



VIRGINIA BOARD OF EDUCATION

AGENDA ITEM

Agenda Item: G

Date: March 28, 2024

Title: First and Final Review of College Partnership Laboratory School Application from Mountain Gateway Community College

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

Purpose of Presentation

Action required by state or federal law or regulation (i.e., a change in law requires a change in program requirements; this is part of a regulatory action).

Executive Summary

On July 12, 2023, Mountain Gateway Community College (“MGCC”) submitted a college partnership laboratory school (“lab school”) application for the Mountain Gateway Community College Technology Education Center Lab School (“MGCC application”) for consideration by the Board of Education (“Board”). In accordance with the Board’s [Guidelines for the Approval of College Partnership Laboratory Schools](#) and [the process](#) established by the Board’s College Partnership Laboratory Schools Standing Committee (“Standing Committee”), the application was reviewed by a subject-matter expert group (“SME group”) composed of staff of the Virginia Department of Education (“VDOE”).

The VDOE SME group generated a completeness and compliance review (“compliance review”), which was submitted to the Standing Committee for review at its meeting on January 8, 2024. The Standing Committee received the MGCC application and completeness and compliance report, and it also asked questions of representatives from MGCC after a detailed presentation from the MGCC applicants including Mr. Alex Morrow, Instructor of Information Technology at MGCC, Dr. Ben Worth, Vice President of Academic Affairs at MGCC, and Ms. Tamra Lipscomb, Assistant Professor and Head of the Information Systems Technology Program at MGCC.

The Standing Committee approved First Review of the MGCC application and VDOE staff posted the MGCC application for the 10-day public comment period on January 18, and it remained

available until February 1. The following comment was received: "The addition of the Mountain Gateway Lab School will greatly benefit our region by giving students an opportunity to gain the skills and certifications for employment in an educational model that fits their individual needs. The skills and certifications the students earn will allow them to stay in the region with a high earning career."

On March 4, 2024, the MGCC application returned to the Standing Committee for Final Review. Dr. Andy Armstrong, Assistant Superintendent of Strategic Innovation for the VDOE, provided the Standing Committee with an overview of the objectives of the MGCC MG-TEC lab school, the VDOE Expert team completion and compliance process, as well as their compliance coaching and review of additional application materials received from MGCC after first review. The MGCC applicants were present at the meeting and answered questions posed by the Standing Committee at final review. The Standing Committee unanimously voted to endorse the MGCC MG-TEC lab school application and refer to the Board for approval.

The application proposes for MGCC to begin a lab school in collaboration and partnership with Rockbridge County Public Schools, Buena Vista City Public Schools, Bath County Public Schools, Alleghany Highlands Public Schools, and Botetourt County Public Schools. Students enrolled in MG-TEC, which will utilize a blend of on-site and virtual learning using a HyFlex instructional model, will participate in the unique offerings of the MG-TEC Lab School. The Lab School allows students to personalize their learning experience, based on their individual learning styles, preferences, and needs, and curriculum innovations that leverage other existing programs in the student's base school. The curriculum unfolds over three dynamic years, each building upon the previous, to create a scaffolded learning experience which is purely based on the goals of the Computer Science Standards of Learning. In years 1 and 2, students are exposed to python programming, digital literacy, computer applications, and specialized modules in networking, PC hardware, and OS architecture before year 3, when students have the unique opportunity to select a concentration: cybersecurity, IT support, or AWS cloud computing.

The proposed lab school named "Mountain Gateway Community College Technology Education Center (MG-TEC)" is an innovative lab school that focuses on development of the skills and knowledge students need to succeed in the IT field and is responsive to the local need to provide support to students served by MG-TEC to establish exposure and earn credentials leading to high-wage, high-skill, high-demand jobs in the IT and cybersecurity industry that would potentially allow students to remain in the region served by Mountain Gateway Community College, a region that hopes to improve the overall workforce demand and retention conditions. The goals of MG-TEC include the following:

- Providing high school students with a comprehensive education in information technology, including cybersecurity, AWS cloud computing, and IT support.
- Preparing students for IT careers by offering courses that lead to career studies certificate.
- Providing a springboard to an associate degree in IT; and
- Providing knowledge and skills necessary to obtain industry-leading certifications through hands-on, project-based learning opportunities that will allow students to develop the skill and knowledge needed to succeed in the field.

The Lab School statutes favor control by the institute of Higher Education. The governance structure of the MG-TEC lab school meets those criteria. VDOE SME team will continue to advise MGCC on meeting statutory compliance within the Applicant’s constitution, governance, and bylaws.

The approval of lab schools aligns with Priority 4 of the Board’s *Comprehensive Plan 2024–2029*: to create innovative pathways for every learner.

Action Requested

First and final review: Action requested at this meeting.

Superintendent’s Recommendation

On the basis of the recommendations from the Standing Committee, the Superintendent of Public Instruction (“Superintendent”) recommends that the Board waive first review and approve the Mountain Gateway Community College Technology Education Center (MG-TEC) for four years with annual reviews.

The Superintendent further recommends that the Board delegate to the President of the Board and the Superintendent final negotiation of the college partnership laboratory school contract with MGCC, including awarding start-up funds and up to \$3 million in per-pupil funding from the College Partnership Laboratory School Fund in accordance with the Board’s [Guidelines and Criteria for the Award and Distribution of Lab School Start-Up and Per-Pupil Operating Funding Grants for Approved Lab Schools](#).

Rationale for Action

The Mountain Gateway Community College Technology Education Center (MG-TEC) proposal partners with Rockbridge County Public Schools, Buena Vista City Public Schools, Bath County Public Schools, Alleghany Highlands Public Schools, and Botetourt County Public Schools to provide a unique and innovative experience for students interested in pursuing careers in IT across the region. Additionally, the proposal has undergone a thorough review process by the

Standing Committee. Approval at the March 28, 2024, meeting of the Board is critical to allowing the lab school to open for the 2024–2025 school year.

Previous Review or Action

The MGCC application has undergone two reviews by the Board’s Standing Committee:

Date: January 8, 2024

Action: First Review of College Partnership Laboratory School Application from Mountain Gateway Community College

Date: March 4, 2024

Action: Final Review of College Partnership Laboratory School Application from Mountain Gateway Community College

Background Information and Statutory Authority

[Chapter 19.1](#) of Title 22.1 of the *Code of Virginia* sets the statutory requirements for lab schools and the process for approving such schools.

Section [22.1-349.6](#) requires the Board to “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. If the Board finds that the application is incomplete, the Board shall request the necessary additional information from the applicant. The Board's review procedures shall establish a review committee that may include experts with the operation of similar schools located in other states.”

In accordance with § [22.1-349.6](#), the Board has set the [Guidelines for the Approval of College Partnership Laboratory Schools](#). Moreover, in preparation for receiving applications, the Board re-formed the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee met from 2010–2013 and had new members appointed by the Board President in December 2022. The Standing Committee comprises five members: Joan Wodiska (Chair), Dr. Pam Moran (Vice-Chair), and John Bailey, as well as Board members Bill Hansen and Andy Rotherham.

The Standing Committee has had three public meetings in 2024. After each meeting, the Standing Committee has provided a report on progress to the Board. In its meetings, the Standing Committee has setup a process for reviewing applications, including a SME review by VDOE staff; standardized process documents, such as application rubrics, compliance reports, and reports to the Board; revised the lab school application; reviewed applications from multiple applicants; and received public comment.

Upon receiving the MGCC application on July 12, 2023, Dr. Andy Armstrong convened a SME group in accordance with the process established by the Standing Committee. The SME group was composed of the following individuals:

- Dr. Andrew Armstrong, Assistant Superintendent of Strategic Innovation
- Dr. Samantha Hollins, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Student Services
- Ms. Melissa Velazquez, Assistant Superintendent of Policy and Communications
- Mr. Robert Gilstrap, Assistant Superintendent for Education Preparation
- Mr. Edward Lanza, Director of Budgeting
- Mr. Jason Ellis, Office of Accountability
- Ms. Rebecca Askew, Director of Policy
- Ms. Erin Madden, Office of Policy

The lab school application was reviewed by members of the SME group for completeness and compliance according to their areas of expertise. The compliance report was then provided to the Standing Committee for first review on January 8, 2024.

At first review, the MGCC applicants presented detailed information and insight to the Standing Committee on their plan for their lab school model. The Standing Committee queried the applicants on various portions of the application. The MGCC applicants responded to all questions, and the Standing Committee approved first review, and cleared the MGCC application for the 10-day public comment posting period. The Standing Committee recommended the MGCC application to advance to second review at the March 4, 2024, Standing Committee meeting.

At the Standing Committee meeting in March, Dr. Andy Armstrong stated the Mountain Gateway Community College MG-TEC Lab School is compliant and ready to implement and recommended to the Committee that the MG-TEC be approved on second review to be forwarded to the Virginia Board of Education for their consideration for approval at the March 28, 2024, meeting. The MGCC applicants were present at the meeting to answer any questions posed by the Standing Committee at final review. Satisfied with all MGCC applicant responses to their inquiries, the Standing Committee endorsed the application and recommended the application be presented to the Board at its next meeting.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Standing Committee has provided opportunity for public comment on agenda items, including the MGCC application, at each of the meetings where the application was reviewed. Additionally, the application was posted for a 10-day public comment period in accordance with

the Standing Committee's process. The public comment was announced through [Virginia Education Update #2024-07](#).

The MGCC lab school application has received letters of support from numerous stakeholders, which have been included in the materials for this item, including the following:

- Mr. Mohamed Azab, Assistant Professor of Computer and Information Sciences, VMI
- Dr. J. Shawn Addington, Head of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, VMI
- Dr. Jayson M. Margulus, Professor and Director, Connolly Center for Entrepreneurship at Washington and Lee University
- Mr. Jacob Wright, Chair, Alleghany-Highlands School Board
- Ms. Karen Hise, Chair, Bath County School Board
- Ms. Anna Weddle, Chair, Botetourt County School Board
- Mr. Neil Whitmore, Chair, Rockbridge County School Board
- Ms. Kim Halterman, Superintendent, Alleghany-Highlands Public Schools
- Dr. Rick Bolling, Superintendent, Bath County Public Schools
- Dr. Jonathan Russ, Superintendent, Botetourt County Public Schools
- Dr. Anthony Francis, Superintendent, Buena Vista City Public Schools
- Dr. Phillip Thompson, Superintendent, Rockbridge County Public Schools
- Ms. Theresa Ellison, Chair, Buena Vista City School Board

Implementation and Communication

Upon approval by the Board, VDOE staff will coordinate with the Office of the Attorney General to execute a contract between the Board and MGCC to establish the lab school within 90 days, in accordance with § [22.1-349.5](#) of the *Code of Virginia*, as well as §§ [22.1-349.3\(C\)](#) and [22.1-349.4](#).

The approval of the lab school will be publicized through the VDOE, MGCC, and participating school divisions.

Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources

This item will not impact resources at the VDOE.