



Board-to-Board, October 2022

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

Class of 2022 graduation rate—Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) announced recently that the on-time graduation rate for the Class of 2022 was 94.3%, surpassing this year's statewide rate for all Virginia graduates of 92.1%. The on-time graduation rate measures the percentage of students who earn a diploma within four years of entering ninth grade. The rate was first calculated by the state in 2008, and graduating seniors in ACPS have exceeded the statewide rate in 14 of the 15 years since then.

In another key academic category, 64% of all ACPS graduates received an Advanced Studies Diploma, which is earned each year by graduates who take the most rigorous academic courses. The statewide rate was 53%.

School division graduates in individual student demographic groups also did well in comparison to their peers across Virginia. Among Hispanic students, students with disabilities, students from economically disadvantaged homes, and English Learners, on-time graduation rates in the division were higher in each group than the average rates across Virginia. Among Black students, the division's on-time graduation rate matched the statewide average of 90.3%.

Individual school highlights include Monticello High School's 93.3% on-time graduation rate for Black students; Western Albemarle's rate of 92.9% for Hispanic students; and the 95.1% on-time graduation rate for students with disabilities at Albemarle High School.

The division also had a lower dropout rate than Virginia's average for all school divisions. Led by a rate of less than one percent at Western Albemarle, the overall dropout rate for the division was 3.9%, compared to the statewide rate of 5.2%.

ACPS also released the college readiness scores for its graduates who took SAT tests earlier this year. Research shows that students who meet or exceed this College Board benchmark have a strong likelihood for success in credit-bearing college work. Better than eight out of 10 seniors (85%) in the school division met the College Board benchmark, compared to 83% of seniors in Virginia and 68% of seniors across the country.

Next year, the school division will be expanding its career readiness program offerings to all students in grades 10-12. The division is providing open admission to any sophomore, junior or senior in career learning communities. Each career learning community represents professional areas with the highest potential for high-quality job opportunities, both locally and nationally. They are based upon state research and division surveys of middle school students over the past four years.

Currently, the division has four academies, one for math, engineering and science; one dedicated to health and medical services; one that focuses on environmental studies; and one for information and communications technology. Each will now become a career learning community, joined by concentrated student project-based studies in:

- Architecture, urban design, and building construction;
- The arts;
- Education and human development;
- Entrepreneurship, business and innovation;
- Geospatial technology, analytics, logistics, and transportation;
- Global leadership, law and social justice; and
- Hospitality, eateries, amusement, and recreation and tourism.

Next spring, for the third consecutive year, the school division will offer, free of charge, SAT tests to all juniors. The test will be administered at every high school during the morning of Wednesday, March 22, a regular school day.

While many colleges and universities no longer require SAT scores and ACPS does not include them on student transcripts, taking the SAT can be helpful to college and university admission and often will advance a student's candidacy for admission if the student's grade point average (GPA) does not accurately represent the quality of their work or potential. Additionally, yesterday, high schools administered PSAT tests for all sophomores and juniors. The PSAT test offers students an excellent opportunity to assess their college readiness, qualify for scholarships, and prepare for the SAT test. Juniors who take the PSAT can qualify for National Merit Scholarships.

School Board statement on transgender & gender-expansive students—The Albemarle County School Board recently released a statement that it “respectfully but vigorously” disagrees with a [newly proposed state policy](#) that would reduce protections for transgender and gender-expansive students. Several elements of the proposed policy are in conflict with the school board's August 2021 [Policy on the Treatment of Transgender and Gender-Expansive Students](#), which was adopted in accordance with [guidance provided in 2021](#) by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE).

“It is unfortunate that the proposed policies were not research-based and are without the input of school divisions and the population most directly and severely affected. We regret that it ignores the experience of divisions that have enacted policies to protect the well-being and the lives of all students,” the board said.

Board members urged the VDOE to revise its proposed policies and to consult with local school divisions. It called upon state officials to “support locally elected school boards in the exercise of their constitutional responsibilities to provide all students with a safe and engaging public education, one that unleashes their highest personal development potential.”

Among the controversial mandates in the state's proposal is the requirement of prior parental approval when a student requests to be called by a name that aligns with their gender identity.

The division's policy does not require prior approval. The state's proposal also would require school divisions to restrict the use of restrooms, locker rooms, and participation in activities to a student's sex at birth. This is contrary to a 2020 U.S. Supreme Court decision that held that existing civil rights law prohibits sex discrimination against people who are transgender. Similarly, state law requires that a person not be discriminated against based on gender identity.

The board wrote, "It is in honest and collaborative partnerships with parents that the highest levels of individual and collective success are delivered. We always must seek out and benefit from parental engagement and join with families and highly credentialed professionals to achieve the best interests of a child's safety, health, and personal development."

"Wonderful would be a world in which family relationships are constructed upon irrevocable and enduring trust, care and support," the board wrote, adding, "We live, however, in the reality that some relationships are imperfect and even harmful, including, on occasion, relationships in our homes. Our response must be to honor personal choice, not the imposition of outside opinions that decide for a child in whom they are allowed to confide or from whom to seek healing."

In a [statement](#) posted on the [Public Comment Forum](#) hosted on the Virginia Regulatory Town Hall website, the school board said, "The proposed policies should more accurately be titled, 'Model Policies on the Privacy, Dignity and Respect of Some Students and Parents in Virginia's Public Schools,' dismissive as it is of students who identify as transgender or gender-expansive."

"Educators play an essential role in creating a supportive school culture and advocating for the safety and health of all students," the school board emphasized. It is important for school staff, students and parents to be aware that transgender and gender-expansive students may be at a higher risk for being left out, victimized, and bullied because of bias and misunderstanding and lack of knowledge about their lives.

In its comments to the VDOE, the board noted that "Schools, as caregivers, must not be limited in their ability to deliver care and support, no more so than they are restricted in their responsibility and obligation to recognize and end any abuse of a child, whether it occurs in the home or in a school."

The school board also sharply disagreed with the state's approach, insisting on a policy directive that is in opposition to the principle of local control. "The proposed policies unilaterally would usurp the ability of school boards to represent the physical, social and emotional health of those they are elected to serve. It would require adherence to the views of those dissociated from the local communities they seek to control, elevating the risk of harm to children in crisis," the board maintained.

Underscoring that the state's proposal was developed unilaterally, not in consultation with local school boards and communities, the school board said that the policy Albemarle County Public Schools adopted last August was formulated over several years and in consultation with those most affected. It found a "reasonable balance" between the protection of vulnerable students and parental engagement, demonstrating the "merit of locally-developed and approved policies," the board said.

“As an example, our schools will follow parental preference in the name by which their child is known, but parental approval beforehand is not mandated. We support safe, non-stigmatizing accommodations for any student who is uncomfortable sharing a sleeping area, shower, bathroom, or any sex-segregated facility with a transgender or gender-expansive student,” the board pointed out.

“It will always be the responsibility and the privilege of Albemarle County Public Schools to maintain a safe and supportive school environment for all students, free from harassment, intimidation, and bullying and discrimination. And to do so with policies and practices that call from within us the highest ethical standards, the greatest levels of responsibility, and the deepest pools of compassion,” board members concluded.

The school board’s full statement is available on our website at:

<https://www.k12albemarle.org/school-board/school-board-statement-october-5-2022>

The state is accepting public comment on its proposed new policy through Wednesday, October 26, on the Virginia Regulatory Town Hall website at:

<https://townhall.virginia.gov/L/comments.cfm?GDocForumID=1953>

ACPS in Talks with Charlottesville City Schools to purchase city interest in CATEC—ACPS recently said it is in discussions with Charlottesville City Schools about the county school division’s desire to purchase full interest in the Charlottesville-Albemarle Technical Education Center, commonly known as CATEC.

Founded in 1973 and jointly owned and managed by the two school divisions, CATEC’s student enrollment increased this year by more than 20%. The center currently has 295 high school students from the county and another 67 city school division students for a total enrollment of 362. It also serves 261 students in its adult education programs.

The nearly 60,000-square-foot CATEC facility, located at 1000 Rio Road in Charlottesville, offers 10 high school programs providing hands-on and work-based learning opportunities that equip students to either immediately enter the workforce or to pursue post-graduate education. Students can receive, on average, 11 dual enrollment college credits from local community colleges and benefit from partnerships with post-secondary institutions and employers.

ACPS said that its interest is predicated on a desire to make substantial investments in the modernization of the CATEC facility. While ACPS plans to retain and modernize all of the current program offerings, there also is a planned expansion of what the school does best: using a project-based learning approach to strengthen its curriculum and providing programs that expand its connections to private employers. The school division says the facility has the capability of significantly increasing the number of both county and city students who would benefit from these improvements.

ACPS said that, under its offer to the city, high school students from the city will continue to attend CATEC. It is hoped that this acquisition can be concluded within the coming months.

Meriwether Lewis Elementary School Community Advisory Committee Appointed; Organizational Meeting Scheduled for October 18—The first meeting of the Meriwether Lewis Community Advisory Committee was held virtually on October 18. A total of 12 school and community members have been selected to serve on the committee, which will review the name of the school consistent with a school board directive and the ACPS facility naming policy. This organizational meeting was closed to the public.

Meriwether Lewis Elementary School (MLES) is the eighth school in the division to have its name reviewed following the Albemarle County School Board's 2018 decision to have Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Matthew Haas, evaluate all schools named for individuals. Of the division's 25 schools, 14 are named for individuals.

At its organizational meeting, the committee reviewed and approved a community survey that will be sent to families in the school's attendance zone to solicit suggestions for the name of their school. The committee also scheduled two public meetings, to be held on November 9 and November 29. The first of those meetings will ask the community to offer their views on all of the names that are proposed in the community survey. The committee will narrow the list of names to five semi-finalists, and a second public meeting will seek comment on those names. The public is encouraged to join those meetings to share any information they have that would help inform the process.

Members of the community and the committee can recommend either a new name be chosen for the school or the retention of its current name. If the advisory committee selects the current school name as one of its three finalists, the policy requires the committee to examine if Meriwether Lewis, for whom the school is named, made contributions to the community of state, national, or world-wide significance. It also requires committee members to determine if his personal and professional conduct exemplified the school board's values of equity, excellence, family and community, and wellness.

Members of the advisory committee were chosen from among those who expressed interest in serving on the committee. Three committee members are from the MLES faculty, including Jennifer Underwood and Laura Morris, the school's principal and assistant principal, respectively. Also, Cheryl Wetmore-Simpson, a teacher at MLES, will serve as the advisory committee chair. Seth Lovell, Tamika Elliot, Corey Brandon Lindsey, and Jessica Allen are all parents of students at MLES. Five additional committee members live in the school community, but do not have students attending Meriwether Lewis: Caroline Ayres, Lorenzo Dickerson, Robert Stubin, Charles Timko, and Janet Webster. The ACPS Director of Community Education, Karen Waters, will serve as the project manager of the name review process.

Updates regarding the [Meriwether Lewis Elementary School Naming Review](#) are accessible on the school division's [School Naming Review](#) website, along with current information on all school naming reviews. Community members with questions or suggestions about the Meriwether Lewis naming review can email the advisory committee at SchoolNamingReview@k12albemarle.org.

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.

The committee's recommendation on a school name will be provided to the superintendent, who, in turn, will make a recommendation to the school board. The board will make the final decision on the school's name. If that decision is to change the name of the school, the new name would become effective next July 1.