



**Board-to-Board, October, 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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***Katrina Callsen resigning from School Board***—Katrina Callsen, who was first elected to the Albemarle County School Board in November 2017 and re-elected four years later as the representative for the Rio Magisterial District, said she is resigning from the board. Callsen is a candidate for the Virginia House of Delegates in this November’s election.

Callsen served this year, from January to August, as Chair of the School Board and previously was Vice-Chair. She made her resignation announcement during the board’s business meeting on September 14. Callsen acknowledged the time constraints of a state election and said that allowing someone else to serve the Rio District is the best step for the community.

In addition to serving the school board as Chair, Callsen is a member of the CATEC governing board and serves on the school board committees for state legislative affairs and environmental sustainability.

Applications to represent the Rio District were accepted through Friday, October 13. School board members will interview candidates at a special public meeting later in the month and will hold a public hearing on the appointment of Callsen’s successor at their November 9 meeting. Following the public hearing, board members are expected to make an appointment, also on November 9. The first meeting in which the new representative will be seated will be on December 14.

In accordance with state law, the Rio seat will be on the ballot during the next general election on November 5, 2024, and the winner of that election will serve the remainder of Callsen’s second term, which expires on December 31, 2025.

A candidate for the school board is required by state code to be a qualified voter and a bona fide resident of the [magisterial district](#) they are seeking to represent, in this case the [Rio District](#). An employee of the school division can apply for appointment or run for election to the school board, provided that, if selected or elected, the employee resigns their position with the school division before being seated as a member of the school board.

The [Rio Magisterial District School Board Member Application](#) is available on the [School Board homepage](#). The deadline to apply was Friday, October 13.

***Students gain in four of five SOL subject areas; achievement gaps remain significant***—The latest results from the Virginia Department of Education’s Standards of Learning (SOL) tests show improvements by students in writing, math, history and science. Pass rates in reading dropped by a point from 75 to 74%, but were one point above the 73% state average.

The same trends were generally true across student demographic groups, but pass rates for Black and Hispanic students, students from economically disadvantaged homes, students with disabilities, and English Learners remained below division-wide averages. As an example, while the overall pass rate for

the division was 74% in reading, it was 48% for Black students, 50% for Hispanic students, 44% for students with disabilities, 49% for students from economically disadvantaged homes, and 24% for English Learners.

Assistant Superintendent Chandra Hayes said the results only reinforce the importance of a recent audit of the division's instructional practices and policies, especially as they impact students of color. The audit, conducted by an outside education consultancy nonprofit, detailed five recommendations for closing achievement gaps that were again revealed in the SOL test results. The audit was concentrated on K-5 reading and math programs in the division's elementary schools and its Algebra 1 program in middle and high schools.

Hayes notably underscored the significance of third-grade reading skills to the future academic success of students throughout their K-12 education, stating that third grade is a time when a child should be transitioning from *learning to read* to *reading to learn*. It's when comprehension becomes essential to understanding and mastering content in all subject areas.

The division's overall pass rates in reading for third graders was 64%, but dropped to 31% for Black students, 40% for Hispanic students, 38% for students with disabilities, 35% for students from economically disadvantaged homes, and 25% for English Learners.

These pass rates only increase the urgency of the division's current actions based on carrying out the audit's recommendations, including:

- The organization of instruction around rigorous tasks;
- The development of a systemic approach to adult (educator) learning;
- Investment in high-quality resources to fill gaps in content;
- The design of a Theory of Change to connect division actions to student outcomes; and
- The strengthening of systems to incorporate more inclusive counsel and feedback from parents, community members, and other stakeholders.

The division currently is investing \$600,000 to address several of these recommendations, including professional development in the science of reading, math, and Responsive Classroom; additional assessment programs and classroom resources in reading and math; staffing that enhances data coaching capabilities; and the expansion of staff and student mentors.

More broadly, division-level administrators have been divided into teams to plan, implement and monitor one or more of the audit recommendations. Assistant superintendents are serving as project sponsors, supporting the recruitment of additional stakeholders and providing guidance for the projects and their strategic alignment.

To expand and diversify input into how best to move forward, the division is forming several steering teams of teachers, parents and administrators for reading, math, professional development, and community outreach. It also is organizing an adoption committee for curricula that will have similar representation.

Annually, each school and department is required to create and post a strategic plan that aligns with the division's strategic plan. This fall, schools and departments must detail how they are incorporating the recommendations of the instructional audit into their operations.

In the near future, the Virginia Department of Education will release accreditation ratings for each school in the division. Accreditation ratings reflect not only the number of students who passed SOL tests, but also the number of students who showed significant growth during the course of the school year. The division is anticipating that 21 of 24 schools will be accredited and that three schools will be accredited with conditions. This would be an improvement over the last school year when four schools were accredited with conditions.

Division and school-specific SOL test results are available by clicking on the [“Assessments” tab of the Albemarle County Public Schools Quality Profile](#).

***Expansive Adoption Committee brings together teachers, administrators, families to select a new reading curriculum for the 2024-25 school year***—More than 60 teachers, administrators, academic coaches, parents, and community partners from across the school division have come together as 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.

Division personnel state that they want the selection process to be transparent to our staff, families, and community partners, as well as to hear as many voices as possible in order to be thoughtful in their approach.

Beyond the adoption committee, every stakeholder in the division will have 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](#). (Click on the name of each program to access a snapshot and overall rating from the Virginia Department of Education.)

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 timetable includes having our Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Dr. Chandra Hayes, make a presentation on January 11 to our school board on the program ACPS will recommend, with a school board decision the following month. That will allow for ACPS to put in place the professional development and training programs our teachers will need prior to the start of the 2024-25 school year next August.

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.

The move to a new reading curriculum is gaining momentum at a highly relevant time for the division. The results from the state's most recent Standards of Learning (SOL) tests showed that the overall pass rate in reading for the division was 74%, slightly above the state average. Pass rates, however, for Black and Hispanic students, students with disabilities, students from economically disadvantaged homes, and English Learners were much lower.

Hayes said the results reinforce the importance of a recent audit of the division's instructional practices and policies, especially as they impact students of color. The audit, initiated by Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Matthew Haas, and endorsed by the Albemarle County School Board in the fall of 2022, was conducted by an outside education consultancy nonprofit and detailed five recommendations for closing the achievement gaps that were again revealed in the SOL test results.

Hayes especially underscored the significance of third-grade reading skills to the future academic success of students throughout their K-12 education. For this reason, ACPS is attempting to ensure the selection process of a new reading curriculum for our elementary school students is as open, inclusive, and deeply researched as possible.

***Ross Holden announces retirement***—Ross Holden, who joined Albemarle County Public Schools in the fall of 2018 as the attorney for the school board, said today he will be retiring from his position at the end of this calendar year. Holden was the first full-time school board attorney for the division. Previously, the division's legal affairs were the responsibility of a member of the county attorney staff on a part-time basis.

As a member of the Superintendent's Cabinet, Holden is a senior advisor to the school board, Superintendent Dr. Matthew Haas, and the division's leadership team on policy; litigation; legal documents; real estate transactions; compliance with county, state and federal regulations; human resource matters; and the hiring, when necessary, of outside counsel.

Prior to joining the school division, Holden was Executive Vice President & General Counsel for the New York City School Construction Authority, where he directed and managed an organization with a five-year capital budget of \$17.5 billion, supporting the city's 1,500 public school buildings. Twice during his tenure, Holden was appointed by the Authority's board of trustees to serve as Acting President and Chief Executive Officer.

Holden, the first full-time school board attorney, built a strong legal foundation and helped steer our division through some very consequential and complex legal challenges, which include the adoption of one of the first anti-racism policies by a public school division in the country, a pandemic, student safety and security through the negotiation of a new memorandum of understanding with the Albemarle County Police Department, as well as a policy to protect transgender students, the expansion of student centers, and the establishment of a non-profit educational foundation to fund learning innovation.

A passionate alum of the University of Virginia (UVA), from which he earned his undergraduate degree with Highest Distinction, Holden and his wife, Ricki, read about the school division's search for full-time legal counsel during a trip to Charlottesville in 2018.

In addition to his undergraduate degree from UVA, where he was Phi Beta Kappa, Holden graduated Magna Cum Laude from Georgetown University Law School, where he was an editor of *The Georgetown Law Journal*.

Haas said the division will begin a search for Holden's successor with a goal of having a new school board attorney appointed before December 31 of this year.