

Nelson School News


Spring 2011

Superintendent's Message



Dear Parents and Friends,


As the Nelson County Public School Division family enters the final phase of the current school year, the administrative team is looking forward to 2011-12 and beyond. The lingering impact of an economic downturn and difficult financial times remains evident. However, school leaders have not allowed this scenario to derail our relentless focus on student learning objectives and goals. It is important that our schools continue to improve and strive for excellence across all programs and in each and every classroom.

 Contemplating the future of K-12 public education can be exciting. The staffs in Nelson's schools take great pride in performing well on the state mandated SOL tests, and this positive trend bodes well for our students, parents, and community members. Beginning this spring, SOL tests in

specific areas will demand greater exactitude and thus will be more challenging. Nevertheless, I have tremendous confidence that by working collaboratively we can succeed.

I ask that you join me in considering the future of learning across our school division and in our wonderful community. Acquiring 21st century skills and creating irrepensible learners continue to be our priorities for the students of Nelson County and the focus of all of the schools in our division.

Thank you for your many positive contributions to our schools. Enjoy the remainder of your spring!


Division Superintendent

Three Schools Earn Competence to Excellence Award

Created in 2007, the Virginia Index Performance Awards program has recognized schools and divisions that have exceeded minimum state and federal accountability standards. Winners were announced in January 2011 by Governor Robert McDonnell and the Virginia Board of Education, and 728 out of 2,093 schools in Virginia earned an award this year. One of those awards, the Competence to Excellence Award, is given to schools that have met all state and federal benchmarks, including Adequate Yearly Progress, for at least two consecutive years. (Virginia's accountability system supports teaching and learning by setting rigorous academic standards, known as the Standards of Learning (SOL), and through annual assessments of student achievement.) For a Virginia school or school division to achieve Annual Yearly Progress, more than 81



percent of students overall and students in all subgroups must demonstrate proficiency in reading (on the SOL test), and more than 79 percent of students overall and in all subgroups must demonstrate proficiency in mathematics (on the mathematics SOL). We are extremely proud to announce that three schools in Nelson County were recognized by Virginia in 2011.

Tye River Elementary and **Rockfish River Elementary Schools** along with **Nelson Middle School** received the Competence to Excellence Award. Upon learning that her school had won the award, Nita Hughes, principal of Rockfish, said, "Our students and teachers work extremely hard every day to be successful. I am very proud of

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our accomplishments, and I definitely consider this a team effort." When Greg Hill heard the news, he said, "Teachers receive very little in the way of a 'thank you,' so this was an absolute pleasure to share with the staff at Tye River. This award served to show the staff at Tye River that we are not only meeting the needs of our students, we are exceeding them in some cases. The work that they do every day (and often times at night) was finally recognized by the state. I have shared with them the requirements we had to meet to earn this award and also what we would need for the next level of recognition. They all agree that we will achieve it with continued hard work and high expectations for our students. I am

*Competence
To
Excellence*

proud and honored to work with this exceptional group of professional educators." Nelson County Middle School principal, Jody Ray, shared the following: "Nelson Middle School is honored to receive this award. I think this is a testament to the dedication and hard work of the staff, students, and community of Nelson."

While every year poses new challenges to the division, the schools are ready, willing, and able to tackle the task at hand. By working together, no challenge is insurmountable. We salute the hard work of all our schools and invite you to continue your involvement as they pursue academic excellence in all areas of the curricula.

Blue Ridge Virtual Governor's School Advances

When most people ponder the idea of a "virtual school", they tend to think first of the technology that makes on-line schooling possible. For example, when Blue Ridge Virtual Governor's School (BRVGS) was just getting under way in early 2000's, the school's education program centered on video-conferencing as a means for students to learn and share information from district to district. Large, robotic video conferencing consoles (bearing an eerie resemblance to the robot from the 1960's series *Lost in Space* who was most known for exclaiming, "Danger, Will Robinson!" on a regular basis) were placed in classrooms in each of the participating school districts. Students used video-conferencing to listen to other teachers instruct in areas of expertise, to share results of projects and research, and to connect occasionally with subject area experts outside of the schools.

Because the technology was difficult to operate, often unreliable, and was primarily designed to connect large groups with one another, BRVGS began to look at "virtual schooling" in a different way. Staff started with the question, "What do we want our students to know and be able to do by the time they graduate from the BRVGS program?" That question guided the program staff to identify specific skills in the areas of problem-solving, collaboration,

teamwork, ethics, time management, and the effective use of updated technology. With those goals in mind, BRVGS has redesigned its educational program as one where student learning goals drive the instructional program and the technology in use – not the other way around.

How does this play out in BRVGS classes? In most courses, students receive the bulk of their instruction and assessment from teachers at the local school. Every student, however, also participates in team-based collaborative projects often involving students from the BRVGS member counties of Nelson, Fluvanna, Goochland, Greene, Louisa, Madison, and Orange. Students usually assemble at a "working field trip" to collaborate with team members at the beginning of a project where they meet team members, acquire the information necessary to get the project under way, and establish procedures and team norms for the projects. Project outcomes vary. In some projects, students produce websites or other learning products that highlight critical learning of their subject. In other projects, students participate in program-wide experiments sharing data and conclusions. Most projects culminate in formal public presentations to peers or a panel of judges.

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Students accomplish all of this collaboration by using on-line tools such as Google Apps for Education. This platform provides all BRVGS students with email and a suite of shared on-line documents, presentations, and website. This means, for example, that a student in Nelson County and a student in Orange County can work on, communicate about, and edit the same document or power-point presentation. Teachers see the student work and related communications as projects progress, and students and teachers provide ongoing feedback as student teams finalize their projects. BRVGS provides laptop carts to each member school so students can accomplish communication and collaboration from within each of their classes.



This style of virtual school has many identifiable advantages to the video-conferencing model of the early years of BRVGS. First, it allows for flexible scheduling of courses at each school since stu-

dents are not required to be on-line at the same time in order to collaborate. Second, it models and prepares students for collaboration in the real world as BRVGS students recently noted in visits to Charlottesville area technology-based businesses. After hearing representatives from LexMark Publishing describe how they collaborate with colleagues around the world via email, shared documents, and other technology, one BRVGS student was moved to exclaim, "That's exactly what we do!" Finally, as research emerges around virtual and on-line learning, there is mounting evidence that the most effective technology-centered learning model is actually what is called a "hybrid" model, one that combines "in-person" learning with the resources and communication tools of technology. BRVGS students accomplish this with on-line projects. With all of this in mind, BRVGS will continue to work to bring effective "virtual" learning to Nelson County students.

Connecting Students to Writing & Their World at TRES

Studying the art of composition is often perceived as a daunting and uninteresting task to most students, but when the study is connected with real-life situations, students become more engaged and excited. During the past few months, the fourth and fifth grades at Tye River Elementary have participated in instructional, yet fun, writing activities.



Over a two week period prior to their SOL Writing test, the fifth graders had the opportunity to work with a local published writer, Ms. Kay Platz of Roseland. Growing up in Charlottesville, she is the author of *Lauren's Story: An American Dog in Paris* which may be found in the library at TRES. The students were extremely interested in improving the details in their writing and sharing their stories with one another. There were no complaints even when given a homework assignment! Having the opportunity to hear from and work alongside a published author connected writing to the real world for the children. The activity also showed them that writing is an exciting way to communicate and allows a person to paint pictures with words.

Fourth grade students practiced their writing by sending letters to the troops in Iraq. When Mrs. Clarkson, guidance counselor, told the teachers about an opportunity to send letters to our soldiers who often receive no mail, Kelly Ferrell connected Veteran's Day activities to lessons on friendly letter writing for her fourth grade students. Ms. Ferrell felt this was a perfect way to tie writing to a real life purpose. The students sent their letters in November, but due to the slowness of mail delivery to Iraq, the soldiers did not receive the letters until January! The company commander, Lieutenant Hutton, wrote back to the students thanking them for their letters and provided a glimpse into the climate and geography of Iraq. Ms. Ferrell's class was elated to hear from the troops and has expressed interest in writing to them again before the end of the school year.

By combining instruction with life experiences, the study of composition becomes meaningful and fun; the teachers at TRES are making that connection for their students. These types of activities help students to practice their skills and increase excitement about learning.

Student Career Academies Offered

Nelson County Middle School students have been learning hands-on with local employers this year by selling wholesale plants at the Lovingston IGA (formerly George's Supermarket) during a Horticulture Academy last fall and creating tasty treats at the Invisible Chef during a Culinary Academy this spring. Piloted as part of the Piedmont Futures program in Nelson County this year, the After-School



Career Academies were designed to give students a hands-on learning experience in a career field related to their skills and interests.

Why career academies?

In a recent study by the Harvard Graduate School of Education (*Pathways to Prosperity*, February 2011), researchers conclude that more workplace learning is needed for students to be prepared for college and careers after high school. The study takes note of educational systems in Europe that successfully transition students into the workplace through a combination of workplace and academic learning for high school students. One group of countries in this study allows students to learn about an extensive array of careers before they choose a specific training track. Moreover, employers take an active role in these programs and, in some cases, offer apprenticeships to students that lead to jobs.

While many countries have seen significant increases in their graduation rates in the last decades, the graduation rates in the U.S. have stayed essentially the same. "Work-linked learning can be extraordinarily powerful in engaging students who are bored or turned off by conventional classroom instruction," note researchers. Additionally, many countries do a better job of integrating recent graduates into their job markets. In Germany, over 80% of graduates were employed within six months of completing their schooling in 2007 as opposed to only 48% in the U.S.

The Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University projects that half of the 28 million job openings in the U.S. for workers with a post secondary credential will require an associate's

degree or an industry credential rather than a four-year degree. This growing sector of "middle skill" jobs includes HVAC technician, police officer, paralegal and allied health careers. Unfortunately, some high school students in the U.S. are often not directed toward educational pathways that lead to career specific credentials and only 40% complete a degree by age 27.



"There is mounting evidence that this [work-linked learning] would be an effective strategy for encouraging young adults to complete both high school and post secondary degrees," the study concludes. Piedmont Futures supports this strategy through its career programs for students in Grades 5-12, including the Career Pathways Speakers Series, the 7th Grade Career Expo, Commonwealth Scholars 10th Grade Career Day at PVCC, as well as the After-School Career Academies in Nelson County.

This summer Piedmont Futures will be focusing on twenty different career areas in their week-long Summer Career Academies at PVCC for middle and high school students. The participants in these academies will engage in hands-on, project-based learning directed by PVCC faculty and area business professionals and will go on field trips to area businesses and the University of Virginia. Rising sixth through tenth grade students are invited to enroll. More information about the Summer Career Academies and other Piedmont Futures programs can be found at www.pvcc.edu/futures.



Chinese Visitors at RRES

Did you know that China is shaped like a rooster? Are you aware that the compass and gunpowder were invented by the Chinese? Second graders at Rockfish River Elementary School learned these and many more interesting facts about China from three UVA undergraduate students who visited their school. Following a unit of study on China, the students were treated to the visit which was coordinated by the university's Asian Institute Outreach Program. RRES students viewed a power-point presentation which covered many topics including the geography of China, the animals that live there, the population, inventions, festivals, and architecture. Question and answer sessions revealed what the children had learned, and they were rewarded with treats by their visitors to thank them for the opportunity to share their knowledge.



In September, Rockfish has scheduled the arrival of a large world map supplied by the Asian Institute Outreach Program. It measures about 32 x 35 feet and will be set up in the gym for several days allowing students to examine it, walk on it, and discover new facts about world geography. The institute is willing to visit schools and tailor programs based on the academic needs of students and desires of teachers. The staff at Rockfish thanks the Asian Institute Outreach Program for their collaboration. RRES continues to prepare students for a globally connected future.



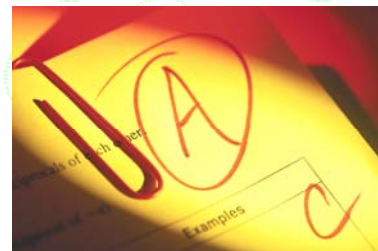
Early Results Show Positive Impact of NCHS "G" Block

The school improvement process is thriving in the Nelson County Public School Division. Over several months, the NCHS staff studied additional ways to heighten opportunities for student success. In February, the school staff implemented the "G" Block, an alternate schedule designed to provide remediation and enrichment activities during regular school hours. The "G" Block occurs during the first part of each school day.

At the completion of the fourth six weeks, the "G" Block appeared to show a positive impact on grades when compared to the first six weeks from last semester. After just one six-weeks, high school students showed a 5% increase in A's and B's and a 7% decrease for grades C and below. Overall, the total number of A's and B's increased while C's, D's, and F's declined. The school personnel will continue to monitor both informal and formal data as well as solicit feedback from students and faculty regarding the new schedule. At the conclusion of this school

year, the NCHS staff will analyze a myriad of results to determine the impact on student achievement. The "G" Block is an innovative method of creating a more positive learning environment for high school students.

Mr. Dunnick, NCHS Assistant Principal, welcomes suggestions in an effort to continue to improve the "G" Block. He may be contacted directly by email: rdunnick@nelson.k12.va.us or by calling (434) 263-8317.



Thanks for the Memories

With mixed emotions and feelings of gratitude for their tireless efforts on behalf of children, the Nelson County School Board and administration acknowledge the well-deserved retirement of the following individuals at the end of the 2010-11 school year:

Marsha Campbell	8 th Grade Math Teacher	Nelson Middle School
Jane Davey	Attendance Clerk	Nelson County High School
Kay Grumbach	Kindergarten Teacher	Tye River Elementary School
Helen Meredith	Custodian	Nelson County High School
Ella Sue Parker	Special Education Teacher	Rockfish River Elementary School
Cindy Seal	Reading Specialist	Rockfish River Elementary School
Gloria Sumter	Reading Specialist	Rockfish River Elementary School
Edward Thacker	Horticulture Teacher	Nelson County High School
Shirley Wade	Instr. Asst. & Bus Driver	Nelson County High School
Emma Wardlaw	Principal	Nelson County High School
David Miller (Sept. 30)	Maintenance Mechanic	Division

Please join us as we celebrate the professional achievements of these valued public servants. The program will be held in the auditorium of Nelson County High School on Thursday, May 12, 2011, at 4:30 PM. A brief reception will follow. The public is invited to attend.



Math Corner

Parents - you can make a difference!

With the increased focus on math and science in our society, division staff have made high student achievement in these subjects a top priority. In addition, today's students need more than just basic computational skills; they must also master higher level concepts and develop skills to approach problem solving with more confidence. We must work together to challenge and engage students' in creative and independent thinking more than ever before.

Starting with the school year 2011-12, students in Virginia will become accountable for learning new math standards aligned to the national standards in mathematics. Along with these new standards, students taking the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests will experience higher level thinking questions integrated with non-multiple choice items. Our division is currently engaged in preparing for these changes, and together we can help our students achieve even more success.



We invite you as parents to explore the world of mathematics along with your children. Embrace high expectations for them in math, and support their learning along the way. Make math enjoyable by digging into challenges together and keeping experiences positive. Playing board games, solving puzzles, and working brain teasers together with your child are wonderful ways to have fun! Connect math to everyday life events, and look for ways to involve your children in solving some of the problems that naturally occur in life. In addition, continue to support them during homework time by encouraging them to accept the responsibility to think and problem solve independently. You can do this by listening and asking questions, asking your children to explain something to you, and encouraging them to work the problem out on paper to show you; sometimes drawing a picture of the problem can be a great support to discovering the solution. Specifically, parents of students in Grade 5 through Algebra I may visit

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the “Figure This!” website at http://www.figurethis.org/about_ft.htm and explore the eighty math challenges for you and your child to solve together.

There are many resources available for parents today. You can begin by visiting the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) Family Resources site found at <http://www.nctm.org/resources/families.aspx>. Family involvement in mathematics is important in your child’s path to success. By working together, parents and schools can provide the experiences necessary for success in math. Be positive about mathematics and chances are your child will be positive, too!



Virginia’s Fourth Graders in Tie for National Achievement in Science

The 2009 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), also known as “The Nation’s Report Card,” is the only test given nationally to quantify what students in America know and can do. In the second half of 2009, randomly selected students in Grades 4 and 8 participated in this national assessment. The average score for these students in Virginia was significantly higher than their peers nationwide.

Fourth grade students in Virginia and North Dakota are in a virtual tie for high national achievement in science. In both states, students in Grade 4 earned an average score of 162, out-performing other fourth graders around the nation with the excep-

tion of New Hampshire which scored only one point higher at 163. NAEP assessment results are only reported state-wide eliminating individual school and division level results.

Virginia’s fourth grade girls ranked second in the nation, and boys ranked fifth. Additionally, African-American, Asian, Hispanic, and white students in the fourth grade achieved the highest average scores for their respective subgroups.

This year’s NAEP results are the first based on a new, rigorous assessment reflecting the latest national standards. Because this assessment is not comparable with previous NAEP tests, the results this year should not be compared to previous data trends. The next NAEP science test in 2013 will be compared to the 2009 results.

Walk for the Cure at NMS

Since 2009, Nelson Middle School students have made countless contributions toward conquering cancer through the Nelson County Relay for Life. In the past, students have supported the Nelson Middle School Relay for Life team, the Mustang Sallies, made up of faculty members and parents. Although working for months to raise money, many were unable to participate in the actual relay due to the fact that it takes place after school hours and well into the



night. This year, that will change with an activity scheduled during school hours! The Nelson Middle School staff and students will raise money together during the month of April and will then hold a Mini-Relay on the afternoon of May 6. The faculty, staff, and students at NMS are excited to work collaboratively on this opportunity to help others and support an admirable community cause.

Spring Division SOL Testing Dates

Nelson County students in grades 3-8 and students in certain high school courses will be taking the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment this spring. Please plan your calendar now so your child will be present and prepared for Virginia’s SOL Assessments.

Scheduled Standards of Learning (SOL) test dates are as follows.

Elementary Schools (TRES & RRES): May 23rd – June 3rd
Nelson Middle School & Nelson County High School: May 27th – June 6th
Testing dates are subject to change.

Students in the following grades and subjects will be taking the SOL tests.

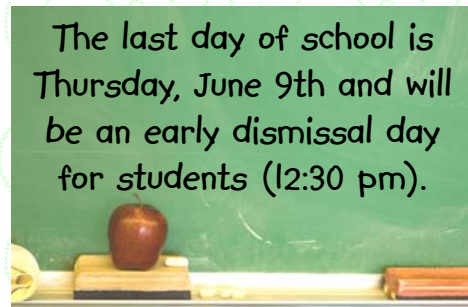
- Grade 3 – Reading, Math, Science, & History/Social Studies
- Grade 4 – Reading & Math
- Grade 5 – Reading, Math, Science, & VA Studies
- Grade 6 – Reading & Math
- Grade 7 – Reading, Math, & History
- Grade 8 – Reading, Math, Science, & History
- High School Reading – English 11
- High School Math – Algebra I, Geometry, & Algebra II
- High School Science – Earth Science, Biology, & Chemistry
- High School History/Social Studies – VA US History, World History I & II



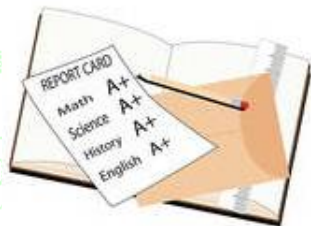
School Report Card

The Virginia School Report Card provides information on SOL achievement at the state, division, and school level and is available online at:

<https://p1pe.doe.virginia.gov/reportcard/>



The last day of school is Thursday, June 9th and will be an early dismissal day for students (12:30 pm).



Catch us online at:
www.nelson.k12.va.us



School Board Members

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