

Board of Education Agenda Item

Item: I.

Date: March 24, 2011

Topic: First Review of a Request for Approval of an Innovative Program Opening Prior to Labor Day from Alexandria City Public Schools

Presenter: Ms. Anne Wescott, Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communications
Dr. Morton Sherman, Superintendent, Alexandria City Public Schools

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Origin:

Topic presented for information only (no board action required)

Board review required by

State or federal law or regulation

Board of Education regulation

Other: _____

Action requested at this meeting

Action requested at future meeting: April 28, 2011

Previous Review/Action:

No previous board review/action

Previous review/action

Date _____

Action _____

Background Information: Section [22.1-79.1](#) of the *Code of Virginia* prohibits local school boards from adopting school calendars that require schools to open prior to Labor Day unless a waiver is granted by the Board for "good cause." The conditions under which the Board may grant such waivers are outlined in the *Code*. The provision that permits the Board to approve a waiver for an experimental or innovative program may be found in § 22.1-79.1.B.3 as follows:

§ [22.1-79.1](#). Opening of the school year; approvals for certain alternative schedules.

A. Each local school board shall set the school calendar so that the first day students are required to attend school shall be after Labor Day. The Board of Education may waive this requirement based on a school board certifying that it meets one of the good cause requirements....

B. For purposes of this section, "good cause" means:

...3. A school division is providing its students, in the school year for which the waiver is sought, with an experimental or innovative program which requires an earlier opening date than that established in subsection A of this section and which has been approved by the Department of Education pursuant to the regulations of the Board of Education establishing standards for accrediting public schools. However, any waiver or extension of the school year granted by the Board of Education pursuant to this subdivision or its standards for accrediting public schools for such an experimental or innovative program shall only apply to the opening date for those schools where such experimental or innovative programs are offered generally to the student body of the school. For the purposes of this subdivision, experimental or innovative programs shall include instructional programs that are offered on a year-round basis by the school division in one or more of its elementary or middle or high schools....

The *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*, at [8 VAC 20-131-290.D](#), permit local school boards to seek approval to implement experimental or innovative programs under the following conditions:

D. With the approval of the local school board, local schools seeking to implement experimental or innovative programs, or both, that are not consistent with these standards shall submit a waiver request, on forms provided, to the board for evaluation and approval prior to implementation. The request must include the following:

1. Purpose and objectives of the experimental/innovative programs;
2. Description and duration of the programs;
3. Anticipated outcomes;
4. Number of students affected;
5. Evaluation procedures; and
6. Mechanisms for measuring goals, objectives, and student academic achievement....

The following school divisions with innovative or experimental programs were approved for the 2010-2011 school year: Alexandria (two schools), Arlington County (one), Charlotte County (six), Covington (two), Danville (five), Harrisonburg (five), and Richmond City (one).

Summary of Major Elements: The Alexandria City School Board (ACPS) is requesting approval of waivers for innovative programs to allow all of its schools to open prior to Labor Day:

- John Adams Elementary School
- Charles Barrett Elementary School
- Patrick Henry Elementary School
- Douglas MacArthur Elementary School
- George Mason Elementary School
- Matthew Maury Elementary School
- James K. Polk Elementary School
- William Ramsay Elementary School

- Samuel W. Tucker Elementary School*
- Jefferson-Houston K-8 School
- Cora Kelly School for Math, Science and Technology
- Lyles-Crouch Traditional Academy
- Mount Vernon Community School*
- George Washington Middle Schools 1 and 2
- Francis C. Hammond Middle Schools 1, 2, and 3
- T.C. Williams High School

*Samuel W. Tucker Elementary School and Mount Vernon Community School already open before Labor Day, as these schools were approved by the Virginia Board of Education in 2004 and 2005 to operate on a Modified School Calendar as year-round schools.

The school division is requesting the waiver in order to facilitate the implementation of numerous innovative programs ACPS is initiating to help schools meet state and federal standards:

- To increase learning time for students;
- To better connect professional learning with the school calendar by creating additional professional learning time and reducing the amount of time teachers are pulled from classrooms;
- To provide time for teachers to work on school education goals and their Individual Professional Learning Plans; and
- To provide professional opportunities for teachers to update Individual Achievement Plans for students as part of the transformation model for school improvement as an option under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

The Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) have 11,999 students with thirteen elementary schools, five middle schools, and one high school. Students come from more than a hundred different countries and speak 65 native languages. Fifty-two percent of ACPS students are eligible for free or reduced price meals, and three schools have more than 70 percent of their students classified as disadvantaged. About 21.5 percent of the students receive English Language Learner (ELL) services. ACPS also has a highly mobile population, with some immigrant students entering the system in middle or high school with little formal education in any language. ACPS currently has 1,661 students, or 13.8 percent, receiving special education.

T.C. Williams High School, the school division's only high school, has been federally designated as a Persistently Lowest Achieving High School and has adopted the Transformation Model of Improvement. It has not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) since 2002 when Congress amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Twelve other schools did not make AYP in the 2010-2011 school year. Eighteen of the 19 schools are fully accredited. Jefferson-Houston Elementary School is warned in English and history.

The school division's on-time graduation rate (students who enter 9th grade and finish within four years) is currently 79 percent, compared to the statewide average of 85.5 percent for the class of 2010.

In March 2009, the Alexandria City School Board, adopted a strategic plan that commits to "Set[ting] the international standards for educational excellence, where all students achieve their potential and

actively contribute to our local and global communities.” The School Board further declared “We will achieve our vision as we provide the environment, resources, and commitment to ensure that each and every student succeeds – academically, emotionally, physically, and socially.” The school board and administration have also pledged to ensure that all students graduate prepared for college or higher learning if that is their choice.

In its request, ACPS indicates that it has begun an assertive transformation of its schools and central office. When T.C. Williams High School was designated as one of Virginia’s Persistently Lowest Achieving Schools, the Transformation Model that was put into place recognized that teachers are the core to school improvement. The following transformation efforts are being implemented:

- Hiring additional high school counselors to adjust the student load from 260 to about 180;
- Hiring additional middle and high school mathematics and English teachers to enable these teachers to provide individualized instruction and interventions for at-risk students;
- Creating Individual Learning Plans for every middle and high school student in mathematics and language arts and providing additional tutoring for students;
- Requiring Professional Learning Plans for every licensed employee and providing enhanced professional development and coaching for teachers;
- Transforming the two large middle schools into five smaller schools to create more personalized and customized learning environments; and
- Creating limits on elementary class size.

In its request, ACPS proposes to provide more time for learning to all students with the following actions:

- The 2011-2012 school year would begin on August 29, 2011, and end on June 15, 2012, which would allow ACPS to offer five days of instruction prior to Labor Day.
- ACPS plans to add two instructional days to the school calendar, increasing the number of instructional days from 183 to 185, as part of the larger effort to increase instructional time.
- ACPS also plans to use other strategies to maximize student time in the classroom, such as adding teacher work days for professional development rather than pulling teachers out of class for professional development and reducing half-day classes.
- ACPS has recently adopted a new policy to hold elementary summer school the first two weeks of August, rather than immediately after the end of the school year, to prepare students better for the upcoming school year.

A copy of the complete package submitted by the ACPS School Board is attached.

Superintendent's Recommendation: The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education accept the request from Alexandria City Public Schools for first review, pursuant to the provisions of [§22.1-79.1](#) of the *Code of Virginia*.

Impact on Resources: The impact on resources is not expected to be significant.

Timetable for Further Review/Action: The request will be presented to the Board of Education for final review at the April 28, 2011 meeting.

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
BOARD OF EDUCATION
P.O. Box 2120
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23218-2120

REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF CERTAIN ACCREDITING STANDARDS
AND/OR APPROVAL
OF AN INNOVATIVE OR EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM

The *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*, (8 VAC 20-131-10 et seq.) set the minimum standards public schools must meet to be accredited by the Board of Education. Accreditation of public schools is required by the Standards of Quality (§§ 22.1-253.13:1 et seq.). The annual accrediting cycle for public schools is July 1 through June 30.

This cover sheet, with the supporting documentation, must be submitted to the Department of Education for review and recommendation to the board at least 90 days prior to the beginning of an accrediting cycle or the proposed implementation of the program or activity that precipitates the request for the waiver. The types of waivers available and the corresponding section of the standards are indicated below. Please attach additional sheets or information deemed appropriate. [The board will consider this request in its monthly meeting and school divisions may be requested to appear before the board to explain a waiver request.]

SCHOOL DIVISION Alexandria City Public Schools (101)

TITLE OF PROGRAM/ACTIVITY Early opening Waiver for all ACPS Schools

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: to "facilitate the implementation of numerous innovative academic programs that ACPS is initiating to help all schools meet federal and state standards"

- Approval of an Alternative to the Standard School Year and School Day (8 VAC 20-131-150)
 - Approval of an Alternative Accreditation Plan (8 VAC 20-131-280.D)
 - Approval of an Experimental Program (8 VAC 20-131-290.D)
 - Approval of an Innovative Program (8 VAC 20-131-290.D)
 - Approval of a Waiver of Other Provision(s) of the Standards (8 VAC 20-131-330) (Complete Pages 1 and 3 of the application only.)
- Explanation attached*

SCHOOL(S) INVOLVED IN THE PROPOSED PROGRAM/ACTIVITY All ACPS schools - listed in the attachment

March 3, 2011
Date Approved
by the Local School Board

[Signature]
Signature
Chairman of the School Board

March 4, 2011
Submission Date

[Signature]
Signature
Division Superintendent

SCHOOL DIVISION

Alexandria City Public Schools (101)

TITLE OF PROGRAM/ACTIVITY An earlier start will facilitate a number of innovative programs, some of which are required. TC Williams is a Persistently Lowest Achieving School and thus has adopted the Transformation Model of improvement. We are applying for the International Baccalaureate Programme for two elementary schools and for the middle schools, necessitating much collaborative planning. Exemplary programs such as CETA, MindUp, Habits of Mind and AVID (described in the attached application) each require significant training of teachers. We hope to reduce the amount of time that teachers are pulled from class by working in more days for professional development during the year. These are only some of the examples.

IF THE PROPOSED PROGRAM IS EXPERIMENTAL OR INNOVATIVE, EXPLAIN HOW THIS IS SO AND PROVIDE A PROGRAM DESCRIPTION, INCLUDING THE TYPE OF PROGRAM, ITS PURPOSE, THE GRADES SERVED, DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION DESCRIBING THE STUDENTS WHO WILL BE ATTENDING, THE RATIONALE FOR THE PROGRAM, THE PROGRAM'S GOALS, EVALUATION PROCEDURES, AND OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

See the attached application for full details. The early opening waiver is requested for the entire school division. Fifty-two percent of ACPS students are disadvantaged. It is a highly mobile population. More than thirty percent are Hispanic, and 21.5 percent receive ELL services. Some of our schools, including the high school, have never made Adequate Yearly Progress.

The required transformation of TC Williams, because of the PLA designation, indicates the need for some transformation and innovations throughout the school system, all of which require additional teacher training. One important innovation is the creation of Individual Achievement Plans for every middle and high school students in math and language arts. IAPs are also being developed for "at risk" students in the elementary schools. This individualized approach requires days interspersed throughout the year for the IAP student-led conferences. Teachers' professional development will be guided by Professional Learning Plans (PLPs). We assert that the extensive use of IAPs and PLPs is highly innovative. ACPS is also developing professional learning teams in each school. More details are in the attached application.

DOES THE PROGRAM REQUIRE THAT SCHOOLS IN THE DIVISION OPEN PRIOR TO LABOR DAY? Yes

IF YES, EXPLAIN WHY.

Details are in the application. In brief,

- Additional days of meaningful instruction before spring SOL testing by adding two days to the calendar and by pushing more instructional time to early in the year, so that students will gain more than two days of instruction before tests
- More meaningful professional development throughout the year rather than "front loaded"

IF THE PROGRAM IS EXPERIMENTAL, INCLUDE INFORMATION THAT EXPLAINS WHY THERE IS REASON TO EXPECT THAT THE PROGRAM WILL BE SUCCESSFUL.

The programs being implemented are not experimental. They are tried and tested throughout the country. They are, however, innovative, particularly in Alexandria City Public Schools. The only aspects of the innovations that might be considered experimental are the Individual Achievement Plans implemented for

so many students. Already, anecdotal evidence indicates that they will be successful, as does the extremely high rate of participation by parents and guardians in the conferences...more than 90 percent. The conferences are student-led, student centered, and goal oriented. Parents have expressed appreciation for this approach.

DESCRIBE THE ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OF THE PROGRAM(S)

We anticipate that all schools will become fully accredited and make AYP

We anticipate that the dropout rate will be reduced.

We anticipate significantly higher student achievement.

We anticipate a better-trained staff of teachers, engaged in professional learning communities that nurture the development of teachers and students alike.

IF YOU ARE SEEKING A WAIVER OF A PROVISION OR PROVISIONS OF THE ACCREDITING STANDARDS, STATE THE PROVISION AND THE RATIONALE FOR SEEING A WAIVER FOR EACH.

Not applicable

DESCRIBE THE PROCEDURES THAT WILL BE USED TO EVALUATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE WAIVER/PROGRAM/ACTIVITY. (Include information that includes measurable goals, objectives, and student academic achievement that will be expected as a result of the implementation of the program/activity.)

The early start of school will provide an opportunity for innovation. As such, the evaluative component of the effort takes a constructivist bent in capturing the process aspects of the endeavor, as well as its summative outcomes. With the concurrent initiation of multiphase efforts to transform, not only our PLA designated T.C. Williams, but our entire school system, many disparate threads of action must be denoted. The bottom line, however, is that time is a critical variable.

Ultimately, the most compelling evaluative criteria revolve around the improved achievement of Alexandria's students. Presently, every ACPS AYP subgroup, save whites, score below their State counterparts on the VSAP. By the end of the 2011-12 school year, the 2009-10 reading and mathematics gaps between ACPS subgroups and their equivalents will have been reduced by at least one half (presently only black students in reading equal their colleagues.).

Surveys will be conducted during the coming school year to determine how staff and students are using the additional time. ACPS has conducted investigations of this sort in the past (see for example the report entitled Lengthened School Day Survey at <http://www.acps.k12.va.us/mes/reports/20100828-lengthened-school-day-full.pdf> where nearly 500 staff responded to survey items involving the lengthen school day (made necessary by snow closings in the 2009-10 school year). From proven survey methodology, best practices will be gleaned and replicated in other settings.

The rollout of the Schoolnet software, which is a management information and assessment system, means additional needed staff training time, but also means that a wealth of discrete data will now be available not only to administrators, but to the classroom teacher. Implementation of this software will allow tracking of newly developed (again as a function of more time) formative assessments that are better aligned to the SOLs and to our emerging new curricula. This system will move us toward diagnosis of student achievement issues rather than autopsy. By the end of 2011-12, every teacher will have been trained to bring up an achievement and affective snapshot of her students.

The reformatted Title I Quarterly reports will be a vehicle for reflective school-level discussions and growth. By capturing unique or individualized indicators for the schools in Title I improvement, these newly customized Quarterly Reports will be another medium for transformation. Again, time is the variable that will permit these in-depth contemplations to occur, grow, and eventually help students to achieve.

The first national database of schools that have added learning time to their schedules, which was released in December 2009, suggests that the extra time might play a role in boosting middle and high school achievement. The National Center on Time & Learning, which assembled and analyzed the database, found a moderate association between increased time and how well students did on their states' standardized English and mathematics tests compared with their peers in nearby schools on regular schedules.

Time is not a panacea, it is a present.

Number of students involved in the program: Official enrollment this year is 11,999. Projections indicate it will be higher next year.

What is the anticipated length of the program or duration of the waiver? ACPS seeks an early opening waiver for the 2011-12 school year. We expect to repeat the request each year.

This application and supporting documentation must be sent to:

Division of Policy and Communications
Department of Education
P.O. Box 2120
Richmond, VA 23218-2120

Remarks by Alexandria School Board Chairman, Yvonne Folkerts, after unanimous adoption of the early Opening Waiver Request, March 3, 2011.

I am glad the resolution, calling for a waiver from the State Board of Education to open ACPS before Labor Day, has passed.

I appreciate the input we received from parents, teachers and other interested community members. Each Board member takes seriously the views of the community on each matter that comes before us.

I acknowledge this issue was not without some initial controversy. And, I acknowledge that if State Board of Education approves our request, this calendar will inconvenience many families and ACPS employees who have already made summer plans.

Yet as elected officials, we are required to do what we believe is best for the school division – even if it imposes hardships on some and benefits for others.

This vote is another change for ACPS, and one that I believe will benefit our students – whether they be our highest-achieving students, or our students on the verge of dropping out, or every student in between. Adding time to our calendar will help our students with more in-class time before AP and other exams. This calendar will also allow our teachers to be in their classrooms more – and pulled out less for professional development. This is a fair, and frequent complaint of teachers that we are trying to address.

Dr. Sherman initially proposed this waiver to the School Board because the state has requested ACPS add more time to its calendar, as part of its oversight of moving TC Williams out of its persistently-lowest achieving status.

This vote signals we are responding to a state request, we are moving forward, and we are working to do what is right for our students.

Executive Summary

The modified school calendar (MSC) was implemented at Samuel Tucker Elementary School (Tucker) in 2004-05 and at Mount Vernon Community School (Mount Vernon) in 2005-06. This report briefly summarizes some of the relevant literature on the MSC, recapitulates discussions with Tucker and Mount Vernon school staff, and compares student test scores for MSC schools with the division and the state. The student data are also disaggregated by the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) subgroups outlined in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. While this report provides an overview of the two MSC schools and offers a snapshot of current performance and some insight into the differences, a more extensive evaluation is highly recommended. The report concludes with a list of recommendations intended to improve planning, operations, and implementation of Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) division-wide initiatives at the two MSC schools.

Staff at both MSC schools indicated the importance of having ACPS Central Office support for intersession planning and operations and throughout the entire year. Both MSC schools had participation rates of over 96 percent of all students in the fall 2010 intersession.

Review of test results indicated that Tucker tended to outperform the division and state in nearly all measures. For Mount Vernon, the White subgroup tended to outperform the division and state in nearly all indicators; however, the Hispanic, Meal Status, and Limited English Proficient subgroups tended to be roughly on par with the division and well below Tucker and the state. Given the demographics at Tucker and Mount Vernon, it is all the more impressive that Tucker tended to outperform the division and the state and that Mount Vernon was roughly on par with the division. It is also helpful to consider that Mount Vernon had larger proportions of Hispanic, Special Education and Limited English Proficient students than Tucker or the division. These AYP subgroups tend to have greater proportions of at-risk students (i.e., students who fail the SOL tests).

With the three intersessions included, most MSC students benefit from having an additional 25 days of instruction. However, challenges tended to arise due to MSC schools being out of sync with the rest of the division (see Appendix 1 for a side-by-side comparison of the MSC and traditional school calendars for the 2010-11 academic year). In conclusion, there are a number of key differences between the two MSC schools, which include the student populations, the staff culture, and school facilities.

Recommendations

- Recommendation 1: Modify the calendar to eliminate a five-day intersession.
- Recommendation 2: Have ACPS Central Office develop an intersession policy and procedures manual.
- Recommendation 3: Increase ACPS Central Office awareness of MSC schedules and support needs.
- Recommendation 4: Increase ACPS Central Office support for planning and running intersessions.
- Recommendation 5: Coordinate and plan professional development to include the MSC staff.

RESOLUTION TO REQUEST SCHOOL CALENDAR WAIVER
PURSUANT TO VA. CODE §22.1-79.1

Whereas the Code of Virginia provides generally that local school division calendars shall be set so as to provide that the school year begins after Labor Day; *and*

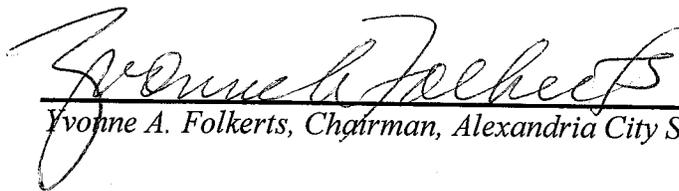
Whereas the Code of Virginia further provides that for good cause, the Virginia Board of Education may, upon the application of a local school board, waive this requirement; *and*

Whereas after careful study, review and consideration, and with the recommendation of the Division Superintendent, the Alexandria City School Board has determined that such a waiver would facilitate the implementation of numerous innovative academic programs that Alexandria City Public Schools is initiating to help all of its schools meet federal and state standards.

Therefore, be it resolved that the Alexandria City School Board:

- a) *Certifies that its request for a calendar waiver pursuant to Va. Code §22.1-79.1 meets the "good cause" requirements of Va. Code §22.1-79.1(B)(3); and*
- b) *Authorizes the Division Superintendent to take those actions necessary to request from the Virginia State Board of Education a school calendar waiver pursuant to Va. Code §22.1-79.1, allowing all schools within the Alexandria City Public Schools not already on a modified calendar to open prior to Labor Day 2011 for the 2011-12 school year.*

So resolved this the 3rd day of March, 2011.



Yvonne A. Folkerts, Chairman, Alexandria City School Board

March 2, 2011

**FROM: Alexandria City Public Schools
Morton Sherman, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools**

TO: The Virginia Board of Education

RE: Request for Waiver to Begin School Before Labor Day

Background

Section 22.1-79.1 of the *Code of Virginia* prohibits local school boards from adopting a school calendar that requires schools to open prior to Labor Day unless a waiver is granted by the Virginia Board of Education for “good cause.” The conditions under which the State Board of Education may grant such waivers are outlined in the *Code*.

Summary of Major Elements of the Application

The Alexandria City School Board is requesting approval for all Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) to open prior to Labor Day. These schools include: T.C. Williams High School; George Washington Middle School #1; George Washington Middle School #2; Francis C. Hammond Middle Schools # 1, #2, and #3; and thirteen elementary schools: John Adams, Charles Barrett, Patrick Henry, Jefferson-Houston, Cora Kelly School for Math, Science, and Technology, Lyles-Crouch Traditional Academy, Douglas MacArthur, George Mason, Matthew Maury, Mount Vernon Community School, James K. Polk, William Ramsay, Samuel W. Tucker. (Note: Mount Vernon and Samuel Tucker already open before Labor Day, as they are on a Modified School Calendar.)

The waiver request is based on academic reasons and on the fact that the waiver would facilitate the implementation of numerous innovative programs ACPS is initiating to help our schools meet federal and state standards:

- To increase learning time for students
- To better connect professional learning with the school calendar by creating additional professional learning time by reducing the amount of time teachers are pulled from classrooms
- To provide time for teachers to work on school education goals and their individual Professional Learning Plans
- To provide professional opportunities to update Individual Achievement Plans for our students as part of the Transformation Model for school improvement as an option under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

The Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) have 11,999 students with thirteen elementary schools, five middle schools, and one high school. ACPS is a diverse school division, with a student population that includes 34 percent Black, 30.7 percent Hispanic, 25 percent White, 5 percent Asian Pacific. Students come from more than a hundred different countries and speak 65 native languages. Fifty-two percent of ACPS students are eligible for free or reduced price meals, and three schools have more than 70 percent of students who are classified as disadvantaged. About 21.5 percent receive English Language Learner (ELL) services. ACPS also has a highly mobile population, with some immigrant students entering the system in middle or high school with little formal education in any language.

T.C. Williams High School has been designated as a Persistently Lowest Achieving High School and has adopted the Transformation Model of Improvement. T.C. Williams High School has not made Adequate Yearly Progress since the federal law went into effect in 2002; and, in fact, has a long record of under-serving significant portions of our school population. Twelve of nineteen schools did not make Adequate Yearly Progress under No Child Left Behind this past year. Several schools have been under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) sanctions for years. (Attached is Schools Not Making AYP for 2010-11)

ACPS student demographics clearly indicate that ACPS is very different from its school division colleagues in Virginia. Very few school divisions in the country have high percentages of both ELL students and disadvantaged students, as well as a sizeable percentage of special education students. ACPS currently has 1,661 students receiving special education services, or 13.8%. ACPS welcomes the challenge, responsibility, and the opportunity presented to us with this diverse student population.

ACPS is fortunate to have a long tradition of success for many of our students and a firm foundation on which to build, while welcoming the ongoing challenge of creating a school division well steeped in and responsive to the expectations of 21st century learning. Recent Standards of Learning (SOL) results indicate that reading scores for white 4th graders are at the top of the state. However, overall reading scores for 4th graders fall slightly below the state average. ACPS 4th graders who are Latino score in the bottom fourth in the state. The average overall percent passing 8th grade math SOL ranks in the bottom fourth in the state. The same is true for the 2010 Algebra I End-of-Course SOL. More time for instruction and more skilled teaching (time for professional development) are needed.

Overall in the Alexandria City Schools, all groups of students have made improvements in recent years, although only one NCLB category of students stays above the average of their counterparts in Virginia: white students, who constitute about 25 percent of the student body. The on-time graduation rate (students who enter 9th grade finishing within four years) is currently only 79 percent, with ELL students at 68 percent and Hispanic students, in particular, at 69 percent.

Strategies in Place to Improve Student Achievement

The Alexandria City School Board, in March 2009, adopted a strategic plan that commits to “Set the international standard for educational excellence, where all students achieve their potential and actively contribute to our local and global communities.” The School Board further declared, “We will achieve our vision as we provide the environment, resources, and commitment to ensure that each and every student succeeds—academically, emotionally, physically, and socially.”

ACPS has firmly committed to the development of The Whole Child. Each school has adopted an exemplary program that aims to create well-balanced, healthy students, in the belief that this contributes to academic achievement. Some examples of the strategies ACPS has embraced that enrich the lives of our students are:

- Changing Education Through the Arts (CETA), a cooperative program with the Kennedy Center, which incorporates the fine arts into academic instruction
- Habits of Mind, which help to develop a student’s thinking skills, with emphasis on metacognitive processes.
- MindUp which emphasizes the Optimistic Classroom and the development of confidence and calm (curriculum to be published by Scholastic this fall)
- Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Program
- International Baccalaureate Programme
- Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)
- Core Knowledge Curriculum (in cooperation with the University of Virginia)

While one goal is to demonstrate academic success on traditional testing procedures, the challenge for 21st century teachers is to adhere to required guidelines while also allowing for spontaneity, curiosity, adventure, exploration, and fun.

The Alexandria School Board and administration have also pledged to ensure that all students graduate prepared for college or higher learning if that is their choice. No student should fail to achieve in college because he or she was not prepared adequately in high school. Thus, an emphasis this year is placed on the five key college preparation competencies:

1. reading comprehension,
2. writing to promote post-secondary success,
3. data analysis and interpretation,
4. discourse within the disciplines,
5. speaking and listening.

Very specific professional learning must take place to prepare teachers to embrace these new strategies, which in turn lead to more active and participatory learning. Development of creative thinking and higher order thinking skills is, we believe, the best way to ensure that students do well on required tests, whether SOL, SAT, AP, or any

other. Thus, significant time throughout the year for professional development is a hallmark of this proposal.

ACPS goals for the proposal to begin school early and add to the time for student learning and professional development are:

- High levels of learning for all students
- Personalized and customized instruction
- Exemplary levels of respect and responsibility for oneself and others among staff and students.

The good news is that, building on historical strengths, over the past three years ACPS has seen division-wide SOL improvement in every NCLB student category and a slight decrease in the achievement gaps. Since Superintendent Morton Sherman started as ACPS Superintendent in 2008, ACPS has created several structural and conditional changes to enhance learning, such as maintaining some of the smallest class sizes in the region. Advanced Placement participation and test scores and middle school participation in world languages are at all-time highs. Through aggressive placement efforts, 8th grade Algebra I participation has increased dramatically.

ACPS has begun an assertive transformation of its schools and central office. When T.C. Williams, Alexandria's only public high school, was designated as one of Virginia's Persistently Lowest Achieving Schools, the Transformation Model put into place recognized that teachers are the core to school improvement. The reality that T.C. Williams has never made the federal NCLB standards compelled change. With the support, professionalism, and energy of our teachers and staff, significant transformation efforts are being implemented this year. Efforts include:

- Hiring additional high school counselors to reduce the student load from 260 to about 180
- Hiring additional middle and high school math and English teachers to enable these teachers to provide individualized instruction and interventions for "at promise" students (The term often used is "at risk." In ACPS we refer to "at promise" students as those who are not achieving up to their ability or fulfilling their promise.)
- Creating Individual Achievement Plans for every middle and high school student in math and language arts
- Requiring Professional Learning Plans for every licensed employee
- Providing a Professional Learning Center and enhanced coaching for teachers
- Providing training in The Skillful Teacher and The Skillful Leader (Research for Better Teaching)
- Opening a High School Saturday Academy, where additional tutoring by qualified instructors is provided
- Creating Secondary Math and Writing Centers that offer tutoring by licensed teachers throughout the day and after school

- Establishing partnerships with several organizations and experts in their fields, including:
 - Writer’s Project of Columbia Teachers College
 - Dr. Lucy West (coaching)
 - Conspiracy to Succeed and the Tripod Model: led by Dr. Ron Ferguson, Harvard University
 - The National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST - Staff from Stanford and Columbia Universities)
 - Dr. Jon Saphier, Research for Better Teaching

Transformation of the two large middle schools into five smaller schools was designed to create more personalized and customized learning environments. For example, ACPS introduced the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) Program to boost achievement of the so-called “middle achievers,” those students who do average work, or prove at risk to fall behind but also have the potential to do much better. The Middle Years International Baccalaureate Programme (IB) is being introduced in all middle schools.

The creation of limits on elementary class size through a Board policy is a proud and important counter to what is happening across the country given difficult economic conditions. The increase in licensed staff and the prudent fiscal management of budgets which have remained flat over three years are all deliberate efforts to focus limited resources. Each of these decisions is designed to give teachers a fighting chance to help our students learn, because real transformation must start at the teacher and classroom level.

Specifics of the Proposal

ACPS proposes to provide more learning time to students with these actions:

- Begin the school year on August 29. This would allow the division to add two extra student days (14 ½ hours) as part of the larger effort to increase instructional time. The last day of school will be June 15 in 2012.
- Also, by use of other strategies, such as use of Individual Achievement Plans (IAPs) instead of secondary release time for student conferences, reduction of half-days during and at the end of the school year, and addition of teacher work days during the school year rather than pulling teachers out of class for professional development, even more student time can be added. The start before Labor Day allows ACPS to “stretch” the calendar, add student days, and return approximately four additional days of instructional time *in addition to* increasing the school year from 183 days to 185 days. This adds at least six days to instruction, all before SOL testing.
- Elementary school summer learning will take place during the first two weeks of August and will be specifically tied to the schools students attend and their

specific learning needs to prepare them for the school year. Summer learning is intended to offer remedial instruction for students to better prepare them for the next grade level or who have not successfully completed required courses. A recently adopted practice is to hold elementary summer school just before the next school year, rather than at the end of the year and to locate the learning at the school that the child will attend, rather than at a central location.

ACPS proposes to provide more time for teacher reflection, collaboration, and professional development with these actions:

- A recommendation has been made to the School Board to increase the number of teachers' hours by more than 20 hours, besides adding the two instructional days. The local teachers association and the Committee for Compensation and Benefits Review have endorsed this proposal. A community and staff survey indicated support for the proposal.
- Full days for professional development/collaboration are interspersed throughout the year.

Areas to Be Addressed in Additional Professional Development

- Required instructional focus areas:
 - Differentiation of instruction for all learners at all levels, with particular attention to students with disabilities and English Language Learners in Inclusive Learning Environments.
 - Formative Assessments to support continual student learning growth
 - High levels of achievement for all students
- Curriculum/Content focus areas:
 - Developing Career and College Readiness Skills for 21st-century learners in the following areas:
 - Writing college-ready essays
 - Reading and analyzing complex text
 - Using data and evidence in all subjects
 - Developing discipline-based Inquiry
 - Speaking and Listening
- Relationships focus areas:
 - Respect and responsibility
 - Cultural competence
 - Civic responsibility

Principals will be required to be involved in professional development to administer effective, fair, objective and consistent teacher evaluations.

- Assessing teacher performance and evaluating education professionals are about more than just test scores.

- Professional evaluations of teachers must include opportunity for demonstration of data and evidence of student growth, and should provide opportunity for peer and team collaboration.

Reasons for Additional Days Occurring Prior to Labor Day

- The timing would provide additional meaningful student learning time before Standards of Learning and Advanced Placement exams. Used wisely and well, the additional student time will provide opportunity to enhance learning for all students; thus, blow away the ceiling and raise the floor through personalized and customized education.
- In 2011, all teachers would report during the week of August 22 and all new teachers during the week of August 15. This training/planning time would not be “front-loaded” as in the past. More meaningful professional development and collaboration would come during the course of the school year, for reflection upon specific students and specific student Individual Achievement Plans and for teachers to work on their Professional Learning Plans (PLP), which are tied to student performance.
- Two ACPS elementary schools, Mount Vernon Community School and Samuel W. Tucker Elementary School, are already on a modified calendar and these schools normally begin in July or the first week of August. Samuel Tucker, with a highly mobile student population with many students qualifying for free and reduced price lunch, is among our best performing schools. Samuel Tucker is fully accredited and has always made Adequate Yearly Progress. In 2005, after the first year of Tucker’s modified calendar, the Office of Monitoring and Evaluation conducted an evaluation and concluded that the school met or surpassed all of the anticipated outcomes. ACPS is working to bring Mount Vernon’s scores to the level of Tucker’s, as it builds on exceptional community support for Mount Vernon Community School. Typical attendance for the intersessions at **both** schools is more than 95 percent. ACPS plans an updated evaluation of the effectiveness of both modified calendar schools within the next year.
- An additional five days of instruction before Labor Day will add 36 hours of instruction before state testing and many hours of additional professional development that proves more meaningful, occurring during the school year so that review of data and necessary adjustments can occur.

Obviously, simply adding days to the school calendar or minutes to the school day are not sufficient measures to improve student learning, though the added time is the essence of our proposal/request. Additional time must be matched with quality instruction gained through revised and improved professional development, teacher evaluation, and student assessment. Since a highly qualified teacher is the most important factor in a student’s

success, it follows that having integrated frequent professional development days imbedded in the calendar would positively impact student achievement. Adding these days would not be possible without beginning the school year before Labor Day.

Due to the impact that approval could have on the budget and the need for planning and early notification of the community, we request approval at first review for a waiver to begin school before Labor Day for innovative changes to our academic program.

Note: The Alexandria City School Board voted unanimously on March 3, 2011, to submit this waiver request to the Virginia Board of Education.

Preliminary Alexandria City Public Schools Accreditation & AYP Status by School for the 2010-11 School Year

The school accreditation and AYP statuses, as shown below, are based on VSAP test results from the 2009-10 school year. Eighteen of 19 schools are fully accredited. One school is accredited with warning. Six of 19 schools made AYP. Six of 19 schools are fully accredited and made AYP.

SCHOOL NAME	2010-11 ACCREDITATION STATUS	2010-11 AYP STATUS
JOHN ADAMS ELEMENTARY	Fully Accredited	Did not Make AYP
CHARLES BARRETT ELEMENTARY	Fully Accredited	Made AYP
PATRICK HENRY ELEMENTARY	Fully Accredited	Made AYP
JEFFERSON-HOUSTON ELEMENTARY	Warned in English and History	Did not Make AYP
CORA KELLY MAGNET ELEMENTARY	Fully Accredited	Did not Make AYP
LYLES-CROUCH ELEMENTARY	Fully Accredited	Made AYP
DOUGLAS MACARTHUR ELEMENTARY	Fully Accredited	Did not Make AYP
GEORGE MASON ELEMENTARY	Fully Accredited	Made AYP
MAURY ELEMENTARY	Fully Accredited	Did not Make AYP
MOUNT VERNON ELEMENTARY	Fully Accredited	Did not Make AYP
JAMES K. POLK ELEMENTARY	Fully Accredited	Made AYP
WILLIAM RAMSAY ELEMENTARY	Fully Accredited	Did not Make AYP
SAMUEL W. TUCKER ELEMENTARY	Fully Accredited	Made AYP
FRANCIS C HAMMOND 1 MIDDLE	Fully Accredited	Did not Make AYP
FRANCIS C HAMMOND 2 MIDDLE	Fully Accredited	Did not Make AYP
FRANCIS C HAMMOND 3 MIDDLE	Fully Accredited	Did not Make AYP
GEORGE WASHINGTON 1 MIDDLE	Fully Accredited	Did not Make AYP
GEORGE WASHINGTON 2 MIDDLE	Fully Accredited	Did not Make AYP
T. C. WILLIAMS HIGH	Fully Accredited	Did not Make AYP
DIVISION	NA	Did not Make AYP

Accreditation Benchmarks

Subject	Grade 3	Grade 4-5	Grades 6-12
English	75%	75%	70%
Math	70%	70%	70%
Science	50%	70%	70%
History	50%	70%	70%

The AYP benchmarks for Virginia's tests administered in 2009-2010 were: English: 85% and Mathematics: 83%.
The AYP benchmarks for Virginia's tests to be administered in 2010-2011 will be: English: 89% and Mathematics: 87%.

Four Year Cohort On-Time Graduation Rates, 2008, 2009 & 2010
 Alexandria City Public Schools
 Graduation Percentages for No Child Left Behind Subgroups

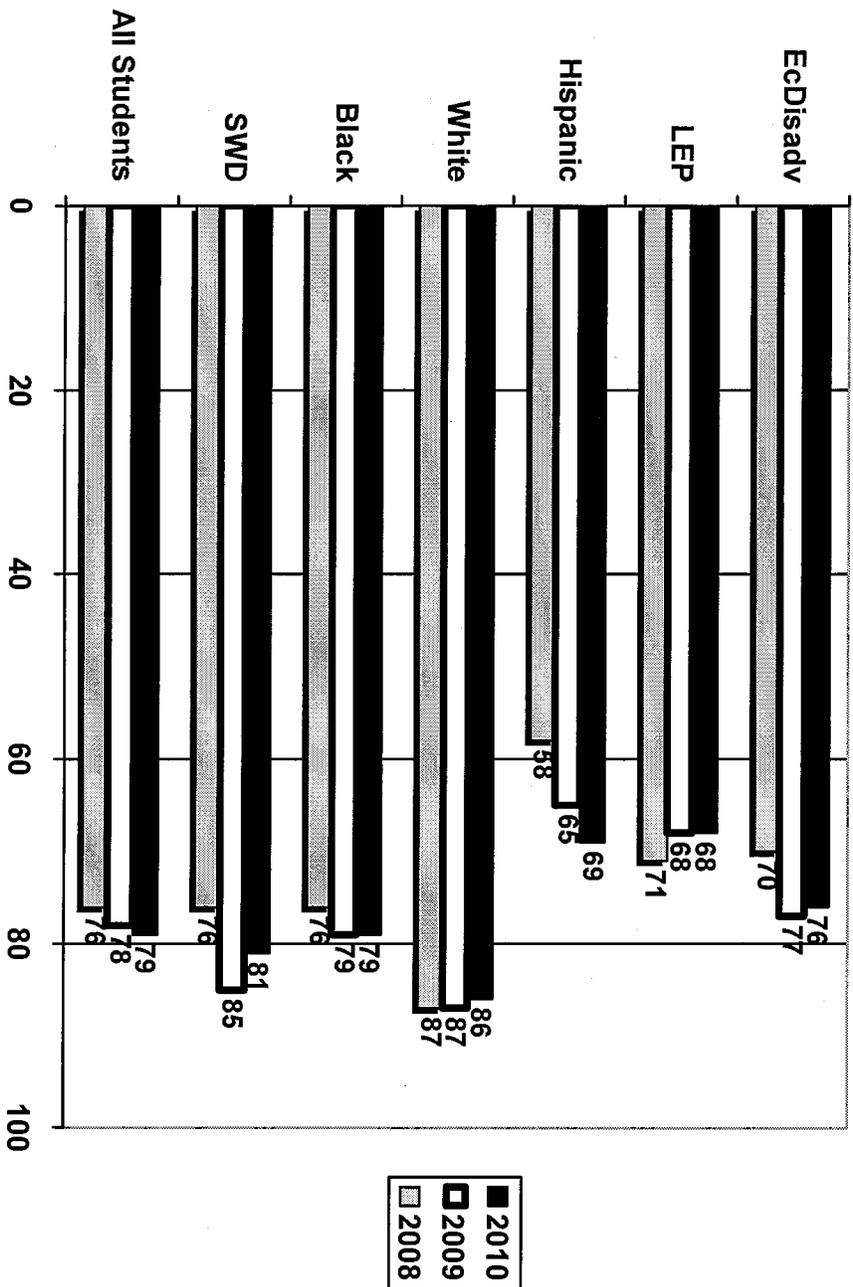


Figure 1