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Dear Steve, Ned, Diantha, Pam, Eric, Barbara and Jason:

I recently had the opportunity to participate in two events within three days that were highly unusual for any school division. Both gave me great confidence in the potential of Albemarle County Public Schools as we near the end of an extraordinary year for our students.

On Saturday, May 25, I was part of a special ceremony hosted by the Burley Varsity Club that bestowed a high school diploma upon Olivia Ferguson McQueen 54 years after she completed her senior year in the back office of an annex next to the Venable School. Ms. Ferguson was a plaintiff in a school desegregation suit and the School Board's response in 1959 was to deny her a high school diploma. I was struck by two poignant student moments. The first was learning about the extraordinary courage, character and maturity demonstrated by a 16-year old forced to spend her senior year in a lonely, sparse office. The second was the insightful and compassionate comments offered by Burley middle school students who talked about the importance of young people, respect and community. Both moments represent the timeless excellence we seek for all students, undiminished by the separation of more than 50 years.

Two days later, Virginia's Education Secretary Laura Fornash and I brainstormed about the future of education in the Commonwealth. We talked about the power of bringing together the state's political and business leaders, design professionals, policy experts, educators, parents and community representatives over a weekend. Much as entrepreneurs use business incubators to develop innovative concepts, test and challenge ideas, learn from one another's energy and imagination, our education incubator would match resources and planning to our highest aspirations for every student. How close we come to those aspirations will depend upon the decisions we make beginning Monday.

This truly is a transformational time in education and like all such turning points, the biggest danger we face as a school division is complacency. We all can celebrate, for instance that:

- 1) Out of more than 130 school divisions in the Commonwealth our students place second and third in college readiness as measured by the SAT scores;



- 2) Our three high schools placed with the top five percent of all high schools in the nation in *Newsweek's* annual survey of how well high schools prepare their students for college and the workforce;
- 3) Three of our Destination Imagination teams placed in the top ten in the world in their respective categories in the recent Global Finals;
- 4) Burley's young women's chorus placed third in the World Choir Games;
- 5) our Health & Medical Sciences Academy now is a Governor's Academy and we soon will add a third center of excellence at Western Albemarle High School;
- 6) We were among the first school divisions in the country to offer students a computer science and programming academy experience;
- 7) Our M-cubed program was selected by the National School Boards Association as the best community engagement program in the country for advancing student performance in our population category.

These are but a sample of what we have achieved in the past year but they are not enough to ensure the future for those who will enter high school next August, let alone those who will begin kindergarten.

For guidance on these decisions, I suggest we consult the messages we received from those who stake in our success cannot be higher—parents, students, business leaders and educators—who came together to tell us they value academic accomplishment above all else. Is it possible to meet this expectation without a full embrace of technology's incredible disruptive power to enrich and expand learning? Can we meet this expectation absent a robust world language program at all levels that not only prepares students for the global economy but also delivers uncommon intellectual discipline and focus?

This brings us to another important finding in our research. Our stakeholders get it—in addition to academic accomplishment, they strongly agreed that creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication truly do expand the horizons of their children. Can we provide those difference-making competencies without bringing in the best minds we can find to design the high school of the future, without removing transportation and technology barriers to our academies for all students, without ensuring that our teachers have the cutting-edge skills and knowledge they need to stretch the horizons of our students?

I see the strategic planning process as establishing the gateways through which our students will enter and shape the future of our county, our nation and our world. I look forward to a spirited, thoughtful, healthy exchange of ideas-- a discussion that truly tests us all to think deeply about the trust that our families and businesses and neighbors have in us as leaders of education in our community.

It has been my privilege to have been an educator for more than a few years and I have never been more hopeful about the future of education than I now am. We have all the assets for greatness—children eager to learn and to teach others, parents who care and are involved, teachers who every day invent new ways to excite learning in the classroom, a business community that desperately needs capable and talented employees and a School Board strongly committed to the competitive distinction of Albemarle County Public Schools.

Our work together will matter a great deal.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Pamela R. Moran". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pamela R. Moran, Ed.D.
Superintendent