



COLLEGE PARTNERSHIP LABORATORY SCHOOLS
STANDING COMMITTEE

RECOMMENDATION REPORT
College Partnership Laboratory School Application For:

George Mason University - Frederick

May 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 and seven partner school districts, one Governor’s School and Laurel Ridge Community College (“LRCC”) in the Shenandoah Valley. The seven-partner rural and rural fringe school divisions include Clarke County, Fauquier County, Page County, Shenandoah County, Warren County and Winchester City, along with the Governor School at Mountain Vista. (“Applicants”). GMU will also leverage the expertise from faculty in the College of Science, College of Engineering and Computing, GMU Smithsonian Mason Conservation Center, LRCC and Shenandoah University. The lab school is entitled Shenandoah Valley Rural Regional College Partnership Laboratory School for Data Science, Computing and Applications (“DCSA Lab School”).

The DSCA Lab School will provide access to five learning 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.

In addition, the DSCA Lab School will create new teacher professional learning opportunities that build capacity in the Valley for high school teachers to teach Data Science and/or Computer Science elective courses.

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 DSCA Laboratory School as a school within Frederick County Public Schools exposes and seeks to enact the Frederick County Public Schools Mission and Vision from our division strategic plan: Inspire 2025: A Promise for Progress.

The Frederick County Public Schools Mission and Vision aligns well with the Mission of GMU DSCA which is innovative and entrepreneurial in spirit and utilizes its multi-campus organization and location to attract outstanding faculty, staff, and students. Through this College partnership lab school, George Mason will:

- Educate the new generation of leaders for the 21st century men and women capable of shaping a global community with vision, justice, and clarity.
- Encourage freedom of thought, speech, and inquiry in a tolerant, respectful academic setting that values diversity.
- Provide opportunities for innovative and interdisciplinary courses of study that enable students to exercise analytical and imaginative thinking and make well-founded ethical decisions.
- Nurture and support a highly qualified and entrepreneurial faculty that is excellent at teaching, active in pure and applied research, capable of providing a broad range of intellectual and cultural insights and is responsive to the needs of students and their communities.
- Maintain an international reputation for superior education and public service that affirms its role as the intellectual and cultural nexus among the Commonwealth, the nation, and the world.

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 DSCA 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:

Lab School Application for George Mason University - Frederick

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 DSCA Laboratory School will focus on delivering a high-quality high school program of studies to students All courses will be in alignment with the studies prescribed Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) and graduation requirements. The DSCA Laboratory School will be learner-centered, typically inquiry and project based using design thinking and the data cycle iterative processes. Two electives per year will offer student choice in goal setting and selection of workforce credentials, certificates and university mentored research projects and apprenticeships as part of career and personalized learning.

The program and Data Hub space will model the collaborative work teams in the digital industry spaces. Classroom learning experiences will be designed based on research-based approaches to how educators deliver instruction featuring flexible grouping, hands-on learning, student reflection and use of feedback and student choice in how they access content and where possible how to demonstrate learning with projects and applications.

The curriculum will be designed to be interdisciplinary, data-driven, integrating subjects whenever possible to create connections between different fields of study. Project-based learning will be a central component, allowing students to engage deeply with topics and develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration skills. The curriculum will include both traditional academic subjects and practical, real-world skills such as digital literacy, communication, and creativity. Flexible pathways will be offered to accommodate diverse student interests and learning styles, including opportunities for internships, apprenticeships, and independent study projects.

With the required credentials for curriculum development and assessment in place, the Standing Committee highly recommends the DSCA 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:

Lab School Application for George Mason University - Frederick

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 will build on the existing Shenandoah Valley CS Regional Partnership founded in 2019 with eleven school divisions, Governor’s School and 4-year institutions (GMU, SU) and two-year Community College (LRCC). The school will be governed at three different levels that include:

- The Level 1 - Governing Board of the DSCA Lab School will be co-chaired the Superintendent of Frederick County Public Schools and the Dean of George Mason University. They will work with a group of academic leaders from George Mason University, Frederick County Public Schools and Laurel Ridge Community College along with a group of members representing Workforce Development in Shenandoah Valley, a high school teacher from James Wood High School, two parent representatives and one senior student representative from Frederick County Public Schools. This group will provide diverse expertise and perspectives for guiding the school's strategic direction and operations.
- The Level 2 - Superintendent's Committee is composed of superintendents from seven participating school divisions along with the Regional Director of the Governor’s School at Mountain Vista.
- The Level 3 - DSCA Lab School Planning Committee consisting of GMU and LRCC leadership, as well as leadership from Frederick County Public Schools and Dowell J Howard Center. This committee will collaborate to design, develop, and implement plans for the DSCA Lab School, drawing on their expertise in various areas to ensure its success and effectiveness in meeting educational objectives.

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 DSCA 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:

Lab School Application for George Mason University - Frederick

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. The proposed DSCA lab school day to day operations staff will include the Director of the Lab School, a part-time administrative assistant, a full-time Systems Administrator and lab technician and three lab school teachers. All Lab School staff will be employees of GMU.

At present, the school’s faculty and leadership. 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.

The personnel of the DSCA Lab School will be directly hired and employed by GMU. Lab school employees will have opportunities for co-teaching alongside GMU and LRCC staff when appropriate. All licensed personnel will be recruited by GMU either as adjunct faculty or adjunct professional development staff. The onboarding process will be tailored to incorporate elements of both GMU and Frederick County Public Schools' onboarding procedures, ensuring compliance with GMU policies and K-12 instructional guidelines at the laboratory school. 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 DSCA 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 - Frederick

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 \$1,800,000 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 DSCA Academy.

The Applicant’s current operations complies with all fiscal policies and procedures through their fiscal agent, GMU. The governing board for the DSCA Lab School may choose to adopt certain fiscal policies and procedures, but these policies will serve as a baseline, and only adopted fiscal policies and regulations will override a fiscal agent policy.

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 GMU DSCA 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 may need to assist with ideas and support for longer term financial sustainability planning.

ELEMENT 7: PLACEMENT PLAN

OVERALL ELEMENT ASSESSMENT:

The Applicant’s Lab School placement plan includes the notification to the students and their families of the option to take classes at their geographically zoned high school. They would also receive notification of different specialty programs they might consider transferring to, should the family continue to desire a specialty experience. Some examples in the area include:

- Mountain Vista Governor’s School
- The Handley High School Innovation Center
- Other programs at DJ Howard Center
- Laurel Ridge Data Science and CS certificate

The Applicants 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 DSCA 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:

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 DSCA 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 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 DSCA Lab School will provide access to five learning experiences including:
- A. Interdisciplinary Coursework Experience: Students will be exposed to data-focused coursework from various aspects of STEM that applies to the real-world workplaces;
 - B. 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;
 - C. 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;
 - D. Work-based Learning Experience: Students will be mentored by Big Data business and industry partners through a choice of work-based experiences and;
 - E. Global and Multicultural Experience: Data collaborations around global challenges where every student will interact with students from developing countries.

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

Lab School Application for George Mason University - Frederick

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.

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 DSCA Laboratory School to the Board.