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## **Virginia & France Strengthen Educational Ties** ***State Superintendent Signs Agreement Promoting Partnerships***

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) is beginning a four-year partnership with the Académie de Reims — a large school district in northeastern France — to strengthen and promote educational and cultural ties between France and the commonwealth.

Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright and Académie de Reims Superintendent Philippe-Pierre Cabourdin signed a formal agreement today defining the partnership terms during a ceremony in Richmond.

“International school-to-school partnerships provide benefits that extend beyond the classroom,” Wright said. “Virginia students and their French peers will gain a global perspective as they engage in sustained, real-life communication critical to developing proficiency in a foreign language.”

VDOE will disseminate information about the agreement to school divisions and provide technical assistance to schools in completing applications to participate in authorized programs and opportunities. Interested Virginia schools will then apply directly to the French embassy’s education office to be matched with a French school. Once paired, Virginia and French schools may establish joint projects, such as:

- Collaboration and the sharing of resources between French and Virginia schools;
- Student exchanges between partnered schools and collaborations by Virginia and French students on specific projects;
- Exchange programs for Virginia teachers of French and French teachers of English and educators in other subjects;
- Student-teaching opportunities for aspiring Virginia teachers of French and aspiring French teachers of English; and
- Joint professional-development opportunities for teachers and administrators focused on instructional issues common to educators in both Virginia and France.

VDOE’s initial discussions with the French embassy and the Académie de Reims about potential partnerships took place in fall 2010. Those talks resulted in several Virginia schools entering into partnerships with schools in the French district. Two of these schools, Gar-Field High School in Prince William County, and its partner, Lycée François 1er de Vitry le François, were selected by the Fulbright Commission for the 2012 French-American Friendship prize.

“It is important to support these types of projects in economics, science, social studies and culture,” Cabourdin said. “Partnerships between schools can start small and eventually become long-term links, allowing students and teachers to communicate and work on themes common to their respective curriculums.”

The delegation from the Académie de Reims began visiting potential partner schools last week with meetings and tours at Lafayette High in Williamsburg, Woodside High in Newport News and Henrico High in Henrico County.

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Prior to the signing ceremony, the delegation visited Hermitage High in Henrico County. The delegation will visit Henrico County's Deep Run High Tuesday before returning to France.

French is the second largest foreign-language program in Virginia's public schools and the commonwealth is recognized nationally as a leader in French instruction. The language is offered by 108 school divisions and regional programs and also is available statewide through VDOE's Virtual Virginia online school. Since the inception of the summer Governor's French Foreign Language Academy in 1986, more than 1,600 students have participated in the annual three-week immersion program.

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