family belief systems.

There are currently 96 countries of origin and 73 home languages represented among the division's students. Among Mitchell's responsibilities will be the administration of the division's culturally responsive teaching credentialing. All newly-hired licensed staff members will earn a Culturally Responsive Teaching micro-credential or credential within their first three years in ACPS or, in the case of teachers under contract as of the 2020-21 school year, by 2026.

Both Irizarry and Mitchell are part of the Office of Community Engagement, led by Dr. Daphne Keiser. Keiser was recently appointed Assistant Superintendent for School Community Engagement.