



# VIRGINIA BOARD OF EDUCATION

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# AGENDA ITEM

**Agenda Item:** B

**Date:** May 21, 2024

**Title:** First and Final Review of College Partnership Laboratory School Application from George Mason University George Mason University's Shenandoah Valley Rural Regional College Partnership Laboratory School for Data Science Computing and Applications (DCSA)

**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 April 2, 2024, George Mason University ("GMU") submitted a college partnership laboratory school ("lab school" or "GMU DCSA") application for GMU's DCSA lab school ("GMU 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 May 6, 2024.

The Standing Committee received the GMU application and completeness and compliance report, and it also asked questions of representatives from GMU after a detailed presentation from the GMU applicants including Dr. Padmanabhan Seshaiyer, Professor and Director at George Mason University and Dr. Deb Crawford, Supervisor of Mathematics & World Language Instructional Services Department at Frederick County Public Schools. Dr. Andy Armstrong, on behalf of the VDOE, provided the Standing Committee with an overview of the objectives of the GMU lab school, the VDOE Expert team completion and compliance process, as well as their

compliance coaching and review of additional application materials received from GMU since their initial submission in April of 2024. The GMU 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 GMU application to be forwarded for consideration by the Virginia Board of Education.

VDOE staff posted the GMU application for the 10-day public comment period on May 6 and it remained available until May 20. No comment was received.

Prior to the Standing Committee's First and Final Review on May 6, 2024, VDOE staff provided technical assistance to the GMU DCSA team in preparation for Standing Committee review. Prior to application submission, technical assistance calls were held between VDOE and the GMU DCSA team on August 17, 2023, November 2, 2023, November 14, 2023, and March 18, 2023. Following submission of the application, additional technical assistance was provided and the first round of counseling from VDOE SME review was provided to the Applicants the week of April 16. A revised application was submitted to the VDOE on April 18, 2024. An additional application responsive to OAG and VDOE review was provided to the VDOE on April 25, 2024 for completion of this report to the College Partnership Laboratory School Standing Committee. Follow-up feedback has been provided to the Applicants.

The application proposes for GMU to begin a lab school in collaboration and partnership with Laurel Ridge Community College and Frederick County Public Schools. The proposed lab school named "GMU DCSA" 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 while being provided with several options to engage in career exploration, including dual enrollment opportunities at Laurel Ridge Community College. The proposed lab school will serve 50 students from grade 10, 50 students from grade 11, and 50 students from grade 12, who will have the opportunity to engage in DCSA through five common experiences including:

- Interdisciplinary Coursework Experience: Students will be exposed to data-focused coursework from various aspects of STEM that applies to the real-world workplaces;
- Research and Creative Experience: Students will work on specific, student-led research projects, where he/she works closely with the faculty across the commonwealth and other researchers helping them earn college credit through George Mason University;

- Design-thinking and Entrepreneurship Experience: Students will learn to solve problems using a human-centered approach to problem solving and, in this process, learn to build viable business models;
- Work-based Learning Experience: Students will be mentored by Big Data business and industry partners through a choice of work-based experiences and;
- Global and Multicultural Experience: Data collaborations around global challenges where every student will interact with students from developing countries.

All students will also have the opportunity to earn directed online data analytics focused certifications through companies such as Google and Amazon. Instruction will be administered in a hands-on environment and include simultaneous teaching by FCPS staff, GMU faculty and pre-service students, LRCC faculty, and industry experts. 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.
- GMU’s DCSA 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 GMU Lab School meets those criteria. VDOE SME team will continue to advise GMU 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 GMU 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 GMU, including awarding start-up funds and up to \$1,800,000 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 GMU lab school proposal partners with Laurel Ridge Community College, a partner to Frederick County Public Schools. Additionally, the proposal has undergone a thorough review process by the Standing Committee. Approval at the May 21, 2024, meeting of the Board is critical to allowing the lab school to immediately engage in start-up activities in order to open for the 2025-2026 school year.

### **Previous Review or Action**

The GMU application has undergone review by the Board’s Standing Committee:

**Date:** May 6, 2024

**Action:** First and Final Review of College Partnership Laboratory School Application from George Mason University.

### **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 five 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 GMU lab school application on April 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. Claire Bremner, Coordinator of Innovation
- Ms. Sofia McDaniel, Senior Policy Analyst

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 May 6, 2024.

At review, the GMU 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 sustainability, provision of meals to students, and the lab school's plans to ensure that the lab school is open to all students. The GMU applicants responded to all questions, and the Standing Committee approved first and final review and cleared the GMU application for the 10-day public comment posting period. The Standing Committee recommended the GMU application to advance to Board consideration for approval at the May 21, 2024, Board meeting.

At the Standing Committee meeting in May, Dr. Andy Armstrong stated GMU's DCSA is compliant and ready to implement and recommended to the Committee that GMU's DCSA be forwarded to the Virginia Board of Education for their consideration for approval at the May 21, 2024, meeting. The GMU applicants were present at the meeting to answer any questions posed by the Standing Committee at standing committee review. Satisfied with all GMU 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 GMU 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 #2024-19](#).

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

- Ms. Megan Gordon, School Board Chair, Page County Public Schools
- Mr. Bryan Pearce-Gonzalez, School Board Chair, Winchester Public Schools
- Mr. Dennis Barlow, School Board Chair, Shenandoah County Public Schools
- Ms. Susan Pauling, School Board Chair, Fauquier County Public Schools
- Mr. Scott Sturdivant, School Board Chair, Frederick County Public Schools
- Dr. Kristen Pence, School Board Chair, Warren County Public Schools
- Ms. Monica Singh-Smith, School Board Chair, Clarke County Public Schools
- Mr. Jason Van Heukelem, Superintendent, Winchester Public Schools

### **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 GMU 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, George Mason University, Laurel Ridge Community College, and participating school divisions.

**Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources**

This item will not impact resources at VDOE.