

Date: July 3, 2013

For ACTION _____

For INFORMATION X

Board Agenda: July 11, 2013

FROM: Morton Sherman, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Karen A. Graf, Chairman, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Options for Jefferson-Houston Elementary School

Background

Jefferson-Houston Elementary School has a remarkable history which parallels the efforts of desegregation and attempts to improve achievement in Alexandria over the past 40 years. Opening with 50 White students out of 860 students in the 1971-72 school year, Jefferson-Houston School replaced Jefferson School on West Street and Charles Houston on Wythe Street.

The original desegregation plan for ACPS was approved in 1965 by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and was known as “geographical assignment.” Under this plan, a racial breakdown of enrollment and staff membership at each school had to be presented to the Office of Civil Rights, in accordance with H.E.W. guidelines. By September, 1968, all Black and all White elementary schools had been at least partially desegregated. However, by the early 1970s, the plans were not deemed sufficient as ACPS still had all White and all Black schools.

In the years since its opening, Jefferson-Houston has gone through ongoing and significant efforts to improve achievement. The original “pairings” of schools created the following pattern:

Cora Kelly, K-3; John Tyler, K, 4-6; James Polk, K-3; Stonewall Jackson, K, 4-6; Maury, K-3; Lyles-Crouch, K, 4-6; Jefferson-Houston, K-3; William Ramsay, K, 4-6; Douglas MacArthur, K-3; and Robert E. Lee, K, 4-6; Mount Vernon, Charles Barrett, George Mason, Patrick Henry, William Ramsay, K-5.

Since that time, Jefferson-Houston has been the focus of every ACPS Superintendent of Schools and School Board. Patterns have changed from paired schools, to a K-5 schools, and now to a K-8 school. To attract students from throughout the city, Jefferson-Houston was designated as an elementary focus school for the arts. During the past decade, the state dedicated significant human and financial resources, estimated to be well over one million dollars. ACPS has provided salary incentives to attract and retain teachers at Jefferson-Houston. Academic interventions, staff development, changes in leadership and staff, changes in programs, and improvement in facilities have all been deliberate and focused efforts. Yet, the pattern of low school achievement continued during all of these years and through each of these efforts.

Perhaps the most devastating impact on the potential of Jefferson-Houston Elementary School took place during the No Child Left Behind years. Having never made Adequate Yearly Progress, the school had to provide parents the choice to attend another school. In recent years, over 50% of families districted to Jefferson-Houston selected another elementary school for their children. With the approval of Virginia's waiver of No Child Left Behind in 2012, families are no longer provided that choice. And with increasing city-wide enrollments leaving few openings in other schools, administrative transfers to other schools have been nearly eliminated.

Opportunity Education Institution (OEI)

During the recent Virginia legislative action, the Governor's plan was approved to create an Opportunity Educational Institution (OEI). OEI may take over local schools which have not achieved accreditation over recent years. Jefferson-Houston is designated as one of six schools in VA which have been identified as ones which might be taken over. The status of a state takeover for specific schools will not be known until January, 2014.

Between now and the possibility of an official takeover notice, changes might take place at the state level. A new Governor will be elected this November, and the new legislature may revisit the OEI law. However all this works out, what is certain is that we must continue our very best to improve achievement at Jefferson-Houston.

(The research on state takeovers of local schools is mixed at best in terms of improving achievement:

<http://www.centerforcsri.org/pubs/restructuring/KnowledgeIssues1StateTakeovers.pdf>

http://ielp.rutgers.edu/docs/developing_plan_app_b.pdf

http://www.greatlakescenter.org/docs/Policy_Briefs/Mathis_Restructuring.pdf)

How do we continue to improve achievement at Jefferson-Houston School?

It certainly seems that ACPS has tried many models and has worked hard with exceptional results for many individual students, but not with overall school success. So, what could possibly be considered now which would be different, stand a very good chance of success, and not replicate the patterns of the past 40 years?

The opening of a new facility in September, 2014, provides opportunity for discussion about how to build on recent progress, yet, assure even greater gains for all students. There is freshness, a sense of renewal and excitement, and optimism that comes with opening a brand new facility. There is also danger in thinking that just opening a new building will change achievement patterns. This opportunity must be looked at with a broader lens than we have used in the past. In addition to the options listed below, strong community and parent involvement must be a cornerstone of the renewal efforts at Jefferson-Houston. James Comer's programs in CT, Community Schools, Harlem Children's Zone, and other community-involved initiatives must be explored in addition to the programmatic options listed below:

1. Stay the course we are now on
2. Closing School/opening new one, or combining with higher performing school
3. Charter School
4. Reconfiguration, e.g., K-4, 5-8

Each of the above options, combinations of these options, and perhaps new ones not mentioned in the state guidelines or regulations, should be discussed. These options have been part of the discourse for years at Jefferson-Houston, but the congruence of events compels accelerated discussion and action: the opening of a new building and the reality of state assessments which continue to label Jefferson-Houston as not accredited.

The new facility was designed and is being built in accordance with the K-8 Education Specifications approved by the School Board. Within the building design are some natural links among grade levels, e.g., early childhood, middle school years.

To begin these conversations, it is proposed that within the new facility, a PreK-(3) or 4 school and a (4) or 5-8 school be opened for the 2014-15 school year.

PreK-4

Core achievement concerns for early childhood programming have been consistent for many years. Specifically, there is the ongoing need for language acquisition skills, early literacy, and related integrated skills at all schools. Recent efforts at Jefferson-Houston have shown very good results, specifically the PALs scores have been among the highest in the city, and compare very favorable with the state. Building on the significant and beacon-like success in the early years efforts at Jefferson-Houston, consideration of a PreK-4 "academy" in the new facility could optimize achievement. Seen as a

new early years school, this focused effort would serve students at all developmental and skill levels, and could serve as a model for other schools as it partners with universities (e.g., professional development schools) and with the community.

5-8

Jefferson-Houston has used the ACPS curriculum as the core framework for the Middle Years Program (MYP), which has built on the Primary Years Program (PYP) of the International Baccalaureate (IB). This effort has been effective. With new opportunities emerging in Alexandria, there could be a new emphasis on related subject areas, such as a Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) as the core. We are fortunate to have exceptional partners such as the Alexandria Seaport Foundation and others who can provide project-based real time learning experiences for our students. The soon-to-arrive National Science Foundation could be a natural partner for ACPS, especially if a 5-8 STEAM academy were housed at the new facility. An often overlooked natural partner for ACPS is the Potomac River, which could provide many opportunities for project-based, experiential education similar to what is emerging across the country. The schools listed below serve as examples of what a new 5-8 school could be but are not to be seen as the only recommended options:

- The Maritime Academy of Toledo (5-8) Toledo, OH:
<http://www.maritimeacademy.us/>
- Palm Beach Maritime Academy, West Palm Beach, FL:
<http://www.palmbeachmaritimeacademy.org/pbma/>
- Maritime academy Charter High School, Philadelphia, PA:
<http://www.maritimecharter.org/>

Finally, three other factors enter into the conversation about Jefferson-Houston's future:

1. Changing state and national standards and measures of accountability
2. Local initiatives including the just-started Patrick Henry facilities committee, and the possibility of a division-wide conversation about elementary redistricting and/or other choice models.
3. The introduction of a STEM Academy at T.C. Williams starting in 2013-14; consideration of T.J. as an option for our high school students; question whether ACPS should consider a Governor's School for Alexandria.

RECOMMENDATION

To begin focused school division and community conversations about programs for the new facility, to continue the progress being noted at Jefferson-Houston, and to recognize opportunities for partnerships, it is proposed that the ACPS School Board consider renaming and reopening Jefferson-Houston school concurrently with the opening of the new facility in 2014, with two new schools (PreK-4, 5-8), housed in the new facility:

- (to be named) Early Childhood Academy
- (to be named... perhaps after Ferdinand Day?) Middle School STEAM Academy

It is further recommended that the new configuration of two new schools include a formal community-involved program.

These proposals should be seen as starting points, with other options considered by a staff, parent, and community committee to be convened starting early this September and providing the School Board with a status of its discussions and a draft of its recommendations by early December, 2013, and with an eye towards implementation in the 2014-15 school year. The process should mirror the ongoing Middle Schools for Tomorrow Work Group and the new Patrick Henry Planning Committee.

Related Explanatory Notes:

- **OEI Legislation:** <http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?131+sum+SB1324>
 - The OEI legislation creates a statewide school division and a supervisory Board made up of state legislators and citizen members, with all the powers of a local school division. Va. Code §22.1-27.1. Any school within the Commonwealth that is denied accreditation shall be transferred to the supervision of the OEI. Va. Code §22.1-27.2 (B). Additionally any school that is accredited with warning for three consecutive years may be transferred to the supervision of the OEI based on a majority vote of the OEI Board. Once a school is transferred to OEI it will not be returned to the control of the local school division for five years or until it achieves full accreditation. Va. Code §22.1-27.2 (D & F). Additionally, during this time the OEI will make all employment decisions for the school, will have the option to use existing school facilities, and will require the students who are enrolled in the school at the time of transfer to continue in attendance unless the parents opt out under an existing local open enrollment process. Va. Code §§22.1-27.3, 27.4 & 27.6.
- **Current Accreditation Regulations**
 - Under current law, the responsibility for accrediting public schools in Virginia is vested in

Virginia Board of Education. Va. Code §22.1-19. The specific requirements for accreditation are provided as part of the Standards of Quality. Va. Code §22.1-253.13:3. The required state Board of Education regulations for accreditation are provided at 8 VAC 20-131-5 et. seq.. The current accreditation regulations – which will need to be revised in response to the OEI legislation – provide the standards and procedure for accreditation as well as the requirements for schools that fail to achieve accreditation. 8 VAC 20-131-5 et. seq.. Under the current regulations, when a school is denied accreditation, the School Board must do one of four things:

- enter into a memorandum of understanding with the Virginia Department of Education (“VDOE”) to address required actions for improvement (8 VAC 20-131-315 (B))
- reconstitute the school and apply for conditional accreditation (8 VAC 20-131-315 (C))
- close the school (8 VAC 20-131-315(D))
- combine the school with a higher performing school in the division (8 VAC 20-131-315(D)).

- **Closing School/Opening New One, or Combining with Higher-Performing School**

- While VDOE must approve either of the first options, the local school division has discretion with regard to the second two. As far as combining the school with a higher-performing school, local school boards have the express statutory authority to: “Provide for the consolidation of schools or redistricting of school boundaries or adopt pupil assignment plans whenever such procedure will contribute to the efficiency of the school division;” Va. Code §22.1-79(4). (Prior to such consolidation or redistricting the board must hold a public hearing to receive public comment on the proposed change. Va. Code §22.1-79(8)).

If a school that has been denied accreditation is closed and a new school is opened, or if the school that has been denied accreditation is consolidated with a higher performing school, the resulting “new school” will be conditionally accredited for one year.

- **Definition of “School”**

- For the purposes of this regulation, a “new school” is one “comprised of students from one or more existing schools.” 8 VAC 20-131-300 (C) (4). Such a “new school” “will be awarded a Conditionally Accredited-New status for one year pending an evaluation of the school's eligible students' performance on SOL tests or additional tests approved by the Board of Education to be rated Fully Accredited.” After receiving the conditional accreditation, the new school may be accredited with warning for three more years if it continues to fail to meet the accreditation standards before being denied accreditation under the current regulations. 8 VAC 20-131-300 (C) (2-3). While the term “school” is not further defined within Chapter 22.1 of the Code of Virginia, the Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia defines a “school” as a publicly funded institution where students are enrolled for all or a majority of the instructional day and:
 1. Those students are reported in fall membership at the institution; and

2. At a minimum, the institution meets the preaccreditation eligibility requirements of these regulations as adopted by the Board of Education.” 8 VAC 20-131-5.

Given that both the definition of a “school” and the provision for conditional accreditation for a “new school” are directly tied to the students in attendance, the student makeup of any “new school” is one important factor for establishing that a school as “new” rather than the continuation of an existing school that has been denied accreditation. Therefore, as the examples provided below suggest, selecting an option with some reasonable degree of difference in the student population will be a necessary element. Additionally, the preaccreditation requirements provide the minimum requirements that must exist for each “new school.” These include such things as, compliance with the requirements for course offerings and instructional programs, the ability to meet leadership and staffing requirements and the existence of facilities that meet the minimum safety requirements. 8VAC20-131-280 F.

Therefore, to the extent division of an existing school into separate smaller schools is being considered, each “new school” must satisfy these requirements independently to be considered its own school. While there is no precise formula for determining how much change is sufficient to be considered a new school, based on the definition of “school” and the options for accreditation of a new school provided by the current regulations, some options to consider would be:

- 1) Consolidating JH with another existing school(s) that is(are) higher performing.
- 2) Closing the existing JH and reopening two new smaller schools in the same building, similar to the reorganization of the middle schools, provided each new school independently meets the preaccreditation eligibility requirements. This could be two new K-8 schools or an elementary school and middle school that share a campus.
- 3) Closing JH, redistricting the middle schools so that JH students are consolidated with the other middle schools, and open a new elementary school which meets the pre-accreditation standards for an elementary school, and includes some changes to leadership, staffing, and special instructional programs.
- 4) Closing JH, redistricting the current elementary students at JH to other elementary schools and opening a new middle school in the JH facility.
- 5) Closing JH, redistrict current JH students and open a district-wide program.

Overall, to establish a new school the key will be to demonstrate sufficient change in the elements that provide the basis for the definition of a “school” for purposes of accreditation, specifically the students enrolled and the factors considered for pre-accreditation eligibility, such as leadership, staffing, course offerings, instructional program, and physical space.

- **Reopening as a Charter School**

- As an alternative to opening a new school or consolidating schools, an existing school that has been denied accreditation could be allowed to reopen as a public charter school instead. Va. Code §22.1-215.5 et. seq. The “public charter school” is a “public, nonreligious, or non-home-based alternative school located within a public school division ...[which] may be created as a new public school or through the conversion of all or part of an existing public school.” Va. Code §22.1-215.5.

A public charter school is formed by acceptance of a charter application by the local school board, which forms the contract between the local school board and the management committee of the chart school for its operation. Va. Code §22.1-212.7. The requirements for chart school applications are detailed, including requirements for how the Standards of Accreditation will be met and plans for accommodating displaced students and staff. Va. Code §22.1-212.8. Additionally, all charter school application must also be submitted to and reviewed by the Virginia Board of Education. Va. Code §22.1-212.9.

As a general matter, the charter school is managed and operated by an independent management committee, not the school board, and may be released from any policies and regulations of the local school board, as agreed in the charter contract. Va. Code §22.1-212.6 (B & C). The School Board may agree to allow the charter school to use available facilities, but may not charge rent in those instances. Va. Code §22.1-212.6 (D). A public charter school is generally open to all students within the division through a lottery process, but may have a targeted admission process consistent with its express mission provided that is not inconsistent with federal and state anti-discrimination laws. Va. Code §§ 22.1-212.6 (A) & 212.8(B)(6). Therefore, a public charter school would not be the zoned school for any particular neighborhood, which would therefore necessitate redistricting. Additionally, a public charter school generally will be subject to the Virginia accreditation requirements, but a public charter school for at risk students may seek approval for an Individual School Accreditation plan from VDOE. Va. Code §§22.1-212.6(B) & 212.7; 8 VAC 20-131-280 C.

Converting to a charter school can be a lengthy process. By statute it requires at least 14 days notice to the public and receipt of public comment when reviewing any charter school application. Va. Code §22.1-212.8. Also, the ACPS procedures for receipt and review of charter applications are extensive, including a pre-application and Review Committee. See, Policy LC and Regulation. LC-R

Early Childhood Resources:

- **Foundation for Child Development's PreK-3rd website:** <http://fcd-us.org/our-work/prek-3rd-education>
- **Map of states that include districts that have embraced the PreK-3rd approach:** <http://fcd-us.org/our-work/prek-3rd-education/prek-3rd-map-work-progress>
- <http://www.sju.edu/majors-programs/undergraduate/majors/education-early-childhood-education-prek4-major>
- <http://www.cabrini.edu/Academics/Academic-Departments/Education-Department/Pre-K-4-Education/>

STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) and STEM Resources:

- <http://steam-notstem.com/>
- <http://www.linkedin.com/groups/STEAM-Journal-Science-Technology-Engineering-4229160>
- <http://www.nea.org/home/stem.html>
- <http://cteresource.org/featured/stem.html>