



Board-to-Board

September 2024

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

CORRECTION—A previously shared document included inaccurate first-day enrollment numbers. Contrary to what was included in that item, ACPS enrollment numbers are trending upwards relative to last year. ACPS does not, however, officially report enrollment numbers until after 30 school days and thus will have final numbers to share in October.

Albemarle County Public Schools Aligns to Gov. Youngkin's Cell Phone-Free Education Draft Guidelines

Guidelines—On August 15, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) released Draft Guidance for Cell Phone-Free Education Pursuant to Executive Order 33. These guidelines define a cell phone-free education as the “elimination or restriction of cell phones and other personal electronic communication devices in public schools” from the time that the first bell rings at the start of the day until the dismissal bell rings at the end of the day (which the VDOE refers to as “Bell-to-Bell”).

Albemarle County Public Schools’ cell phone policy, included in School Board Policy *JFC - Student Conduct*, allows students to possess a cell phone, smartphone, tablet, or other communication device on school property as long as the device remains off and out of sight during instructional time unless otherwise instructed by a teacher. In our elementary schools, cell phones are to remain off and away for the entire school day. At the secondary level, our policy differs slightly from the VDOE guidelines by allowing students to access and use cell phones during class changes and lunch periods.

We are piloting Yondr Pouches at Walton Middle School during the 2024-25 school year to strengthen our already robust cell phone policy. Upon arrival at a designated “cell-phone-free space,” students will deposit their phones in a Yondr Pouch, which will lock while in the cell phone-free space. In order to use their phone, students must exit the cell phone-free space to unlock the pouch. These devices allow students to maintain possession of their cell phones at all times while limiting their ability to use them during instructional time.

ACPS is also implementing a Cell Phone Policy Enforcement Committee to evaluate the effectiveness of our current cell phone policies and procedures and will guide any necessary adjustments, the addition of resources, and professional development for our staff to ensure that our policies and practices serve the best interests of our students and staff. The committee will be made up of students, parents and caregivers, educators, counselors, and other division leaders to provide a variety of perspectives to this work.

One Hundred Percent of ACPS Bus Routes Assigned a Driver for Start of 2024-25 School Year—Thanks to the hard work of the ACPS Transportation, Human Resources and Communications departments, every Albemarle County student who requested transportation to school had a bus on the first day of school.

Over the summer, our staff worked to recruit drivers through television and radio commercials, social media advertisements and by holding job fairs. These efforts returned 92 transportation department applications that filled various transportation roles, including full-time drivers, transportation assistants, an additional full-time trainer, a new Area Transportation Supervisor, a Program Manager for Special Needs and a new router.

Additionally, we currently have 15 full-time bus drivers, three part-time bus drivers and three transportation assistants participating in our training program. Once these candidates are done with their training, our

Transportation Department will next focus on uncoupling routes, meaning that many students will have shorter rides to school. The department anticipates this work will begin when classes resume after Labor Day.

The Department of Transportation is still looking to hire an additional Area Transportation Supervisor, one lead bus driver, two dispatchers, one router, an Assistant Director and an Operations Manager in addition to continuing to recruit bus drivers and transportation assistants.

ACPS School Board Receives Updates on Literacy and Math for K-12—At its September 12 meeting, the Albemarle County School Board will receive an update on its current initiatives to improve math and literacy instruction throughout the division.

In tandem with the Virginia Literacy Act (VLA), passed during the 2022 Virginia General Assembly, ACPS first drafted a document outlining the goals and expectations of our literacy instruction. This comprehensive document highlights the fundamental parts of literacy, including how the Science of Reading can assist students in reaching their reading goals in various grades. ACPS has also created a one-page document outlining these beliefs and goals in a family-friendly format to engage families in the literacy instruction of their students.

While drafting this document, our Reading Curriculum Coaches gathered a committee of parents, teachers and other ACPS staff to vet six VDOE-approved reading curriculums as part of the VLA. After several community meetings, material reviews and a survey on the available curriculums, the committee selected HMH Into Reading as ACPS' new literacy curriculum.

During our preservice week, staff received instructional training for HMH Into Reading implementation this fall. HMH Into Reading facilitators and trainers will make visits to all of our schools throughout the year for support and to ensure full implementation of this program.

Following the shift to our new literacy curriculum, we will begin to vet new elementary school math curriculum in January of 2025. This adoption will follow the same process as our literacy curriculum adoption. ACPS Math Curriculum Coordinators are also working on redesigning middle school math classes to allow students to gain the skills necessary to take Algebra I in the eighth grade rather than having to wait until high school.

SOL data released by the VDOE on August 19 shows division gains in overall passing rates in Math, Reading, Writing and Science — which are the four categories that impact accreditation — as well as improvement in passing rates in 21 out of 24 reporting demographic groups that typically have achievement gaps. We continue to have some persistent achievement gaps for students in these groups when compared to our division results as a whole, although several of the gaps decreased this year.

| Test | ACPS Pass Rate | | | State Pass Rate |
|------------------|----------------|---------|---------|-----------------|
| | 2021-22 | 2022-23 | 2023-24 | |
| English: Reading | 75% | 74% | 75% | 73% |
| English: Writing | 67% | 73% | 78% | 76% |
| Mathematics | 66% | 69% | 72% | 71% |
| Science | 62% | 67% | 68% | 68% |

Albemarle County Public Schools Partners with Communities in Schools to Drive Family Engagement—This summer ACPS partnered with Communities in Schools (CIS NOVA) to drive family engagement in student learning.

CIS works with parents, educators, community-based organizations and administrators to provide additional systems of support for students within our schools. Through the use of school-based Site Coordinators, CIS will conduct a needs assessment to inform goal-setting at several of our schools.

Communities in Schools is hiring several school-based Site Coordinators: One Site Coordinator each for Greer Elementary, Red Hill Elementary and Journey Middle. Albemarle High School will receive two Site Coordinators and the CIS will also hire one division-wide program coordinator.

These coordinators will work with schools and community partners to ensure that students' basic needs are met, to encourage students to attend school on a daily basis, to support the social-emotional learning in our schools, and to support graduating seniors with their next steps, whether it be going to college or straight into a career.

Preliminary ACPS Enrollment Numbers Show Slight Drop in Student Enrollment—Preliminary enrollment data as of August 21, 2024, shows that student enrollment in ACPS decreased slightly for 2024-25 from 2023-24. Total enrollment for the division as of the first day of the 2024-25 school year shows 13,713 students in our schools. This is about 250 students less than the 2023-24 school year.

Elementary school enrollment sits at 6,199 students, middle at 2,894 and high at 4,416. Generally, we wait until the 10th day of school to finalize our enrollment numbers, which this year is Tuesday, September 3.