



Board-to-Board, August, 2018

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

Board of Supervisors

Opening of the New School Year—August 22nd was the first day of school for our nearly 14,000 public school students. Here are some highlights:

- **Enrollment.** Student enrollment numbers are not officially reported to the state until the end of September but, based on current projections, we anticipate we began the new school year with approximately 250 more students than last year. We remain among the one-third of the school divisions in Virginia that continue to see year-over-year growth.
- **Capital Projects.** The new school year included completed capital projects that were part of the 2016 bond referendum—at Woodbrook Elementary and Murray High School and science labs at secondary schools.
- **New High School Curriculum.** Also new this year is the required Freshman Seminar class for approximately 1,000 students consistent with the first entering class subject to the new state diploma requirements, *Profile of a Virginia Graduate*.
- **Mental Health and School Safety.** At the urging of high school student leaders the School Board approved the addition of two student mental health and safety counselors that extend the availability of these services down into our middle schools. In addition, ACPS launched a new electronic security controlled access pilot system at Woodbrook, and expanded the number of school buses with extended stop arms, from 10 to 40. In previous tests, these extended arms have reduced the number of motorists who illegally pass a stopped school bus by as much as 89 percent on heavily traveled roads.
- **Albemarle Tech.** This school year also marks the debut of our Albemarle Tech, a pilot student center located at the Comdial Building. In this first year, between 20 and 25 seniors will spend two days a week at the center working on a variety of innovative tech projects.

Capacity Watch List—Eight of the division's 25 school buildings now are over-capacity, ranging from Albemarle High School (+179) to Stony Point Elementary School (+10). Brownsville Elementary School, which is 37 students over capacity, had to add two trailers this summer, bringing the total number of trailers in use at ACPS to 42. The most urgent situation is at Baker-Butler, which is projected to be 45 students over capacity and which may become a candidate for a redistricting study within the next year. The schools with the most mobile classrooms are Albemarle High School and Scottsville Elementary School, both of which have eight. No other school has more than four.

Albemarle Schools in Top Two Percent of Nation—Niche's 2019 educational assessment rankings, based upon an in-depth analysis of several data bases and the reviews of millions of stakeholders across the country, placed Albemarle County Public Schools in the top three of all school divisions in Virginia and in the top two percent of all school divisions in our nation. ACPS received the organization's highest grade, A-plus, and received the same grade for our academics, the college preparation of our students and our athletics programming. In addition to strong academic performance, Western

Albemarle High School was ranked number one in the state for the quality of its athletic programming. Individually, all three comprehensive high schools were ranked in the top ten percent in the nation. More than 83,000 schools and nearly 11,000 school divisions were evaluated by Niche.

Student Dress Regulation, Anti-Racism Policy—Disruptions caused by many protesters, including some from as far away as Orange County, North Carolina, prevented the Board from completing its business agenda at our August 22 meeting. The protesters shouted, chanted and used obscenities during public comment despite being asked on multiple occasions to respect the Board’s public comment policy. When the outbursts continued, we had no choice but to adjourn the meeting. We are attempting to schedule a Board meeting prior to our next regularly scheduled meeting on September 13 to complete the agenda from the August 22 meeting.

On that agenda is a proposed change in our student dress code policy. Emphasis for dress code violations will no longer be on discipline but instead on education. In its application, students who wear clothing that violates the dress code will be counseled on why their choice of clothing is offensive or threatening to others and will be asked to change that clothing item. On advice of counsel and consistent with Supreme Court rulings protecting student free speech in all but a few circumstances, the School Board did not approve content-specific prohibitions on student clothing as requested by some community members of the community who urged bans on clothing with Confederate insignia. Separately, we directed staff to develop and draft a policy on anti-racism that will be presented to the School Board in the fall. A diverse group of students who participated in this past summer’s Leadership Academy, is working with a University of Virginia facilitator and with our Chief of Community Engagement to draft the policy.

First in the State Status for Murray—Murray High School became the first public school in Virginia to be selected to join the Mastery Transcript Consortium, an organization consisting primarily of private college prep schools, to revise the high school transcript. The goal of this effort is to develop a new metric transforming assessment of student learning by letter grades to a system evaluating skills acquisition. This change would fit well with Murray’s instructional model, which long has centered on project-based and mastery learning. Mastery learning does not confer a grade upon a student until their academic work meets acceptable standards. A long term goal of the Mastery Transcript Consortium is to share best practices, motivating high schools to move away from rote learning instruction to a model that enhances students to acquire and develop such work-based skills as teamwork, creativity, problem-solving and communication. Ultimately, the Mastery Transcript Consortium hopes to change college admission practices that are tightly focused on letter grades and test scores.

Project-Based Community Service Project—Among the more innovative skill acquisition pilot programs this year is at Monticello High School (MHS). Environmental students are designing a computer-based water testing kit that will yield real-time data to post on a website to monitor the water quality of local waterways. The first site in the pilot will be Moores Creek. MHS is working with Virginia Tech and the Rivanna River Water Authority on the project. The course is being taught by CBIC’s (Charlottesville Business Innovation Council) Teacher of the Year, Chris Stanek, who pointed out the value that this program can have for the local community. For example, when a sewer pipe malfunctioned in Lake Monticello a few years ago, Stanek notes, the condition went unnoticed for several weeks. Had there been a water testing module in the lake, the sewer malfunction would have been discovered within one day. Currently, the Rivanna Conservation Alliance only has resources to

test water quality in the county every six months. A goal for this course is to post the curriculum for this water quality monitoring project and the instructions to manufacture the testing module on line to be shared with schools across the nation.

Change in Leadership—Earlier this month, Ira Socol, Chief Technology and Innovation Officer, left the school division. The interim department leader is Jamie Foreman, who previously served as deputy. The school division is conducting a search for a permanent successor to Mr. Socol.

CATEC State Grant—CATEC has received a \$50,000 planning grant from the Virginia Department of Education to design a curriculum and put in place a youth apprenticeship program for next summer. The state recently revised age guidelines allowing students as young as 16 to participate in building trades apprenticeship programs. This past year, about a dozen of CATEC's students participated in the first Apprenticeship Program for the building and automotive trades and the school established partnerships with 15 different companies. The apprenticeships were paid and also allowed students to earn academic and certification credits. The new youth program is designed to create a pipeline into the full Apprenticeship Program. CATEC will be eligible to reapply for additional funding in future years that would allow for an expansion of the youth program.

New VSBA Advocate—Katrina Callsen, representing the Rio District, has been elected as Albemarle's representative to the Virginia School Board Association (VSBA) . Jason Buyaki was selected as the alternate. VSBA is the most influential advocate for public education within the profession and with state government.

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