| **Virginia Board of Education Agenda Item** | **Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia** |
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# Agenda Item: F

## Date: April 26, 2018

### Title: First Review of Request for Approval of an Innovative Program Opening Prior to Labor Day (Year-Round Schools) for Chesterfield County Public Schools’ Bellwood Elementary School

#### Presenter: Mr. Zachary Robbins, Director of Policy

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## Purpose of Presentation:

Action required by state or federal law or regulation.

## Executive Summary:

Chesterfield County Public Schools (CCPS) requests a waiver to permit Bellwood Elementary School to open before Labor Day to allow an innovative program to be implemented, specifically, a year-round school.

Section 22.1-79.1 of the *Code of Virginia* requires local school divisions to set their calendars so that the first day of school each year is no earlier than the day after Labor Day, unless a waiver is provided for the Board of Education for certain reasons provided in law. One permissible reason for which the Board may grant a waiver is to allow a school division to implement an innovative program, including an instructional program offered on a year-round basis. These waivers would only be applicable to the individual school where the innovative program is being implemented.

CCPS received a $50,000 grant from VDOE to assist with planning and consideration of transitioning as many as three of its schools with high percentages of economically disadvantaged students to a year-round schedule. CCPS plans to implement the pilot program at Bellwood Elementary, and possibly expand to two other schools in the future.

CCPS’s proposal is intended to reduce “summer learning loss,” which research shows is more acute among economically disadvantaged students. The division proposes four instructional quarters of about 45 days with breaks of about fifteen days each. These breaks also would provide opportunities for students to participate in programs of remediation, enrichment, or extracurricular activities. CCPS has developed measurable objectives to evaluate the success of the year-round program based on student progress in reading assessments for grades two through five.

This request is consistent with relevant state law, and Board of Education-approved guidelines related to the approval of innovative programs.

This request aligns with several of the goals identified in the Board of Education’s *Comprehensive Plan* that are intended to promote high-quality, effective learning environments for all students, and to foster continuous improvement in schools to benefit all students. Specifically, the *Plan* guides the Board to “[a]dvance policies that expand equitable learning opportunities with access to a variety of learning platforms, courses and programs…” and to “[r]eview and identify best practices, and promising approaches that would benefit local school divisions.”

## Action Requested:

Action will be requested at a future meeting. Specify anticipated date below:

June 28, 2018

## Superintendent’s Recommendation:

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends the Board of Education receive this request for first review.

## Previous Review or Action:

No previous review or action.

## **Background Information and Statutory Authority:**

Chesterfield County Public Schools (CCPS) requests a waiver to permit Bellwood Elementary School to open before Labor Day. CCPS plans to implement an innovative program at this school, specifically, a year-round school.

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 include the implementation of innovative programs, including year-round schools, and are outlined in the *Code,* which states, in part:

§ 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 of subsection B.

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

1. A school division has been closed an average of eight days per year during any five of the last 10 years because of severe weather conditions, energy shortages, power failures, or other emergency situations;

2. A school division is providing, in the school year for which the waiver is sought, an instructional program or programs in one or more of its elementary or middle or high schools, excluding Virtual Virginia, which are dependent on and provided in one or more elementary or middle or high schools of another school division that qualifies for such waiver. However, any waiver granted by the Board of Education pursuant to this subdivision shall only apply to the opening date for those schools where such dependent programs are provided;

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; or

4. A school division is entirely surrounded by a school division that has an opening date prior to Labor Day in the school year for which the waiver is sought. Such school division may open schools on the same opening date as the surrounding school division…

In 2013, the Board approved guidelines for consideration of Pre-Labor Day opening requests, including the approval of innovative programs. Those guidelines are attached.

For the 2017-2018 school year, four school divisions (three percent) had one or more schools open prior to Labor Day pursuant to a waiver for innovative or experimental programs, and 82 school divisions (62 percent) opened prior to Labor Day for one of the other reasons permitted by law. In the same year, 47 school divisions (35 percent) did not open prior to Labor Day.

*Background.* Chesterfield County Public Schools (CCPS) requests a waiver to permit Bellwood Elementary School to open before Labor Day to allow an innovative program to be implemented, specifically, a year-round school.

Since 2013, the *Appropriation Act* has included funds for planning grants of up to $50,000 per school division to assist with preparations for new year-round school programs, in support of findings from the 2012 Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) report, [Review of Year Round Schools.](http://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/reports/Rpt430.pdf) The *Appropriation Act* also provides additional funds to assist with start-up costs of these programs. The 2012 JLARC report found that the implementation of year-round schools does not necessarily improve test scores for all students; however, certain student groups, including black, Hispanic, English learners, and economically disadvantaged student test scores are more likely to improve. The report suggests that school divisions may want to consider implementation of year-round calendars to improve student performance where high percentages of these students are concentrated.

CCPS received a $50,000 grant from VDOE to assist with planning and consideration of transitioning as many as three of its schools with high percentages of economically disadvantaged students to a year-round schedule. CCPS plans to implement the pilot program at Bellwood Elementary, and possibly expand to two other schools, Falling Creek Elementary and Falling Creek Middle.

VDOE’s fall 2017 enrollment data indicate that Bellwood Elementary has 547 students in grades PK through 5, and has a concentration of student groups that the 2012 JLARC study suggests would benefit from year-round school programs. Of the school’s students, 22.5 percent are black, 41.1 percent are Hispanic, 26.9 percent are English learners, and 74.4 percent are economically disadvantaged.

The proposal for Bellwood’s year-round program would begin instruction on July 23, 2018. Four instructional quarters of about 45 days are proposed with breaks of about fifteen days each. These breaks also would provide opportunities for students to participate in programs of remediation, enrichment, or extracurricular activities.

CCPS has indicated community support for this proposal through parent and student surveys. The division also has developed a waiver process to allow students to enroll at an out-of-zone school should their parents not wish to participate in the year-round program on a space-available basis.

The division also has developed measurable objectives to evaluate the success of the year-round program based on student progress in reading assessments in grades two through five.

Bellwood Elementary is fully accredited for the 2017-2018 school year.

Timetable for Further Review/Action:  
This item will be presented to the Board of Education for final review on June 28, 2018.

## Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources:

The administrative impact for this request is expected to be minimal.