



Board-to-Board

December, 2017

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

No Fourth Comprehensive High School—At our December 14th meeting, we reviewed the final recommendations from our international education consulting firm on how best to align our high schools to accommodate our High School 2022 initiative, address capacity and modernization needs and expand access and equity opportunities for our nearly 4000 high school students. Among key findings in the consultant's report is that although Albemarle High School is significantly over capacity, growth in the western feeder pattern over the next several years will create greater overcrowding at Western Albemarle High School than now exists at Albemarle.

We voted to proceed with the construction of as many as two student centers rather than a comprehensive 1200-student new high school. The report also calls for the modernization of our three comprehensive high schools. One center could house several hundred students in a curriculum that offers students expanded opportunities to design their own course of studies, work collaboratively with their peers on joint projects and have more interaction with community and business leaders. A second, smaller center might be opened later in the southern part of the county. The centers would be available to any student in the county, not require redistricting and offer flexibility since centers can be added as needed. This approach also would lower our capital budget request--capital costs for the larger center plus modernization of our three comprehensive high schools is estimated at \$87.9 million compared to \$134.4 million for a fourth comprehensive high school and modernization of existing schools.

Expanding Access to Academies---Also at our December 14th meeting, the School Board approved a two-year pilot program that will provide transportation to all students who are enrolled in one of the division's three academies—the Math, Engineering & Science Academy at Albemarle High School; the Health & Medical Sciences Academy at Monticello and the Environmental Studies Academy at Western Albemarle. Currently, any public school student in the county can apply to an academy but if the academy is housed at a school that is not their base school, the student is responsible for their own transportation. Especially among freshmen, this requirement can be a barrier for students. It is expected that by providing school transportation, more students will have the opportunity to participate in academy programs. The school division will use three buses from their pool to support the pilot. Data will be analyzed after the first year to determine if the service should become permanent. At the present time, 113 of the 556 students enrolled in academies attend a program outside their base school.

2017-18 Community Budget Survey—We received nearly 2,300 online responses to our community-wide survey on priorities for the 2018-19 fiscal year. Approximately 1,000 of the respondents were parents and another 750 were employees. The highest ranking was given to competitive salaries to attract and retain high quality teachers and support staff. Other areas of strong support included expanding workforce readiness opportunities and fully funding student activities, such as field trips and academic state and national competition travel costs, many of which are now fee or family-supported.

Redistricting—Superintendent Moran has approved the recommendations of a citizen advisory committee on redistricting and a public hearing will be held on January 11 on the proposal. The study was undertaken to address overcapacity issues among the division's three urban ring elementary schools. It calls for relocating 216 students in total, moving 113 students from Greer to the newly-expanded Woodbrook; 31 from Greer to Agnor-Hurt and 72 Agnor-Hurt students to Woodbrook. The changes would put all three schools at less than 95 percent capacity and balance demographic representations. In its report, the advisory committee also suggested a comprehensive, countywide review of student enrollment demographics throughout the division to further balance demographic representations among all schools. It noted that closer discussions between the School Board, the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission would be helpful in meeting this goal.

State Honors—Burley's Chris Shedd was selected by the Virginia DAR as its outstanding teacher of American History in the state. He now is a candidate for national honors. Chris is known for his innovative use of technology including connecting students to Native American curators in North Dakota, the use of 3D printing to create artifacts of the Civil War and virtual reality to allow students to participate in the American Revolution. His students recently visited Monticello, where they created a virtual tour of its slave quarters.

National Project—Nearly 200 high school students from Albemarle, Western Albemarle and Monticello visited Montpelier as part of their research on a project to study the role of monuments in a community's culture. The project is funded by a \$20,000 grant from the National Writing Center that was partially prompted by the events in Charlottesville this summer. The students also visited Richmond, Washington and several local areas. At Montpelier, the students heard from a distinguished panel of national historians. The culmination of the project will be presentations by the students on local historical figures that they deem worthy of celebration.

MIT Partnership—Murray High School is one of 20 schools from around the nation and the only one in Virginia selected by MIT to participate in a research project to improve K-12 education across the country. The project is looking at how schools on the leading edge of maker curriculums integrate this creative problem-solving approach into every classroom and discipline. Eventually, MIT will create an online data base that will share best practices with all schools. One Murray approach, for example, has students researching the most effective job interview skills and techniques and applying them in virtual reality interview settings.

Teacher Shortage—Governor McAuliffe recently announced several new areas of funding to address the growing teacher shortage in the state. He called it a "growing crisis." Locally, we have not experienced significant issues in attracting and retaining teachers but we did approach the chair of the House of Delegates' Education Committee, Del. Steve Landes, about sponsoring a bill that would strengthen our ability to fill career and technical education positions. He has agreed to carry a bill that would give the superintendent the authority to grant local teaching licenses to professionals who teach career and technical education classes. If approved by the General Assembly, this would open up new possibilities for experienced professionals in the private sector to teach in public schools.

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