

# Board of Education Agenda Item

Item: C. Date: November 30, 2005

**Topic:** Final Review of a Request for Approval of an Alternative Accreditation Plan from the Henrico County Public Schools for Mount Vernon Middle School

**Presenter:** Mrs. Kathleen M. Smith, Director of the Office of School Improvement  
Dr. Lynn H. Thorpe, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Henrico County Public Schools

**Telephone Number:** 804-225-2865 **E-Mail Address:** Kathleen.Smith@doe.virginia.gov

## Origin:

Topic presented for information only (no board action required)

Board review required by  
 State or federal law or regulation

Board of Education regulation

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Action requested at this meeting  Action requested at future meeting: \_\_\_\_\_ (date)

## Previous Review/Action:

No previous board review/action

Previous review/action  
date October 26, 2005

action Board accepted for first review

## Background Information:

The *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* adopted by the Board in July 2000, Section 8 VAC 20-131.280.D. of the standards states:

Special purpose schools such as regional, special education, alternative, or career and technical schools that serve as the student's school of principal enrollment shall be evaluated on standards appropriate to the programs offered in the schools and approved by the Board prior to August 1 of the school year for which approval is requested. Any student graduating from a special purpose school with a Standard, Advanced Studies, or Modified Standard Diploma must meet the requirements prescribed in 8 VAC 20-131-50.

Section 22.1-253.13:1.D.8 of the *Standards of Quality* requires local school boards to provide educational alternatives for students whose needs are not met in programs prescribed elsewhere in these standards. Such students shall be counted in average daily membership (ADM) in accordance with the regulations of the Board of Education. Regulations governing programs such as this are found in the accrediting standards, which permit alternative accreditation plans and allow the Board to grant waivers to certain provisions of the standards.

In September 2004, at the board's request, the department developed a template for school divisions to use in preparing alternative accreditation plan proposals. The department also developed criteria for the evaluation of proposals. This request has been reviewed against the evaluation criteria and a copy of the department's review is attached.

### **Summary of Major Elements:**

The school board of Henrico County is proposing an alternative accreditation plan for Mount Vernon Middle School, an alternative school that serves students grades 6-8 who are consistently functioning below grade level in reading and/or mathematics for whom no other appropriate services have been successful and who are unlikely to make up academic deficits in a traditional middle school setting. Students identified for this alternative program have failed to respond positively to the traditional schools' intervention strategies and have fallen into the at-risk category of being retained one or more years.

The mission of Mount Vernon Middle School is to fully prepare each individual student in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades to earn promotion to high school, access high school content and earn a standard or advanced diploma. An interdisciplinary approach will allow focused instruction in reading and mathematics enhanced by the infusion of social studies and science subject matter. Time in the program is three years; initial capacity of the school/program is 100 students. Prior to enrollment, the parent(s), student, and principal will discuss the advantages of the alternative program. Signatures of the parent(s) and the student indicate their agreement to placement at Mount Vernon Middle School.

An interdisciplinary instructional program incorporating the four major content areas is offered that includes exposure to organization and study skills and self-management for each student as specified in an Individualized Student Success plan. A vocational program is also offered. Each student completes the Stanford Achievement Test (10<sup>th</sup> edition) and/or the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessments prior to entering the program to assist with the development of the student's educational plan. These assessments are also used as post-measures of student achievement. Students will be taught by highly qualified teachers and will complete rigorous work in the core subject areas of mathematics, history/social science, and English. Students are placed at a grade level according to pretest scores and a review of the student's classroom performance.

Middle grade students are determined to be ready for 9<sup>th</sup> grade when they have acquired the academic knowledge needed to pass 8<sup>th</sup> grade SOL assessments and appropriate behavioral skills. Progress indicators include quarterly gains in reading, mathematics, and writing, as well as attendance. Students at all grades will participate in SOL testing in all four content areas; however, a student must be in attendance at Mount Vernon Middle School for a minimum of four semesters, including the semester in which testing takes place, for the scores to be included in the accreditation calculation. Four semesters

of instruction in this alternative environment is needed to compensate for the academic and social deficits with which students enter this program.

Students will participate in all tests at all grades for the purpose of assessing progress and meeting the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Students will be taught by highly qualified teachers who are licensed and endorsed in their content area. Mount Vernon Middle School will meet the pre-accreditation requirements outlined in the Standards of Accreditation.

Henrico County Public Schools is requesting that the school be accredited on the following criterion:

Scores for each test in each of the four content areas will be combined to create one (composite) pass rate, reflecting the interdisciplinary approach to instruction. In order to meet accreditation requirements, the composite pass rate must be 70% for grades 6-8 combined. Scores of students in attendance for four semesters or more, including the semester in which testing takes place, will be included in the accreditation calculation.

Henrico County Public Schools is requesting a waiver to the provision of the *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*, 8 VAC 20-131-80.B, that requires the middle school to provide a minimum of eight courses to students in the eighth grade. Mount Vernon Middle School will not provide foreign language as an elective.

**Superintendent's Recommendation:** The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education approve the alternative accreditation plan and requested waiver for Mount Vernon Middle School for their 2006-2007 accreditation rating and require the submission of a program evaluation by July 2006 showing that the stated objectives of the program and proposed evaluative criteria have been met.

**Impact on Resources:** There is no impact on the resources of the Department of Education.

**Timetable for Further Review/Action:**

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA**

**REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF AN ALTERNATIVE ACCREDITATION PLAN**

*Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*, (8 VAC 20-131-10 et. seq.) set the minimum standards public schools must meet to be accredited by the Board of Education. Accreditation of public schools is required by the Standards of Quality (22.1-253.13:1 et. seq.). The annual accrediting cycle for public schools is July 1 through June 30. This cover sheet, with the supporting documentation, must be submitted to the Department of Education for review and recommendation to the Board at least 90 days prior to August 1 of the school year in which the plan is to be implemented.

8 VAC 20-131-280 of the *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* states (in part): *Special purpose schools such as regional, special education, alternative, or career and technical schools that serve as the student's school of principal enrollment shall be evaluated on standards appropriate to the programs offered in the school and approved by the Board prior to August 1 of the school year for which approval is requested. Any student graduating from a special purpose school with a Standard, Advanced Studies, or Modified Standard Diploma must meet the requirements prescribed in 8 VAC 20-131-50.*

The Board of Education, in its *Guidelines Governing the Implementation of Certain Provisions of the Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*, states:

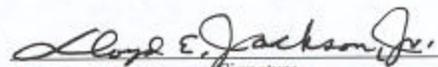
*Schools described in this section are those that serve as a student's school of principal enrollment and where students are reported in fall membership for the school. Fall membership determines whether or not these schools are subject to the provisions of the accrediting standards; therefore, schools reporting fall membership are subject to the provisions of the standards. These schools may or may not administer Standards of Learning (SOL) tests.*

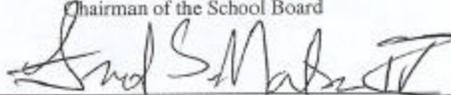
In accordance with the provisions of 8 VAC 20-131-330 of the standards, local school boards may seek waivers of provisions of the standards to address the unique needs of these special purpose schools. Such requests may include an alternative accreditation plan. Applications must be submitted to the Board for consideration at least ninety days prior to August 1 of the school year. Requests for consideration must be accompanied by information that documents the need for approval of the request.

*We, the undersigned, submit this request for review and approval by the Board of Education and understand that we are expected to appear before the Board to discuss the program and respond to questions raised.*

8/25/05  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Approved  
by the Local School Board

\_\_\_\_\_  
Submission Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature  
Chairman of the School Board

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature  
Division Superintendent

## **Request for Approval of Mount Vernon Middle School, Henrico County Public Schools, as an Alternative Program for Underachieving Middle Grade Students**

Intent: To fully prepare each individual student in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades who is significantly behind in academic and behavioral fundamentals to successfully access high school content and earn a standard or advanced diploma (not just pass 8<sup>th</sup> grade SOL tests).

Vision/Mission: Mount Vernon is an educational environment where certain students who have not experienced academic success in a comprehensive elementary or middle school setting, and who have been referred by their home schools, can develop the academic and personal skills and habits that will prepare them for success in high school.

Mt. Vernon exposes students to a safe and stimulating alternative learning environment where they will grow academically through an exposure to interdisciplinary instruction. An interdisciplinary approach will allow focused instruction in reading and math enhanced by the infusion of social studies and science subject matter. Time in the program is three years; initial capacity of the school/program is 100 students.

Target Population: Mt. Vernon Middle School serves HCPS students aged 11 through 15 and grades 6-8 who are consistently functioning below grade level in reading and/or mathematics for whom no other appropriate services have been successful and who are unlikely to make up academic deficits in a traditional middle school setting. Students identified for our alternative programs have failed to respond positively to the traditional schools' intervention strategies and have fallen into the at-risk category of being retained one or more years. Students are considered for placement in the alternative program based on recommendations of the child study committee in the home school, which has conducted a rigorous review of the student's academic performance and needs, and family and behavioral issues.

Student selection indicators:

- The type of instructional strategies needed to foster student achievement cannot be accommodated in a traditional setting.
- Academic performance is low or declining and the student is at risk of being retained. The student may have failed one or more SOL or local criterion-referenced tests.
- The student's behavior management needs are beyond the scope of programming that exists at any of our comprehensive schools.
- A series of in-school, short-, and long-term suspensions has not effectively modified the student's behavior.
- The student's behavior negatively affects the learning environment of others and impedes the teaching-learning process.
- Prior to enrollment, the parent(s), student, and principal will discuss the components of the alternative program. Signatures of the parent(s) and the student indicate their agreement to placement at Mt. Vernon.

### Program of Instruction:

- An individualized student success plan will be developed for each student attending Mt. Vernon Middle School. This plan will be designed to address the specific academic and behavioral needs of the student, and will include performance goals to support the transition back to a comprehensive setting.
- An interdisciplinary instructional program incorporating the four major content areas will be offered that includes exposure to organization and study skills and self-management for each student as specified in the individualized student success plan.
- A vocational program will be offered:
  - ✓ Career and Technical Occupational Exploration, which is designed to help students explore career options, design/build products following a design brief, work in teams to accomplish course objectives, explore occupational areas and education programs for Career and Technical Education within the 16 career families.
  - ✓ This course will focus on an awareness of the relationship between technology and science, with a focus on the nature of science and how it is applied. It will involve strong integration of reading, writing, and math skills. Interdisciplinary topics to be included are technology, biotechnology, transportation systems, communication systems, alternative energy, aerospace/flight, and manufacturing.
  - ✓ Those students who participate in these vocational experiences will be well prepared to take advantage of similar opportunities at the high school level, at either of the school division's technical centers or at Virginia Randolph Community High School.
- Students will complete the Stanford Achievement Test (10<sup>th</sup> edition) and the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessments upon entering the program to assist with the development of the student's educational plan. These assessments will also be used as post-measures of student achievement. The DRP assessment will be given as indicated to monitor reading skill development.
- Individual course schedules will be designed to assist students to achieve their highest potential.
- Students will be taught by highly qualified teachers and will complete rigorous work in the core subject areas of math, science, social studies, and English.
- Students will experience an interdisciplinary exposure to core content subject matter. Interdisciplinary teacher teams will meet bi-weekly to monitor student progress in all content areas. All core teachers from each grade level and an elective teacher will participate in this planning activity.
- Developing skills in social studies and science also will be accomplished through interdisciplinary selections for reading and writing instruction through the use of Reader's Workshop and Writer's Workshop.
- Applied instructional methods and experiences, which will involve partnerships with local universities, businesses, and museums, will be utilized to facilitate learning in the core content areas.
- The PTR will not exceed 12:1 to better serve the students at this school.
- Student support services will include a focus on self-management and adjustment skills. The 8<sup>th</sup> grade Health Standards of Learning will serve as the foundation of curriculum and counseling in self-management as well as the Life Skills curriculum.

- Physical activities will be incorporated daily.
- Career exploration, in addition to the vocational offerings, will be provided through the use of ACT's *Explore*, interest and aptitude inventories that each student will take and be counseled on the results, for the purpose of planning a high school course of study. In addition, Career Days will be held at the school periodically throughout the school year.

Student Assessment/Evaluation:

*Academic Achievement:*

- Each student will be diagnostically pretested upon program entry in reading and mathematics using the Stanford Achievement Test (10<sup>th</sup> edition) and the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessments. The Stanford 10 Reading test assesses word study skills, vocabulary, and comprehension, whereas the Mathematics test evaluates problem-solving and procedural skills. The DRP assessment is used to collect information on student reading comprehension. Results from these pretests will be used to determine the individualized instruction each student subsequently receives.
- A student will be placed at a grade level according to pretest scores and a review of the student's classroom performance.
- Students at all grades will participate in SOL testing in all four content areas; however, a student must be in attendance at Mt. Vernon for a minimum of four semesters, including the semester in which testing takes place, for the scores to be included in the accreditation calculation. Four semesters of instruction in this alternative environment is needed to compensate for the academic and social deficits with which students enter this program.
- Posttests, including the DRP, will be administered to monitor student progress. Students will be tested at intervals during and at the end of the academic year to document academic progress and determine content for the next instructional period.

Monitoring Academic Achievement and Development of Study/Self-Management/Leadership Skills: The guidance counselor and teachers will monitor student progress towards meeting the goals of the student success plan. Grades and performance on quarterly criterion-referenced assessments, use of specifically taught skills, such as note taking and organizational management, and behavioral indicators such as attendance and discipline will be monitored on an ongoing basis. Quarterly meetings will be held with each student to review academic, self-management, and behavior indicators and progress, and related progress reports will be sent to parents with each report card.

Progress and Exit Criteria: Once consistent progress is documented through the quarterly review meetings, students will be determined to be ready for transition to a comprehensive setting at the end of the academic year when the goals of the student's educational plan have been met. When a student is ready to begin the transition process, a six-step transition plan is developed and implemented.

1. A committee is established to plan for and support the student's transition to a comprehensive school. The committee includes the student's teachers, counselor, principal and parents.

2. The committee reviews multiple progress indicators including academic, behavior, attendance, and other pertinent information.
3. The committee determines if the goals of the educational plan have been met and transition is appropriate.
4. The guidance counselor meets with the student and his/her parents to discuss and explain the transition process and establish a date for moving to the next placement.
5. The guidance counselor, working with the guidance staff at the comprehensive school, establishes a mentor for the student.
6. Once transition occurs, the guidance counselor at the alternative school visits/meets with the student and the comprehensive school counselor at least once each nine weeks for a minimum of one year. Progress reports will be sent to parents after each meeting. Additional monitoring and program adjustments will be provided as needed.

Basis for Accreditation and Adequate Yearly Progress:

- Mt. Vernon Middle School students will be taught by highly qualified teachers who are licensed and endorsed in their content area.
- Mt. Vernon Middle School will meet the pre-accreditation requirements outlined in the Standards of Accreditation.
- Scores for each test in each of the four content areas will be combined to create one (composite) pass rate, reflecting the interdisciplinary approach to instruction. In order to meet accreditation requirements, the composite pass rate must be 70% for Grades 6-8 combined. Scores of students in attendance for four semesters or more, including the semester in which testing takes place, will be included in the accreditation calculation.

No Child Left Behind:

- Testing requirements of NCLB will be met annually. Students will participate in all tests at all three grades for the purpose of assessing progress and meeting the Adequate Yearly Progress requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

Waiver Requested: Mount Vernon Middle School will require one waiver from the following state standard:

- Required middle school electives (foreign language). (8 VAC 20-131-90 B)

Mt. Vernon is designed to focus on significant interventions in the fundamentals to equip the students to succeed in high school when without such dramatic interventions they would not succeed. Student interests in other electives, such as a foreign language, will be accommodated on an individual basis.

Program Evaluation: The progress of students promoted from the program, as well as those who do not successfully complete it, will be monitored throughout middle and high school. This process will include monitoring grades and test results as well as attendance and discipline histories. Former students will also be interviewed periodically during their 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades by their instructors from Mount Vernon in order to make program improvements and refinements. Additionally, inquiry sessions will be held during the year with existing students and parents to monitor program effectiveness.

**Virginia Department of Education  
Evaluation Criteria  
Mount Vernon Middle School, Henrico County Public Schools  
Alternative Accreditation Plans for Special Purpose Schools**

Criteria	Yes	No	Limited
<b>School characteristics and instructional program:</b>			
1. The mission, purpose, and target population of the school justify its categorization as a “special purpose” school and, therefore, eligible to request an alternative accreditation plan.	v		
2. The characteristics and special needs of the student population are clearly defined, and the criteria for student placement require parental consultation and agreement.	v		
3. The program of instruction provides all students with opportunities to study a comprehensive curriculum that is customized to support the mission of the school.	v		
4. The school provides transition planning to help students be successful when they return to a regular school setting.	v		
5. Strategies used to evaluate student progress are aligned to the mission/purpose of the school and include academic achievement measures.	v		
6. Convincing evidence has been provided that students enrolled in the school have not been successful in other schools subject to all the accrediting standards.	v		
7. Students will be taught with highly qualified teachers who meet the Board of Education’s licensure requirements for instructional personnel.	v		
<b>Alternative Accreditation Plan:</b>			
1. Rationale and evidence provide convincing evidence that the “special purpose” nature of the school precludes its being able to reach and maintain full accreditation status as defined in the SOA.	v		
2. Alternative accreditation criteria described in the plan include academic achievement measures that are objective, measurable, and directly related to the mission and purpose of the school.	v		
3. The plan includes use of statewide assessment student achievement results of English and mathematics.	v		
4. The plan meets the testing requirements of the SOA.	v		

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Limited</b>
5. The plan meets the testing requirements of NCLB and describes how the school plans to meet “adequate yearly progress” requirements of the federal law.	<b>v</b>		
6. The plan provides convincing evidence that all pre-accreditation eligibility criteria are met for standards in which waivers have not been requested.	<b>v</b>		
7. Waivers have been requested for accrediting standards that are not being met, and the rationale for the waivers are clear and appropriate for the mission/purpose of the school.	<b>v</b>		