



COLLEGE PARTNERSHIP LABORATORY SCHOOLS
STANDING COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATION REPORT
College Partnership Laboratory School Application For:

Roanoke College

April 2024
VIRGINIA BOARD OF EDUCATION

Lab School Application for Roanoke College

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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:

Roanoke College submitted a Laboratory School Application for Explore@RC (“Explore@RC”). Explore@RC is a partnership between Roanoke College and Salem City Schools who worked jointly to develop the concept for this lab school, based on pressing and emergent needs identified with Salem High School students and the broader Roanoke Valley.

Explore@RC is committed to providing an exceptional educational experience that empowers students to thrive academically, socially, and personally. Explore@RC will serve a growing population of economically disadvantaged students in Southwestern Virginia to provide traditional dual enrollment opportunities that are often inaccessible due to cost and transportation barriers. Explore@RC’s goal is to provide an encouraging, supportive environment for high school students who may be the first in their family to attend college or lack access to college preparatory programs, empowering them to see college as a viable pathway for their future.

Additionally, Explore@RC features three career-oriented pathways: Education/Global Studies, STEM/Healthcare, and Communications/Civic Engagement. Courses are inquiry-based and provide dual enrollment credit. The academic program spans grades 10-12 and will culminate in a senior capstone course with project-based learning and fieldwork related to the selected Career Pathway. These pathways tie directly into workforce needs in the Roanoke region and will set students up for success in their chosen pathway through academic preparation and real-world learning opportunities.

With solid academic curriculum theory proposed and a state-of-the-art facility in place, the Standing Committee highly recommends the Roanoke College 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:

Mission: Explore@RC is committed to providing an exceptional educational experience that empowers students to thrive academically, socially, and personally. Our mission is to cultivate a diverse and inclusive learning community where all students can reach their full potential, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Vision: Explore@RC students will acquire skills to succeed in their fields of interest, build confidence in their own abilities to intellectually engage with contemporary issues, and gain hands-on experiences through service and internships in the Roanoke Valley.

Explore@RC commits to following and complying with § 22.1-349.3 of the *Code of Virginia*—it recognizes it is subject to all federal and state laws in hiring and enrollment practices; enrollment will be through an admissions process that recognizes the need for a lottery and with space available for any interested students in the Commonwealth; a Governing Board will administer and manage the lab school. Roanoke College and Explore@RC commit to responsibility for the lab school’s operation, including budget preparation, contracts for services, and personnel matters. Explore@RC will not charge tuition to its students and will work closely with local school divisions for the purpose of building seamless education opportunities for students in the region.

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 Explore@RC 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:**

The overall goal of the Laboratory School at Roanoke College is to provide at-risk high school students with an inquiry-based, career-focused, academically challenging program that allows them to engage in innovative, collaborative instruction. Explore@RC will offer dual enrollment credits to these students and accelerate their path towards career readiness and real-world preparation. Through the thematic collection of courses on a path students choose for themselves (with the guidance of counselors at the high school and Explore@RC staff), the introduction to Explore@RC, the capstone, and the community-based context of the program, students will investigate contemporary and relevant issues from thematic perspectives and apply learning to work in the community with civic engagement partners. Students will have early exposure to college life and learning and increase their confidence that higher education is a credible pursuit for themselves.

Student Learning Outcomes Lab School students will:

1. Formulate questions and explore novel solutions to real-world problems alongside scholars and experts in the field.
2. Develop and use critical thinking to engage with community-based, multi-faceted challenges.
3. Build and use employer-requested skills such as critical thinking, communication and problem-solving.
4. Develop a sense of motivation through engagement with authentic stakeholders in the community and on the college campus.
5. Engage in and reflect on professional career exploration.

With the required credentials and well-designed curriculum and assessment processes in place, the Standing Committee highly recommends the Explore@RC 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:

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The Applicant has proposed a solid, theoretical curriculum/instructional approach. VDOE can provide guidance on any statutory requirements related to expeditionary learning, internships, etc.

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 of Explore@RC will be comprised of members of Roanoke College administration, local school district administration, Career Pathway Representatives (Education, STEM/Healthcare, and Communications/Civic Engagement), a Roanoke College faculty member, at least one parent, and at least one Lab School student.

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 Explore@RC 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:

Explore@RC 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. Explore@RC recently hired an Executive Director to manage and oversee school operations on Roanoke College’s campus. This position provides strategic vision and leadership to ensure that Explore@RC becomes a leader in preparing Roanoke Valley students for advanced education opportunities. The Director will oversee all aspects of Explore@RC, including leadership for faculty, staff, and students consistent with Explore@RC’s by-laws, goals, policies, and procedures.

Roanoke College will work closely with participating school systems to post, recruit, and hire Explore@RC staff. All staff will be considered employees of Roanoke College and will be hired in accordance with Roanoke College policies, but the College will consult with local K-12 divisions for recommendations and references. Explore@RC’s employment policies are based upon Roanoke College’s standard employment policies and will be overseen by Human Resources.

The Applicant will assemble a working group to outline, build out, and propose a Student Code of Conduct policy to address student behavior, discipline, and participation in school activities. Roanoke College and Salem City Public Schools have a Memorandum of Understanding that details the contractual relationship for Explore@RC. This will also become the foundation for MOUs to be drafted with Roanoke County and Roanoke City Schools.

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 Explore@RC 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 Roanoke College

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 \$2.38 million in operational per-pupil funding support over a four-year period.

Roanoke College maintains financial processes in accordance with the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Roanoke College utilizes a fund accounting system typical of higher education institutions, in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles. The financial plan and projections for Explore@RC have been developed by Roanoke College’s Associate Vice President of Finance and Budget and approved by the Vice President of Business Affairs. All financial policies, controls, and audit requirements of Explore@RC will be overseen by Roanoke College’s Business Office, in accordance with the College’s existing policies and procedures.

Explore@RC currently has one collaborative partnership designated with a Memorandum of Understanding between Salem City Public Schools and Roanoke College. Salem High School will be a partner for Explore@RC in year one of operations. Additional partnerships with local school divisions may be made in years two and three, but have not yet been formalized (Roanoke County and Roanoke City Schools).

Roanoke College’s existing liability and property insurance policies will provide the necessary coverage for Explore@RC. Health insurance is offered to all Explore@RC employees, faculty, and staff through Anthem BCBS, in accordance with Roanoke College health insurance policies.

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 Explore@RC 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 one public comment and numerous institutional endorsements that supported the application.

AREAS REQUIRING VDOE REINFORCEMENT:

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VDOE may need to assist with fiscal agent status change and resultant Memorandums of Understanding between Roanoke College and additional public schools/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 using the secure VDOE Dropbox process or other secure Student Information Systems procedures.

The Applicant’s proposed governing Board’s Constitution and Bylaws will 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 Explore@RC 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:

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 Explore@RC 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 numerous institutional endorsements that supported the application.

AREAS REQUIRING VDOE REINFORCEMENT:

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

CONCLUDING REPORT COMMENTS

The Explore @ RC Lab School is a partnership with Salem City Schools and features three career-oriented pathways: Education/Global Studies, STEM/Healthcare, and Communications/Civic Engagement. Courses are inquiry-based and provide dual enrollment credit. Examples of courses include "Introduction to Public Health," "Chemistry and Crime," and "Principles of Education." The program will culminate in a senior capstone course with project-based learning and fieldwork related to the selected Career Pathway. These pathways tie directly into workforce needs in the Roanoke region and will set students up for success in their chosen pathway through academic preparation and real-world learning opportunities. Explore @RC students will have the unique opportunity to experience the critical exposure of class attendance on the RC campus.

With solid academic curriculum theory proposed and a state-of-the-art facility in place, the Standing Committee highly recommends the Roanoke 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 Roanoke College

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 Explore@RC Laboratory School to the Board.