



Board-to-Board, August 2019

A monthly report from the Albemarle County School

Board to the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors

Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) Start a New Academic Year—On Wednesday, August 21, ACPS started a new academic year. The annual ACPS calendar was mailed to ACPS families on August 14 so that the ACPS community will have access to all pertinent school dates and other useful ACPS information for reference. It also features art by talented students from all of our 25 schools.

Changes to ACPS Policy—In his back-to-school address on August 13, Superintendent Matt Haas announced two new school policies that will help the school division as it endeavors to identify and remove practices that perpetuate the achievement gap.

This spring and summer, school officials asked the middle school principals to develop a pilot plan and work together to curtail students' use of cell phones during the school day. This is because, as many national studies show, phones are distracting, perpetuate learning and teacher-student gaps, and are generally unnecessary given that the schools issue laptops to students for their learning use. Cell phones will no longer be allowed in middle school classrooms, but students are allowed to take them to school and leave them in their lockers if they choose.

Additionally, Haas announced the elimination of suspension from school for minor drug and illicit substance abuse infractions, such as possession or use of alcohol or marijuana. This change is based on research that shows that suspending students for misbehaving does not improve their behavior. Suspension has also been shown to perpetuate the achievement gap in schools, as it has a disparate impact on students of color as well as economically disadvantaged students and special education students.

Over the past few years, several middle and high schools have started programs to eliminate the practice of out of school suspension, replacing it with a program designed to be a restorative and therapeutic learning experience focused on reducing recidivism. This program is called STEP (Short Term Education Program). This year, students accused of minor drug infractions will either attend in-school suspension or STEP for three days while attending the Region 10 Teen Intervene program. The goal of this change is to cut down on repeat offenses and eliminate hundreds of missed school days for students.

Final Public Meeting of Cale Renaming Advisory Committee Scheduled—The next public meeting of the Cale Renaming Advisory Committee will be held on Wednesday, September 11 at 6 p.m. in Room 241 in the County Office Building at 401 McIntire Road in Charlottesville. At

the meeting, committee members are expected to make a recommendation to Superintendent Matthew Haas on whether the name of Cale Elementary School should be changed.

In a note to the committee, Haas told members that their charge is contained in the school division's renaming policy: "If a school is named after an individual, the committee shall examine whether the individual, on the whole, has made outstanding contributions to the community or made contributions of state, national or worldwide significance in light of the Board's adopted vision, mission, goals and values."

ACPS Standards of Learning Test Scores Released—On August 13, the Virginia Department of Education released 2019-20 Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) scores. ACPS saw across-the-board improvement on math SOLs, with 81% of students passing, an increase of 5 percentage points from the 2017-18 school year. Students from different demographic groups improved, as well.

In Albemarle, math pass rates for English learners improved by 12 points to 54%, Hispanic students improved by 9 points to 67% and black students improved by 7 points to 59%. For students who are economically disadvantaged, pass rates increased by 9 points to 63%. While there is still work to be done to close the achievement gap, the progress shown in these scores is encouraging.

78% of ACPS students passed the reading SOL, including 70% of third graders. Murray Elementary had the highest reading pass rate, at 91%, of all of Albemarle's elementary schools. Overall, 79% of students passed the writing, history and science test.

Accreditation ratings for 2019-2020 and School Quality Indicator data will be released to the public in September.

Proposed Changes to Public Comment—A recommendation has been made to the School Board that, in order to provide more opportunities for community participation, an online sign-up for public comment sign-up system be implemented. These changes to public comment would mean that constituents could sign up to speak ahead of time using an online system starting at 8 AM on the Monday after the School Board packet is published. To address accessibility issues, people will also be able to sign up for public comment in advance by telephone or in person at the School Board meeting. This is a pilot program that will start at the September 2019 School Board business meeting and will last through November.

The purpose of this provisional change is to encourage community participation in School Board meetings while also allowing the School Board Chair to adjust the timing of the meeting's agenda in order to accommodate those who wish to speak at meetings. If the Board approves this change, community members will be notified in advance of how they can sign up to participate so that as many voices of the ACPS community as possible can be heard.

New Time and Attendance System for ACPS Employees—The county will soon implement Kronos, a new time and attendance system, for all employees on October 19, 2019. Kronos will replace the current manual and paper-based timekeeping, attendance, and leave tracking

processes. Kronos will integrate with the payroll system and provide multiple improvements: leave-eligible employees will gain real-time self-serve access to leave balances and leave-related benefits, plus faster approval turnaround times for leave requests and the ability to monitor those requests; hourly employees will benefit from accurate pay for actual hours worked; leave reporting will be improved; and processes for reporting will be simplified for supervisors and leave administrators.