



# VIRGINIA BOARD OF EDUCATION

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# AGENDA ITEM

**Agenda Item:** L

**Date:** April 25, 2024

**Title:** First and Final Review of College Partnership Laboratory School Application from Roanoke College (Explore@RC)

**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 February 2, 2024, Roanoke College (“RC”) submitted a college partnership laboratory school (“lab school” or “RC lab school”) application for RC’s Lab School (“RC application”) for consideration by the Board of Education (“Board”). RC’s Lab School is formally named “Explore@RC.” 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 April 11, 2024.

The Standing Committee received the Explore @RC application and completeness and compliance report, and it also asked questions of representatives from Explore @RC after a detailed presentation from the Explore @RC applicants including Dr. Lisa Stoneman, Associate Professor at Roanoke College; Ms. Heather Johnson, Director of Academic Grants and Foundations at Roanoke College; Ms. Natasha Watts, Executive Director of Explore@RC; Dr. David Taylor, Assistant Vice President for Academic Operations, Roanoke College; Dr. Kathy Wolfe, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean, Roanoke College; Mr. Jesse Griffin,

Director, Center for Civic Engagement at Roanoke College, and Ms. Jennifer Dean, Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, Salem City Public Schools. Dr. Andy Armstrong, on behalf of the VDOE, provided the Standing Committee with an overview of the objectives of the Explore @RC lab school, the VDOE Expert team completion and compliance process, as well as their compliance coaching and review of additional application materials received from Explore @RC since their initial submission in February of 2024. The Explore @RC applicants were present at the meeting and answered questions posed by the Standing Committee at final review. The Standing Committee unanimously approved First and Final Review of the Explore @RC application to be forwarded for consideration by the Virginia Board of Education contingent upon responsiveness by Explore @RC to the provision of the following:

- Additional information related to sustainability, including fundraising and local contribution.
- Additional letters of financial support or commitments from potential funding partners and/or a letter of support from Roanoke College detailing commitment to ongoing and enduring support for Explore @RC.

VDOE staff posted the RC application for the 10-day public comment period on April 11, and it remained available until April 25. No comment was received.

On April 11, 2024, Dr. Andy Armstrong provided the Standing Committee with an overview of the objectives of the Explore @RC lab school, the VDOE Expert team completion and compliance process, as well as their compliance coaching and review of additional application materials received from Explore @RC since their initial submission in February of 2024. The Explore @RC 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 RC lab school application and refer to the Board for approval.

VDOE staff provided technical assistance to the Roanoke College team during the development stage prior to submission of their application and following submission in preparation for Standing Committee review. Following submission of the application, the first round of counseling from VDOE SME review was provided to the Applicants the week of February 19. A technical assistance call was held on February 26, 2024, to discuss the SME feedback with the Roanoke College applicant team. A revised application was submitted to the VDOE on March 8, 2024, and an additional round of SME feedback was provided on March 18, 2024. An additional technical assistance call was held on March 21, 2024. A meeting to discuss budget and sustainability was held among the applicants, VDOE, and Governor's Transformation Office on March 26, 2024.

The application proposes for Roanoke College to begin a lab school in collaboration and partnership with Salem City Public Schools. The proposed lab school named “Explore@RC” is an innovative interdisciplinary lab school model that focuses on providing career exposure to students through real-world problem solving in collaboration with higher education professionals, pre-service college students, and industry experts. Students remain enrolled in their home school division and engage dual enrollment opportunities on the Roanoke College Campus in grades 10-12. Students will take two courses per semester (four courses per academic year). In grade 12, one of these courses will be a work-based capstone course that will be aligned with the student’s Career Pathway (STEM/Healthcare, Education/Global Studies, or Communications/Civic Engagement). The lab school would address multiple desirable outcomes for students, future teachers, and regional schools with hiring needs, including the following:

- Students will engage in high-level application of real-world problem-solving while working closely with a team of experts from both industry and the higher education partners.
- RC’s Lab School will provide a space for innovation where educators, industry, and pre-service professionals can explore best practices in teaching and learning.
- Students will engage in coursework aligned with personal interest and regional market demand industry and business, streamlining the pipeline for high-wage, high-skill, high-demand employment in the region served by the Lab School.

The Lab School statutes favor control by the institute of Higher Education. The governance structure of the Explore @RC meets those criteria. VDOE SME team will continue to advise Explore @RC 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 of Education waive first

review and approve the RC lab school application for a five-year contract period 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 Roanoke College, including awarding start-up funds and up to \$2,380,000 [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 RC lab school proposal partners with Salem City Schools to provide dual enrollment programming at Roanoke College. Lab school students are provided specialty courses in one of three distinct curricular pathways of their choice (Education/Global Studies, STEM/Healthcare, and Communications/Civic Engagement). Additionally, the proposal has undergone a thorough review process by the Standing Committee. Approval at the April 25, 2024, meeting of the Board is critical to allowing the lab school to begin start-up activities in order to open for operations in the 2024-2025 school year.

### **Previous Review or Action**

The Explore @RC application has undergone review by the Board's Standing Committee:

**Date:** April 11, 2024

**Action:** First and Final Review of College Partnership Laboratory School Application from Roanoke 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 eight public meetings in 2023 and four in 2024. After each meeting, the Standing Committee has provided a report on progress to the Board. In its meetings, the Standing Committee has set up 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 Explore @RC lab school application on February 2, 2024, Dr. Andy Armstrong, Assistant Superintendent of Strategic Innovation for the Virginia Department of Education, 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
- Ms. Shawna LeBlond, Director, Office of Teacher Licensure
- Mr. Edward Lanza, Director of Budgeting
- Mr. Jason Ellis, Office of Student Performance and Support
- Ms. Rebecca Askew, Director of Policy
- Ms. Claire Bremner, Coordinator of Innovation
- 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 and final review on April 11, 2024.

At review, the Explore @RC 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, with emphasis on financial sustainability of the lab school beyond the four-year grant funding timeline. RC applicants responded to all

questions, and the Standing Committee approved first and final review and cleared the RC application for the 10-day public comment posting period. The Standing Committee recommended the Explore @RC application to advance to Board consideration for approval at the April 25, 2024, Board meeting.

At the Standing Committee meeting in April, Dr. Andy Armstrong stated the Explore @RC Lab School is compliant and ready to implement and recommended to the Committee that the Explore @RC Lab School be forwarded to the Virginia Board of Education for their consideration for approval at the April 25, 2024, meeting. The Explore @RC applicants were present at the meeting to answer any questions posed by the Standing Committee at standing committee review. Satisfied with all Explore @RC 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 RC 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 the [Virginia Education Update #2024-15](#).

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

Dr. Frank Shushok Jr., President, Roanoke College  
Dr. Nancy Bradley, Chair, Salem City Public Schools Board  
Dr. Curtis Hicks, Superintendent, Salem City Public Schools  
Ms. Karen Pillis, Executive Director, West End Center of Youth

### **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 RC 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, Roanoke College, and participating school divisions.

**Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources**

This item will not impact resources at VDOE.