

MINUTES

REGULAR MEETING OF THE ALBEMARLE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, October 10, 2024

[Meeting Video Link](#)

ROLL CALL - UPON THE ROLL BEING CALLED, THE FOLLOWING WERE PRESENT:

BOARD MEMBERS - Dr. Kate Acuff, Dr. Rebecca Berlin, Ms. Judy Le, Ms. Ellen Osborne, Mr. Chuck Pace, Mr. Graham Paige, Ms. Allison Spillman, and Student Representative, Cam Roper.

ABSENT – None

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE - Superintendent Matthew Haas; School Division Counsel Josiah Black; Assistant Superintendent Clare Keiser; Assistant Superintendent Daphne Keiser; Assistant Superintendent Chandra Hayes; Chief Operating Officer Rosalyn Schmitt; Chief Technology Officer Christine Diggs; Public Affairs and Strategic Communications Officer Helen Dunn; and Clerk of the Board Christine Thompson

AGENDA ITEM NO. 1.0 CLOSED MEETING

Agenda Item No. 1.1 Closed Meeting - At 5:00 p.m., Dr. Acuff offered a **motion** that the Albemarle County Public School Board go into a closed meeting as authorized by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, section 2.2-3711(A) of the Code of Virginia, which provides that “Neither the gathering of employees of a public body nor the gathering or attendance of two or more members of a public body at any place or function where no part of the purpose of such gathering or attendance is the discussion or transaction of any public business, and such gathering or attendance was not called or prearranged with any purpose of discussing or transacting any business of the public body shall be deemed a “meeting.” The purpose of today’s closed meeting is to allow School Board members to engage in a facilitated discussion about standard operating procedures for internal and external communications, which will not involve the discussion of any public business. Ms. Osborne seconded the **motion**. **A voice vote was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Dr. Acuff, Ms. Osborne, Mr. Pace, Mr. Paige, and Chair Le.

NAYS: None.

ABSENT: Dr. Berlin and Ms. Spillman

Motion carried by a 5:0:2 vote.

Dr. Berlin arrived at 5:05 p.m. and joined the Board in Closed Session

Ms. Spillman arrived at 5:25 p.m. and joined the Board in Closed Session

AGENDA ITEM NO. 2.0 OPENING ACTIVITIES

Agenda Item No. 2.1 Call to Order - At 6:30 p.m., Chair Le called the Albemarle County School Board meeting back to order.

Agenda Item No. 2.2 Closed Meeting Certification - At 6:31 p.m., Dr. Acuff offered a **motion** that the Board certify by recorded vote that to the best of each Board member’s knowledge, only public business matters lawfully exempted from the open meeting requirements of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act and identified in the motion authorizing the Closed Meeting were heard, discussed, or considered in the Closed Meeting. Ms. Osborne seconded the **motion**. **Roll was called, and the motion passed by the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Ms. Spillman, Dr. Berlin, Mr. Pace, Mr. Paige, Ms. Osborne, Dr. Acuff, and Chair Le.

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 7:0 vote.

Agenda Item No. 2.3 - Roll Call

Agenda Item No. 2.4 - Pledge of Allegiance

Agenda Item No. 2.5 - Moment of Silence

AGENDA ITEM NO. 3.0 APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Agenda Item No. 3.1 Approval of Agenda – Dr. Acuff offered a **motion** to approve the agenda. Mr. Paige seconded the **motion**. **A voice vote was called, and the motion passed with the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Dr. Acuff, Dr. Berlin, Ms. Osborne, Mr. Pace, Mr. Paige, Ms. Spillman and Chair Le.

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 7:0 vote.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4.0 APPROVAL OF CONSENT AGENDA

- 4.1 Approval of Consent Agenda
- 4.2 Approval of the Minutes
- 4.3 For Action: Policy Review and Revision
- 4.4 For Information: Policy Review and Revision
- 4.5 For Information: Annual Class Size Report*
- 4.6 FY 2025/26 Budget Development Calendar (with revision)
- 4.7 Personnel Action
- 4.8 FY 2024/25 Fee Schedule (amended)

Ms. Osborne offered a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Ms. Spillman **seconded the motion**. **A voice vote was called, and the motion passed with the following recorded votes:**

AYES: Dr. Acuff, Dr. Berlin, Ms. Osborne, Mr. Pace, Mr. Paige, Ms. Spillman and Chair Le.

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

Motion carried by a 7:0 vote.

* At Mr. Paige’s request, staff will send the Board more information on lab classes

AGENDA ITEM NO 5.0 ITEMS PULLED FROM CONSENT AGENDA - None

AGENDA ITEM NO. 6.0 ANNOUNCEMENTS

Agenda Item No. 6.1 Student Representative to the School Board, [Cam Roper](#), Community Lab School

Agenda Item Non. 6.2 Spotlight on Education – Hispanic Heritage Month

During the Hispanic Heritage Month - a presentation was given to the Albemarle County School Board, Principal Christy Isaiah of Woodbrook Elementary, along with third-grade teacher Caroline Peterson, shared the school's efforts to celebrate and educate about Hispanic heritage. Principal Isaiah emphasized the school's commitment to equity and the cultural diversity of its student body, which includes over 20 languages and 33% Latino and Hispanic students.

Highlights included:

- Daily Morning Announcements: Students read facts related to Hispanic heritage, which teachers build upon during morning meetings with PowerPoint presentations.
- Cultural Displays: The school halls feature student work such as flags, books, timelines, projects, and biographies, showcasing lessons on influential Hispanic figures in history, art, and science.
- Art and Music Integration: Teachers have incorporated Hispanic culture into art and music classes, enhancing creative learning.
- 4th Grade Data Collection Project: Led by Jamila Jasper, this project engaged students in gathering data on the diverse origins of their peers, promoting cultural understanding and practicing data skills.
- Flag Ceremony: A school-wide morning meeting featuring a parade where students proudly display their countries' flags, promoting pride and belonging.
- Cultural Food Experience: The celebration concludes with a Hispanic-themed menu in the cafeteria, including traditional dishes and popsicles from a local business, La Flor Mejicana, fostering cultural appreciation.

The presentation concluded with an invitation to attend the flag ceremony, emphasizing the celebration's role in promoting pride and cultural awareness among students.

Agenda Item No. 6.3 School Board/Superintendent Business

Superintendent Haas provided several key updates to the board:

- National School Lunch Week: He highlighted the upcoming National School Lunch Week, encouraging board members to recognize the contributions of child nutrition staff.

- Burley Middle School Initiative: He mentioned a clothing drive and fundraiser organized by Burley Middle School students to support Hurricane Helene victims in North Carolina, with a special event planned for Monday.
- School Visits:
 - He shared details of his visit to Albemarle High School with Vice Chair Dr. Acuff, highlighting a calm atmosphere, engaging projects like the shape project in geometry, and an interactive biology class experiment on bacteria.
 - Dr. Haas visited Henley Middle School with Ms. Spillman, observing engaging teaching practices and student feedback on various subjects.
- Upcoming Events:
 - He outlined key observances in October, including the final days of National Hispanic Heritage Month, bullying prevention, Children's Health, learning disabilities awareness, and public-school principals' recognition.
 - He noted Walk to School Day and National School Bus Safety Week, emphasizing October 23rd as School Bus Transportation Employees Appreciation Day.
- Vaccine Fair: Dr. Haas announced a vaccine fair at Burley Middle School on October 26th, offering vaccinations for children and adults in partnership with UVA Health.

Dr. Acuff highlighted a new initiative at Albemarle High School, where the principal asked each teacher to write a short piece about their motivation for becoming an educator, displayed on laminated cards outside their doors. She also reminded everyone that it was National Mental Health Awareness Day.

Ms. Spillman praised the visit to Henley Middle School, noting how impressed she was that no cell phones were visible in classrooms or hallways, a significant improvement from when her children attended. She also shared her positive experience participating in Crozet's Walk and Bike to School Day, where she enthusiastically gave high fives to students and appreciated the PTO's efforts in organizing the event.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 7.0 PUBLIC COMMENT

Lila Gerow (Monticello High School Senior): Lila spoke about the importance of comprehensive sex education in schools. She referenced a 2018 incident involving inappropriate content shown to students and criticized the current curriculum for promoting abstinence without adequately addressing contraception with the realities of teenage sexual activity. The need for students to receive a full spectrum of information regarding sexual health, stating that sexual education is a right and urging the board to consider how to improve this aspect of their curriculum.

Karen Egan (Rivanna district): addressed concerns regarding school enrollment data and building capacity following the previous year's redistricting process. She noted that the predictions for enrollment were significantly underestimated and highlighted the disruptions caused by last minute teacher hiring, paid out that several elementary and high schools are currently over capacity, and expressed worries about overcrowding schools as well. She urged the board to prioritize addressing these issues and offer parental support in advocating additional funding and solutions to alleviate overcrowding.

Sean Parnell (Rio district): expressed gratitude for the support his child received during her transition into kindergarten. Staff members at Agnor and Woodbrook Elementary Schools. He emphasized the importance of the school's role in facilitating this transition and recognized the dedication of the staff who assisted his family during this time.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 8.0 – SCHOOL DIVISION BUSINESS

Agenda Item No. 8.1 – [2025 Legislative Agenda](#) – Dr. Helen Dunn - Every year, the Albemarle County School Board adopts a legislative program to inform our state legislators and public of our positions on the legislative policy issues that are important to Albemarle County Public Schools.

Dr. Berlin asked what the staff needs from the board, wondering if prioritization or highlighting top items would be most helpful. Dr. Dunn responded that prioritization from the board would indeed be beneficial, especially to understand which issues to emphasize. While the funding issue remains a priority, they welcome board members accompanying them to lobby in Richmond and appreciate guidance on items to prioritize or strike. Ms. Spillman is interested in accompanying Dr. Dunn to Richmond.

Ms. Osborne inquired if some proposals are unrealistic despite lobbying efforts. Staff agreed that some items may have a lower chance of success but emphasized the importance of showing support for these items to build momentum over time. Specific issues, like the grocery tax, are included in the funding discussion.

Chair Le noted the need for balance in advocating for items that impact various community groups, expressing skepticism about some proposals' chances of success but still appreciating efforts like advocating for free school meals. Dr. Dunn acknowledged the balance challenge and stressed the long-term value of persistent advocacy.

Dr. Dunn supported the point that success isn't only about getting bills passed immediately but about expressing support and gradually building influence over time. Examples like the Virginia Retirement System changes highlight how persistence eventually leads to policy shifts.

Ms. Roper shared insights on mental health support, emphasizing the benefit of having younger counselors for peer relatability. Dr. Dunn valued this perspective, recognizing it as an important consideration, even as they also factor in logistical concerns.

Agenda Item No. 8.2 – Enrollment Update – Ms. Rosalyn Schmitt - Staff presented an update on the enrollment for the 2024/25 school year.

Enrollment [report](#) for September 30, 2024

[2024-2025 Enrollment Update](#)

Ms. Spillman asked why student numbers have increased. Ms. Schmitt explained that it's largely due to students returning from private schools. This increase traces back to students who left during fourth or fifth grade. Projections are based on historical data, and while the trend will take time to solidify, the increase was not fully anticipated.

Ms. Osborne inquired about the need for more learning cottages and whether there is space for them. Ms. Schmitt confirmed that there is room, and mobile classrooms installed during the pandemic at various schools are still in use. Currently, there are 77 mobile classrooms.

Mr. Pace questioned whether the division has data on students choosing private schools. Ms. Schmitt responded that they only have self-reported data from some families, as there is no direct access to private school enrollment numbers.

Ms. Spillman also asked about pre-pandemic enrollment numbers. Ms. Schmitt noted that pre-pandemic enrollment was over 14,000 students. The current enrollment is close to that figure, but a school-by-school analysis would provide more detail.

Dr. Berlin asked about the total K-12 enrollment figure of 13,757 and whether it includes preschool special education students. Ms. Schmitt clarified that it does not include preschool or early education programs. Dr. Berlin also suggested exploring how kindergarten and first-grade enrollment patterns impact projections, as shifts in student numbers can have significant effects on classroom dynamics.

Dr. Acuff expressed appreciation that students are returning from private schools, noting that it was unclear during the pandemic where many students had gone. She acknowledged the continuing need for space despite this positive trend.

Agenda Item No. 8.3 – The School Board took a break from 7:26 p.m. to 7:36 p.m.

Agenda Item No. 8.4 – Long Range Planning – [2024 Recommendation](#) – Maya Kumazawa Staff provided updates and recommendations for the FY 26-30 Capital Improvement Program (CIP).

[Recommended FY26-FY30 Capital Improvement Program Request](#)

[Enrollment and Capacity Projections](#)

The purpose of the Long-Range Planning Advisory Committee (LRPAC) is to inform and advise the Superintendent and School Board in the development of comprehensive, long-term plans for facilities needs in the most effective and efficient way and in support of the School Division's Strategic Plan. The last comprehensive LRPAC report was provided in October 2023 and the School Board approved a revised recommendation in November 2023. [The 2023 LRPAC final report.](#)

Updates to the 2023 report will be provided as well as updates to Ongoing/Maintenance Programs.

Ms. Osborne asked about the composition and selection process of the preschool center design task force, questioning whether members are staff or community members and how the selection is made fairly. She also inquired if there is a standard system for forming such task forces. Ms. Schmitt confirmed that the task force includes current staff, community partners, and preschool teachers, and its purpose is to develop informed recommendations.

Ms. Spillman raised concerns about overcrowding in high schools, questioning the decision to invest in Center 2 when Center 1 is not at full capacity. She doubted that moving students to these centers would adequately solve the overcrowding issue and emphasized the urgency of addressing high school seating needs before 2032. She also questioned the cost-effectiveness of expanding the Community Lab School, given the modest projected increase in student enrollment. Ms. Schmitt explained that the Community Lab School project aims to increase capacity to about 400 students.

Ms. Spillman continued to emphasize the need to prioritize high school expansion, especially as enrollment is projected to keep increasing. She expressed concerns about relying on temporary solutions, such as mobile classrooms, and asked for more details about Center 1's capacity and plans for Center 2 if it also falls short of expectations. Dr. Haas responded that he has directed staff to reassess Center 1's capacity, noting that it had been miscalculated and needs a more accurate

evaluation. He referenced the 2017 high school study and the board's unanimous approval of the current plans, emphasizing that the capacity figures have changed over time based on evolving usage and recalculations.

Ms. Spillman expressed frustration, questioning how the capacity calculations for Center 1 could change and reiterating the ongoing problem of insufficient seats at high schools. Dr. Haas clarified that school capacities are often recalculated due to changes in usage and class sizes. He mentioned that Center 1's initial capacity was determined under a previous administration and that it was recalculated for accuracy. He suggested that board members could revisit the direction of the high school expansion strategy if needed.

Dr. Acuff provided historical context for Ms. Spillman's concerns, explaining that the board, including her and Mr. Paige, previously debated whether to build a new full high school or adopt a more flexible and creative approach. The decision at the time, supported by expert consultants, was to pursue a central model that emphasized renovating and expanding existing facilities rather than constructing a completely new high school. This plan aimed to achieve quality education infrastructure at roughly two-thirds the cost of a new high school.

Dr. Acuff further acknowledged that the pandemic delayed these plans, and the current concerns about capacity are valid. She noted that the new center being built is smaller than a standard high school facility but agreed with Dr. Haas that revisiting the original recommendations and trade-offs would be worthwhile. She also emphasized that the board has focused almost entirely on capacity-related projects and highlighted the immense cost of building a new high school, estimating it at \$160 million, including land costs, which would significantly impact the division's budget for other projects.

Chair Le expressed frustration over high school overcrowding and the challenges in securing adequate funding for new facilities. She referenced a recent bill that reached the governor's desk but was vetoed, which would have provided approximately \$30 million annually for capital projects. Acknowledging the financial constraints faced by the Board of Supervisors, she noted their efforts to allocate additional funds, such as for the recent elementary school project. However, she emphasized that, given the current state administration and existing funding streams, securing the substantial resources needed for a comprehensive new high school seems unlikely. She advocated for continued efforts to address capacity issues within these limitations.

Ms. Schmitt clarified that Center 2 is set to begin construction in 2029-2030, but the project is already in the bidding phase, with a timeline for bids to be returned by November 7. He stressed the urgency of confirming any changes to the plan if the board wishes to take a different direction. She elaborated on Dr. Acuff's point, emphasizing that Center 2 was never intended to fully solve high school capacity issues. It was noted that the current high school capacity projects include planned expansions at Monticello and Western Albemarle High Schools, which represent a compromise between building a comprehensive new high school and utilizing centers. She acknowledged concerns about whether this approach is timely enough and encouraged the board to discuss whether to reprioritize and accelerate these projects. Ms. Schmitt emphasized the importance of clear and immediate direction from the board if adjustments to the current plan are needed.

Dr. Acuff highlighted the importance of expanding and modernizing all schools in addition to constructing new centers. She noted that funding has been shifted away from these broader infrastructure projects over time. She emphasized the need for the school board to improve communication with the community about these funding needs. Reflecting on the 2016 school construction referendum, she pointed out that it received overwhelming support, with 75% approval and at least 66% support in every precinct. Dr. Acuff stressed that the community is generally supportive of investing in school infrastructure, but the school board must actively make the case for continued and increased investment. She underscored the board's responsibility to engage and inform the public effectively.

Dr. Berlin asked for clarification about the elevator additions in elementary schools, questioning whether these are separate projects or part of a larger renovation plan. She mentioned hearing that the elevator project had not been approved and sought to understand its status. Ms. Schmitt explained that elevator additions were previously separate projects but, based on the board's recommendation last year, they have now been combined with broader school renovation projects. For instance, any elevator additions needed are included within elementary school renovation requests, and similar needs are folded into high school and middle school improvement plans, such as the gas plant project.

Chair Le asked for clarification on the high school restroom improvements, specifically regarding the number of communal restrooms being converted to single-user restrooms at Western Albemarle, Monticello, and Albemarle High Schools. Matt Wertman, Director of Building Services, explained that a previous study conducted for Albemarle and Western Albemarle High Schools provided recommendations, while Monticello High School was not included in that study. The recommendation for Albemarle High School was to convert one set of communal restrooms to single-user restrooms, while Western and Monticello High Schools each have projects to convert four sets, to ensure parity across the three high schools. Albemarle High School's design included additional constraints, such as mechanical spaces, which affected the number and placement of restrooms. The project at Albemarle includes about 12-14 single-user restrooms on the second floor and 14-16 on the first floor.

Ms. Roper highlighted a safety concern at the Community Lab School, noting that the school's evacuation route involves going down a hill, which poses a significant challenge for individuals using wheelchairs or mobility aids. She mentioned hearing about evacuation wheelchairs designed to help people descend stairs safely and requested that this issue be addressed.

Chair Le acknowledged the concern and noted that it had been raised in the Student Senate last year.

Ms. Spillman asked for clarification on the five-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) requests, specifically regarding whether the costs for facilities maintenance and network technology are one-time expenses or recurring every five years. Ms. Kumazawa explained that facilities maintenance costs are consistent and spread evenly over the five years, while network technology costs are more cyclical and vary year by year based on replacement needs. Staff offered to provide detailed year-by-year cost breakdowns and referred to a handout that outlines these amounts.

Dr. Acuff asked about the number of school buses funded, noting that school buses are typically prioritized in funding. Ms. Kumazawa confirmed that while buses are generally funded first, the request from last year did not receive full funding. Specifically, they did not receive the full request for 30 buses, and the funding remained at the historical level.

Dr. Acuff asked about the status of a \$1.8 million grant application for geothermal energy at Monticello High School. Mr. Wertman explained that the grant application was submitted to a federal entity (possibly DEQ) but was unfortunately not awarded. As a result, the project is now being presented for board consideration. He outlined that the HVAC system at Monticello will undergo a three-year phased replacement starting next summer. The new equipment will be "geothermal ready," allowing for future conversion if funding for drilling wells becomes available.

Mr. Wertman elaborated that the total cost of the geothermal project is projected at \$27.7 million, primarily due to the expense of drilling wells and piping. The design phase alone would cost around \$120,000. He emphasized that geothermal systems typically have a seven-year payback period and a life expectancy of 50 years, resulting in significant long-term operational savings. As an example, he cited Crozet Elementary, where an expansion with geothermal energy maintained the same energy usage as the original building, demonstrating the efficiency and cost benefits.

Mr. Paige asked about the potential for adding new classrooms at Monticello and Western Albemarle High Schools to address capacity issues. Ms. Kumazawa explained that the High School Capacity project is designed to provide these additions specifically for Monticello and Western Albemarle. This project is separate from the High School Improvements project, which does not include classroom expansions.

Mr. Paige also raised concerns about the condition of school buses, referencing the poor appearance of several buses he saw near Walton. He asked whether these buses are evaluated for replacement based on mileage and age. Ms. Schmitt responded that while they do not assess buses based on appearance, mileage and age are the key factors for bus replacement. They acknowledged a likely correlation between the age of the buses and their worn appearance, but there is no specific metric for evaluating bus aesthetics.

Chair Le asked whether the current 12-year replacement cycle for school buses would remain effective, given that buses are accumulating more miles, especially with the increased use due to school centers. Ms. Schmitt explained that the replacement criteria are based on age or mileage. They try to distribute mileage evenly across the fleet by rotating buses. The increased mileage is partly due to greater efficiency and route consolidations, which have become necessary because of a shortage of drivers.

Dr. Berlin asked staff to compile data from the past five years, detailing the funding requests made to the Board of Supervisors for each category and the amounts that were actually funded. She emphasized that having this historical information would be useful for internal discussions and for conversations with constituents to better understand funding patterns and expectations.

Ms. Spillman asked if it would be possible to accelerate the high school capacity project and whether some of the planned \$35 million in improvements over the next three years could be incorporated into an expansion project. She inquired about the feasibility and potential impact of integrating these efforts. There was conversation on prioritizing and potentially combining the High School Capacity Project (#8) and the High School Improvements and Elevator Additions (#2). It was suggested that integrating these projects might yield cost savings and efficiencies, such as conducting renovations and additions at Western simultaneously.

Staff agreed, noting that combining the projects would create synergies, reduce costs through economies of scale, shared general conditions, and single mobilization, and help mitigate inflationary impacts. They offered to estimate the cost savings of this combined approach.

Chair Le expressed concern about funding limitations, wondering if not pursuing full expansion now could result in future constraints. She proposed considering a phased approach that would add some seats now and plan for further expansion in five to ten years.

Staff and other board members acknowledged her concerns but pointed out that current funding is limited, and nothing would be lost by discussing creative solutions since the full funding isn't yet secured. The board emphasized the need to be strategic while acknowledging the existing financial constraints.

Dr. Acuff asked which feeder pattern the land acquisition project was intended to support and whether it was specifically for the Western feeder pattern. She mentioned the suggestion from the Long-Range Planning Advisory Committee about potentially needing another elementary school in that area. Ms. Kumazawa clarified that the land acquisition is not designated for any specific feeder pattern at this time. The project is meant to provide flexibility so that land can be purchased anywhere in the county as opportunities arise. The funds are allocated in year one to ensure readiness for land purchases when needed, supporting various space-related projects.

Mr. Paige asked if state funding would be available for the Lambs Lane loop road project. Mr. Wertman confirmed that state funding is possible, but it may not align with the preferred timeline.

Local government plans to submit a revenue-sharing grant application to VDOT, with potential funding for design starting in 2031 and construction in 2032. However, funding is not guaranteed, as it depends on the grant approval from VDOT.

Dr. Berlin suggested collaborating more closely with the Board of Supervisors, emphasizing the importance of showcasing the positive work happening in schools and highlighting the community impact of projects like renovations. She mentioned the value of inviting the Board of Supervisors to visit schools to better understand the needs and outcomes. She also noted the significance of fulfilling commitments made to the community and ensuring that completed assessments and teaching-related improvements are effectively communicated.

Agenda Item No. 8.5 – [School Health Advisory Board and Nursing Update](#) – Kevin Kirst
The School Health Advisory Board informs the School Board on issues of health and related services / conditions in the context of the public schools within our community.

Ms. Spillman noted that the updated COVID guidelines now only require a 24-hour isolation period and no longer need to be reported. She emphasized the importance of clearly communicating this change to families, as many parents may still believe the isolation period is five days, based on previous guidelines.

Dr. Berlin thanked staff for verifying clinic visit data, expressing concern about the potential link between increased visits and mental health issues. She suggested considering whether mental health reasons could be explicitly tracked, though acknowledging that school nurses may feel this falls outside their expertise. She shared an example of how anxiety manifests in students, highlighting how school nurses often serve as the first line of support by teaching techniques like breathing exercises before sending students back to class. She emphasized the importance of investing in mental health support staff, noting that in a specific instance where a mental health professional left a school, there was a significant increase in clinic visits. This demonstrated the critical role of mental health specialists in managing student wellness and allowing nurses to focus on physical health care.

Mr. Pace inquired about the two immunization clinics held at Woodbrook and confirmed that they provided multiple opportunities for immunizations. He noted that Woodbrook frequently deals with immunization-related challenges and suggested making the clinics more regular, perhaps monthly, to help ensure stability and get students into school by meeting immunization requirements.

Mr. Kirst agreed, acknowledging that accessibility and regular scheduling are crucial. He noted that the process also involves support from schools in the area to help parents sign up and ensure students meet the requirements.

Ms. Roper noted that the report uses the term "ADD/ADHD" and pointed out that "ADD" is outdated, as it now falls under the broader term "ADHD." Staff acknowledged this and agreed to update the terminology.

Dr. Acuff commented on the striking statistics of 144,000 student interactions, noting that with 14,000 students, this averages about 100 interactions per student. She emphasized that this highlights the significant need for mental health services in schools.

Agenda Item No. 8.6 – Annual Student Discipline Review – Kevin Kirst - The review of annual school discipline data included an overview of the 22-23 school year to 23-24 year by administrative referral type. Additionally, current trends were highlighted when compared to last year. A Mental Health and Wellness review was also included as we believe discipline, mental health and community partnerships are best addressed as intertwined vs. separate entities.

[Annual Student Discipline Review](#)

[2024 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions](#)

Dr. Berlin asked Mr. Kirst to provide examples of behaviors related to school operations that are considered problematic. Mr. Kirst described several examples, including giving false information or misrepresentation, failure to attend an assigned disciplinary setting (like in-school suspension), bringing unauthorized individuals to school, dress code violations, gambling, possessing items inappropriate for school, unauthorized use of electronic equipment, and vandalism.

Ms. Spillman asked for data on disciplinary actions involving special needs students and how these numbers compare to the general population. She requested similar data on discipline based on ethnicity, race, or income, citing Fairfax's approach as a helpful example. Mr. Kirst acknowledged the request and indicated he would investigate providing this information in future reports.

Ms. Spillman inquired about evaluating interactions between students and the recently added School Resource Officer (SRO). She was interested in understanding if the SRO is building rapport with students, and whether interactions are positive or negative. Mr. Kirst responded that there's currently no formal way to track SRO interactions, though anecdotal feedback could be collected. He mentioned that survey results or similar feedback mechanisms might be considered to gauge the SRO's impact.

Ms. Spillman asked for clarification on what constitutes a "referral to law enforcement." Mr. Kirst explained that referrals are required for specific incidents, such as possession of a weapon or controlled substances, where law enforcement must be involved.

Ms. Spillman shared a request from the Family Council for the School Safety and Security Office to establish a "know your rights" program for students regarding law enforcement interactions. Mr. Kirst agreed to explore this idea further to determine what such an initiative might entail.

Ms. Roper asked whether there are procedures for informing a person who reports harassment about any disciplinary action taken against the harasser. Mr. Kirst explained that while they aim to provide some reassurance to the reporting individual, confidentiality laws prevent sharing specific details of disciplinary actions taken against other students. They typically inform the victim that appropriate action has been taken without disclosing specifics, balancing transparency with respect for privacy. He acknowledged that this approach can sometimes leave victims wanting more information.

Dr. Berlin appreciated the disaggregated behavioral data for elementary, middle, and high schools, noting that the trends align with national patterns. She highlighted the impact of the pandemic on current elementary students, who missed crucial early years of social and emotional development. Dr. Berlin emphasized the need to explore additional support options for elementary schools, including mental health resources, behavioral assessments, and social skills training. She also mentioned hearing from schools during budget discussions about the essential need for mental health support. Mr. Kirst acknowledged the importance of focusing on community building and shared that they are collaborating on professional development initiatives, including support from school counselors and mental health professionals. They are also assessing how current resources are being used in elementary schools to determine if they are effectively targeted. The goal is to evaluate whether existing supports are sufficient or if additional measures are needed, ensuring resources are optimized and effective.

Ms. Osborne asked how restorative practices are being applied in the school division. Mr. Kirst explained that restorative practices are used to address what students and families are communicating about their needs, often beginning with conversations during discipline hearings. He acknowledged that the system is still in its early stages, especially as the community continues to

recover from the pandemic. He emphasized that the current focus is on gradually building a network of practitioners to implement restorative practices with greater consistency and fidelity.

He described efforts such as student safety coaches and professional development sessions for staff, including collaboration during pre-service training to introduce what restorative practices look and sound like. Mr. Kirst mentioned publishing an article to guide principals and staff in implementing these practices. While he noted that the adoption is still in its infancy, he highlighted growing interest and buy-in from staff and principals, estimating that about 80% of those he works with are on board. He also shared positive outcomes, including more constructive interactions with families, often ending in a handshake or a sense of mutual understanding, even in difficult situations. Mr. Kirst expressed optimism about continued growth and improvement in applying restorative practices across the division.

Mental Health Based Services – Miles Nelson

Chair Le requested additional information about the peer nomination process and the data points used. Mr. Nelson explained that the peer nomination process involves a three-question anonymous survey conducted every November. The survey asks students if they know someone who is being bullied, if they know someone who is bullying others, and if they would like to request help for themselves. The purpose is to identify trends and provide support. If an individual's name appears three or more times, staff members reach out to that student to check in and offer support. The data collected helps staff understand peer dynamics and intervene as needed to ensure student well-being.

Dr. Acuff asked how the HelpMe app is introduced to students. Staff explained that the HelpMe app is introduced through a lesson within the advisory program. Counselors visited classrooms to walk students through the app, particularly in middle schools, and teachers incorporated the lesson during advisory periods to ensure all students understood how to use it. The app is integrated into ClassLink, the single sign-on platform, making it accessible for all K-12 students and teachers. Mr. Nelson highlighted how the app allows students to seek help through multiple avenues. Teachers have even received alerts outside of school hours, allowing immediate action, such as contacting parents and arranging support from school counselors or coordinating with mental health professionals. The app's design allows for efficient coordination, with designated staff members, like safety coaches or counselors, taking ownership of each case to ensure students receive appropriate support.

Ms. Spillman asked if the HelpMe app could be accessed through students' cell phones. Mr. Nelson explained that while the app is primarily utilized as a web-based application within the school environment, it can indeed be accessed via native iOS and Android apps. However, due to restrictions like the bell schedule, the web-based version has been the main focus. He also noted the importance of educating students on how to properly use the app, as issues can arise with retrieving codes and maintaining communication if the web page is closed. Although students can submit another request if needed, the app does not sync communication seamlessly like a typical account-based system.

Dr. Acuff asked about the increase in mental health contacts and details about the "touches" reported. Mr. Nelson explained that in-person mental health contacts increased from around 25,000 to 32,000, representing a 14,000-contact or 14% increase. These contacts are separate from interactions through the HelpMe app, which has had approximately 105 interactions so far. Additionally, the system tracks thousands of logins, indicating active engagement. He highlighted the structure of the HelpMe app, which includes three main sections: resources, a tip line, and school support. Although immediate responses are provided within operational hours, there are plans for continued follow-up as needed.

Mr. Nelson also discussed the integration of local resources, like the Charlottesville support sheets and the Blue Ridge Food Finders, to help families access essential services such as food banks. An example shared was assisting a family in finding a nearby food bank when transportation was an issue, emphasizing the importance of expanding and utilizing these resources to support the community effectively.

Mr. Paige asked about the reasons for the downward trend in the usage of bullying reports over the past few years and why high school reports appear lower compared to elementary school reports. Mr. Nelson explained that while the data shows a decrease, it may not necessarily reflect less bullying but rather a shift in understanding and communication. He noted that through increased education and awareness efforts, such as bullying awareness initiatives, students and staff have become better at distinguishing between conflict and bullying. He emphasized that conflict, which involves mutual disagreement, should be addressed collaboratively, while bullying, characterized by a power imbalance, requires different interventions.

Regarding the differences between high school and elementary reports, Mr. Nelson suggested that high school students are more adept at recognizing and differentiating between conflict and bullying, whereas younger elementary students are more likely to report all negative interactions as bullying. This improved understanding among older students likely accounts for the lower number of reports in high school compared to elementary levels.

Dr. Acuff remarked on the impressive level of student support, noting that there have been 140,000 interactions with school nurses and 44,000 mental health touches. She expressed her pleasure that the district is committed to continuing these crucial services, acknowledging the overlap but emphasizing the significant support provided to students.

Superintendent Haas added his appreciation for the presented data, highlighting how it demonstrates the effectiveness of the board's investment in mental health services and the impactful work of the staff. He acknowledged that data such as the school climate and working conditions surveys further validate the positive outcomes. He expressed gratitude for the dedication of staff members, especially Mr. Miles Nelson, recognizing their 24/7 commitment to supporting students.

No. 9.0 OTHER BUSINESS

Agenda Item No. 9.0 Other Business by the Board Members and Superintendent - None

Agenda Item No. 9.1 Closed Meeting – None.

Agenda Item No. 9.2 Closed Meeting Certification – None.

AGENDA ITEM NO. 10.0 ADJOURNMENT - At 9:34 p.m., hearing no objections, Chair Le adjourned the meeting of the Albemarle County School Board.



Clerk


Chair