



Board-to-Board, November, 2018

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

Albemarle County Public Schools Graduates Again Exceed State & National Scores on SATs, College Readiness Benchmark—Albemarle County Public Schools graduates once again turned in strong performances on the College Board’s Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), with 2018 scores surpassing both state and national averages on the reading, writing and mathematics tests and on the Board’s college readiness benchmark. The average reading and writing score for school division graduates was 592, which was 29 points higher than their state peers and 63 points better than the national pool. In mathematics, local students earned a 583, which exceeded state and national scores by 36 and 63 points respectively. The combined average in Albemarle County for the tests was 1175, compared to 1110 in Virginia and 1049 across the nation.

Participation rates for local graduates also topped the state rate. Nearly three out of four graduates in the school division, 73.4 percent, took the SATs, compared to a participation rate of 65 percent across Virginia.

The College Board also provides a college readiness score, derived from the SAT results. Students who meet this benchmark, the Board says, have a 65 percent likelihood of achieving a grade point average of B or higher during their first year of college. Two out of three Albemarle County Public Schools students met this benchmark. This was 13 percent higher than the college readiness score for all students in Virginia and 23 points above the national score.

Albemarle County Public Schools Hold Division-Wide Professional Development Day—On November 2, Albemarle County Public Schools held Making Connections, its annual professional development day. The day is meant to encourage educators to engage in equitable practices that enhance student learning. This year, there were 20 visiting educators whose work closely aligns to the division’s current strategic priorities, offering an important opportunity to learn about new perspectives and strategies that support all students. Sessions were held at several different schools throughout the division and included such topics as strategies for purposeful differentiation and personalized learning, practical strategies for promoting creativity, and understanding and supporting mental health as educators.

Albemarle County Bus Drivers Join Forces to Fight Cancer—On Saturday, November 3, the Albemarle County Public Schools Transportation Department hosted its first cancer walk at Albemarle High School. The walk had a good deal of participation from school division employees and their families. Participants raised \$1,000, which will go to the UVA Cancer Center. Walk organizers hope to make this an annual event to benefit the community.

Monticello High School Play Takes on Racial Issues—A play called #WhileBlack, written by Monticello High School senior Kayla Scott, has received first-place recognition from the Virginia Theater Association. The play is about three African-American friends struggling with a white cafe manager and handles such important topics as gentrification and racial profiling. It is based in large part on the author's personal experience. Scott, who in addition to being a playwright, is a student at the Health & Medical Sciences Academy at Monticello High School, says that her goal was to educate others about race in contemporary society. #WhileBlack was performed for the public on November 9 and 10 and will be performed at a regional competition in Knoxville, TN, in February of 2019.

Teachers, Students, Staff, and Community Members Contribute to Superintendent's 100-Day Report, Focusing on Role of Schools in Lifting All Students to Greatness—Albemarle County Public Schools Superintendent, Dr. Matthew Haas, presented his 100-day report to the School Board on November 8, outlining how his listening tour will shape his priorities this year. Last fall, the School Board announced Dr. Haas' appointment as superintendent, effective July 1. Throughout the summer, he held 16 conversations with nearly 400 people. Dr. Haas said he heard a great many positive comments.

Still, the Superintendent said that more important than hearing about strengths were the comments he heard about areas that needed improvement. Student climate surveys show, for instance, that 70 percent of third graders say they are curious about their schoolwork, but only 30 percent of high school seniors agree. Pass rates for state-mandated Standards of Learning (SOL) tests for African American and Latino students are below state averages and range from 51 to 64 percent. This would equate to a D or an F on the division's grading scale. Average pass rates for students with disabilities range from 41 to 52 percent.

He also stated that the division must broaden its faculty diversity, as sixty-five percent of the student population identifies as white, but 89 percent of the teacher population is white. It would take an additional 312 teachers of color to have the percentages of students of color and teachers of color reach parity in the division.

Haas added a list of other goals for the school division. Among these, he stated that the division's process for evaluating teacher performance needs a complete overhaul to make it simpler, easier to understand, and more relevant for teachers. He also said that instruction should promote the development of skills for students in four areas—critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity. Finally, he wants a major expansion in the division's community partnerships and volunteer programs. In accordance with the new state graduation requirement spelled out in *Profile of a Virginia Graduate*, the division will seek to provide as many as 1,000 work-based experiences each year for high school students.

Dr. Haas said he is highly optimistic about the future of the school division, based upon the progress he has seen over the 14 years he has served as a principal, assistant and deputy superintendent, and now as superintendent. Over that time, he said, the on-time graduation rate of students has become among the very best in the state; drop-out rates are much lower; far fewer students are suspended; and student attendance records are much more favorable than state averages. School climate reports also are more positive than many of the reports from school divisions across Virginia.

Virginia's House Select Committee on School Safety Finalized Specific Recommendations to General Assembly—House Speaker Kirk Cox announced on November 14 that the House Select Committee on School Safety had finalized their report and recommendations. The recommendations from the committee include proposals to realign the role of school counselors, develop a statewide mental health and suicide prevention tip line application, increase funding for School Resource Officers, increase funding for school security grants, and create a Commission on Student Mental Health to continue to study a number of important topics considered by the committee.

The committee recommends that the General Assembly should realign the roles and responsibilities of school counselors to ensure that school counselors are spending the majority of their time providing direct student services, including emotional, behavioral, career, and life counseling and guidance. They believe that the General Assembly should fund new school-based staff positions (e.g., testing coordinator) to relieve school counselors of additional administrative duties and ensure they have sufficient time to provide counseling services.

The committee also suggests that the GA should implement a statewide mental health and suicide prevention tip line that is similar to SafeUT. The SafeUT Crisis Text and Tip Line is a statewide service that provides real-time crisis intervention to youth through texting and a confidential smartphone-based tip program. They say this will help students gain access to receive real-time crisis-intervention counseling and report threats of violence.

In regards to increasing funding for School Resource Officers, the committee recommends prioritizing increasing funding for the School Resource Officer Grants Program to fund 44 new SRO positions, saying this would reduce the current unfunded demand by half.

The committee continues to say that the GA should require all school divisions that receive funding through the School Resource Officer Grants Program to enter into an MOU with local law enforcement that outlines the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of the School Resource Officer, the school division, and the law enforcement agency. The committee also recommends that the GA amend the Code of Virginia to allow retired law enforcement officers to be hired as School Resource Officers or School Security Officers without affecting their retirement benefits.

Regional Officers from AVID Visit Jack Jouett—On Thursday, November 29, regional officers from AVID visited Jack Jouett to revalidate their status as a demonstration school for AVID. AVID is skill-based instruction in preparing students for eventual success in college, many of whom are the first in their family to attend college. There are one of four demonstration schools in Virginia and fewer than 200 such schools across the country. Demonstration schools are selected as model programs for any school in the country that is considering adding the AVID program to their curriculum.

Albemarle County School Board Members Hold Town Halls—On Tuesday, December 4, Jonno Alcaro (Vice-Chair, At-Large) will hold a town hall at Agnor-Hurt Elementary School at 6 p.m., and Steve Koleszar (Scottsville Magisterial District) will hold one on Wednesday, December 5 at Cale Elementary School at 6 p.m. These town halls will give school division community

members the opportunity to interact with their school board representatives and to talk about how the school division is doing in meeting its responsibilities to students.

Albemarle County Public Schools Receives More Than 4,500 Community Responses

Identifying Budget Priorities for the 2019-20 School Year—For the second straight year, attracting and retaining high-quality teachers is the top goal for those Albemarle County residents who responded to the school division’s annual budget survey. The online survey attracted more than 4,500 responses to a question about the most important objectives for the 2019-20 school year budget. Eight out of ten responses said paying competitive teacher salaries should be one of the division’s top priorities.

Nearly 53 percent of responses said increasing student health and wellness services should be a priority, followed by 49 percent that identified paying competitive salaries to attract and retain high-quality support staff. Also near the top of the list was 48 percent of responses that said the physical safety and security of students and staff in school buildings was a priority and 47 percent who called for increasing career and workforce readiness opportunities, such as internships, for high school students.

Among survey participants, 46 percent were parents and another nine percent identified themselves as both a parent and an employee. Employees constituted 27 percent of the sample, and another 17 percent were either community members or students.

Superintendent Dr. Matthew Haas said the survey results will be valuable as he develops his funding request for the next school year, which he will present to the School Board on January 17, 2019. The Board is scheduled to hold a public hearing on the Superintendent’s Funding Request on January 29, moving to a series of work sessions and adoption of their budget request to the Board of Supervisors by February 7. On December 18, Virginia Governor Ralph Northam is expected to release his proposed budget for the state’s next fiscal year, which begins on July 1. State revenues to local school divisions have recently begun to reverse several years of declining state support, now funding approximately 25 percent of the school division’s operating budget. Prior to the recession ten years ago, that percentage exceeded 30.

December School Board Agenda Items—School Board Policy FA, *Building and Naming Facilities Policy* is being reviewed by members of the policy and equity teams. The School Board will review the policy at its December 6 meeting and further revisions will be made subsequently. At its December 13 meeting, the School Board will devote the entire work session to the development of an anti-racism policy to be implemented throughout the school division upon completion.