

DATE: September 24, 2009
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Superintendent Recommends Maintaining and Renovating Red Hill, Yancey and Scottsville Elementary Schools to School Board

(ALBEMARLE COUNTY, Virginia) – At the Albemarle County School Board work session on September 24, 2009, Superintendent Pamela Moran outlined her recommendation for how best to allocate capital improvement program dollars to support teaching and learning spaces in southern Albemarle County. Dr. Moran recommended to the Board that Red Hill Elementary, located in North Garden; B.F. Yancey Elementary, located in Esmont; and Scottsville Elementary schools each be maintained as individual schools and be renovated and slightly expanded to meet the needs of students in that area.

The superintendent had been considering whether to close one or more of the three small schools – each of which has less than 200 students – and build a new consolidated elementary school or expand one of the existing sites in order to establish a larger, more diverse student population, fully fund educational program opportunities at levels comparable to other elementary schools in the county, and save annual operating costs due to efficiencies captured by having fewer and newer facilities. The operational and instructional effectiveness of the small schools was called into question by the independent Resource Utilization Review, received by the school division in late 2007.

The superintendent based her recommendation to the board on the following data:

The relatively small annual operating cost savings captured in consolidating the schools;
The difficulty of building a school large enough for all students in the three schools at the proposed site adjacent to Walton Middle School;
Strong community support for maintaining the three small elementary schools;

A lack of compelling evidence that the size of the school affects student achievement;
The history and community value of the schools at their present sites.

A Southern Feeder Pattern Planning team met in the fall of 2008 and spring of 2009, and carried forward the preferred recommendation of keeping all three schools open with renovations. Their secondary recommendation was consolidation of the three schools to a single school at the site of Walton Middle School, where the county already owns land. The School Board's Long Range Facilities Planning Advisory Committee recommended closing the three schools and building a single school at the Walton site based on data available at the time. Subsequent reports from engineers and architects studying that site determined that the site could not support a 650-student elementary school due to septic drain field requirements.

"I am confident that we can renovate Yancey, Red Hill and Scottsville elementary schools to bring them on par in terms of facilities and access to technology with our other elementary schools," Dr. Moran said. "I also believe we can examine the ways we allocate resources for people and technology to our schools to discover other ways to save operating costs while keeping these long-standing community schools open."

The Southern Feeder Pattern Planning Study presents several options. The projected cost to renovate and expand the three elementary schools is \$17.1 million dollars: \$4 million for Scottsville, \$4.2 million for Red Hill, and \$8.9 million for Yancey elementary school. The current cost to build a new 650-student elementary school is \$20.4 million.

The final decision on whether to renovate the three schools or to close one or more of them rests with the School Board. The School Board will host a public hearing on Tuesday, September 29, 2009 at 7 p.m. in the Monticello High School auditorium. The board is slated to vote on the matter on October 22.

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