

Board of Education Agenda Item

Item: _____ G. _____

Date: May 28, 2009

Topic: First Review of a Request for Approval of an Innovative Program Opening Prior to Labor Day from Harrisonburg City Public Schools

Presenter: Ms. Anne Wescott, Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communication
Dr. Donald J. Ford, Superintendent, Harrisonburg City Public Schools

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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: _____

Previous Review/Action:

No previous board review/action
 Previous review/action
date _____
action _____

Background Information: The *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*, at 8 VAC 20-131-290.D, permit local school boards to seek approval to implement experimental or innovative programs that are not consistent with accreditation standards or other regulations promulgated by the Board. The request must contain information that includes, but is not limited to, a description of the program, the purpose and objectives of the program, the number of students affected, and anticipated outcomes and evaluation procedures for measuring student achievement.

Section 22.1-79.1 of the *Code of Virginia* prohibits local school boards from adopting school calendars that require schools to open prior to Labor Day unless a waiver is granted by the Board for "good cause." The conditions under which the Board may grant such waivers are outlined in the *Code*. Part 3 of § 22.1-79.1.B permits the Board to approve a waiver for approval of an experimental or innovative program.

§ [22.1-79.1](#). Opening of the school year; approvals for certain alternative schedules.

A. Each local school board shall set the school calendar so that the first day students are required to attend school shall be after Labor Day. The Board of Education may waive this requirement on a showing of good cause.

B. For purposes of this section, "good cause" means:

1. A school division has been closed an average of eight days per year during any five of the last 10 years because of severe weather conditions, energy shortages, power failures, or other emergency situations;
2. A school division is providing, in the school year for which the waiver is sought, an instructional program or programs in one or more of its elementary or middle or high schools, excluding the electronic classroom, which are dependent on and provided in one or more elementary or middle or high schools of another school division that qualifies for such waiver. However, any waiver granted by the Board of Education pursuant to this subdivision shall only apply to the opening date for those schools where such dependent programs are provided; or
3. A school division is providing its students, in the school year for which the waiver is sought, with an experimental or innovative program which requires an earlier opening date than that established in subsection A of this section and which has been approved by the Department of Education pursuant to the regulations of the Board of Education establishing standards for accrediting public schools. However, any waiver or extension of the school year granted by the Board of Education pursuant to this subdivision or its standards for accrediting public schools for such an experimental or innovative program shall only apply to the opening date for those schools where such experimental or innovative programs are offered generally to the student body of the school. For the purposes of this subdivision, experimental or innovative programs shall include instructional programs that are offered on a year-round basis by the school division in one or more of its elementary or middle or high schools....

For the 2009-2010, school year, 58 school divisions have been approved for emergency or weather-related reasons, 13 have one of more schools approved because of a dependent program, and five have one or more schools approved because of an innovative or experimental program. Of the five, four have year-round schools (Alexandria, Arlington, Danville, and Fairfax), and one, Covington City Public Schools, was approved by the Board in May 2008. Danville City Public Schools and Covington City Public Schools have some schools approved as dependent programs, and some as innovative or experimental programs.

For the 2008-2009 school year, 53 school divisions were approved for emergency or weather-related reasons, 14 had one of more schools approved because of a dependent program, and seven had one or more schools approved because of an innovative or experimental program. Of the seven, six had year-round schools (Alexandria, Arlington, Danville, Fairfax, Hampton, and Virginia Beach), and one,

Covington City Public Schools, was approved by the Board in May 2008. Danville City Public Schools and Covington City Public Schools had some schools approved as dependent programs, and some as innovative or experimental programs.

Summary of Major Elements: The Harrisonburg City School Board is requesting approval of an innovative program for Spotswood Elementary School and Waterman Elementary School. Approval of this request would permit both of these schools to open prior to Labor Day. All other schools in Harrisonburg are eligible for a pre-Labor Day waiver because they meet the requirements of § 22.1-79.1.B.2 by having a dependent program shared with school divisions that qualify for a weather-related waiver.

Harrisonburg City Public Schools participates in a seven-division consortium for preschool programs, which includes the Shenandoah Valley Head Start consortium, the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), and early special education preschool. The other participating school divisions are Augusta County, Bath County, Highland County, Rockingham County, and the cities of Staunton and Waynesboro. All of the other school divisions have waivers to begin before Labor Day.

Both the Head Start and the VPI-funded classrooms are blended classrooms, and both serve students who are receiving Early Childhood Special Education Services. Augusta County Public Schools serves as the fiscal agent and employs all of the teachers in the Head Start consortium. The Head Start and VPI programs work together to coordinate services and share the same curriculum, use the same assessment system with a Web-based entry, provide the same staff development on the same days, have a joint Parent Policy Council, and have common business meetings. Having a common calendar promotes a more streamlined delivery of instruction, the coordination of services, and the sharing of resources.

In addition, Harrisonburg High School has a mentor-tutor program for students who plan to go on to college and pursue a professional career. One of the mentorship opportunities allows students to work with teachers in the elementary schools. The mentorship requires a minimum of 90 hours of service and the submission of a portfolio of learning experiences. This program provides an innovative way to provide students with work-based learning, and, for those students who work with teachers, encourages them to consider going to college and entering the teaching profession. In order to meet the 90-hour requirement for the program, students need to be in all mentorship opportunities as early as possible in the school year. Since Harrisonburg High School is eligible to open before Labor Day, mentorship opportunities would also need to begin before Labor Day. If Waterman and Spotswood Elementary Schools open after Labor Day, it would limit opportunities to participate in the mentor-tutor program in these two schools.

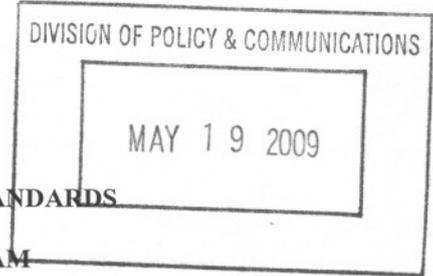
A copy of the complete package submitted by the Harrisonburg City School Board is attached.

Superintendent's Recommendation: The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education approve the request from Harrisonburg City Public Schools for an innovative program, pursuant to the provisions of §.22.1-79.1 of the *Code of Virginia*.

Impact on Resources: The impact on resources on the Department is not expected to be significant. There will be a fiscal and administrative burden on Harrisonburg City Schools if this request is not approved.

Timetable for Further Review/Action: Upon approval by the Board of Education, Department of Education staff will notify the Superintendent of Harrisonburg City Public Schools that Spotswood Elementary School and Waterman Elementary School are authorized to open prior to Labor Day in the 2009-2010 school year.

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
BOARD OF EDUCATION
P.O. Box 2120
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23218-2120



**REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF CERTAIN ACCREDITING STANDARDS
AND/OR APPROVAL
OF AN INNOVATIVE OR EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAM**

The *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 the beginning of an accrediting cycle or the proposed implementation of the program or activity that precipitates the request for the waiver. The types of waivers available and the corresponding section of the standards are indicated below. Please attach additional sheets or information deemed appropriate. [The board will consider this request in its monthly meeting and school divisions may be requested to appear before the board to explain a waiver request.]

SCHOOL DIVISION 113

TITLE OF PROGRAM/ACTIVITY Shenandoah Valley Head Start Program/Harrisonburg Mentor-Tutor Program

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:

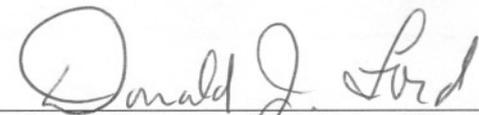
- Approval of an Alternative to the Standard School Year and School Day (8 VAC 20-131-150)
- Approval of an Alternative Accreditation Plan (8 VAC 20-131-280.D)
- Approval of an Experimental Program (8 VAC 20-131-290.D)
- Approval of an Innovative Program (8 VAC 20-131-290.D)
- Approval of a Waiver of Other Provision(s) of the Standards (8 VAC 20-131-330)
(Complete Pages 1 and 3 of the application only.)

SCHOOL(S) INVOLVED IN THE PROPOSED PROGRAM/ACTIVITY Spotswood Elementary and Waterman Elementary

April 21, 2009
Date Approved
by the Local School Board


Signature
Chairman of the School Board

May 15, 2009
Submission Date


Signature
Division Superintendent

IF THE PROPOSED PROGRAM IS EXPERIMENTAL OR INNOVATIVE, EXPLAIN HOW THIS IS SO AND PROVIDE A PROGRAM DESCRIPTION, INCLUDING THE TYPE OF PROGRAM, ITS PURPOSE, THE GRADES SERVED, DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION DESCRIBING THE STUDENTS WHO WILL BE ATTENDING, THE RATIONALE FOR THE PROGRAM, THE PROGRAMS GOALS, EVALUATION PROCEDURES, AND OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION.

Harrisonburg City Schools (HCPS) has approximately 4400 students served by one high school, two middle schools, and five elementary schools. Our school population is very diverse with a high ESL population. Students come from 46 different countries and speak 41 different languages other than English. Currently we have a 41% ESL population with a 59% division free and reduced lunch population. 6 of the 8 HCPS schools do qualify for a pre-Labor Day opening. Only Spotswood and Waterman Elementary Schools do not qualify.

We participate in a 7 school district consortium for pre-school programming. Within the consortium we have working agreements with Augusta County Schools, the fiscal agent that manages the Head Start program. Augusta County does qualify for a pre-Labor Day opening. All HCPS elementary schools have Head Start classrooms.

Shenandoah Valley Head Start (SVHS) began service to seven localities February 1994. The localities served in the Shenandoah Valley Head Start Consortium are Augusta County, Bath County, Highland County, Rockingham County and the cities of Harrisonburg, Staunton and Waynesboro. All school divisions except Harrisonburg currently have waivers to open before Labor Day. The Consortium comprises the seven public school divisions serving the localities listed with Augusta County Public Schools (ACSB) serving as the grantee for the participating communities. All pre-K teachers in the Head Start Consortium are employed by the Augusta County School System. In addition to the services to Head Start funded children, the Consortium participates in collaboration with the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) and early special education preschool.

HCPS Head Start classrooms share common essential support systems with the other divisions in the Consortium. The Consortium provides all pre-K students, whether part of the VPI or Headstart, with the same services in order to assure both continuity and efficiency. Such services are a common curriculum, common assessment system with a web-based entry, common staff development, a joint Parent Policy Council and common business meetings. A common school calendar will provide HCPS the continued opportunity to access the Head Start Services in an equal manner to all other school divisions involved.

The Shenandoah Valley Head Start participates in a regional advisory collaboration committee planning process formed in 2007 to assist the seven school divisions' coordination efforts to support all preschool options they offer. Staff development and the coordination of services are planned by the regional Head Start authority for employees working with this program. This coordination of services is important so that all teachers share a common calendar to access staff development opportunities, testing schedules, parent-teacher conference days and parent advisory meetings. The regional Head Start program uses *Creative Curriculum and Blue Print Early Literacy* in all classrooms supplemented with additional researched-based educational materials. The Blue Print Early Literacy

is a critical offering by the program to assist children prepare for literacy requirements upon entry into kindergarten. The effective application of the curriculum is monitored using assessment design by *Creative Curriculum*. This assessment program is web-based and has a common assessment window for all Head Start classrooms. If HCPS Head Start classrooms were on a different school schedule our students would not be ready to be assessed by the first scheduled assessment date. All Head Start classrooms share a common staff development schedule. If HCPS Head Start classrooms were on a different school calendar we would not be able to access staff development trainings led by the Head Start Consortium. This would not allow HCPS Head Start classrooms teachers the benefit of valuable training especially in instructional areas such as pacing, assessment, alignment and articulation.

The Head Start program is meeting the Virginia requirements defined in the Virginia Block's for Early Learning. The program blends Virginia Department of Education instructional requirements, Quality Rating System standards, Head Start Act requirements and components found in the Virginia Early Childhood Development Alignment Project into a single comprehensive educational plan for all preschool age children served in the Consortium preschool network.

The Shenandoah Valley Head Start program enters the fifteenth year of continued service to the seven school districts with a current funded enrollment of 274 three and four year olds. To help ensure that all preschool programs are working in harmony, steps are taken to minimize competition for enrolling children and to prevent parents from thinking they must "shop around" for the best school-based preschool option. Participating divisions agree to operate on the calendar adopted by the Augusta County School board for streamlined instructional programs for all pre-K students, common assessment windows, common staff development training, common parent-teacher conference days and all unified planning opportunities as it relates to instruction.

In Harrisonburg, both VPI and Head Start funded classrooms are blended classrooms as they both have students who are receiving Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services. Shenandoah Valley Head Start maintains a detailed schedule of reciprocity of sharing resources and equity of staffing patterns that is revised periodically as changes occur to demonstrate parity in human resource use is monitored by Head Start, VPI, Special Education Preschool and the seven school divisions.

DOES THE PROGRAM REQUIRE THAT SCHOOLS IN THE DIVISION OPEN PRIOR TO LABOR DAY?
X YES NO.

IF YES, EXPLAIN WHY.

If children in Head Start classrooms located in Spotswood and Waterman Elementary Schools follow an after Labor-Day opening and not the pre-Labor Day opening calendar the following would be impacted:

All other Shenandoah Valley Head Start Program students and classrooms will start August 18th and will be in school 14 days prior to Spotswood and Waterman Head Start classrooms. Since the Head Start Consortium purchases the Creative Curriculum and a common assessment window is used for all schools, Waterman and Spotswood Head Start students would have 14 days less instruction prior to the first assessment than other Head Start students.

Support services such as Music, Guidance, Physical Education, Art, and Library need to be provided daily to preschool students. Access to staff development and instructional planning for these support teachers would be affected since the remaining HCPS staff would be on a different school calendar.

Special Education services would need to be provided to children within these classrooms. This would be an additional cost to Harrisonburg City Schools since HCPS provides the special education services to Head Start students and all other pre-school students.

Staff development for Head Start and other pre-school teachers is coordinated and conducted regionally prior to the first day of school. The Head Start teachers in Spotswood and Waterman Elementary schools would not be "under contract" and not able to participate if those schools opened after Labor Day. If they did not participate then HCPS would need to provide training at an alternate time at an additional cost in order to ensure that instruction was not negatively impacted. The level of training and the consistency of training would not be the same for all HCPS Head Start teachers.

Transportation is provided to and from school daily. An additional cost to the division will be incurred due to the fact that transportation staff would not be under contract.

The collaborative nature of the Head Start Consortium has HCPS provide many in-kind services to the Head Start classrooms – administrative support, secretarial and janitorial support.

Preschool students do not attend school the first Fridays of each month. This allows teachers to do home visits/parent conferences and to attend staff development opportunities." The staff development opportunities are set by the Head Start Consortium – a different school calendar would prevent HCPS Head Start teachers from accessing the planned staff development. This is important particularly when looking at goals and outcomes of our pre-school program with our ESL population at 41% and the free and reduced population at 59%.

Mentor-Tutor Program

Harrisonburg High School offers a program/course for students who plan to pursue a baccalaureate degree and employment in a professional career. The course is designed to provide students with an in-depth orientation to a career and exposure to the supervisory, management, and decision-making skills needed for the profession. One of the mentorship opportunities allows high school students to work along side teachers in the Harrisonburg City Schools. A minimum of 90 hours is required in addition to the submission of a portfolio of learning experiences that were encountered during the mentorship training. A number of ESL and minority students participate in this program gaining valuable work experience. The "real world" work experience is a beneficial tool in helping to define career choices and provides students the opportunity to see first hand the day to day operation of businesses and for those students who may wish to enter the field of education. Harrisonburg High School does send students into all elementary schools, including Spotswood and Waterman that do not qualify for a pre Labor Day opening. Harrisonburg High School does qualify for a pre Labor Day opening. High school students provide tutoring for elementary students during their mentorships. They also assist with before and after school tutoring sessions in the assigned schools.

The mentorship program provides a structured, hands-on experience for students interested in the field of education. It is an innovative way to not only allow students to experience work-based learning and earn a credit, but also to increase the potential field of future educators. Students learn a great deal from being in the classroom and working one on one with students. They are able to apply what they have learned from their own classroom experiences. They usually complete the program with excitement and enthusiasm for the teaching profession.

Students from the high school do begin their work in elementary schools within the first two days of school. If other schools within our division did not start until after Labor Day and if Harrisonburg High School were to open before Labor Day, students could lose many days of mentorship time. Since students need to be placed to satisfy the 90 hour requirement for time spent in their mentorship assignment as early as possible, schools that were not available to high school students beginning within the first days of school would lose HHS students mentorship students to other schools that could open prior to Labor Day. This would negatively affect placement and tutoring opportunities for Spotswood and Waterman that do not qualify. Waterman and Spotswood Elementary schools may lose Harrisonburg High School placed student mentors since they would not be able to start until after Labor Day.

Other Considerations:

Consideration: Rockingham County Public Schools (RCPS), which does qualify for a pre-Labor Day opening, participate in several regional special education programs located within HCPS. If HCPS opens after Labor Day and RCPS opens before Labor Day the instructional program for students will be affected. There are currently 8 Rockingham students in three different Harrisonburg schools.

Consideration: HCPS shares with RCPS a jointly operated Massanutten Regional Technical Center. If HCPS students did not begin school until after Labor Day their instructional program and possibly graduation could be affected. There are currently 87 Harrisonburg High School students that attend this program.

IF THE PROGRAM IS EXPERIMENTAL, INCLUDE INFORMATION THAT EXPLAINS WHY THERE IS REASON TO EXPECT THAT THE PROGRAM WILL BE SUCCESSFUL.

DESCRIBE THE ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OF THE PROGRAM.

A desired outcome of the Head Start program is to provide a common instructional program using *Creative Curriculum and Blue Print* in all classrooms supplemented with additional researched-based educational materials. The effective application of the curriculum is monitored using assessment design by *Creative Curriculum*. This assessment system is a web-based system utilizing common test window. If HCPS Head Start classrooms are on a different school calendar, students will not be ready for the assessments they are to take given the common assessment schedule. If the schools in Harrisonburg City Schools opened on a different schedule VPI preschool students and Head Start preschool students who are attending school in the same building would be on a different grading/progress report cycle, confusing for parents and hard for teachers.

A desired outcome of Head Start program is meeting the Virginia requirements defined in the Virginia Foundation's Block's for Early Learning. Our data shows us that 80% of the pre-school children that complete Head Start will fall into the targeted development range on the Pre-K PALS assessment

A desired outcome of the Head Start program is to ensure the strong connection between home and school in meeting the needs of children. Head Start and school divisions collaborate to support a comprehensive support service network that includes guidance, Intervention Response Teams (IRT), division health services, mental health intervention and prevention using school psychologists, social workers and other related school division personnel, parent involvement and community advocacy to ensure students receive a solid pre-school education.

SCHOOL DIVISION

113

TITLE OF PROGRAM/ACTIVITY

Innovative Program

IF YOU ARE SEEKING A WAIVER OF A PROVISION OR PROVISIONS OF THE ACCREDITING STANDARDS, STATE THE PROVISION AND THE RATIONALE FOR SEEKING A WAIVER FOR EACH.

Not Applicable.

DESCRIBE THE PROCEDURES THAT WILL BE USED TO EVALUATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE WAIVER/PROGRAM/ACTIVITY. (Include information that includes measurable goals, objectives, and student academic achievement that will be expected as a result of the implementation of the program/activity.)

The assessment data related to ESL children indicates that gaining early language mastery reduces remediation for ESL children in later grades due to language use issues.

Harrisonburg City Schools report as a result of rich language instruction and a solid pre-school education, there is increased family involvement in their child's education. Additional ESL support is noticeably reduced and there are fewer difficulties in transitioning children into kindergarten.

Number of students involved in the program

84

What is the anticipated length of the program or duration of the waiver?

On going

Questions should be directed to the Division of Policy and Communications at (804) 225-2092, or by e-mail to policydata@doe.virginia.gov. This application and supporting documentation must be sent to:

Division of Policy and Communications
Department of Education
P. O. Box 2120
Richmond, VA 23218-2120