



WE WILL KNOW EVERY STUDENT.

2024 STATE OF THE DIVISION

ALBEMARLE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



www.k12albemarle.org/sotd

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BELOW: Baker-Butler students pose for a photo while having outdoor time as a class.



WELCOME TO THE 2024 STATE OF THE DIVISION

Welcome to the 2023-24 State of the Division. This annual report is an essential tradition in Albemarle County Public Schools. It gives us the chance to reflect on our achievements, address challenges and share our vision for the future. Through this report, we provide transparent updates on our progress toward delivering a world-class education for every student.

The 2023-24 school year was a year defined by growth, innovation, and teamwork. After partnering with Bellwether Education Partners to review our instructional practices, we examined how we can address persistent achievement gaps within our schools. Bellwether identified five root causes of these gaps and provided recommendations for impactful changes to help us close them.

The audit pointed to several areas for improvement, including aligning instruction with rigorous tasks, strengthening professional development for our staff, investing in high-quality instructional materials (especially in reading and math), increasing transparency around division-level decisions, and enhancing systems for community feedback and involvement.

In response, we've already begun a series of projects to address these recommendations. With more than 20 project proposals identified and approximately \$600,000 in our budget set aside to fund them, we're seeing positive momentum toward closing achievement gaps and supporting student success. While it's still early in this work, we're committed to improving learning for every student—individually, as members of demographic groups, and as part of the ACPS community. For instance, during the 2021-22 school year, 12 out of our 45 student groups matched or exceeded the state's average test scores. In 2022-23, 16 of our student groups matched or outperformed the state, and, in 2023-24, 20 of our student groups met or



Dr. Haas watches a National Hispanic Heritage Month celebration at Woodbrook Elementary School. It is programs like this that foster a sense community in our schools.

exceeded state averages. Our strategic plan's title is *Learning for All*, and all means all!

In this report, you'll find highlights of our recent accomplishments, including improvements in on-time graduation rates and teacher retention. It also includes insights from our staff on our new K-5 literacy curriculum, HMH Into Reading.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to our schools.

LEARNING FOR ALL

OUR VISION

Our learners are engaged in authentic, challenging, and relevant learning experiences, becoming lifelong contributors and leaders in our dynamic and diverse society.

OUR MISSION

Working together as a team, we will end the predictive value of race, class, gender, and special capacities for our children's success through high-quality teaching and learning for all. We seek to build relationships with families and communities to ensure that every student succeeds.

We will know every student.

OUR VALUES

EQUITY

We will provide every student with the level of support necessary to thrive.

EXCELLENCE

We will mitigate barriers and provide opportunities for every student to be academically successful.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

We will engage with and share the responsibility for student success with families and community partners.

WELLNESS

We will support the physical and emotional health of our students and staff.

OUR GOALS

GOAL 1: THRIVING STUDENTS

ACPS will facilitate learning experiences grounded in high expectations, networks of care, and student curiosity to ensure academic and social-emotional development for all students while eliminating opportunity, access and achievement gaps.

GOAL 2: AFFIRMING AND EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

ACPS commits to developing a culturally-responsive environment that respects and champions the diversity of life experiences of all stakeholders and supports the physical and mental health of our students, staff and families so they are actively empowered to engage in our school community.

GOAL 3: EQUITABLE, TRANSFORMATIVE RESOURCES

ACPS will attract, develop and retain the highest quality staff; develop sustainable and modern facilities, infrastructure and equipment; and distribute all resources in an equitable manner to transform learning experiences and opportunities.

ABOUT THE STATE OF THE DIVISION

Through the annual State of the Division report, Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) provides information to the school board and the community about our successes and challenges from the previous school year. The report serves as an accountability tool, whereby the school division seeks to track our progress toward meeting our goals and to identify and improve our weaknesses. The report also informs our decision-making, whether we are evaluating an instructional method, shaping a systemic practice, or considering budget priorities.

Each year, ACPS shares the State of the Division report as another opportunity to engage our stakeholders, including our students and their families, our employees, and our community members. We consider stakeholder feedback to be an essential part of the continuous improvement process, and we encourage community members to contribute to our ongoing efforts to learn, adapt and grow through participation in school board meetings, community meetings, and online surveys.

During the 2021-22 school year, the division developed a new strategic plan titled *Learning for All*. In this plan, we clearly define the three main goals of our division: supporting our students and helping them thrive, affirming and



Thanks to a partnership with Northrup Grumman, several ACPS students were able to attend Space Camp at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama.

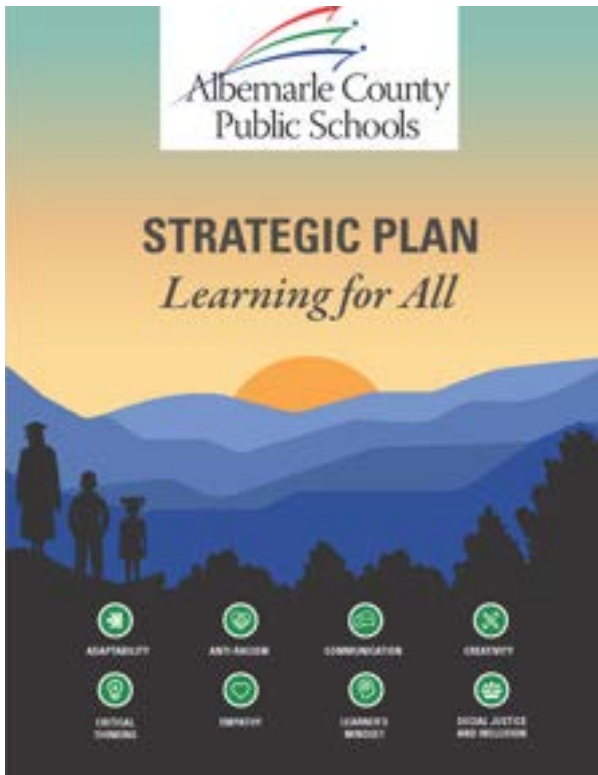
empowering our communities while encouraging engagement in our schools, and providing transformative and equitable resources throughout the division.

Within these three main goals, each department developed strategies to guide the

implementation of programs in the division designed to help us meet our goals. The State of the Division report outlines the work the division has done over the past year to work toward these goals and uses data to support strides being made to help every student succeed.

WHAT DRIVES OUR DIVISION?

LEARNING FOR ALL



During the 2021-22 school year, Albemarle County Public Schools' Office of Strategic Planning worked with students, staff and community members to create the division-wide Portrait of a Learner, which outlines the skills our community believes all students should possess by the time they graduate high school. This Portrait, once approved, acted as a guide in creating the division's strategic plan, which will ensure that schools engage with and meet the needs of all students while preparing them with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in a complex and rapidly-changing world.

Ultimately, *Learning for All* is a collective, local vision that articulates our community's hopes for ALL of our students and enables the division to provide our students with an educational experience that prepares them to be lifelong learners and to make positive contributions to society, both while they are our students and in the future.

By analyzing data in our State of the Division report, we are able to ensure that the objectives and strategies included in *Learning for All* continue to serve our division.

THE ACPS BUDGET

Each year, our Fiscal Services Department works with each department and school in the division to create a budget that funds the operation of the division but also funds programs that move us toward meeting the goals outlined in *Learning for All*.

The 2023-24 School Board Adopted Budget outlined several initiatives aimed at moving the needle toward these goals. These initiatives include (just to name a few):

2023-24 BUDGET INITIATIVES

COMPENSATION INCREASE

The School Board's adopted budget included an initiative that provides all ACPS employees with a 5% salary increase, which supports students by helping the division attract and retain high-quality staff.

ENGLISH LEARNER (EL) GROWTH

This initiative established funding to add 8 full-time

equivalent (FTE) staff members to the EL Program. This additional funding will allow ACPS to continue to support and affirm students and families new to the area.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The 2023-24 Adopted Budget includes funding for our Social-Emotional Coaches (now known as Mental Health Support Specialists). Initially, these positions were covered by one-time COVID-19 relief funding. *Learning for All*, however, includes supporting the physical and mental health of our students and, therefore, included funding for this program in order to continue supporting the well-being of our students.

For more information on our budget process and to see the full 2023-24 School Board Adopted Budget, including all of the initiatives supporting our division, visit k12albemarle.org/budget.

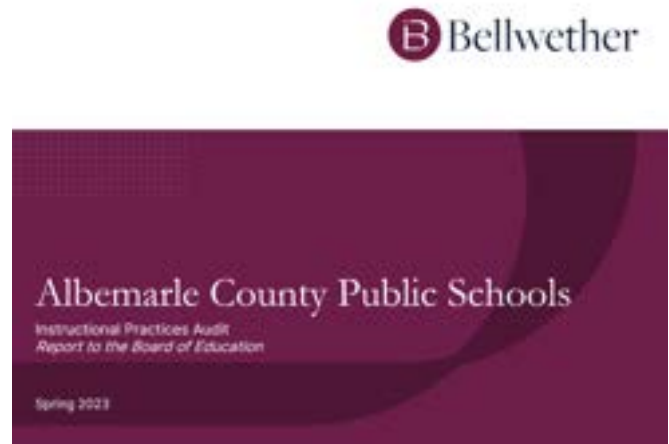
INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES AUDIT

Part of the mission of our strategic plan, *Learning for All*, states that “Working together as a team, we will end the predictive value of race, class, gender, and special capacities for our children’s success through high-quality teaching and learning for all.”

On average, our division outperforms the state of Virginia on a number of achievement measures. However, within our division, we have seen a gap in the achievements of our students of color and economically disadvantaged students.

To ensure that we are doing all we can to help all of our students succeed, ACPS partnered with Bellwether Education Partners in 2023 to complete a third-party audit of our instructional practices.

Bellwether presented five broad recommendations, each supported by key initiatives and specific actions, to address deficiencies in the areas of instructional tasks,



adult learning, curricular resources, strategic alignment, and stakeholder engagement. To learn more about these five root causes and what we’re doing to address them, see page 20.



A Journey Middle School student poses for a photo with a robot she created during the school’s Robotics Club.

STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL 1:
THRIVING STUDENTS

ACPS will facilitate learning experiences grounded in high expectations, networks of care, and student curiosity to ensure academic and social-emotional development for all students while eliminating gaps in opportunity, access and achievement.

2023-24

MILESTONES

Created and implemented common pacing guides for all core subjects

Implemented common formative assessments at the end of each quarter of instruction

Adopted “HMH Into Reading” as our high-quality literacy curriculum

Redesigned the instructional coaching model to better support classroom teachers

Launched Career Learning Communities

Launched ALL In Tutoring programs, including winter and spring break intersession programs



TOP: Courtney Wood leads her class through an HMH Into Reading exercise. BOTTOM: A student follows along in her My Book as Wood leads them through more exercises. Learn more about our HMH Into Reading on page 10.



GOAL 1 OBJECTIVES

ACPS will ensure that each student is supported to achieve their best.

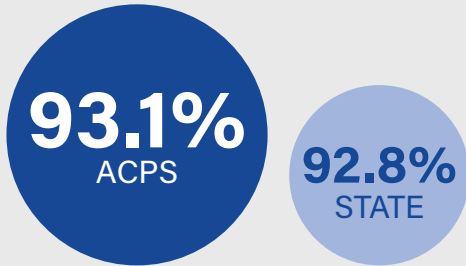
ACPS will develop structures that support students’ academic mental health for both proactive and intervention purposes.

ACPS will increase student engagement in their own learning, in school culture, and in student government.

STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL 1:
THRIVING STUDENTS
KEY METRICS

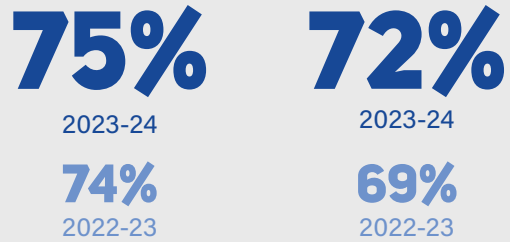


GOAL: Achieve on-time graduation rates higher than the state



More ACPS students graduated on time compared to the state.

GOAL: Improve pass rates in reading and math SOL test scores



Reading pass rates increased.

Math pass rates increased.

GOAL: Beat the state averages in unadjusted pass rates



Categories in which ACPS students scored higher than the state average



ACPS students scored higher than the state average in 20 out of 45 categories, which is four more than in 2022-23.

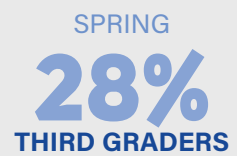
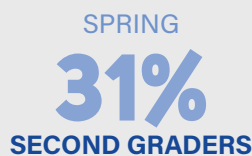
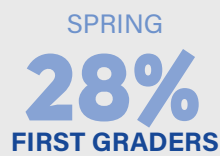
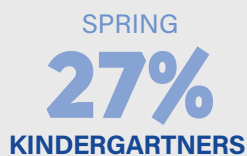
GOAL: Maintain course failure rates below 10% in middle and high schools



Middle school course failure rates increased but remained below 10%.

High school course failure rates decreased but remained above 10%.

GOAL: Reduce Virginia Language & Literacy Screening System (VALLSS) high-risk bands in grades K-3 from fall to spring each year and achieve less than 20% of students identified as high risk by 2026-27



MILESTONE IN ACTION: THRIVING STUDENTS



ABOVE: One of Wood's students works in his My Book as the class goes through an HMH Into Reading lesson in their Brownsville Elementary School classroom. END OF FEATURE: Wood instructs her students using HMH Into Reading materials.

HOW “HMH INTO READING” IS CHANGING ACPS LITERACY INSTRUCTION

“Reading is our gateway to the world,” Courtney Wood, a first-grade teacher at Brownsville, said. “If we want our students to be able to successfully navigate the world, they need to be able to read well and understand what they’re reading.”

Wood, who has taught in Albemarle County Public Schools for the last 19 years, thinks that HMH Into Reading is the program that will get students there.

“This curriculum is exposing our students to challenging content and they are rising to that challenge,” Wood said.

IN THE CLASSROOM

ACPS adopted “HMH Into Reading,” a research-backed program focused on direct, whole-student instruction, after the Virginia Literacy Act passed in 2022. The “HMH Into Reading” curriculum

pulls from The Science of Reading and Scarborough’s Reading Rope to guide students in kindergarten through fifth grade through the process of learning to read.

For many years, ACPS focused heavily on word recognition and decoding but sometimes neglected to ensure that students understood what they were reading, according to Wood. “HMH Into Reading,” however, uses direct, explicit instruction in the classroom to teach students vocabulary and spelling and then connects those words and spelling to meaning within their lives through reading.

“The ‘HMH Into Reading’ curriculum gives students rules to follow,” Sarah Rodgers, a fourth-grade teacher at Red Hill Elementary School, said. “It’s kind of like, if you’re playing a video game and you’re just wandering around trying to figure out what to do, you don’t make much headway. But, if someone gives you a map, suddenly you have an idea of where to go. So, ‘HMH Into Reading’ is like giving students a map to reading and writing.”

These rules center around helping students build the foundations they need to read and write at grade level and teaching them how to build on those skills as they encounter more complex texts. Throughout the year students will revisit and practice these foundational skills each week as they work through the “HMH Into Reading” modules.

“The program spirals, which gives us the opportunity to reinforce the comprehension of the words for the week and assess what we might need to review,” Wood said. “As a teacher, it’s helpful for me to have a chance to adjust my instruction if I know there is something the students aren’t understanding.”

The “HMH Into Reading” curriculum focuses on skills and strategies that support a variety of texts rather than introducing texts that support a weekly skill. By spiraling through the skills and

strategies that service text, students learn to draw on a variety of skills and strategies to comprehend what they are reading, according to “HMH Into Reading’s” Research Evidence Base. As students move through the curriculum, the texts become more and more complex to challenge students to apply their newfound comprehension skills.

Although it’s early in the year, Rodgers, who has been teaching for 17 years throughout Virginia, has already noticed some changes in her students compared to previous years.

“They’re seeing themselves as readers and writers and they’re wanting to improve those skills,” she said. “Confidence in their skills is more than half the battle. If you’re confident in your ability to understand what you’re reading, you’re not going to say, ‘I can’t read that, it’s too long,’ or, ‘It’s too hard.’”

In addition to being strong readers on grade level, Rodgers said seeing her students writing confidently and independently is a big win for her.

“Just today they sat with their partners, read four pages of a story and summarized what they read without needing support,” she said. Second only to reading, writing is a high-level skill that students must have to function in modern society.

“Reading and writing are critical to every career. It gives students the opportunity to have their voices heard,” Michele Castner, Executive Director of Elementary Education, said. “The early introduction of writing was one of the reasons we were really drawn to ‘HMH Into Reading’ when we were researching options for a new literacy curriculum.”

“HMH Into Reading” introduces writing into their curriculum in kindergarten and continues to develop students’ writing skills throughout elementary school.

“Our goal is that all ACPS students are effective and confident in this crucial, high-level skill,” Castner said.

This relationship between reading, comprehension and writing is helping students develop critical thinking skills and developing their ability to identify themes and connect them to other texts or the real world.

“They’re making these connections to the texts and they’re growing in other subjects, too,” Rodgers said.

It’s the rigor of the program and concentration on foundational skills, Wood said, that helps instill confidence in students early on. She and Rodgers agree that this program uses instructional time to its fullest potential to grow students’ abilities.

“This program is a huge jump in rigor for our students,” Wood said, “and this is exactly where we need to be going as a division.”

SUPPORTING TEACHERS

A large factor in the selection of “HMH Into Reading” is the wealth of resources and professional development they provide for our teachers.

“If there’s a resource you need, they have it,” Rodgers said. The ‘HMH Into Reading’ website is a treasure trove of materials that integrate seamlessly into the weekly lessons. “The resources are more robust and tie in directly with what we’re doing in class so I’m not having to spend as much time searching for materials and adapting them to my lessons.”

At the beginning of the 2023-24 school year, “HMH Into Reading” representatives spent half of a day working with our K-5 language arts teachers to introduce them to the new curriculum and walk them through how to implement the lessons in their classrooms.

Each teacher is provided with a manual that lays out the lessons for the week, what skills their students will be learning or

developing, and what benchmarks their classes should be meeting. HMH also offers instructional webinars through its website if teachers want to explore more ways of engaging their students in these lessons or maybe need some more information on different sections of the curriculum.

“Change is hard, but the research supports this program and our end goals are going to be met,” Wood said.

At the division level, we have adjusted our instructional coaching model in an effort to support our teachers while they implement a new curriculum in such an important core subject. Wood has worked directly with her instructional coach to map out lessons for the week and ensure that her class stays on track.

“My time with my instructional coach has been a wonderful use of my time and so beneficial to my practice,” Wood said.

AT HOME

Both Wood and Rodgers say that one of the most important things families can do to help their students at home is to read with them. But, for families that are busier, “HMH Into Reading” offers plenty of quick ideas to give students a chance to show off their new skills at home.

“One thing I like to suggest families do is ask their students questions about the day’s reading and if there’s anything their student is unsure about, look up the answer together,” Rodgers said. This fosters a deeper connection to the texts and allows students to practice critical thinking and reasoning skills.

The big takeaway for families, Rodgers said, is to know that their students are reading on grade level and reading rigorously.

“The rigor has really stepped up with this program,” she said.

Wood said she hopes families will join their partnership and trust that teachers are doing what’s best for their students.

“We’re still learning too,” she said, “but I hope our families trust that we are doing what needs to be done to help their students succeed.”

LOOKING FORWARD

Although it’s still early in the year and early in the implementation of this curriculum, both Wood and Rodgers have positive outlooks moving forward with “HMH Into Reading.”

“It’s still very early, but I can see that what I’m learning and what I’m implementing in the classroom is making an impact,” Wood said.

As teachers become more familiar with the curriculum and how to implement it in their classrooms over the next few months and years, Rodgers thinks we will see gains in our students’ reading scores.

“I do think they’re going to make leaps and bounds in reading,” Rodgers said.



STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL 2:

AFFIRMING & EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

ACPS commits to developing a culturally-responsive environment that respects and champions the diversity of life experiences of all stakeholders and supports the physical and mental health of our students, staff and families so they are actively empowered to engage in our school community.

2023-24

MILESTONES

Created and distributed “On-Track Albemarle” to help families better understand their students’ progress in elementary reading and math

Fully funded division mental health coordinators and SEL coaches in all schools

Created and implemented the ACPS Theory of Change

Launched quarterly community engagement nights in all schools

Gathered research and implemented a streamlined two-way communication tool for employees and families

Launched the Student Senate program to encourage student voice



TOP: Lakeside Middle School student Claire Meng won the Scripps Regional Spelling Bee and had the chance to compete in the Scripps National Spelling Bee. BOTTOM: Avery Bruen and Brooke Blankenship collect feminine hygiene products to distribute to the AHS and Albemarle County community through their nonprofit EmpowerHER.



GOAL 2 OBJECTIVES

ACPS will foster culturally-responsive environments that affirm the identities and life experiences of all community members.

ACPS will support the physical and mental health of our students, staff and families.

ACPS will actively empower our students, staff and families to engage in our school community through effective communications.

STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL 2:

AFFIRMING & EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

KEY METRICS

GOAL: All teachers certified in Culturally Responsive Education by the 2025-26 school year

33%
2023-24

ACPS staff certified in Culturally Responsive Education **increased**.

31%
2022-23

GOAL: Increase teacher diversity each year until it matches or exceeds the level of student diversity in our schools

WHITE	PEOPLE OF COLOR
86.8%	13.2%
2023-24	2023-24

2023-24 teacher demographics **more closely resemble** student diversity (42%) than in 2022-23.

88.8%	11.2%
2022-23	2022-23

GOAL: Lower chronic absenteeism levels each year until we reach pre-pandemic levels of 9% or less

12.6%	17.7%
2023-24	2022-23

levels of chronic absenteeism **decreased** since 2022-23

GOAL: Increase the positivity families feel about school climate, school fit, and family engagement as measured by the Panorama survey

70%	65%	20%
2023-24	2023-24	2023-24

School Climate	School Fit	Family Engagement
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57%	57%	17%
2022-23	2022-23	2022-23

GOAL: Percentage of students identified as needing instruction in social-emotional learning is lower than the national average, and percentage of students identified as strong in social-emotional learning is higher than the national average

		NAT'L NORM	ACPS
K-8	NEED	16%	11%
	STRENGTH	16%	36%
9-12	NEED	45%	39%
	STRENGTH	5%	9%

MILESTONE IN ACTION: AFFIRMING & EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES



ABOVE: A student colors during an assignment in class. Drawing and coloring are two techniques that our Mental Health Support Specialists use to help students center themselves when they are struggling with mental health. END OF FEATURE: Kim Rambow's "Cozy Corner" at Agnor Elementary School features a cozy couch, a snuggly teddy bear, and other tools students can use to calm themselves.

SUPPORTING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS, STAFF AND FAMILIES

"Supporting the mental health of our students is just as important as supporting their physical health," Jennifer Croll, a Mental Health Support Specialist (MHSS) at Walton Middle School, said. "Our mental health doesn't just take a break from 9 to 4."

Helping students ground and center themselves when they are experiencing anxiety, depression or just an all-around bad day so that they can return to the classrooms and learn is the main focus, Croll said. Her favorite techniques to use with students — and staff — are mindfulness activities and breathing exercises.

"These techniques aren't just for people experiencing mental health issues," Croll said. "They can help everyone center themselves and be ready to take on whatever challenges might be before them."

When the program first started during the 2021-22 school year,

these positions were called Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Coaches. These coaches equipped students with skills for conflict resolution, academic focus, self-awareness, emotional regulation, and stress management, and were available to provide support during crises.

Initially, the one-time federal pandemic relief funds that allowed ACPS to establish this program covered one SEL Coach at each school, which amounted to 24 in total. In the adopted Fiscal Year 2024-25 budget, ACPS took on the funding for the initial 24 SEL Coaches and added enough funding for an additional six coaches to be dispersed throughout our schools based on need.

As the roles expanded to a three-pronged approach to mental health support — supporting students, staff, and families — these positions were reclassified as Mental Health Support Specialists to better capture the work these positions cover.

"ON-DEMAND SUPPORT"

The first prong of an MHSS's role is supporting students' mental health. What makes this work unique, according to Dr. Dawn Monroe, an MHSS at Albemarle High School, is that MHSSs can provide students with on-demand mental health support.

While typical therapeutic treatment can be constrained by barriers like time, money or transportation, our students can access mental health support from MHSSs in school any time they need it, according to Monroe.

"It's important to have these supports in schools because this is where students are for most of their waking hours," she said. "Life

happens here and we need to meet them where they are.”

Although our MHSSs don’t function as therapists, they use many of the same techniques therapists use. Mindfulness exercises, breathing exercises, drawing or coloring, journaling or simply taking a break are some of the more common techniques our MHSSs use to help students in moments of crisis.

While social-emotional support typically focuses on social and communication skills, the transition to having MHSSs in our schools brings staff into our schools who are trained in trauma-informed techniques.

“The social-emotional support is still happening here,” Monroe said, “but we’re now able to look at this work through a trauma-informed lens and make sure we’re addressing the root of what’s causing distress.”

A good deal of that stress seems to stem from problems many students encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic, Monroe said.

“We’re seeing more mental health problems among youth than I have ever seen in my 17 years as a mental health support,” Monroe said. “The difference between pre-pandemic and now is just night and day.”

The experience of the collective trauma, Croll said, made underlying issues come to the surface for many students.

“There were a lot of students who could maybe cope with these issues before the pandemic, but the isolation and disruption exacerbated those,” she said, “and when we came back to school, the students had forgotten how to connect with each other.”

Kim Rambow, the MHSS at Agnor Elementary School, said that forming relationships with students and helping them remember how to connect with others is the basis of the work.

“Our world can be so isolating nowadays,” Rambow said. “Think about all of the stores that only have self-checkout now. You can’t even connect with a cashier when you buy your groceries.”

The latest developments in neuroscience support the importance of human connection in our lives, she said. If we can help students feel connected to their peers, teachers and school community, it moves us in the direction of being able to solve other problems like chronic absenteeism and achievement gaps.

“If students don’t feel connected and safe in the classroom, they’re not going to learn, no matter how engaging the lesson is,” Rambow said.

HELPING STAFF HELP STUDENTS

The second prong of an MHSS’s role is to support school staff and educate them on mental health matters so that they can better support students.

“We push into the classroom a good amount to make sure that staff are able to support their students while they’re in class,” Monroe said. “As mental health professionals, we look at everything through a mental health lens, so we can help teachers identify student issues that may be a product of poor mental health and teach them techniques and strategies to help them support their students.”

Teachers can use these techniques to take care of themselves as well, Croll said. Mindfulness and breathing exercises are beneficial for everyone, even if you’re not in the midst of a mental health crisis.

“If your teachers are well, their students will thrive,” Croll said. “If you fill the teachers’ cups, they can fill their students’ cups.”

Rambow spent her summer working with teachers at Agnor to create “calm corners” in their classrooms that provide students

with a safe space to feel and deal with big emotions.

“All behavior is communication,” Rambow said. “Especially at the elementary school level, we want to look at what’s driving that behavior and see what we can do to remedy that. Students at this level don’t always have the words to articulate what they’re dealing with.”

She recalled a story of when a teacher asked her to take a student outside to run off some energy before a test.

“That was such a beautiful moment,” Rambow said. “Instead of getting frustrated with a student who needed to get his wiggles out, we were able to give him the space to get some of that energy out and he was able to return to class and take his test.”

LIFTING UP OUR FAMILIES

The third prong of this role is supporting and partnering with our families. Our MHSSs work with several outside organizations like Families in Crisis and Region 10 to ensure that our students’ families have access to the support they need.

“If a student’s family is struggling at home, it’s going to be really hard for them to come to school and pay attention to what’s going on in class. So, we want to do as much as we can to help our families and students through the hard parts of life,” Monroe said.

Rambow connects with families by calling families directly when their students are absent from school.

“I like to be able to be a real voice on the phone and make sure everything is going OK,” she said. “School can be so insular sometimes and our students exist outside of our buildings, so we need to make sure that everything is going well outside of school too.”

LOOKING FORWARD

“There will always be a need for mental health supports,” Monroe said. “If you take that away, we go right back to square one.”

And students are making strides with this work, she said.

“Seeing the little epiphanies that students have is so beautiful,” she said. “It’s the most beautiful thing and that’s what keeps me coming back.”

“Progress is there and there are little wins and joys all the time,” Monroe said.



STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL 3:

**EQUITABLE, TRANSFORMATIVE
RESOURCES**

ACPS will attract, develop and retain the highest quality staff; develop sustainable and modern facilities, infrastructure and equipment; and distribute all resources in an equitable manner to transform learning experiences and opportunities.

MILESTONES

2023-24

Completed redistricting for northern feeder pattern elementary schools

Secured funding for construction of two new elementary schools and one additional high school center

Implemented a 5% raise for all division employees

Adopted a resolution authorizing collective bargaining

Launched the Accelerated School Program to provide advanced support to high-need schools

Expanded guaranteed field experience program to include all students K-8



TOP: Students explore firefighting as a career opportunity during Pathway Exploration Day. BOTTOM: Students in Greer Elementary's Extended Day Enrichment Program partnered with the Virginia Department of Forestry to collect tree nuts to help stock the DOF's tree nursery.



GOAL 3 OBJECTIVES

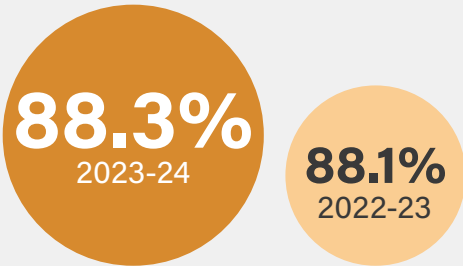
ACPS will attract, develop and retain the highest-quality staff.

ACPS will develop modern and environmentally sustainable facilities, infrastructure and equipment.

ACPS will provide resources in an equitable manner that transforms learning experiences and opportunities for students.

STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL 3:
EQUITABLE, TRANSFORMATIVE RESOURCES
KEY METRICS

GOAL: Improve the teacher retention rate



The teacher retention rate **increased**.

GOAL: Reduce the number of schools over 95% capacity

38%
2023-24

The percentage of schools at more than 95% capacity **increased** from last year.

33%
2022-23

GOAL: All schools in the division are rated as accredited by the VDOE

20
SCHOOLS

Are rated as **Accredited** by the Virginia Department of Education.

4
SCHOOLS

Are rated as **Accredited with Conditions** by the Virginia Department of Education.

GOAL: Increase employee engagement levels

3.83/5
2023-24

The employee engagement mean **improved**.

3.76/5
2022-23

GOAL: Guarantee two field experiences per student per year by the 2025-26 school year

During the **2022-23 school** year, all students in grades

K-5

participated in two field experiences.

During the **2023-24 school** year, all students in grades

K-8

participated in two field experiences.

MILESTONE IN ACTION: EQUITABLE, TRANSFORMATIVE RESOURCES

SCHOOL BOARD APPROVES COLLECTIVE BARGAINING RESOLUTION



*ABOVE: Supporters of the Albemarle Education Association attend a School Board meeting at which collective bargaining was being discussed.
END OF FEATURE: Supporters gathered outside of the County Office Building before a School Board meeting.*

During the 2020 Virginia General Assembly, lawmakers approved an amendment to Virginia Code § 40.1-57.2 that repealed the prohibition against collective bargaining between public sector employers and employees if they choose to do so — including Virginia public school divisions.

The law does not require localities to adopt ordinances that recognize collective bargaining but allows them to adopt a resolution or ordinance that gives the governing body the authority to recognize labor unions if they so choose. Within this amendment, localities are required to outline procedures for certification and decertification of exclusive bargaining representatives within the resolution or ordinance.

This amendment reverses a decades-long prohibition on such practices in Virginia, the first of which was passed by the General Assembly in 1946 and prohibited state offices from recognizing public sector unions after Black employees at the University of Virginia formed the Local 550 union. Then, in 1977, the Virginia

Supreme Court prohibited public sector collective bargaining with its ruling in the *Commonwealth v. Arlington County* case and codified this prohibition into law in 1993.

COMING TO AN AGREEMENT

In May of 2022, the Albemarle Education Association (AEA) sought certification as the collective bargaining representative of Albemarle County Public Schools employees. At the time, however, the Board felt that there was not enough guidance from the state on how the process of entering a collective bargaining agreement as a school division would work and voted against the measure.

But, School Board members and the AEA persisted through 13 meetings over the next year to discuss how the two might enter into an agreement and to draft the language of a collective bargaining resolution. After a presentation of this resolution to the School Board at its March 28, 2024, meeting, the Board approved the resolution on April 11, 2024, with a unanimous 7-0 vote.

"It's been an honor to be part of this process," Dr. Rebecca

Berlin, White Hall Representative, said at the time. "I truly appreciate both sides of the table were able to come together and reach across the aisle and really, truly negotiate to agree on what is best for teachers."

STRENGTHENING EMPLOYEE VOICE

If ACPS is to attract and retain high-quality staff, as outlined in Goal 3, Objective 1, of our strategic plan, *Learning for All*, ensuring that our employees have a voice in division decisions is an important piece of the puzzle.

"Every employee in Albemarle County Public Schools deserves a seat at the table and a voice in decisions regarding their employment," Mary McIntyre, a reading specialist at Journey Middle School and the president of the AEA, said. "Having a bargained contract can provide valuable clarity and be a positive experience for both employees and management within the division. It also makes us a top-tier employer compared to other divisions without bargained contracts."

With a collective bargaining agreement, the chosen bargaining representative will be able to work with the School Board and other ACPS administrators to negotiate contracts on matters like pay, benefits and working conditions.

"I've experienced firsthand the positive impact that collective bargaining and union membership can have," McIntyre said. "Morale was extremely high and the employees and students in those schools really thrive, from top to bottom."

Through collective bargaining, ACPS employees hope to:

- Form a long-term, meaningful partnership with the school division to improve pay, benefits and working conditions for all employees;
- Provide a structured and safe platform for employees to raise concerns and advocate for themselves and their students; and
- Improve the recruitment, retention and morale of employees.

The Albemarle County School Board's Collective Bargaining Resolution allows two bargaining units to have space at the

table: One unit that recognizes licensed staff including teachers, counselors, speech therapists, and other employees who hold Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) or Virginia Department of Health (VDH) licenses to work with students in schools, and another unit that recognizes educational support professionals, also known as classified staff, including bus drivers, teaching assistants, nurses, custodians, office associates, Extended Day Enrichment Programs staff, cafeteria employees and more.

In September 2024, ACPS staff and the AEA held an election for staff to choose an organization to represent them in collective bargaining talks. More than 82% of licensed staff and more than 55% of education support professionals participated in the vote. Both units voted in favor of the AEA as their representative in talks with the School Board. Employees also indicated strong support for representation in negotiations regarding compensation, benefits and working conditions.

A third-party organization certified the election on October 2, 2024, solidifying the AEA as the bargaining unit for both licensed and education support staff.

WORK STILL TO DO

Now that our employees have chosen a representative for negotiations, the real collective bargaining work begins. The Albemarle Education Association will work with members of the Albemarle County School Board to negotiate contracts and remedy other work-related issues.

"The AEA firmly believes that without a strong staff, we cannot have strong schools," McIntyre said. "Collective bargaining is the best tool we have to secure vital improvements for our staff and schools, which will ultimately improve the educational experience of our students."

This sentiment is shared by the School Board as well.

"I am grateful every single day for everything that our teachers do for our students on a daily basis," Allison Spillman, the At-Large Representative, said. "I'm really excited that our board, the AEA, and our teachers could come to this point and that we're finally here after a lot of hard work."



NOTABLE HAPPENINGS

CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

HOW OUR INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES AUDIT IS GUIDING OUR WORK TOWARD HELPING EVERY STUDENT THRIVE

Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) partnered with Bellwether Education partners in 2023 to complete an instructional practices audit to identify ways that ACPS can improve the quality of education for all students, particularly student groups that have been historically underserved. The audit examined instructional policies and classroom practices to uncover why some students, especially students of color, are not performing as well as other groups on standardized tests in areas like reading and math.

Through conversations with students, staff and families, and spending time in our schools observing instruction, this audit looked closely at the way teaching happens in our schools, including what is being taught, how it's being taught, and how students are being supported in their learning. By identifying strengths and areas of improvement, we are better able to create environments of equitable learning opportunities for all our students and uphold our commitment to ensuring that every child, regardless of race, background or special capacities, has access to high-quality learning experiences.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The changes recommended by this audit are designed to improve learning for all students, but they are especially focused on achievement gaps within our division that have affected students of color, students from low-income families, and students with special needs. Some students from these groups do not perform as well as others on important assessments, which can have a long-term impact on their educational future. By addressing the root causes of these gaps, we are aiming to close these gaps and improve the educational outlook for all ACPS students.

The changes recommended by this audit are designed to improve learning for all students, but they are especially focused on achievement gaps within our division that have affected students of color, students from low-income families, and students with special needs.



We are working to make the classroom more engaging and challenging, providing teachers with the training and support they need to be effective in the classroom and ensuring that every student has access to the materials and resources they need to thrive. These changes will not happen overnight, but this audit provides a place to start and a meaningful path forward, and a clear plan for making meaningful improvements in our division.

WHAT'S NEXT

We have already started implementing recommendations from this audit, like adopting and implementing "HMH Into Reading" as our new K-5 literacy curriculum. Over the coming months and years, families may see changes in the way their child's school approaches teaching and learning.

Teachers will receive more training, new materials may be introduced in the classroom, and schools will work with families more to support student success. By working together, we can ensure that every student in Albemarle County Public Schools has the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Organize instruction around rigorous tasks

that allow all students to deeply engage with challenging, standards-aligned content and demonstrate learning in authentic ways.

Develop a systematic approach to adult learning

that combines workshop-based professional development, job-embedded coaching, and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to support staff, at all levels, to develop the skills to continuously improve instruction.

Invest in high-quality instructional materials to fill gaps in content

including a consistent math curriculum for Algebra 1 and middle grades, a comprehensive system of interventions, and a state-recommended literacy program.

Clarify how division actions lead to student outcomes;

articulate and communicate beliefs about both why and how each role within the division is designed to contribute to strengthening the instructional core.

Strengthen systems for input and feedback

and processes for communicating decisions at all levels to ensure the full spectrum of the ACPS community is authentically engaged, including students, families, teachers, school leaders, central office staff, and community members.



TOP: Students explore firefighting as a career option during Pathway Exploration Day. MIDDLE: A Journey Middle School student works on coding a robot during the Robotics Club. BOTTOM: Murray Elementary students met with members of the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors to present their ideas for community improvement.

NOTABLE HAPPENINGS

SIX ALBEMARLE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS EARN VIRGINIA'S HIGHEST ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

**BROADUS WOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
COMMUNITY LAB SCHOOL
HOLLYMEAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

**IVY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
STONY POINT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
VIRGINIA L. MURRAY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

Each year, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) recognizes schools throughout the Commonwealth for outstanding academic performance and achievement based on the prior school year. The Virginia Board of Education awarded the prestigious Highest Achievement Award to 92 schools throughout Virginia for the 2024-25 academic year, including six to ACPS schools.

To qualify for this top honor, schools must meet a series of rigorous criteria, including:

- **Accreditation:** Schools must be fully accredited or hold triennial waivers.
- **Core Subject Benchmarks:** Schools must achieve state benchmarks of 75% for reading and 70% for both math and science, determined by current year pass rates on state assessments, excluding growth or English Learner progress.
- **Student Group Performance:** All student groups within the school must meet the same benchmarks (75% for reading and 70% for math) based on current year pass rates. For schools with two student groups, there must be no more than a five percentage point gap between the lowest performing group and all other students. For schools with three or more student groups, this gap must not exceed 10 percentage points.
- **Chronic Absenteeism:** Schools must demonstrate a chronic absenteeism rate of 15% or lower.



Journey Middle School students work on robots during their robotics club meeting.

For schools with graduating classes, two additional criteria apply:

- **Graduation and Completion Index (GCI):** Schools must achieve a GCI of 88 points or higher for the current year.
- **Dropout Rate:** Schools must maintain a dropout rate of 6% or lower.

"This award reflects the exceptional efforts by our teachers, students, educational support staff, and families at these six schools," said Matthew Haas, Superintendent of Schools. "It is an honor to be recognized for the hard work and commitment to providing a high-quality, equitable education to all of our students, underscoring the division's dedication to academic excellence."

These awards are a significant milestone for schools, as they are indicators of an ongoing commitment to preparing students for success in a global society while ensuring that achievement gaps are minimized and every student has the opportunity to excel.

2023-24 DIVISION SNAPSHOT

Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) serves nearly 14,000 students in preschool through 12th grade in Albemarle County, Virginia, the sixth largest county by area in the Commonwealth of Virginia. A diverse locality of 726 square miles in the heart of Central Virginia, Albemarle County is a blend of primarily rural, but also suburban and urban settings.

401 McIntire Road
Charlottesville, VA 22902
(434) 296-5820
Dr. Matthew S. Haas,
Superintendent
Region 5

13,821

students

13.0%
Students with
Disabilities

30.4%
Economically
Disadvantaged

11.9%
English
Learners

100
Countries
of Origin

76
Home
Languages

16.22%
AP Tests
Taken

21.84%
AP Course
Enrollment

23.13%
Dual
Enrollment

0.27%
IB Program
Enrollment

2,792

employees

1,407
Teachers
(including classroom teachers, speech pathologists, school counselors, instructional coaches and librarians)

181
Administrators
(including principals, assistant/associate principals and central office and other leadership personnel)

1,204
Classified Staff
(including all non-teacher and non-administrative positions such as teaching assistants, bus drivers, custodians, maintenance and food service staff, human resources staff and other support staff)

DATA

spotlight

1,900
Daily
Breakfasts

5,700
Daily
Lunches

9,404
School Bus
Miles Per Day

1:1
Tablets for
K-2 Students

1:1
Laptops for
3-12 Students

18.1
Avg. Elementary
Class Size

20.0
Avg. Middle
School Class Size

20.4
Avg. High School
Class Size

