



Board-to-Board, April, 2023

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

After a Career Spanning More Than 40 Years of Putting Students First, Debora Collins Will Retire as Deputy Superintendent on June 30—Deputy Superintendent Debora Collins said she will retire on June 30. Collins served Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) for four decades, primarily in increasingly responsible executive leadership positions. Among her signature legacies is the division’s nationally renowned instructional coaching model, which has been the inspiration for similar programs in many other school divisions.

In 2016, as executive director of pre-K through grade 12 education, Collins was honored as the Commonwealth’s Curriculum Leader of the Year by the Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (VASCD). The organization chose Collins for contributions consistent with its support for “proactive and innovative education policies and programs that ensure lifelong learning for all.”

In 2017, Collins was named assistant superintendent for student learning, overseeing all curriculum staffing, budgeting, and special education and federal programs for the division’s 25 schools and more than 13,000 students. A year later, she became the division’s deputy superintendent, succeeding Dr. Matthew Haas, the current superintendent.

In a letter to the school board and to Haas, Collins wrote, “My time with ACPS has filled me with a sense of purpose and belonging that none other could offer. It’s been such a joy to work in an environment that has high expectations and calls educators to work together to reach all students.”

Collins has helped guide the division through some of the most transformational and turbulent times in public education. In the 1990s and the early part of this century, for example, Virginia instituted measures, for the first time, to annually assess student academic performance; Albemarle evolved into a much more diverse and complex school community, with students from 96 different birth countries; and the school division endured the Great Recession, and most recently, a worldwide pandemic.

One of the most effective proactive responses during the Great Recession was the formulation of the division’s instructional coaching model, led by Collins. At a time when many school divisions were laying off teachers and eliminating classroom programs, ACPS avoided such drastic measures by cutting back on administrative budgets, including central office staff, and reducing spending in areas such as professional development.

The coaching model was designed to assist teachers with their own professional learning in the face of the significant reductions in the professional development program. In the coaching model, classroom teachers work with instructional coaches on strategies and best practices that promote student academic achievement.

The superintendent noted, for example, Collins' leadership in moving the division to become an early adopter among school divisions of Being a Reader, a comprehensive K–5 reading program that integrates the science of reading through foundational skills instruction, practice in reading comprehension strategies, and rich literacy experiences with explicit social skills instruction and activities.

The deputy superintendent also is on the task force that is working with an outside analytical firm on an audit of the division's practices, policies, programs and resources for reading and math programs in the division's elementary schools and for math instruction in secondary school. The audit will lead to recommendations for enhancements to instruction for all students, with a focus on shrinking achievement gaps among student demographic groups.

Throughout Collins' tenure, first as the executive director of secondary education, then heading the instructional program as an assistant and deputy superintendent, the division's on-time graduation rate has remained among the highest in the state, with nearly two out of every three graduates earning the state's most rigorous academic diploma. Statewide, the average for an Advanced Studies Diploma is just over one out of two.

Collins began her career in public education in 1979 as a math teacher in Tazewell and then Orange counties. She joined ACPS as a math teacher at Henley Middle School in 1983. Prior to joining the division's central leadership team, she was the principal of Greenbrier Elementary School for Charlottesville City Schools, and later, with the county, served as principal of Red Hill Elementary School and then Yancey Elementary School.

"I never dreamed I would have been with ACPS for 40 years. Our school division's commitment to continuous improvement and its wholehearted dedication to teaching and learning at its core give me great confidence in the future of public education here in Albemarle County," she said.

ACPS Teachers & Classified Employees of the Year Led by Monticello's Jessica Eisenhauer & Agnor-Hurt's Pecolia Conner—"She asks the tough questions and pushes us to step outside our comfort zones when utilizing best practices and strategies," said Dr. Beth Costa, principal of Monticello High School, talking about Jessica Eisenhauer, who was named as Albemarle County Public Schools' 2022-23 Teacher of the Year. Of the more than 1,300 teachers in the school division, 25 were recognized as Teacher of the Year for their respective schools, and among this select group, Eisenhauer will move forward as the school division's nominee for the Virginia Teacher of the Year competition.

The school division also announced that its 2022-23 Classified Employee of the Year is Pecolia Conner, a teaching assistant and Extended Day Enrichment Programs (EDEP) site facilitator for Agnor-Hurt Elementary School. Conner, who is completing her 13th year at the school, was described as a "warm demander" by her principal, Dr. Michael Irani.

Each school and department in the division was invited to nominate a teacher and classified employee for recognition. Executive Director of Human Resources, Dan Redding, explained that a committee of executive staff, principals, teachers, and parents formed the selection committee.

Elementary school teachers and classified employees of the year include:

- Agnor-Hurt: Adam Mohr, multi-age classroom teacher; Pecolia Conner, teaching assistant & EDEP site facilitator
- Baker-Butler: Danielle Paxton, second-grade teacher; Emily Sims, school nurse
- Broadus Wood: Elizabeth Strauss, fifth-grade teacher; Ruth Smith, office associate
- Brownsville: Angela Rutherford, intervention teacher; Jennifer Layne, office associate
- Crozet: Jaylen Crist, third-grade teacher; Juliannah Vining, social emotional learning coach
- Greer: Karen Snead, third-grade teacher; Darla Ullery, bookkeeper
- Hollymead: Sarah LaPrade, fourth-grade teacher; CJ Hall, teaching assistant
- Meriwether Lewis: Bonnie Carey, fourth-grade teacher; Kelley Hathaway, office associate & bookkeeper
- Mountain View: Mary Morales, fourth-grade immersion teacher; Darleen Ragland, teaching assistant
- Murray: Hollins Mills, kindergarten teacher; Janet King, office associate
- Red Hill: Jessa Campbell, learning technology integrator; Casey Powell, office associate & bookkeeper
- Scottsville: Elizabeth Cox, second-grade teacher; Elizabeth Payne, teaching assistant
- Stone-Robinson: Laura Sexton, first-grade teacher; Stephanie Jones, custodial team leader
- Stony Point: Julia Trammell-McGill, librarian; Teresa Jones, teaching assistant
- Woodbrook: Kim Martin, second-grade teacher; Susan Reuschling, office associate

Middle school teachers and classified employees of the year include:

- Burley: Ainsley Davis, sixth-grade English teacher; Sharon Wood, office associate
- Henley: Pam Koury, eighth-grade civics teacher; Alissa Layne, office manager
- Journey: Patricia Mariscal, seventh-grade math teacher, intervention; Chastity Clements, office associate
- Lakeside: Bobby Gregg, band director; Connor Harris, school-based substitute teacher
- Walton: Heather Kepple, eighth-grade science teacher; Lolita Curry, teaching assistant

High school teachers and classified employees of the year include:

- Albemarle: Jennifer Morris, music and choral director; Carol Janssens, school nurse
- Monticello: Jessica Eisenhauer, math teacher; Roxanne Steppe, teaching assistant & coordinator
- Western Albemarle: Brian Bell, science teacher; David McCauley, school custodian

From Community Lab School, which serves grades 6-12, the teacher and classified employee of the year are history teacher, Kristin Wilson, and office associate, Rachel O'Neill.

At the department level, Building Services nominated Tracy Hocutt, office administrator; Child Nutrition selected Lisa Marshall, food service manager; Transportation Services nominated Robert Mitchell, parts and service clerk; and, reflecting its dual role in the schools, the Department of Technology selected both a teacher of the year, learning technology integrator Jessa Campbell, and a classified employee of the year, senior technology support specialist Christina Denyer.

All nominees were recognized by the Albemarle County School Board during its most recent meeting.

New principal at Scottsville Elementary School—Cyndi Wells, who has served as the principal of Mountain View Elementary School since 2019, was appointed by the Albemarle County School Board as the next principal of Scottsville Elementary School. Her appointment will take effect on July 1.

Wells joined Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) in 2006 as the Title I Coordinator, supporting teachers, administrators and students in Title I schools. In 2009, she was appointed as a lead coach in the division, co-creating the instructional coaching model and overseeing the curriculum and professional development for fine arts teachers, preschool teachers, and professional development, followed by ESOL and World Languages.

Over the past four years, Wells has led Mountain View through a dynamic growth period, which has seen student enrollment climb by more than 20%, from 630 to 760 students. The school has embraced culturally responsive teaching, a practice that aligns instruction to the life experiences and cultures of its highly diverse school community. About 43% of Mountain View's students are white; 28% are of Hispanic heritage; 17% are Black; and 9% are from multiracial families. Mountain View students come from 17 different birth countries.

The school was the first elementary school in the division, and one of the few in the Commonwealth, to offer students an immersion program in which 50% of all instruction during the school day is in English and 50% in Spanish. Today, all children at Mountain View learn Spanish, whether in the Immersion program or in Discovery classes that offer Spanish instruction as part of the overall curriculum.

As is the case with Mountain View, Scottsville is a Title I school, but with an enrollment of about 230 students. Dating back to 2006, Wells has known and worked with the school's five principals.

Earlier this year, Art Stow, who is serving as the interim Scottsville principal, announced his retirement. Assistant Superintendent Dr. Clare Keiser, who led the search for his successor, said that the Mountain View community will be asked to assist in the search process for a new principal through an online survey and the possibility of serving on a committee that will screen candidates. They anticipate naming a new principal by the end of May.

Wells began her career in public education as a classroom teacher in San Antonio, Texas. She was a clinical faculty member at Trinity University, her alma mater, and a summer school principal. She later was the Director of Professional Development for the Core Knowledge Foundation here in Charlottesville, Virginia. She attended the New England Conservatory of Music's Extension Division and earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees from Trinity University in San Antonio. She holds two Master of Arts degrees, one in teaching and the other in administration and supervision.

Middle School Master Plan—ACPS has partnered with [VMDO Architects](#), a local architectural firm specializing in K-12 education, to conduct a new Middle School Master Plan. This project includes a comprehensive study of our middle schools with the goal of developing a master plan to address, improve and resolve ACPS capacity challenges and our renovation needs. Throughout the project, which is now underway and will continue through the end of the calendar year, there will be multiple opportunities for community members to engage with and inform this work.

For additional meeting details and project information, please [view this community message](#), which we will share this evening with the full ACPS community. Stakeholders can also follow along as the project progresses on the [Middle School Master Plan web page](#).

ACPS Kindergarten Registration currently open—For those who live in Albemarle County and have a child who will turn 5 by September 30, ACPS has opened kindergarten registration, which will run from April 19 to May 31. To learn more or to start the registration process, visit us online at www.k12albemarle.org/kindergarten.