



Board-to-Board, April 2022

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

Dr. Bernard Hairston to Retire as Assistant Superintendent for School Community

Empowerment—Dr. Bernard Hairston, who joined Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) in 1992 as the associate principal of Western Albemarle High School and rose to become an assistant superintendent for the division, said this week he will retire on June 30.

Upon his appointment as Assistant Superintendent for School Community Empowerment in 2018, the school division's superintendent, Dr. Matthew Haas, described Hairston as a "highly influential advocate for equal educational opportunity in our school division and in our region," and added that Dr. Hairston "has developed programs that have brought more equity into our classrooms and, with that, higher academic achievement by students."

Among programs championed by Hairston were the division's first formal bullying prevention program when he was principal of Burley Middle School; our national award-winning M-Cubed program that increased the number of middle school black males who succeeded in advanced math classes; our partnership with the African American Teaching Fellows that brought more teachers of color to the division; and, since 2015, our award-winning culturally responsive teaching program that has lifted tests scores for students in all demographic groups. The latter received the state's highest educational equity award in 2021.

Hairston, who has presented nationally on the success of culturally responsive teaching, said the program operates on the basis that, based on life experiences, students vary in how they learn and process information from teachers. "Our goal is to increase teacher awareness of these differences and to support them in developing the classroom strategies and techniques that turn these differences into assets for learning," Hairston explained.

Scores on the state's Standards of Learning (SOL) tests have increased for many students taught by teachers who have earned either a micro-credential or certification in the program designed by Hairston. Last year, the Albemarle County School Board approved a recommendation from the superintendent that all teachers earn a micro-credential or certification in culturally responsive teaching within three years for newly hired teachers and within five years for all other teachers.

Hairston's equity leadership also encompassed the school board's adoption of an anti-racism policy in 2019, making ACPS one of the first school divisions in the Commonwealth and the nation to do so. The assistant superintendent worked closely with students from the division's high schools in drafting the policy and training requirements that reject all forms of racism as destructive to the mission, vision, values and goals of the school board and school division.

When Haas was appointed superintendent, he turned to Hairston to lead a series of meetings with more than 300 parents, teachers, students and staff to support the development of the superintendent's initial strategic and operational plans for the division.

In addition to the policy and programmatic changes he brought to the school division, Hairston's influence on school division operations can be seen in accountability measures and tools he introduced to address historic opportunity and achievement gaps in public education. In addition to introducing and hosting annual equity conferences and an annual report, Hairston developed a policy checklist that is used by decision-makers in the division to ensure that all policies and programs are vetted from an equity lens to serve the academic, social and emotional interests of students in all demographic groups.

Hairston received his undergraduate degree from Norfolk State University, and through a grant from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, he earned his master's degree from Virginia State University. He later developed curriculum resources that integrated space technology and industrial arts curricula in partnership with the Virginia Department of Education and Virginia State University. Hairston was recognized as Virginia's Industrial Arts Teacher of the Year within his first four years as a teacher, and he completed his Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) from Virginia Tech while working as an academic advisor and financial aid administrator.

Prior to his service as an ACPS administrator, Hairston was an administrator for the Roanoke City and Spotsylvania County public school systems. He was also an adjunct instructor at Piedmont Virginia Community College, where he taught a number of students who later became teachers in the county.

Rick Vrhovac, Monticello Principal Since 2017, Will Retire on June 30 After 36 Years as Teacher, Coach & Administrator—Rick Vrhovac, who is completing 36 years of service as a teacher and administrator, almost exclusively for Albemarle County Public Schools, said today he will retire as principal of Monticello High School on June 30. Vrhovac will continue to serve the school division in an advisory capacity through the current calendar year.

Vrhovac was appointed as Monticello's principal in 2017 after having served three years as the principal of Lakeside Middle School. Previously, he was an assistant principal for Walton Middle School and for the division's largest high school, Albemarle.

Under his direction as Monticello's principal, the school's on-time graduation rate surpassed 95% last year, exceeding the rate for all Virginia seniors. In four key demographic groups, including Black and Hispanic students, students with disabilities, and English Learners, the school's on-time graduation rate also exceeded state averages.

Monticello's mission of embracing students, inspiring learning, and innovating learning opportunities is reflected in such signature programs as its Early Scholars Program, which enables students from any of the division's high schools to graduate with both a high school diploma and an associate's degree. The school also houses the division's Junior Reserve Officers Training Corp program and its Health and Medical Sciences Academy.

The superintendent said that the division would immediately begin its search process for a successor and that a new principal would be appointed by July 1.

Vrhovac began his career in K-12 public education in 1986 as a science teacher for Burley Middle School. He moved to Louisa County Schools in 1988, adding athletic director and head football coach to his teaching duties. He also was an assistant football coach for Delaware State College and James Madison University.

He returned to Albemarle County Public Schools in 1996 as an earth science teacher for Albemarle High School and was appointed as an assistant principal for the school from 2009 to 2013. As assistant principal, Vrhovac was the administration's liaison to the students for the school's highly successful "Stop One, Save One" bullying prevention program. He moved to Walton Middle School as its assistant principal in 2013 and became Lakeside's principal a year later.

Vrhovac received his Bachelor of Science degree in Health and Physical Education from David Lipscomb University and his master's degree in Physical Education from James Madison University.

School Board Resumes In-Person Meetings While Retaining Virtual Options—The Albemarle County School Board returned to in-person meetings beginning with its April business meeting on Thursday evening, April 14. It was the board's first in-person meeting since the pandemic in March of 2020 led to state and county emergency measures to protect public health.

The highly contagious COVID-19 virus first prevented in-person public meetings two years ago this month, and subsequent variants of the illness continued the need for mitigation strategies to prevent the transmission of the virus in school facilities. For much of this time, Albemarle County remained in the highest risk category for virus transmission according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The most recent COVID data is showing that although infections are continuing, they are occurring at far lower rates, resulting in Albemarle County moving first into the moderate risk category and now into the low risk category. The risk determination is based upon the total number of new cases over a seven-day period per 100,000 people and also includes hospital admission rates and hospital bed occupancy.

When the Board of Supervisors voted to lift the local emergency and announced that their monthly meetings will be held in person beginning on April 6, the school board followed with its decision to also resume in-person public meetings on April 14.

Over the past two years, the school board has seen significant increases in the number of community members who have attended via livestream or participated in its online meetings, in some instances with audiences reaching well over 100 and, in one case, more than 1,000.

Those wishing to address the school board, either virtually or in person, are required to register in advance. The registration period opens on Monday at 9 a.m. on the week of a meeting, and the

deadline for signing up to speak is being moved from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. on the day of the meeting. Community members should register using the [Public Comment Sign-Up form](#), which is available on the [School Board homepage](#).

Individual speakers have three minutes in which to provide comments. School board policy provides that whenever a significant number of people sign up to speak at a meeting, the time set aside for individual remarks can be reduced from three to two minutes. In rare cases where more than 40 people are registered to provide public comment, the County Clerk, John Zug, will conduct a random lottery to select 40 speakers who each will have two minutes in which to offer their comments to the board.

In accordance with guidelines from local government, Lane Auditorium in the county office building at 401 McIntire Road in Charlottesville will offer those who will be attending school board meetings in person the option to maintain social distancing. Half of the auditorium will have seating that allows participants to be six feet apart from one another, and half of the auditorium will have no such limits.

The school board generally meets on the second and fourth Thursday evenings of each month, with some exceptions over the summer and during holiday periods. Agenda are posted online the Friday before a regularly scheduled meeting. All meetings are livestreamed on the [school board's Media Streams page](#).

Superintendent Announces Greer as Next School to Undergo Naming Review—ACPS Superintendent, Dr. Matthew Haas, recently announced last night that the next school to conduct a naming review will be Mary Carr Greer Elementary School. The school, named for Mary Carr Greer, a local educator, annually has an enrollment of approximately 400 students.

Mary Carr Greer attended the Union Ridge Graded School, a primary school that would later become the Albemarle Training School. Greer taught school locally for several years before attending Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute in Petersburg, Virginia, now known as Virginia State University. She then joined the faculty at Albemarle Training School and, in 1931, became its third principal.

Susie Lee, a guidance counselor at Greer, 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 Steve Saunders, the school's principal; at least three teachers and/or staff; at least three parents of Greer students; and two residents of the school community who do not presently have children enrolled in the school. Saunders will also involve students in the review process.

As required by school board policy, the Greer naming advisory committee will conduct up to 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 discuss survey results. Following these public engagement sessions, the committee will make a recommendation to Dr. Haas.

Greer will be the seventh school in the division to have its name reviewed. In all, there were 13 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 13 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.

Burley Holds Historic Landmark Unveiling Ceremony—On Saturday, April 16, the local nonprofit Burley Varsity Club, in collaboration with ACPS, hosted a [national historic landmark unveiling ceremony](#) at Burley Middle School. The celebration honored the significance of Burley, formerly Burley High School, in the Charlottesville-Albemarle community for having served as the area's African-American high school for 17 years.

Burley achieved Virginia landmark status through the Virginia Department of Historic Resources in 2020, and it went on to be admitted into the National Register of Historic Places in the same year. The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation and is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate and protect America's historic and archeological resources.

Burley Middle School was originally built in 1950 as Burley High School, combining three schools for African-Americans: Jefferson High School, Esmont High School, and Albemarle Training School. The school opened in 1951 and was named for a prominent African-American community leader, Jackson P. Burley. In 1967, the school officially desegregated and became known as the Jack Jouett Junior Annex. In 1973, the school was renamed Jackson P. Burley, housing grades six and seven, and in 1974, it became an ACPS middle school.

Refreshments at the unveiling were catered by the Albemarle High School (AHS) Culinary Arts Club, led by AHS teacher Malik Poindexter. This will serve as the group's capstone project.