



Office of the Superintendent

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Dear School Board Members:

In framing the Retreat agenda with Diantha and Steve, we discussed how the next generation of learning will be shaped in our schools which led us to think about our incoming kindergartners. Imagine what it would be like for all of us who attend this 2010 School Board Retreat to reunite in early June 2023 when our high school graduates receive their diplomas. Think now about the five-year olds entering our schools in August 2010. Dream about how different their world might be in another thirteen years. If the future could speak through voices of our children who will enter kindergarten in another three months, what would you want these graduates to describe about their experiences from 2010-2023? Think about it from the perspective of a graduate who once was a kindergartner. Perhaps you might try to envision the experiences of a child with risk factors who has lived in poverty, with a teen mother, and who never attended preschool. Then, you might choose a different child, a young boy from a middle class family who has a musical talent that long ago became evident to his kindergarten teacher. Or, the child might be a young girl who loved building with Legos and had a thousand curious questions about buildings she saved on the iPod she once brought to kindergarten for "show and tell."

The stories told by our young people who enter kindergarten in 2010 and move through our schools towards graduation in 2023 will reflect the Albemarle County Public Schools story we continue to write in our work as School Board members and superintendent. As a current Board member you will make decisions and set directions that will critically affect the lives of each kindergartner who will enter our schools in August 2010, about a thousand young learners in all. Based on the story we write together with our young people, my questions to you in 2023 will be "how did we do?" and "how do we know?" During the 2009 School Board Retreat, we reviewed ten years of historical data and background information on our key strategic work. Our work to date has positioned our School Division to be a model for performance excellence in Virginia and the nation. Our Division's students have made extraordinary gains on accountability 1.0 assessments including the Virginia Assessments of SOL proficiency, AP exams, and SATs. Our students routinely distinguish their school community and the Division through their exemplary accomplishments in athletics, the performing arts, academic competitions, and community service. Today, graduates of all four high schools routinely are accepted into the most highly competitive colleges and universities in the nation- MIT, Stanford, Harvard, the University of Chicago, Yale, Princeton, Georgetown, the University of Pennsylvania, Duke, Columbia, Bryn Mawr, Vanderbilt, the University of Virginia and many others too numerous to name.



Our schools are visited, called, Skyped, and emailed by other schools and divisions from across the United States and throughout Virginia. The recent MacArthur Foundation grant awarded to Mr. Glen Bull in the Curry School at UVA was based in part upon a pilot project in which some of our elementary students used digital fabrication labs developed by an engineering professor at Cornell University. Our administrative leadership work is recognized by the Darden-Curry Partnership for Leadership in Education as exemplary. Currently, our Division is the subject of a chapter in a book on school leadership being written for publication as part of the Darden-Curry PLE grant closure. Our work to pilot a continuum of learning technologies has received significant attention through national media coverage and state and national conference presentations. Aneesh Chopra, the Chief Technology Officer for the federal government, follows our work and just recently checked in to find out what “Albemarle” is doing to game-change the use of technology learning accelerators.

Despite these successes, I have a sense of urgency about our work as we enter the second decade of the 21st century. The world changes rapidly around us, almost daily. We have lost our position as a second-to-none education nation. We have been known as the nation of inventiveness; the United States has annually registered more patents than any other nation- for as long as patents have been awarded in this country. However, other countries are catching up and are expected to surpass our achievements as innovators. Other nations feel a sense of economic urgency that we do not.

Singapore, China and other nation-builders today recognize that the United States has led the world as a nation of creativity and innovation. In fact, at the same time that we have implemented strategies to standardize our educational system to mirror Singapore’s or China’s, they look to us to find out how to reconfigure their schools to fuel innovation. I fear in our push to standardize our schools, we are losing an educational edge that made us great as a nation- the edge of invention, design, creativity, reasoning, and problem-solving. In fact, a call to action from our President, employers, and colleges and universities indicates our current preparation of young people exiting high schools is not good enough. Small businesses, corporations and higher education all are looking for graduates who are well-rounded learners who demonstrate workplace, thinking, content, and technological knowledge and skills. Parent Focus Groups also have strongly indicated that we need to “raise the bar” for their students. The SOLs represent the floor. We need to define how to remove the ceiling for our young people, and chart an actionable course to help each learner achieve beyond our wildest dreams.

Today’s teachers tap dance their way through school year after school year with one foot on the river bank of Virginia’s 20th century accountability model and one foot on the bank of Albemarle’s 21st century Framework for Quality Learning. As a result, our learners are caught in two worlds of instruction- one that on many days resembles the teaching of my youth and another world that on some days represents the best of contemporary project- and problem-based learning. Our young people can no longer afford to sit in classes where frontal teaching, textbook and worksheet work, and content only learning dominates. Our teachers must realize that the tools of the trade are changing rapidly- smart technologies, digital content, virtual learning, universal access, untethered learning tools, and social media represent some of the rapidly evolving options we need to begin customizing for today’s learners. We can only dream about options that tomorrow’s learners will experience, but we must be ready to adapt to whatever the future brings to our learners and their learning spaces. This adaption is a core tenet of continuous improvement.

The Law of Accelerating Returns suggests that a specific paradigm can provide exponential growth only until the method exhausts its potential. Our Division has experienced exponential growth in the past ten years. Undoubtedly, the graduates of 2023 will experience unprecedented levels of change and technological process. If we are to support their exponential growth through this journey, **how will we know** when the time for our paradigm shift has arrived? Is it here now? And do we have the underlying systems in place to adapt? So, our young people will write a next generation story as they journey through our schools. What will they say about our support for them to become lifelong learners, active citizens, and productive members of an ever-evolving workforce? What do we need to do to ensure that every chapter of their story reflects the Vision, Mission and Core Values that we hold dear?

Sincerely,

Pamela R. Moran

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