



Board-to-Board, July 2021

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

Board Expresses Support for Division's Anti-Racism Programs, Actions & Goals—The Albemarle County School Board, joined by Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Matthew Haas, recently issued a news release stating its unwavering endorsement of programs and activities that empower staff to meet the requirements of the Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) anti-racism policy. This expressly included Henley Middle School's concluded pilot activity that added racial awareness conversations to its student advisory periods.

Board members also said they valued input from Henley parents that led to revisions in the school's lesson plans this past spring and said the student advisory discussions it facilitated were faithful to the board's call for action in its anti-racism policy.

In recent weeks, allegations have surfaced that the lesson plans were based upon critical race theory.

In its statement, board members and Superintendent Haas noted that they had recently received comments from some members of our school community expressing concerns over the adoption into our middle school curriculum of what has come to be known as Critical Race Theory and referred to nationally as CRT. The statement confirmed that Critical Race Theory had not been added to ACPS curricula and that there are no plans to add it in the future.

Reports to the contrary are false, the statement said.

Instead, the Henley lesson plans were a direct result of the division's own anti-racism policy, developed for over a year and formally adopted on February 28, 2019. The policy requires that:

- Curriculum and instructional materials for all grades shall reflect cultural and racial diversity and include a range of perspectives and experiences, particularly those of historically underrepresented groups of color.
- All curriculum materials shall be examined for racial bias by the Division's Department of Student Learning. Where materials reflect racial bias, teachers utilizing the materials will acknowledge the bias and communicate it to students and parents.
- The Board and Division shall implement an anti-racist curriculum and provide educational resources for students at every grade level.
- Student in-class and extra-curricular programs and activities shall be designed to provide opportunities for cross-cultural and cross-racial interactions to foster respect for cultural

and racial diversity. The Board shall support interschool activities that will allow students to experience the diversity within the Division.

While critical race theory often is referred to nationally by the acronym, CRT, the acronym as used in the school division refers to a different program developed entirely by division staff.

There is indeed a CRT program in ACPS and it dates back to 2015 when the school division became the first in the Commonwealth to offer a professional development program to teachers known as Culturally Responsive Teaching, or CRT.

The division's CRT program is "focused on the relationships between teachers and students. It is founded on the concept that by better understanding the diverse life experiences and cultures represented by our more than 13,500 students, teachers can enhance their communication with every student in their classroom. They are better able to adapt teaching strategies and practices to build greater trust and confidence with students. This has produced stronger academic performance," the statement said.

In March, the Virginia State Board of Education revised its teacher performance standards and evaluation criteria to add a standard on culturally responsive teaching and equitable practices. This year, the General Assembly enacted legislation requiring that teacher evaluations include an evaluation of cultural competency. The Albemarle County School Board also approved a requirement that all newly-hired teachers earn, at a minimum, their micro-credential in culturally responsive teaching within three years of their start date.

The division is currently reviewing the now-concluded Henley pilot program as well as other strategies and programs that support the goals of its anti-racism policy. This includes, the joint statement said, the examination, development and improvement of activities that:

- Correct disparities by race in student access to learning opportunities;
- Respond to student reports of racial harassment and bullying;
- Eliminate the unequal demographic impact of policies and programs; and
- Improve the academic performance of all students by closing long-standing opportunity and achievement gaps among students.

"These are non-negotiables," the statement concluded, adding, "We are firmly committed to achieving these outcomes and to supporting the inclusive programs and activities that make this possible. We welcome all points of view in how best to strengthen our continuous growth model, and we reject all efforts that would have us resist positive change in favor of the status quo."

Click here to read the [joint statement signed by all school board members and the superintendent](#).

New Strategic Plan Approved—At its July 8 meeting, the Albemarle County School Board approved a new ACPS strategic plan, entitled *Learning for All*. The plan includes the following vision, mission and values:

Vision: Our learners are engaged in authentic, challenging, and relevant learning experiences, becoming lifelong contributors and leaders in our dynamic and diverse society.

Mission: Working together as a team, we will end the predictive value of race, class, gender, and special capacities for our children's success through high-quality teaching and learning for all. We seek to build relationships with families and communities to ensure that every student succeeds. **We will know every student.**

Values:

- Equity - We will provide every student with the level of support necessary to thrive.
- Excellence - We will mitigate barriers and provide opportunities for every student to be academically successful.
- Family and Community - We will engage with and share the responsibility for student success with families and community partners.
- Wellness - We will support the physical and emotional health of our students and staff.

The plan was developed over more than a year's time under the leadership of Dr. Patrick McLaughlin, Chief of Strategic Planning, and drew from the input of hundreds of ACPS staff, families, students and community members. The plan will be in effect for the next five years at the school division.

Jouett's Volunteer Community Advisory Committee Recommends the School Be Renamed Journey Middle School—The volunteer community advisory committee that has been conducting the naming review for Jack Jouett Middle School has completed its work, recommending that the name of the school be changed to Journey Middle School.

The committee, which began its work in May, included the school's principal; school staff and faculty; parents of students at the school; parents of elementary school students who attend feeder schools; members of the broader community; and an Albemarle High School student who attended the middle school. The 16-member advisory panel held two online surveys and two public meetings to gather input from the broader school community.

The committee's chair, Hannah Peters, who is a teacher at the school, said a guiding influence in the committee's deliberations was the opportunity to select a name that was relevant today to the school's values, its purpose, and what it represents to present and future students and staff. She also said that inclusiveness was the value repeated most often by our students, community members, and staff.

The concept behind the name choice has particular meaning for a school that has earned international recognition for its AVID Program, which is centered on providing students with support, counseling, and program opportunities that provide them with college and career readiness skills.

The committee's recommendation is being reviewed by Superintendent Matthew Haas. Dr. Haas will consider the committee's contributions before making his own recommendation to the

school board on August 12. Board members will decide on the school's name as early as their August 26 meeting. Any changes to the school's current name would take effect on July 1, 2022.

Jouett is the fifth school in the division to conduct a naming review. In directing that all schools named for individuals in the division have their names reviewed, the school board said the purpose should be to ensure that the names of all schools represent the division's values of equity, excellence, family and community, and wellness.

Peters said one of the highlights of the review was the involvement of students, through a project that involved more than 100 sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders. Students were asked to create mandalas to signify their aspirations for the school. Mandalas are geometric designs, and Peters said there was a great deal of similarity among the various representations.

Journey as a shared experience for all was the name that best represented that consensus, said Peters. Other finalists were Hope, Peace and Justice; Monacan; Katherine Johnson; and retaining the Jouett name.

The committee's research stretched back even further than 1966. It included a finding that Jack Jouett, who was a captain in the Virginia militia during the Revolutionary War, owned farms in Virginia and Kentucky. As many as 25 men, women and children were reported to have been enslaved by Jouett.

The four previous school naming reviews also were conducted by volunteer community advisory committees, and the superintendent supported the recommendation in each instance. The school board changed the name of three schools and retained the name of another. Summaries of all completed reviews and those in progress are accessible from the school division's [School Names Under Review](#) web page.

Appointments of New Principals for Western Albemarle High School, Meriwether Lewis Elementary School Approved by School Board—Two new principals have been appointed by the Albemarle County School Board. Jennifer Sublette, who is the division's Director of Professional Learning and is a former assistant principal for Western Albemarle High School, has been named the school's new principal. Also promoted is Jennifer Underwood, who is the new principal for Meriwether Lewis Elementary School and previously served as an assistant principal at both Woodbrook Elementary and Meriwether Lewis.

Sublette has a deep tie to the Western school community, having attended the school and later returning as an administrator. As the Director of Professional Learning since 2018, she has led the division's programming for developing and sharing best instructional practices; supported enhancements to grading and assessment for middle and high school students; launched a micro-credential program in the social, emotional and academic development of students; and headed the division's anti-racism steering committee for the policy's implementation among educators.

Underwood also was a member of the division's coaching model, serving as an instructional coach in support of teachers at Agnor-Hurt, Baker-Butler and Stone-Robinson elementary schools. She also taught at three elementary schools in the division. Her administrative

experience includes two years as the assistant principal at Meriwether Lewis, and for the past three years, she has been the assistant principal for Woodbrook Elementary School.

Sublette is a two-time graduate of the University of Virginia, where she earned her BA and, later, an Ed.S. in Administration and Supervision. She also holds a Master's in Teaching from American University. Sublette began her career in education in Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland in 1995. During her time in Maryland, she was also a faculty associate with Johns Hopkins University. She began her teaching career with Albemarle County Public Schools at Western in 2002.

Underwood, currently studying for her doctorate in education, earned her BA from Mary Baldwin College and her Master of Education from Averett University. Her teaching career began in Albemarle County in 2003 as a teacher at Hollymead Elementary School.

School Board to Review Proposed Policy to Protect Transgender and Gender-Expansive Students—A proposed policy to protect transgender and gender-expansive students went before the Albemarle County School Board at its July 8 meeting, in accordance with [Virginia statutory law](#) that all school divisions in the Commonwealth enact such a policy prior to the start of the 2021-22 school year. The division's draft policy is consistent with the [guidance provided by the Virginia Department of Education](#) to all public school divisions in the state.

Among the state-mandated protections in the policy are the prevention of bullying and harassment of students who identify as transgender, the protection of student privacy, the confidentiality of sensitive information, enforcement of dress codes based on sexual identity, and preservation of the right of students to participate in school activities and events that align with their sexual identity.

The school division's proposed policy also aligns with federal case law as set forth in the recent *Grimm v. Gloucester County Public Schools* decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit and the decision by the U.S. Supreme Court to deny an appeal of that ruling. The Fourth Circuit held that the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution prevents a school division from discriminating against a student by denying them the right to use the restroom of the gender with which they identify.

The proposed policy states, "Students must be permitted to participate in physical education and intramural sports in accordance with the student's gender identity that is consistently asserted at school. Athletic participation regulated by the Virginia High School League (VHSL) or another organization, such as the Virginia Scholastic Rowing Association (VASRA), as well as middle school athletics, shall be in compliance with policies and rules outlined by those organizations."

The school board received the proposed [Policy on the Treatment of Transgender and Gender-Expansive Students](#) for information, and the division has scheduled an online public information session on the policy for members of the community at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, July 28. Members of the community will be able to view the presentation via livestream. Links to access the livestream (<http://streaming.k12albemarle.org/ACPS/player.htm?xml/acpsevents.xml>) and to

submit questions or comments (TransgenderPolicyFeedback@k12albemarle.org) have been shared with the community.

All questions and comments will be distributed to the school board prior to their August 12 business meeting, when they are planning to vote on the policy's adoption. Questions will be answered and published on the school division's website prior to the August 12 meeting. The school board's vote will follow public comment.

In its introduction, the division's draft states that it is the policy of the school division "to maintain a safe and supportive school environment for all students free from harassment, intimidation, and/or bullying and free from discrimination because of actual or perceived race, color, creed, ethnicity, national origin, citizenship/immigration status, religion, biological sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions, or any other protected class outlined in policy AC, *Nondiscrimination.*"

Although the General Assembly enacted legislation this year requiring that all public school divisions in the Commonwealth have protections in place for transgender students, Kirst said the school division's research, outreach, and policy development began more than two years ago.

An essential part of the policy is its requirement for training all staff members in its implementation. That includes, the drafts states, teachers, administrators, counselors, social workers, and health staff, and in orientation programs for new employees. That training, the policy adds, shall include "ongoing professional development to build the skills of all staff members to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying, harassment, and discrimination."

Resources would include communication strategies with students and parents on gender identity, gender expression, and student privacy; prevention and intervention strategies to combat in-person and online bullying; school planning guides; classroom management practices; and curriculum and support for a student's safe transitioning plan as provided for by a medical professional.