



COLLEGE PARTNERSHIP LABORATORY SCHOOLS
STANDING COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATION REPORT
College Partnership Laboratory School Application For:

George Mason University

April 2024
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](#) 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](#) of the *Code of Virginia* and [Item 137.C.44](#) 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.

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

	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

- III. **Public Comment Assessment:** The Standing Committee assessment of public comments received on the Application.
- IV. **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

ELEMENT 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERALL ELEMENT ASSESSMENT:

George Mason University (“GMU”) is proposing a lab school in collaborative partnership between GMU, Northern Virginia Community College (“NOVA”), and Loudoun County Public Schools (“LCPS”). This partnership will extend multi-institutional pathways to both NOVA and GMU, leveraging existing proven programs such as Early Identification Program (EIP), ADVANCE, and wraparound services such as academic advising, success coaching, writing support, and career coaching among other services to reduce the administrative and financial burden associated with college.

The Accelerated College and Employability Skills (ACCESS) Academy is 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. ACCESS Academy aims to alleviate the administrative and financial costs associated with preparing students for high-demand careers. With multiple pathways and on/off ramps to support student access and workforce readiness for high-demand careers in software development, cyber security, data management, and networking in the Information Technology field, ACCESS Academy will utilize 1) wraparound support, 2) innovative teaching and learning methods, 3) transdisciplinary collaboration, and a 4) learn and earn approach, alongside an assets-based approach to students’ strengths and funds of knowledge to create college and employment opportunities.

With solid academic curriculum theory proposed, the Standing Committee highly recommends the George Mason University Laboratory School to the Board.

ELEMENT RUBRIC RATING:

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

PUBLIC COMMENT ASSESSMENT:

The application received 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 vision of GMU ACCESS Academy is to prepare adaptable lifelong learners that collaboratively and creatively solve complex problems in any setting, as technologies, the nature of work, workers, and the workplace evolve over time. The mission of ACCESS Academy is to provide new innovative pathways for at-risk students toward high-demand, well-compensated careers, while simultaneously working toward two- and four-year degrees to maximize their earning potential over their work life.

Both the mission and vision of ACCESS Academy is consistent with the Virginia Standards of Quality (SOQ) and the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs). The school will foster competency-based career and technical education programs that integrate academic outcomes, career guidance, and job seeking skills. The educational program is based upon labor market needs and career guidance will include counseling about available employment opportunities and placement services.

The Applicant's mission and vision clearly outlines the level of innovation anticipated and the targeted student. With completed planning and proposed programs and processes in place, the Standing Committee highly recommends the GMU ACCESS Academy Laboratory School to the Board.

ELEMENT RUBRIC RATING:

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

PUBLIC COMMENT ASSESSMENT:

The application received 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 3: EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM
OVERALL ELEMENT ASSESSMENT:**

ACCESS Academy will transform teaching and learning in information technology and computing science coursework by integrating problem-based learning (PBL) approaches and activities. Problem-based learning immerses teachers and students together in a cognitive apprenticeship that develops critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and problem-solving skills through an ill-structured narrative that is based on real scenarios. PBL not only promotes active learning in students, but also allows students to connect experiences in the classroom with real-time industry conditions while developing content and employability skills. Students develop knowledge while working through the problem and the focus is on self-directed inquiry to inform decision making.

ACCESS Academy plans to adopt curriculum and teaching methods that provide students with access to different on and off specialized learning ramps. Potential off ramps might include:

- coursework that leads to an AS or BS degree;
- career certifications;
- micro-credentials; or
- employment.

Grade 12 students will also engage in immersive experiential learning at “Fuse at Mason”, an innovative space that will house a combination of research and development, education programs, incubators, and technology labs. Students will be able to work side-by-side with researchers, student mentors, and industry partners in a technology incubator setting. GMU’s team will work closely with external entities to scaffold levels of problem complexity into their learning experience to strike the right balance between the students’ knowledge and capabilities and the industry partner’s/external organization’s expectations.

With the required credentials for curriculum development and assessment in place, the Standing Committee highly recommends the ACCESS Academy Laboratory School to the Board.

ELEMENT RUBRIC RATING:

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

PUBLIC COMMENT ASSESSMENT:

Lab School Application for George Mason University

The application received numerous institutional endorsements that supported the application.

AREAS REQUIRING VDOE REINFORCEMENT:

The Applicant has proposed a solid, theoretical curriculum/instructional approach. VDOE can provide guidance on any statutory requirements related to expeditionary learning, internships, or seat time waivers if implemented as part of the competency-based educational approach.

ELEMENT 4: GOVERNANCE

OVERALL ELEMENT ASSESSMENT:

The Applicant has identified a multi-tiered governance structure, with a governing board members include a representative from each committed school division. The governing board will also include key stakeholders from the GMU, including the Dean of the College of Education and Human Development who will provide oversight of the instructional aspects of the lab school, as well as the Chief Academic Officer at NOVA, and the Superintendent of LCPS.

An Advisory Board will represent voices from stakeholders associated with the lab school. The Board will provide shared governance of the lab school, including the establishment and revision of school policies and recommend significant and strategic decisions for the school. The Board will be the authority to which school leadership is accountable for the instructional and operational aspects of ACCESS Academy. 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 proposed organizational structure and the roles and responsibilities enumerated for the governing board demonstrate clear leadership for the successful management and support of the Lab School. The Standing Committee highly recommends the ACCESS Academy Laboratory School to the Board.

ELEMENT RUBRIC RATING:

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

PUBLIC COMMENT ASSESSMENT:

The application received numerous institutional endorsements that supported the application.

AREAS REQUIRING VDOE REINFORCEMENT:

ACCESS Academy has provided organizational charts as well as a draft document for governance. VDOE can provide guidance on any requirements related to the confines of the state statute that may be required.

ELEMENT 5: MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

OVERALL ELEMENT ASSESSMENT:

The Applicant has addressed all requested areas of management structure. GMU, NOVA and LCPS will work closely together on a number of staff development initiatives, and we expect this to expand with the launch of the university partnership laboratory school.

At present, the school’s faculty and leadership beyond the Governing Board do not yet exist. Utmost care will be given to hire educators who have experience and or aptitude of interdisciplinary approaches, working with a wide range of student abilities, and are willing to work collaboratively with higher education peers who will be on-site. All teachers will be 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.

School personnel will be hired directly by ACCESS Academy at GMU and will adhere to the guidelines outlined in the GMU. Teacher recruitment for 9th and 10th grade courses will abide by the established guidelines and personnel policies set forth by LCPS. Dual enrollment course teacher recruitment will also be handled by LCPS. Dual enrollment teachers must also meet criteria established by NOVA to teach dual enrollment coursework. For PBL IT courses, recruitment will be handled by NOVA and Mason, as per the policies established by each.

The lab school will ensure that the educational and professional qualifications of its teachers and administrators meet VDOE requirements for licensing and/or endorsement areas.

The Applicant will use the Lab School Standing Committee’s Best Practices on Administration of Lotteries for College Partnership Laboratory Schools to develop a fully operational lottery process.

The Applicant provided detailed information on overall school management including personnel management that sufficiently demonstrates success for the proposed Lab School. The Standing Committee highly recommends the ACCESS Academy Laboratory School to the Board.

ELEMENT RUBRIC RATING:

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PUBLIC COMMENT ASSESSMENT:

The application received numerous institutional endorsements that supported the application.

AREAS REQUIRING VDOE REINFORCEMENT:

VDOE may need to provide guidance memorandums between school districts and the Lab School as well as guidance on the proposed school lottery process.

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 \$3,360,000 in operational per-pupil funding support over a four-year period. The Applicant is planning on developing a diversified funding strategy, including grants, corporate sponsorships, and community support to reduce dependence on any single source of funding. This financial stability will be vital for the long-term sustainability of the Academy.

The Applicant’s current operations complies with all fiscal policies and procedures through their fiscal agent, GMU. In addition, the Applicant will collaborate through the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) process with LCPS for transportation services for ACCESS Academy.

GMU is an agency of the Commonwealth of Virginia and is self-insured by the Commonwealth of Virginia Risk Management Plan for all claims up to the maximum provided by the Code of Virginia for general liability and property.

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 ACCESS Academy Laboratory School to the Board.

ELEMENT RUBRIC RATING:

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PUBLIC COMMENT ASSESSMENT:

The application received numerous institutional endorsements that supported the application.

AREAS REQUIRING VDOE REINFORCEMENT:

VDOE may need to assist with Memorandums of Understandings if other school districts are added as the result of the success of the ACCESS Academy pilot program.

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 using the secure VDOE Dropbox process or other secure Student Information Systems procedures.

GMU and NOVA will follow the standard procedure as required by SCHEV and SACS-COC for closure of a program. There are no other agreements that will require dissolution. The Standing Committee highly recommends the ACCESS Academy Laboratory School to the Board.

ELEMENT RUBRIC RATING:

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

The application received 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 ACCESS Academy Laboratory School to the Board.

ELEMENT RUBRIC RATING:

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	Emerging/Partial detail	Indicates preliminary stages of implementation for some practices and procedures
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PUBLIC COMMENT ASSESSMENT:

The application received 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 Accelerated College and Employability Skills (ACCESS) Academy is 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. ACCESS Academy aims to alleviate the administrative and financial costs associated with preparing students for high-demand careers. With multiple pathways and on/off ramps to support student access and workforce readiness for high-demand careers in software development, cyber security, data management, and networking in the Information Technology field, ACCESS Academy will utilize 1) wraparound support, 2) innovative teaching and learning methods, 3) transdisciplinary collaboration, and a 4) learn and earn approach, alongside an assets-based approach to students’ strengths and funds of knowledge to create college and employment opportunities.

With solid academic curriculum theory proposed the Standing Committee highly recommends the George Mason Laboratory School to the Board.

As this College Laboratory School Application is in the operational development stages, 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.

Lab School Application for George Mason University

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 GMU ACCESS Laboratory School to the Board.