

Agenda Item: D

Date: November 6, 2023

Title: George Mason University Accelerated College and Employability Skills (ACCESS) Academy – VDOE Documentation of Complete and Compliant Application

Presenter: Dr. Andy Armstrong, Assistant Superintendent of Strategic Innovation

Purpose of Presentation

Review of documentation of complete and compliant Laboratory School Application for George Mason University Accelerated College and Employability Skills (ACCESS) Academy, a laboratory school proposal from a collaboration between George Mason University and Fairfax County Public Schools.

Executive Summary

The laboratory school application entitled George Mason University Accelerated College and Employability Skills (ACCESS) Academy (“George Mason Application”) was received from George Mason University and Fairfax County Public Schools (“Applicants”) on August 11, 2023. In accordance with the Laboratory School Application Process, the George Mason Application was reviewed for completion and compliance by the Application Review Technical Expert Committee, a team of Virginia Department of Education Subject Matter Experts (“VDOE SME”). The goal of the Application Review Technical Expert Committee is to document the needed technical expertise and provide counseling to the Applicants to identify and correct any potential deficiencies in the planning and implementation of the proposed College Partnership Laboratory School, determine compliance with state law or regulation, highlight potential problems or red flags with information contained in the George Mason Application, and to identify aspects of the proposal that are especially exciting or unique.

Dr. Andy Armstrong, Assistant Superintendent of Strategic Innovation, coordinated the efforts of the VDOE SME team who reviewed the George Mason Application and/or the George Mason Addendum for completeness and compliance. The VDOE SME team is comprised of the following VDOE staff:

- Dr. Andrew Armstrong, Assistant Superintendent
- Robert Gilstrap (Office of Licensure and School Leadership)
- Amy Siepka (Office of Accountability)

- Rebecca Askew (Office of Policy)
- Edward Lanza (Office of Budgeting)
- Melissa Velazquez (Department of Policy and Communications)
- Dr. Samantha Hollins (Department of Special Education and Student Services)
- Dr. Dave Myers (Office of Data, Research and Technology)

Each VDOE SME was provided with the Laboratory School Criteria Checklist Worksheet. Areas of expertise were assigned to various staff subject to their education expertise at the VDOE. A compilation of these comments is included in the Excel spreadsheet entitled VDOE Completeness and Compliance Report (Attachment 2).

The first round of counseling from VDOE SME review was provided to the Applicants the week of September 12, 2023, via email and written documentation from the VDOE SME's. The Applicants analyzed the feedback constructively and provided a revised application and related documents with responses to each of the VDOE SME action discussion points. The revised George Mason Application was received by VDOE on October 11, 2023. The VDOE SME reviewed the revised George Mason application the week of October 16, 2023, and provided insights and feedback on the George Mason application for completion of this report to the College Partnership Laboratory School Standing Committee ("Standing Committee"). Follow-up feedback has been provided to the Applicants.

The Virginia Laboratory School Initiative is in alignment with [Board of Education Goals from the 2018-2023 Comprehensive Plan](#).

Action Requested

The Standing Committee's goal for this meeting is First Review of the George Mason Application and recommendations on the ability for the George Mason application to be presented/recommended to the Virginia Board of Education at the next scheduled meeting. In addition, the School Committee can also provide recommendations for additional Subject Matter Experts or coaching to satisfy Laboratory School statutory requirements for the George Mason application.

VDOE Recommendation

The concept of a lab school designed to support the transition of at-risk learners into college and high-demand careers, with a preliminary focus on Information Technology proposed by the George Mason application is an innovative and desirable laboratory school program that is responsive to regional labor market demands. With the students remaining enrolled in their local school division at their home high school with plans for extended scalability in the future,

it appears George Mason ACCESS Academy functions more as a program than a standalone Lab School. This is an acceptable approach to meeting the intent of the lab school concept.

The Applicants responded very well to initial feedback and coaching provided by the VDOE SME team, and provided the additional information requested. The Applicants have an operational dual enrollment program with a sustainable governance structure, including a sustainable financial model for the operation of the lab school program. The George Mason ACCESS Academy has proposed a lab school that appears prepared to meet its mission to “provide students with high school and dual enrollment core curriculum coursework as well as specialized problem-based learning IT coursework that will prepare students to pursue high-demand careers in computing sciences.”

Overall, the VDOE recommends the George Mason ACCESS Academy is operational and ready to implement.

Previous Review or Action

No previous review or action by the Standing Committee.

Background Information and Statutory Authority:

Subsection A of § [22.1-349.6](#) of the Code of Virginia states, in part, that “[t]he Board shall establish procedures for receiving, reviewing, and ruling upon applications and shall make a copy of any such procedures available to all interested parties upon request. . . . The Board’s review procedures shall establish a review committee that may include experts with the operation of similar schools located in other states.”