

COLLEGE PARTNERSHIP LABORATORY SCHOOLS

STANDING COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATION REPORT

College Partnership Laboratory School Application For:

VCU x CodeRVA

July 2023

VIRGINIA BOARD OF EDUCATION

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## INTRODUCTION

College Partnership Laboratory Schools (Lab Schools) have fueled innovation and excellence in preK-12 education across the nation. Some of the nation’s most prestigious schools were started as Lab Schools. Virginia has identified Lab Schools as a critical part of ensuring a high-quality, innovative, and diverse educational ecosystem in the Commonwealth.

## BACKGROUND OF THE COLLEGE PARTNERSHIP LABORATORY SCHOOL FUND

The College Partnership Laboratory Schools Fund (Fund), set out in § [*22.1-349.2*](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title22.1/chapter19.1/section22.1-349.2/)of the *Code of Virginia*, was first established in 2010 for the purpose of establishing and supporting College Partnership Laboratory Schools. During its 2022 Session, the General Assembly appropriated $100,000,000 to the Fund.

The Virginia Board of Education (Board) is authorized to award up to $5,000,000 from the Fund for planning grants to entities pursuing the creation of new Lab Schools. Additionally, the Board is authorized to award up to $20,000,000 from the Fund for initial start-up cost funding grants (Start-Up Grants) for entities approved by the Board and awarded a contract to create a new Lab School and to distribute the remaining balance ($75,000,000 or more) in per-pupil operating funding grants (Per-Pupil Funding Operating Grants) from the Fund for entities with approved Lab Schools.

Section [22.1-349.2](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title22.1/chapter19.1/section22.1-349.2/)of the *Code of Virginia* and[Item 137.C.44](https://budget.lis.virginia.gov/item/2022/2/HB30/Chapter/1/137/)of the 2022 Appropriation Act direct the Board to establish criteria and guidelines for the distribution and award of moneys from the Fund prior to disbursement.

## PURPOSE OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

The Board’s College Partnership Laboratory Schools Standing Committee (Standing Committee) is appointed by the Board. The purpose of the Standing Committee is to assist the Board in its approval process of College Partnership Laboratory School Applications (Application) submitted by Eligible Entities (Applicant).

Once received from the Applicant, the Application is reviewed for completeness and compliance by the Virginia Department of Education (Department), who may also secure technical assistance and/or coaching as needed for the Applicant. The Standing Committee receives the complete and compliant Application from the Department, meets with the Applicant(s), provides opportunity for public comment on the Application, and delivers a report on its recommendation to the Board for their decision.

The recommendation report to the Board provides an objective review and assessment of the Applicant’s ability to achieve quality student performance through evidence of organizational effectiveness that supports a visionary educational process which promotes a culture of continuous, sustainable learning.

## SUMMARY OF APPLICATION ELEMENTS TO BE REVIEWED

The Standing Committee’s review and consideration of Applications includes evaluation of the information found in eight elements of the Application, summarized as follows:

1. **Executive Summary:** Does the Applicant provide the summary and address the need for the Lab School, its goals, and objectives?
2. **Mission and Vision:** Does the Applicant clearly communicate a mission and vision, including identification of the targeted student population, for the proposed Lab School to succeed?
3. **Educational Program:** Does the curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices guide ensure teacher effectiveness and student learning?
4. **Governance:** Do the organizational structure and the roles and responsibilities enumerated for the governing board demonstrate clear leadership for the successful management and support of the proposed Lab School?
5. **Management Structure:** Does the Applicant address recruiting, staffing, leadership, licensure, employment policies, and performance evaluations sufficiently to demonstrate success for proposed Lab School? In addition, how does the Applicant address parent and community involvement; student recruitment plan, open enrollment and waiting list; student conduct; start-up plan with tasks, timelines, and responsible individuals; co-curricular and extracurricular programs, and partnerships with school divisions?
6. **Financial Operations Information:** Has the Applicant provided and addressed financial assumptions, start-up and five-year budgets, anticipated fundraising contributions, insurance coverage, a sound facilities plan, transportation services, including for students with disabilities, and food service operations to successfully start and maintain operations?
7. **Placement Plan:** Does the Applicant provide a plan for effective communication and placement of school students, teachers, and employees in the event of termination or revocation of the contract, including a plan for student records, student transfers, assistance to employees, and a close-out plan related to financial obligations and audits?
8. **Other Assurances and Requirement:** Does the Applicant demonstrate processes in place to implement and monitor federal and state compliance with regulations and waivers, including compliance with the federal *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act*, records retention schedules, and the *Virginia Freedom of Information Act*? Does the Applicant document collaborative partnerships with public school divisions and address conflicts of interest?

**Public Comment:** In addition to the elements found in the Application, the Standing Committee reviews and considers any public comments received when developing its recommendation and report for the Board.

## STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The Standing Committee’s recommendation report to the Board includes the Report Elements criteria outlined below for the Board’s consideration and decision whether to approve a Lab School Application.

1. **Overall Element Assessment:** The overall recommendation of the Standing Committee for this Element of the Application.
2. **Element Rubric Rating**: The Standing Committee’s recommendation of the degree the Element defines areas of strength and/or opportunities for improvement.

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Not Evident** | Little or no indication exists for implementation activities |
|  | **Emerging/Partial detail** | Indicates preliminary stages of implementation for some practices and procedures |
|  | **Operational/**  **Ready to implement** | Indicates practices and procedures fully described and ready to implement |

1. **Public Comment Assessment**: The Standing Committee assessment of public comments received on the Application.
2. **Areas Requiring VDOE Reinforcement**: The Standing Committee’s recommendation for VDOE operational expertise that may be required by the Applicant in various areas of the Lab School’s operations.

## REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

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### ELEMENT 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**OVERALL ELEMENT ASSESSMENT:**

The Virginia Commonwealth University RTR Teacher Residency program is an undergraduate and graduate teacher residency program that recruits, trains, and supports teachers for high-needs and hard-to-staff schools. The program is currently in its 13th year of operation and is currently working in partnership with sixteen (16) school divisions.

CodeRVA High School prepares students for the computer science and information technology workforce. The school serves a diverse population of students from fifteen (15) school divisions with no academic requirements for admission. Admission is based on an existing lottery system.

The VCU x CodeRVA Lab School is the intersection of two already established programs coming together as a partnership designed to:

1. serve as a training site for teacher educators to provide computer science infused educational experiences for all students, while at the same time,
2. preparing students for the information technology workforce.

With both established programs and processes already in place, the Standing Committee highly recommends the VCU x CodeRVA Laboratory School to the Board.

**ELEMENT RUBRIC RATING:**

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Not Evident** | Little or no indication exists for implementation activities |
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**PUBLIC COMMENT ASSESSMENT:**

The application received one public comment and numerous institutional endorsements that supported the application.

**AREAS REQUIRING VDOE REINFORCEMENT:**

VDOE will support the applicant through the development of the contract with the Board and will provide technical assistance as needed as the school begins operations.

### ELEMENT 2: MISSION AND VISION

**OVERALL ELEMENT ASSESSMENT:**

The mission of VCU x CodeRVA Lab School is to prepare Virginia students for college and careers in computer science through personalized, integrated, and applied learning in combination with recruiting, preparing, supporting, and retaining extraordinary, inspiring teacher leaders who are committed to the success of every student. VCU x CodeRVA Lab School’s vision is that every student deserves access to a high-quality computer science focused education provided by innovative teacher leaders trained to empower students for success on their college or career pathways.

The Applicant’s Mission and Vision is geared toward “Rethinking the Future of Teaching and Learning, specifically three main areas:

* Address the critical shortage of high-quality educators going into the field of teaching/education and retaining those educators who are highly qualified;
* Be innovative at looking at pathways to teacher education and licensure that provide new educators with the tools to focus on new models of pedagogy coming with the support of strong teacher mentors; and
* Create a school that provides comprehensive access and deep exposure to high-quality curriculum in all subject areas to meet the needs of every student, specifically for computer science and workforce development.

CodeRVA High School has demonstrated the ability to operate an innovative program within the confines of the SOQ and SOA, utilizing the current assessment program to determine student achievement on the SOL assessment. The needs of all students are met through personalized learning methodologies. The school is open to all students from multiple backgrounds from the following 15 school districts:

Amelia, Charles City, Chesterfield, Colonial Heights City, Cumberland, Dinwiddie, Hanover, Henrico, Hopewell City, New Kent, Petersburg City, Powhatan, Prince George, Richmond City, and Sussex.

VCU RTR Teacher Residency Training (VCU) graduates receive one-on-one training with a content-specific career coach throughout the first two years of their teaching careers. With VCU, participants gain the skills and experience to positively impact the lives of students from under-resourced communities. VCU serves the following school districts in Virginia:

Arlington, Brunswick, Chesterfield, Dinwiddie, Essex, Fairfax, Henrico, Hopewell, Petersburg, Prince George, Prince William, Richmond, Roanoke, Southampton, Stafford and Surry

*\*Overlapping school districts highlighted*

The Applicant’s mission and vision clearly outlines the level of innovation anticipated and the targeted student. With established programs and processes already in place, the Standing Committee highly recommends the VCU x CodeRVA Laboratory School to the Board.

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**PUBLIC COMMENT ASSESSMENT:**

The application received one public comment and numerous institutional endorsements that supported the application.

**AREAS REQUIRING VDOE REINFORCEMENT:**

Virginia’s Laboratory School Statute favors board control governed by the Institute of Higher Education. The Application defines CodeRVA Board as governing with 2 VCU board positions being added. Minor changes to the existing legal construct required to transition from CodeRVA High School to a Laboratory School within the confines of the state statute may be required.

### ELEMENT 3: EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

**OVERALL ELEMENT ASSESSMENT:**

The Applicant plans to use a blended learning model that is personalized to meet the needs of each student. CodeRVA has demonstrated the ability to operate an innovative program within the confines of the SOQ and SOA, utilizing the current assessment program to determine student achievement on the SOL assessments.

The Applicant currently participates in the state SOL program and students complete all required SOL tests needed for graduation. SOL score reports are sent back to the school division who is paying tuition for its students. The Applicant provided course maps which align with the courses needed to obtain an Advanced or Standard Virginia diploma.

In addition, the Applicant utilizes MAP Growth, part of the Growth Activation Solution from NWEA, which is the most trusted and innovative assessment for measuring achievement and growth in K–12 math, reading, language usage, and science. It provides teachers with accurate, actionable evidence to help inform instructional strategies regardless of how far students are above or below grade level. It also connects to the largest set of instructional content providers, giving educators flexibility in curriculum choices.

The Applicant provided historical performance metrics, and results have exceeded the performance of other schools across the Commonwealth in the past. The Applicant has also expressed a willingness to collaborate with VDOE if student performance dips below expected levels in the future and work together to create a plan for improvement.

The Applicant currently serves students with disabilities. The number of students who are currently enrolled with disabilities exceeds the state average. The Applicant’s personalized approach to learning is at the center of their instructional model. The Application also identified special education specific staff at the legally responsible school division who work to ensure delivery of required services and who supports the maintenance of documentation as required by state and federal regulations.

The Applicant’s curriculum, instructional design, and assessment practices ensures teacher effectiveness and student learning. With the established curriculum and operations already in place, the Standing Committee highly recommends the VCU x CodeRVA Laboratory School to the Board.

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**PUBLIC COMMENT ASSESSMENT:**

The application received one public comment and numerous institutional endorsements that supported the application.

**AREAS REQUIRING VDOE REINFORCEMENT:**

The Applicant’s current facility limits school enrollment. VDOE can provide guidance on any requirements related to any new facility that may be needed in the future.

### ELEMENT 4: GOVERNANCE

**OVERALL ELEMENT ASSESSMENT:**

The Applicant has stated the CodeRVA Constitution and Bylaws, which establish the Board Membership and Board of Control, will govern the Applicant’s Lab School. Each of CodeRVA Regional High School’s current Board Members is also an elected/appointed Board Member in their home school division. Two additional spaces will be created on the existing governing Board for VCU. The Application describes the Lab School Board as VCU providing adjacent support to the existing model and a new partnership for CodeRVA.

Overall, each entity with a vested interest in the school will be actively involved in the governance of this proposed Lab School.

The Applicant’s organizational structure and the roles and responsibilities enumerated for the governing board demonstrate clear leadership for the successful management and support of the proposed Lab School. The Standing Committee highly recommends the VCU x CodeRVA Laboratory School to the Board.

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**PUBLIC COMMENT ASSESSMENT:**

The application received one public comment and numerous institutional endorsements that supported the application.

**AREAS REQUIRING VDOE REINFORCEMENT:**

CodeRVA currently uses and existing governance structure. Minor changes to the existing legal construct required to transition from CodeRVA High School to a Laboratory School within the confines of the state statute may be required.

### ELEMENT 5: MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

**OVERALL ELEMENT ASSESSMENT:**

The Applicant has addressed all requested areas of management structure. All teachers at CodeRVA Regional High School in its current form are fully licensed and endorsed in a minimum of one subject area, although most possess two or more endorsements to enable them to teach a variety of subjects. The Applicant intends to continue this practice as the school transitions to a Lab School.

As part of its management structure, the Applicant intends to continue the practice of adhering to the policies and procedures of its fiscal agent (Henrico County Public Schools) in the absence of CodeRVA-specific policies. The Applicant will utilize Henrico County's personnel policies through a Memorandum of Understanding. The Applicant will also utilize Henrico County, one of the member school divisions, as fiscal agency, which includes being the operational provider of nutrition and transportation services for the school.

The Applicant’s current Code of Conduct is in place at Code RVA and will continue to be implemented in the Lab School. The provided CodeRVA Student Code of Conduct (2022-23) outlines student behavior (e.g., specific topics; rights and responsibilities of students, dress code, cellular phones, etc.) and discipline (leveled systems of disciplinary responses) and is utilized for all students, including students with disabilities.

The Applicant has a fully operational lottery process and can be considered as a model for others to follow in the future. This system has been successful since CodeRVAs start. The Applicant has a robust parent and community involvement communication system in place including:

* Open Houses for recruiting prospective students in October, December and March. Presentations are live streamed, and recordings are available on the school’s website.
* An annual Back to School Night in September and Parent Teacher Conference. Day in November. Both events are offered in person and virtually.
* An active Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) that meets monthly virtually and hosts/supports numerous events (e.g., annual Fall Festival, Homecoming, Teacher Appreciation Week, etc.).
* The Raptor School Counseling Advisory (RSCA) composed of parents, community partners, and CodeRVA staff and meets bi-annually in person and virtually.
* A weekly newsletter (The Raptor Rundown) sent to parents, students, and staff each week with copies available on the school website for families.

Students may participate in co-curricular activities during the school day as well as participate in events in their home jurisdiction.

The Applicant provided detailed information on overall school management including personnel management that sufficiently demonstrates success for the proposed Lab School. In addition, the Applicant offers a robust parent/community involvement process which includes a student recruitment plan, and established teacher & student policies and procedures. The Standing Committee highly recommends the VCU x CodeRVA Laboratory School to the Board.

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**PUBLIC COMMENT ASSESSMENT:**

The application received one public comment and numerous institutional endorsements that supported the application.

**AREAS REQUIRING VDOE REINFORCEMENT:**

VDOE may need to provide communications/networking support as the Lab School expands into other school districts.

### ELEMENT 6: FINANCIAL AND OPERATIONS INFORMATION

**OVERALL ELEMENT ASSESSMENT:**

The Applicant has provided and addressed financial assumptions, start-up, and five-year budgets. The Applicant is requesting a total of $8,875,541 in funding support over a five-year period. The budget indicates the annual funding amount requested decreases each year as other funding sources are secured and the Lab School becomes self-sustaining, thereby maximizing the return on investment of public funds.

The Applicant’s current operations complies with all fiscal policies and procedures through their fiscal agent, Henrico County Public Schools. In addition, the Applicant will collaborate through the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) process to identify an auditing agency (e.g., Cherry Bekaert, etc.) to provide an annual financial audit to the Lab School’s governing board.

The Applicants have had several philanthropic and corporate partners support the already successful CodeRVA and VCU Center for Teacher Leadership separately. The Applicant’s goal is to work with those philanthropic and corporate partners on the specific ways they can support the expansion of additional seats at the Lab School and work to provide federal, state, and private funding to replace the Lab School grant funding over the next five (5) years.

The Applicant currently participates in the Virginia Risk Sharing Association (VRSA) to provide general insurance coverage. CodeRVA staff access healthcare and other insurance opportunities through the fiscal agent, Henrico County Public Schools. Once the Applicant is granted Lab School status, this practice will be examined through the MOU process and Henrico County may continue to provide this support as the fiscal agent as VCU’s designee.

The Applicant provided detailed budget and financial assumption information as well as its processes to provide successful operational requirements. The Standing Committee highly recommends the VCU x CodeRVA Laboratory School to the Board.

**ELEMENT RUBRIC RATING:**

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**PUBLIC COMMENT ASSESSMENT:**

The application received one public comment and numerous institutional endorsements that supported the application.

**AREAS REQUIRING VDOE REINFORCEMENT:**

VDOE may need to assist with fiscal agent status change and resultant Memorandums of Understanding between VCU, CodeRVA and other school districts.

### ELEMENT 7: PLACEMENT PLAN

**OVERALL ELEMENT ASSESSMENT:**

The Applicant’s Lab School placement plan includes the current process for students to return to their home school division and/or move to another division out of state, etc. would have their records transferred electronically to their School Next using the secure VDOE Dropbox process or other secure procedures requested by the School Next.

The Applicant’s current CodeRVA governing Board’s Constitution and Bylaws address the details of the close out plan related to financial obligations and audits by the partnering school boards. The Standing Committee highly recommends the VCU x CodeRVA Laboratory School to the Board.

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**PUBLIC COMMENT ASSESSMENT:**

The application received one public comment and numerous institutional endorsements that supported the application.

**AREAS REQUIRING VDOE REINFORCEMENT:**

In the unlikely event the Lab School is terminated, VDOE may need to audit/identify unused funds requiring return to the State.

### ELEMENT 8: OTHER ASSURANCES AND REQUIREMENTS

**OVERALL ELEMENT ASSESSMENT:**

The Applicant demonstrates and currently operates in accordance with all applicable federal and state laws and regulations, including the Virginia Freedom of Information Act.

The Standing Committee highly recommends the VCU x CodeRVA Laboratory School to the Board.

**ELEMENT RUBRIC RATING:**

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**PUBLIC COMMENT ASSESSMENT:**

The application received one public comment and numerous institutional endorsements that supported the application.

**AREAS REQUIRING VDOE REINFORCEMENT:**

VDOE may need to assist with approving additional waivers or assisting with review of Memorandums of Understanding to guard against conflicts of interest if future participation of school divisions is expanded.

### CONCLUDING REPORT COMMENTS

The VCU RTR Teacher Residency program is an undergraduate and graduate teacher residency program that recruits, trains, and supports teachers for high-needs and hard-to-staff schools. The institute of higher education is currently in its 13th year of operation and is currently working in partnership with sixteen (16) school divisions.

CodeRVA High School prepares students for the computer science and information technology workforce. The school serves diverse population of students from fifteen (15) school divisions with no academic requirements for admission. Admission is based on an existing lottery system. The school is in its 6th year of operation. CodeRVA has demonstrated the ability to operate an innovative program within the confines of the SOQ and SOA, utilizing the current assessment program to determine student achievement on the SOL assessments.

The VCU x CodeRVA Lab School is the intersection of two already established programs coming together as a partnership designed to:

1. serve as a training site for teacher educators to provide computer science infused educational experiences for all students, while at the same time,
2. preparing students for the information technology workforce.

As this is the first College Laboratory School Application meeting this Application process milestone, the Standing Committee has noted the areas where the VDOE may be required to provide operational assistance as the Applicant’s Lab School begins to fully develop and grow.

After completing an objective review and thorough assessment of the Applicant’s ability to achieve quality student performance through evidence of organizational effectiveness that supports a visionary educational process which promotes a culture of continuous, sustainable learning, the Standing Committee highly recommends the VCU x CodeRVA Laboratory School to the Board.