

Fauquier Times

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Special Section:
It's about love.
SEE PAGES 9-12



TIMES STAFF PHOTO/ROBIN EARL

"Miss Angie" helps a student with an in-classroom activity.

Thanks to pandemic planning, pre-schoolers return to classrooms

Half of Head Start-eligible students have resumed in-person learning

By Robin Earl
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Nine preschool children play together – apart – four days a week in each of five Head Start classrooms at Central Community Center and in two classrooms at Mary Walter Elementary School in Morrisville. Pairs sit at desks facing one another; a Plexiglas shield allows them to talk and hold up their work to show one another while providing a physical barrier between them.

On the morning of Feb. 4, some focused on

cutting out pictures of healthy food to paste on a picture of a lunch box.

Other children played with blocks or puzzles while sitting on the floor in "pods," 6-foot square areas divided with bookshelves. "Do Your Ears Hang Low," and "The Wheels on the Bus" played while the children completed their tasks and two teachers stopped by each station to reinforce the lessons. "How many children do you have there in that house?" "What color are those blocks?"

See **HEAD START**, page 4

Youngest students could return to school 4 days a week beginning March 15

By Robin Earl
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Some elementary school students could return to classrooms four days a week by March 15. The initiative would include kindergarten through second grade or kindergarten through fifth grade students.

By April 5, all students in Fauquier County schools could have the option of attending class in person four days out of the week. Superintendent of Schools David Jeck announced the initiatives at Monday night's school board meeting.

Surveys will go out to families "in the next day or two," asking families if they'd like to return to school on the four-day a week schedule, said Jeck.

See **SCHOOLS**, page 2

Cost-share program provides funding for stream-saving fencing

Program protects half of county's streams from livestock

By Peter Cary

PIEDMONT JOURNALISM FOUNDATION

Mel Miller had long wanted to keep his cattle from polluting Town Run, a pretty creek that meanders through his Catlett farm. Using a wetlands banking program, he had fenced off most of his pastures from the stream but he still had a mile to go. And that would cost a lot, at least \$50,000, not just for the fencing but also for a watering system to serve the cattle once they were barred from the creek.

Miller knew the John Marshall Soil and Water Conservation District, a state agency headquartered in Warrenton, was paying 75% to 85%



TIMES STAFF PHOTO/COY FERRELL

Mel Miller signed on to protect the creek that crosses his Catlett farm.

of the cost of such projects, but even that was not enough. "We're a small operation and every dollar matters," he said. But in 2019, the district announced that it would start paying up to 100% of the cost.

Miller signed on. And ten months later, in December 2020, the Elkrun Valley Ranch that he runs with his dad sported a mile of grid-like wire

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TIMES STAFF PHOTOS/ROBIN EARL

Since they opened to students in September, Head Start classrooms have only nine students instead of the usual 18.

Pandemic planning brings pre-schoolers back into the classroom

HEAD START, from page 1

Another pair of 4-year-olds in smocks painted on either side of a standing easel.

There were no smiles to be seen, but giggles sometimes escaped from under their child-sized masks.

Several of the children were fascinated by the double-masked reporter in the corner taking photos with a long lens. They indicated that they would be happy to take the camera to their pod to push the buttons and twirl the dials, if she would let them. (She didn't.)

The Head Start program

Fauquier County's Head Start program is funded for 139 at-risk children; the pandemic has reduced that number down to 77. Sixty 3- and 4-year-olds attend in-person classes; 17 learn virtually.

Head Start Executive Director Pat Washington said that virtual learning for 3- and 4-year-olds doesn't mean sitting in front of a computer. "On Mondays, we send hard copies home for families to work on through the week; they are delivered to homes by bus drivers," she said.

The Head Start program was shuttered in March 2020 and did not open its doors again until Sept. 14. During that time, Head Start staff kept in touch with parents through phone calls and provided weekly food packages and hard copies of "homework" for the children.

Washington said that the period between March and September gave her agency an opportunity to come up with a solid pandemic plan, "We did a lot of planning, to really understand what it would look like when we reopened. We had time to think it through."

The Head Start program has been COVID-free so far, but Washington admitted that before they reopened in September, she was "was scared to death." She said she spent the time while they were closed reviewing other programs, taking in all the information she could find, then evaluating how it could work for Fauquier.

Once she came up with a plan, she had to sell it to her managers, then to her staff. "Once the staff became comfortable, we brought our families on board. I wouldn't budge until everyone felt comfortable. We set expectations and goals."



Students work on creating new worlds with blocks or puzzles.

She explained that there are two staff members and up to nine children in each of seven "hubs," or classrooms. The children in each hub all take the same bus, so that if the program did have a COVID case, the number of potential exposures would be limited and easily identifiable. "Having one bus for each classroom, having the children wear masks and socially distance, helps us to keep them safe," said Washington. Children do not attend school on Fridays, so that classrooms may be thoroughly cleaned.

Washington said that 59 of the 77 children in the program are 4-year-olds, transitioning to kindergarten next fall; the rest are 3-year-olds.

The children who attend in person are fed breakfast, lunch and a snack, and receive food for weekend meals. Children who attend school remotely are provided food for the week along with their learning materials.

Washington said that because of the pandemic, some parents choose not to send their children to school and some have opted out of the program entirely for now, but asked to be kept on the wait list. "It's their choice," Washington said.

Lessons learned

Three-year-olds learn to share and work at getting comfortable separating from their parents; they learn colors and shapes, practice their manners and learn to follow rules as a group. For 4-year-olds, the emphasis is on academics, said Washington. They learn their letters and numbers, in preparation for kindergarten.

One boy who was returning to the classroom for the first time since last March was gently reminded by his teacher, Angela Jackson, to stay in his pod, but the eight other children showed no inclination to wander from their areas.

Washington said that the children have been quick to pick up on the new rules. "At this age, they are very resilient. They have a regular routine and know, 'this is what I do at school now.'"

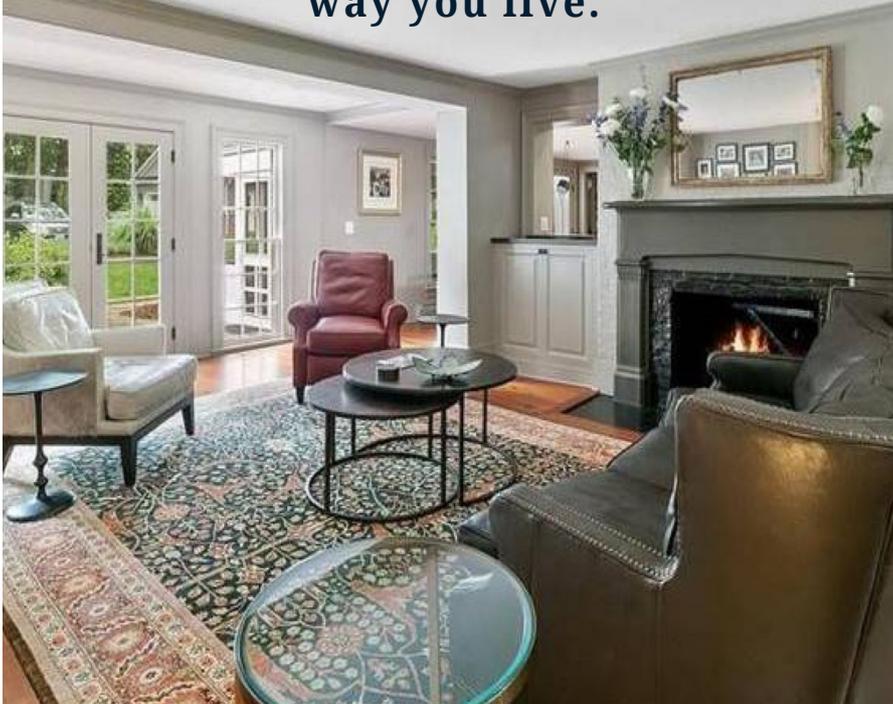
She said that this newest member of the class had been in the program last year as well. "It's different than it was the last time he was here. He's adjusting; he'll get it." She added that his mother wanted him back in school; "she said she had heard we were doing a great job keeping everyone safe."

See **HEAD START**, page 6

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An increased emphasis on handwashing is one ever-present sign of the pandemic.

Back into the classroom

HEAD START, from page 4

Jackson said that the COVID-conscious classroom has taken some adjusting. "It's a new way of thinking. We have to take it a step further to figure out how to do some things."

She said she appreciates being able to be more one-on-one with her students and she is very glad to be back in the classroom. "It gives you purpose. It's what I love to do... Elementary and pre-school kids need to be in school to learn. Learning virtually isn't the same as what they get in school."

Jackson's assistant, Katie Lovelless, admitted, "It's different. We have to take that extra step to get everything done. And we are constantly cleaning."

Washington said that with attendance halved, the children are getting "quality time" with their teachers and are able to move to the next level.

She and her staff serve the county's most vulnerable children. Eligibility for the program is income-based, but there are other considerations. "We prioritize homeless families, children with disabilities and those who use services from social services." Children with Individual Education Plans are prioritized for the program and there is special attention to children who have lost a parent; the children's mental health is a priority.

A counselor monitors classrooms once a month to look out for any troubling signs of mental health issues.

Washington said the ethnicity of her charges is about evenly split among White, Black and Hispanic children. Some are undocumented. "A lot of parents are scared to seek services; they are afraid someone will turn them in. We try to make families see that we are here to help. We want to build relationships."

Washington said that sometimes when parents come in, their older child comes with them to translate. "We encourage those families to sign up for adult English as a Second Language classes, so they can help their child. We work with whole families."

A lot of children speak little to no English when they arrive, but by the time they complete two years in the program, they are fluent in English. "We only have them for two years. We want to do everything in our power to make them self-sufficient and ready to enter kindergarten."

Head Start has a family engagement team that focuses on helping families succeed. One supervisor and three staffers work with parents to set goals. "We tell parents, you have to crawl before you can walk," said Washington.

She told the story of a homeless family – a single mom with four kids – who recently was able to rent an apartment. "She took the class we offer on finances and is doing well. We celebrated with her."

Yoseli Flores is one of Head Start's family engagement workers. She regularly works with 24 families – about half as many as before the pandemic. Her daughter is also a 4-year-old in the program. Flores said her family was speaking only Spanish at home, so that before her daughter started at Head Start last year, she did not speak English. "She was shy at gatherings because she didn't understand what people were saying. She stayed close to me."

Now that her daughter has learned to speak English, she is more outgoing, said Flores. "She has lots of friends and is excited to go to school every day."

The pink-loving, princess aficionado loves coloring and playing with numbers. "She is counting all over the place," said her mom. But Flores' daughter is particular about what at-home schoolwork she does. "If I pull something out of my purse, she doesn't want to do it. She only wants to do the home activities that Miss Angie sends home."

Washington said there is a physical health component of the Head Start program as well. "We make sure they are caught up on immunizations; they have a physical; they get a dental screening. If a child has a toothache, they can't learn; if they can't chew, they eat less than they need... We want to make sure their physical needs are met so they can learn."

Washington acknowledged that the year or two before a child starts kindergarten is "vitaly important, and she knows that the time the children missed is significant.

But "Head Start makes a difference," Washington said definitely. Once children leave the program to enter the public schools, privacy concerns prevent individual tracking, but Washington said, "the feedback we get from the schools is that our kids are doing well."

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SPORTS:
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PAGE 23.



Hundreds of families turn to home schooling, private schools during pandemic

By Robin Earl
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Enrollment in Fauquier County Public Schools over the last year has dropped by about 889 students. Elementary school enrollment fell by 512, with second grade seeing the most significant decrease. Middle schools lost 215 students and high schools, 112. Eleventh grade was the only group to see higher enrollment this year than last.

The difference of course, between fall of 2019 and 2020, was a worldwide pandemic that temporarily forced most children and teachers out of schools and onto computers for remote learning. Dissatisfied with this option, some families tried home schooling and others moved to private school settings.

After beginning the school year with most students receiving instruction remotely, public school students in pre-school through fifth grade had

the option of returning to classrooms four days per week beginning March 15. Middle and high school students will have the same option beginning April 6. About two-thirds of families are choosing to return to in-person instruction, according to school officials.

Now that they feel everyone can return to classrooms safely, public school officials have said at recent school board meetings that they will work to welcome back students who have left the system. But just how many of those more than 800 students will come back is unclear. Every family's situation is different.

Trying out options

Mother Sarah Newton said her family had been thinking about a change even before the first case of COVID was reported. In fall of 2020, her daughter moved from Warrenton Middle School to Belle Meade Montessori School in Sper-



TIMES STAFF PHOTO/COY FERRELL

River Maloney, 7, and her brother Kade, 5, forage for edible plants on their family's farm. Many of the siblings' home-schooling activities are nature-based.

ryville. "We had been floating the idea. The pandemic gave us the final push to make this decision."

Newton's 13-year-old had been doing "reasonably well" at Warrenton Middle School and the family started home schooling when schools closed down. Newton said she didn't have high hopes for remote education. "I

didn't feel there would be quality remote education. And everything kept changing and shifting. Do this one week and another thing the next week. I want to extend a lot of grace to the county school educators, but it wasn't for us."

See **SCHOOLING**, page 10

In the eye of the swarm

'Brood X' cicadas expected in Fauquier this spring



PHOTO BY ERIC DAY,
VIRGINIA TECH ENTOMOLOGIST.
By mid-May, Prince William residents can expect to see – and hear – dozens if not hundreds of Brood X cicadas in their trees and yards.

By Cher Muzyk
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The cicadas are coming, and there will be billions of them -- maybe even trillions of them -- across the 14 states – including Virginia – where a coordinated emergence of periodical cicadas named "Brood X" will occur this spring.

In a normal year, Fauquier residents might see an occasional green annual cicada in their yards or

run across a recently shed, empty skin. But the Brood X periodical cicadas set to arrive this spring are different. With their thick black bodies, orange-veined wings, bulging red eyes and striking orange legs, periodical cicadas are both big and heavy, as those who have been hit in the head by them in past years might remember.

See **CICADAS**, page 14

William Polk appointed as Remington's mayor

By Coy Ferrell
TIMES STAFF WRITER

William Polk Jr. was appointed as Remington's mayor on March 15; the position was vacated when Gerald Billingsley, who had served in the role for three decades, died in January. Polk was appointed to the role by town council members by a 3-2 vote and will serve the remainder of Billingsley's term; the next election is scheduled for May 2022.

See **POLK**, page 16



Mayor William Polk Jr.

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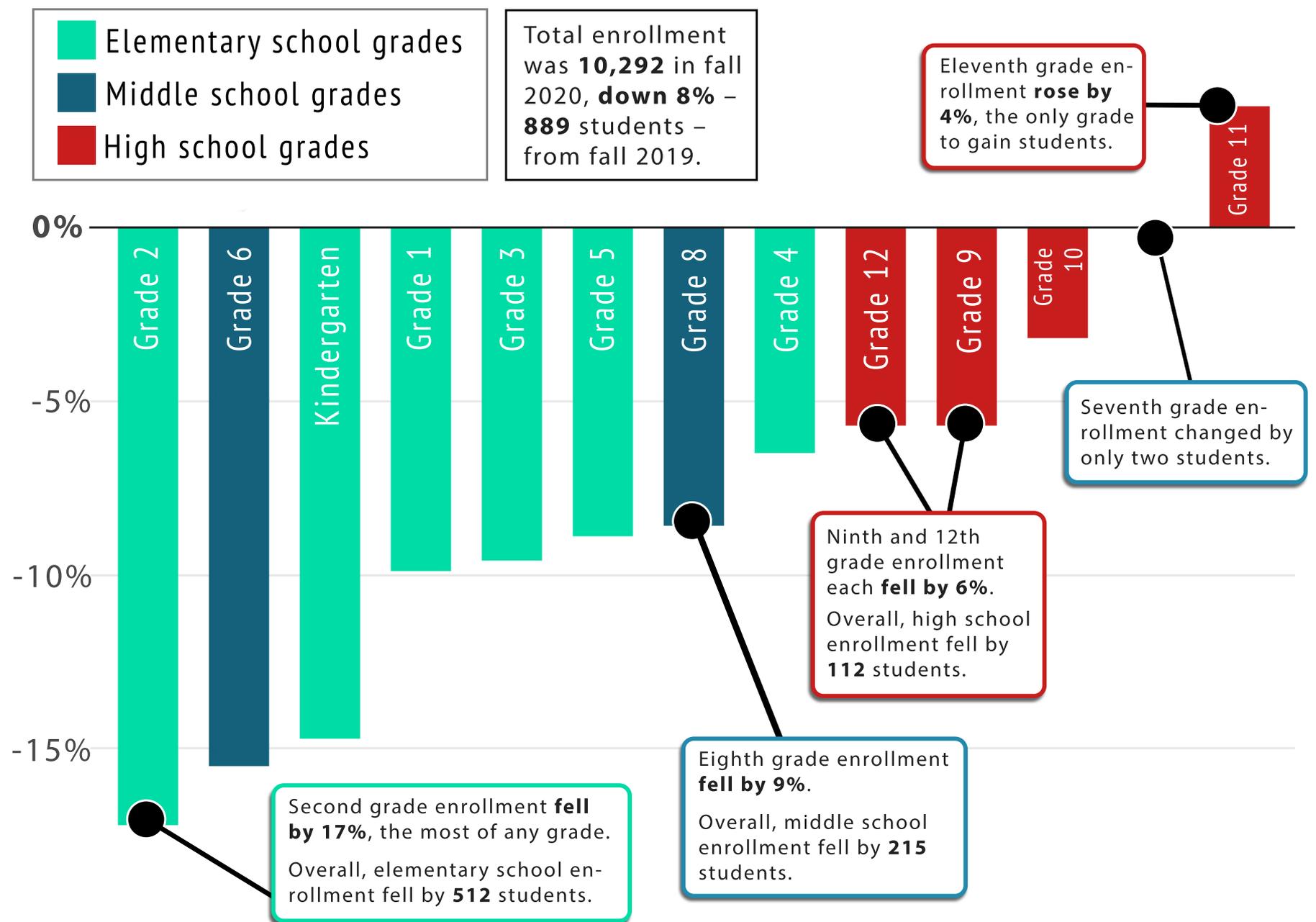
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Percent change in enrollment, fall 2019 to fall 2020

by grade, Fauquier County Public Schools



SOURCE: VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Hundreds of families turn to home schooling, private schools during pandemic

SCHOOLING, from page 1

Newton said that over the summer of 2020, “we thought long and hard about it. Home schooling wasn’t what we thought it would be. And my daughter really didn’t want me to be her teacher.”

“We heard about Belle Meade and decided to test it out. After the first day, my daughter waved at everyone and told them she’d see them tomorrow. It’s the best option for her.”

She added, “I can say with 100% certainty that this school is allowing her to be the person she is meant to be.”

Newton acknowledged that the pandemic has brought with it a lot of negatives, a lot of loss. In fact, she lost her job at a local dental practice for a while, until she was hired back when the business was allowed to open again.

“But the best positive has been finding the school that fit her best. The pandemic gave us the time to take that pause.”

Home schooling

Chanell Maloney and her husband have two children, a son Kade, 5 years old and River, a daughter, who is 7. Before the pandemic, River was attending first grade at Bradley Elementary; Kade was in pre-school at Mountainside Montessori School in Marshall, where his mom also taught physical education part time.

In February, Maloney said, one child had a cold so she kept them home for a week, just to be safe. The pandemic at that time was just beginning to cause concern. The next week, she kept both kids

home after the second had caught the cold.

Maloney said that soon after that she pulled both children from school to reduce the chance of them bringing COVID home and possibly infecting a vulnerable relative. “We pulled them from school as a trial. We thought, ‘Let’s see how this goes.’”

“A couple of weeks after that, everyone was home [when schools closed in March]. We found we enjoyed it.”

Maloney said the family had moved to the family farm in December 2019, explaining, “We had these beautiful, epic surroundings to learn from.”

She said the option of teaching her kids at home was something they’d considered before. “We were already toying with the idea of home schooling.” She said that because of the move to the farm, the family would have had to switch elementary schools. “We were in transition anyway,” and since she wasn’t working full time, “it wasn’t a big transition for me to home-school.”

Because the family had had experience with Montessori methods, Maloney didn’t worry about a curriculum. They were used to “child-led learning,” so that spring and summer, that’s what they did.

Maloney describes the “unschooling” they experimented with. “We have baby goats and a pond. I can’t tell you how many ‘pond studies’ we did. We focused on nature-based learning.”

“Everything is a learning experience. We did a lot of cooking, measuring; we made clay models of everything. School was like play to them.”

The Maloneys had home-schooling friends “who had the same standards of care,” including masking and social distancing, and their kids

were the same age. “We went over there; they came over here.”

When school started in the fall, Maloney decided to continue home schooling. “I pulled the trigger and got a curriculum.” The curriculum she chose includes common core mathematics, which was new to Maloney. “I didn’t learn math that way!”

The children especially enjoy the science lessons. “We forage and have a natural medicine apothecary here at home. My daughter will be eating out of the yard. Now that the violets are coming in, she’ll be turning purple!”

Maloney admitted that there are challenges. Only 5, Kade gets to choose what he is interested in learning; River’s lessons are more structured. He can be a distraction when “he is having a big emotion day,” she said.

Maloney said the more relaxed nature of home schooling allows her to adjust to the children’s needs. “Sometimes they are frisky or can’t concentrate. I’ll push them out the door and tell them, ‘Go jump on the trampoline.’ They run around for half an hour, come back in and have a snack and we’ll try again. If it’s still not working, we’ll try again the next day.”

She admits that home schooling isn’t for everyone. “My husband [John] says if he had to do it, we wouldn’t be home schooling. I’m probably more patient.”

Maloney said the children both want to home-school in the fall. “I’ve already purchased curriculum for next year. I’m enjoying it. They’re enjoying it. We’ll continue until I’m done with it or they are.”

See SCHOOLING, page 11

Families turn to home schooling and private schools

SCHOOLING, from page 10

Split decision

Tracy Baker of Warrenton learned from her COVID trials that what's good for one child may not work for another. Baker has two children. Madison, 10, was a fifth grader at Bradley Elementary School and her son Jack was an 8th grader at Warrenton Middle when the pandemic closed schools in March of 2020.

Baker was dissatisfied with remote learning at the end of the 2019-2020 school year. "There wasn't much there," she said. At the same time, she understands the challenges the teachers and the administration faced. "There were no good options."

She said that many Fauquier residents don't have the infrastructure to learn remotely, but the teachers have to make it work for everyone. "I just decided to take my kids out of the equation."

In August, she enrolled both children in Virginia Virtual Academy, an option that uses online curriculum and services provided by K12, advertised as "an online public school."

Baker felt there had been so much back and forth – the children were in school, then out of school. "For consistency, I thought they would be better off with K12."

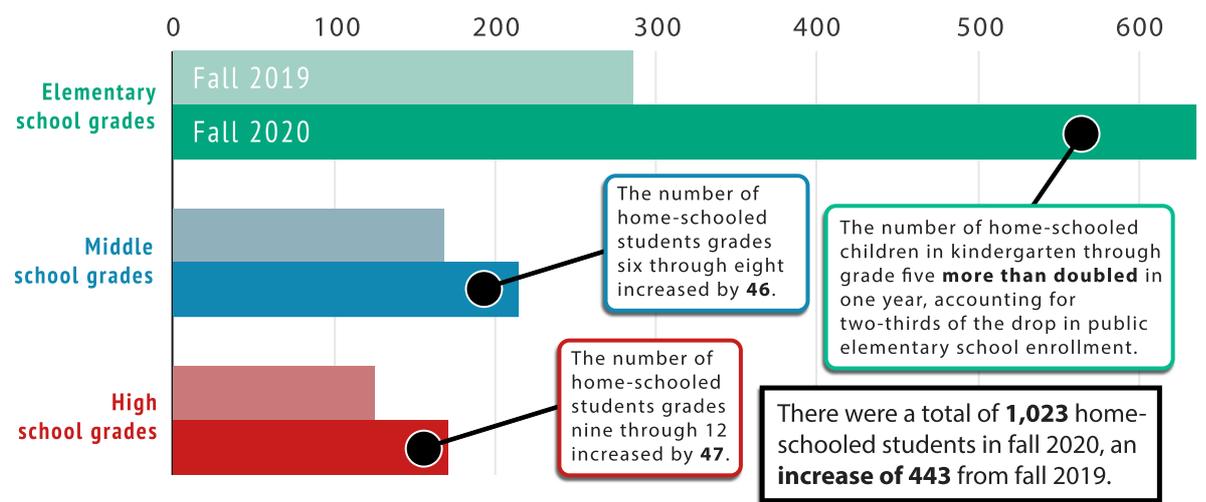
Baker herself is finishing up nursing school and her husband, Steven, who works from home, is completing his master's degree in systems engineering. "We were all learning from home," said Baker.

Jack likes virtual learning, Baker said, "He gets to sleep until 9, works at his own pace ... A lot of his social life is online. He hangs out remotely with his friends and plays games."

Madison, however, begged to go back to school, her mother said. She returned her more social child to her classroom just before the school system went from two days a week of in-person learning to four days. "She is happy," said her mother, but misses the lighter academic day of online learning.

Both children will return to in-person public school in the fall, said Baker, Jack to his first year of high school, Madison to her first year of middle

Home-schooled students in Fauquier County



SOURCE: VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Chart excludes children whose parents successfully claimed a religious exemption from state education requirements.

school. "We're hoping things get back to normal in the fall," she said. "I don't want to keep them from middle school or high school experiences. We are going back to brick and mortar in the fall."

Kids finding their groove

Cary Kane's son Tylen moved from Greenville Elementary School to Highland School in Warrenton in the fall of 2020. The idea had been on the family's radar already, but the pandemic made it happen. "Tylen is very academically focused. We value in-person instruction and he excels in that environment. We wanted to keep him in that groove. He's transitioned very well."

Kane said Highland has kept kids in the classrooms, except for a couple of weeks right after Christmas. There are 14 children in Tylen's class; three of them learn remotely. "They wear masks, but get to take mask breaks. They've done a good job."

Kane said Tylen will start middle school there next fall.

Kane's younger son Kellen, a first grader, is attending four-day-a-week classes at Greenville. She credits his "phenomenal teacher," despite being "pulled in so many directions."

Kellen started back to school when the school division opened its doors to students two days a week. She said that her youngest is so happy to be back

in school. "I see a huge difference. He comes home excited, opening his backpack to show me things."

She said she is comfortable having him back in the classroom. "I trust that they are OK. I have talked to the staff about it."

She said Kellen does not ride the bus. "The schools asked parents who could to drive their kids to school. That was an easy decision. I have no excuse not to drive him to school."

She stressed that Greenville has been doing a great job keeping the students safe. "When I drop him off, I see that they keep the kids distanced. When they are outside in the nice weather, it's easier."

She said she gives the teachers a lot of grace and believes that they and the administrators are making the best decisions they can. "They are trying to do what's best."

She admitted that trying to learn remotely last school year was difficult. In the pharmaceutical field, she has been working from home; conference calls were often interrupted by calls from the other room, "Mommy!" She said she'd have to step away from a call "because Kellen's microphone would stop working or he wouldn't know how to do something. It was exhausting. I don't know how some parents did it."

Feeling like she was being pulled in too many directions, she said. "I was very busy. The work world did not stop for us."

She remembered her husband Jason saying about remote learning, "This is a lot."

And Kane acknowledged that many of her co-workers were going through the same difficulties. "Some just had babies and you could hear them crying ... I think that it brought us closer together."

Kane knows the teachers who have children had it even rougher. "This is first grade. All the kids are jittering in their seats. These teachers have to have a lot of caffeine in the morning to keep up," she joked.

Looking ahead, Kane said she'd like to have both of her sons at the same school, but is not sure whether or not Kellen will make the switch to Highland at some point. "Kellen is a social butterfly. He is still young, so we have time to navigate that."

Reach Robin Earl at rearl@fauquier.com

VDH guidelines change school guidelines to align with CDC

The Virginia Department of Health's interim guidance for K-12 schools was updated March 23 and is available at: <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/182/2021/03/Interim-Guidance-to-K-12-School-Reopening.pdf>.

Highlights include:

- The Centers for Disease Control now generally recommends a minimum of 3 feet of distance between students, 6 feet of distance between adults and others, and during special scenarios (singing, meal time) it recommends 6 feet. Distancing on school buses is also important, but the language is more general. For instance, it says, "create distance" rather than a specific number of feet.
- The CDC recommends that during high community transmission, middle/high schools that don't use cohorting should keep 6 feet of distancing between students. (A cohort or pod is a distinct group that stays together throughout the entire school day during in-person learning, or over the course of any pre-determined period of time, so that there is minimal or no interaction between groups.) The Virginia recommendation is that, in general, cohorting be implemented when possible and "In middle and high schools, students should be at least 3 feet apart in areas of low, moderate or substantial community transmission. During high transmission, consider a minimum of 6 feet distance standard for middle and high school students when cohorting is not possible."

The guidelines balance the goal of getting kids back in school with the goal of preventing disease transmission.

The Fauquier Bank merger to take effect April 1

BANK, from page 3

popularity of that product in The Fauquier Bank means bank officials will strongly consider keeping it when the systems and products of the two banks are merged this summer.

"My sense is: free checking is [a product] we're going to take a real close look at" in the summer, he said.

The combined banks will be

headquartered in Charlottesville. However, the Old Town Warrenton building that currently serves as The Fauquier Bank headquarters will not close and will still house bank offices along with a retail banking branch, Bogan said.

"We have no plans to leave the downtown [Warrenton] market," he said. Although there has been "some interest over the years" from

entities wishing to purchase or lease the building at 10 Courthouse Square, Bogan said that the bank would maintain a presence in Old Town Warrenton even if the existing building was sold or leased. But there are no immediate plans to vacate the building, he emphasized.

Currently headquartered in Warrenton, The Fauquier Bank currently has a total of 11 branches in Fauquier and Prince William counties. The bank was originally chartered in 1902

as Fauquier National Bank and began using its current name in 1994.

Virginia National Bank was founded in 1998 and has several offices in the Charlottesville area, one office in Winchester and is currently set to open an office in Richmond.

The combined entity will have approximately \$1.7 billion in assets, \$1.5 billion in deposits, \$1.2 billion in loans and \$1.1 billion in assets under management based on data from Dec. 31, 2020, Friday's press release said.



HALEY'S FOOTBALL DREAM; KETTLE RUN GOLF EYES STATES
Sports, Pages 19-20, 23

River Access

As the adults listen to speeches on the riverbank, Charlie and Lizzy Bolthouse, ages 7 and 5, play (under dad's watchful eye) in the Rappahannock River at the Rector Tract park in Remington on Saturday.

See page 2.

TIMES STAFF PHOTO/COY FERRELL



TIMES STAFF PHOTO/COY FERRELL

A group of about two-dozen people opposed to the wearing of masks gathered outside the emergency school board meeting on Aug. 13.

School board reverses course, requires masks

Board members focus on exemptions

By Robin Earl
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Starting before noon on Friday, Aug. 13, a small crowd started to form on the sidewalk outside the Warren Green Building and upstairs in an overflow meeting room; both areas offered screens with live video of the main meeting room on the first floor. Inside, at 12:30 p.m., the school board convened an emergency work session to discuss a universal mask mandate handed down to Virginia school divisions 24 hours earlier.

After deciding Aug. 9 at a school board meeting to make masks optional in all Fauquier County schools, the public health order -- aimed at reducing the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 Delta variant -- released by State Health Commissioner Norman Oliver required a quick turnaround. The order requires "all individuals aged 2 and older to wear masks when indoors at public and private K-12 schools in order to inhibit spread of the virus, as recommended and described by the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention]."

Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District Population Health Coordinator April Achter, who was at the meeting, clarified that the order will remain in effect until the CDC changes its requirements.

See MASKS, page 8

Levi Norwood found competent to stand trial

Results of sanity evaluation not public

By Coy Ferrell
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Levi Norwood has been found competent to stand trial, his attorney confirmed Aug. 12. Norwood is accused of shooting and killing his mother and brother on Feb. 14, 2020, at their Midland home, when he was 17 years old.



Levi Norwood

Public defender Ryan Ruzic, who represents Norwood, told a circuit court judge Thursday morning that he is reviewing the results of a separate mental health evaluation performed this summer to "see if there's a resolution" that can be reached with prosecutors before a trial.

See NORWOOD, page 7

Bealeton man killed in car crash; wife charged with murder

Kimberly Dragich also accused of driving while intoxicated

By Liam Bowman
PIEDMONT JOURNALISM FOUNDATION

Kimberly Dragich of Bealeton has been charged with second-degree murder, malicious wounding and driving while intoxicated in connection with the death of her husband, Brian Bowles, 46.



Kimberly Dragich

On Aug. 8, Bowles was allegedly struck by his wife's Honda CR-V on the 3000 block of Revere Street in Bealeton. He succumbed to his

See DRAGICH, page 7

Nonprofits face pandemic uncertainty.

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Under pressure from state government, school board reverses course to require masks

MASKS, from page 1

All school board members agreed that the mask mandate would have to be followed; penalties for non-compliance – a class 1 misdemeanor -- include a \$25,000 fine against the school division for each occurrence. But board members spent time discussing the exceptions parents could use to avoid having their children wear masks in school.

Superintendent of Schools David Jeck said that his staff was working to come up with an easy way for parents to declare an exception. He said parents would have about a week to make any declarations. By Monday, the school division had created a short online form for parents to fill out, eliminating the requirement for their children to wear masks.

The order lists these exceptions to the mask mandate:

- Individuals eating, drinking, or sleeping;
- Individuals exercising or using exercise equipment;
- Any person who is playing a musical instrument when wearing a mask would inhibit the playing of the instrument (e.g., wind or brass instrument) so long as at least six feet of physical distance can be maintained from other persons;
- Any person who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated, or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance;
- Any person who has a disability or meets at-risk criteria or those assisting such persons, including individuals with an Individualized Education Plan or 504 plan under the Rehabilitation Act, where wearing a mask would inhibit communication or the receiving of services.
- When necessary to participate in

a religious ritual; and

- Persons with health conditions or disabilities that prohibit wearing a mask. Nothing in this order shall require the use of a mask by any person for whom doing so would be contrary to his or her health or safety because of a medical condition. Adaptations and alternatives for individuals with health conditions or disabilities should be considered whenever possible to increase the feasibility of wearing a mask to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading if it is not possible to wear one.

After these exemptions, the order continues, “Any person who declines to wear a mask because of a medical condition or any person with a sincerely held religious objection to wearing masks in school may request a reasonable accommodation.” It was this section of the order that meeting attendees seemed to feel offered a solution to their objection to masks. When this was read aloud at the meeting, cheering and stomping could be heard from outside the window of the meeting room and from upstairs in the overflow room.

Jeck said that Fauquier County parents would not be asked to define or defend their child’s medical or religious exemptions. He said the division won’t require documentation or ask for proof of a medical condition or “sincerely held religious belief.”

School Board Chair Donna Grove (Cedar Run District) said that school board attorneys agree that the school division is not required to ask for documentation. “That’s all parents need to do.”

School Board member Susan Pauling (Center District) agreed, saying that she did not get elected to the school board to judge other people’s religious beliefs.



People opposed to the wearing of masks look on as April Achter (on screen), the Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District’s population health coordinator, addresses the school board inside the Warren Green Building. Achter was escorted out of the building by law enforcement officers for her own protection after the meeting.

TIMES STAFF PHOTO/
COY FERRELL

Details of the mandate

Pauling added that students would not have to wear masks while playing sports – either indoors or out -- because of the exception provided for exercising.

Achter pointed out that in the health department’s view, the danger of spreading COVID-19 comes not while children are playing on the field, but while they are huddled close together on the sidelines. She said it would be best if athletes could be kept distanced from one another during these times or wear masks.

When Pauling pointed to a silver lining of the mask mandate – that masked children who come in contact with a positive case of COVID-19 will not have to quarantine – Achter again stepped in to explain that kids would be able to avoid quarantines only if everyone in the classroom is wearing masks. Achter said, “Our number one goal is to keep kids from getting sick. Our number two goal is to keep bottoms in chairs [in classrooms]. This is what we need to do to achieve those two goals.”

It was clear throughout the meeting that school board members were unhappy that local control of COVID-19 mitigations had been taken away by the state. Pauling said, “Anytime I hear the word mandate, I think it’s an overreach,” whether it’s from the CDC, the state government or the school board.

School Board member Stephanie Litter-Reder (Lee District) read a prepared statement that she directed to the governor:

“This is not a one size fits all situation -- the amount of contradictory data and studies (and in some cases, lack thereof) are overwhelming. There is a reason why our communities are distrustful -- why they don’t think their government is being truthful or transparent. Pay attention to this study, but not that one, listen to this statistic, but ignore this one.

“You do not live in this community -- you do not know the little boy with the hearing deficit that has been completely isolated for the last year and a half because he can’t see his classmate’s and teacher’s face and therefore cannot effectively communicate; you do not know the teacher that went against the medical advice of her doctor, putting her own pulmonary health

at risk due to a mandate that didn’t take into account the fact that, while we do need to be concerned with the greater good, there are individual circumstances for each and every person; you do not know the students or staff that have suffered anxiety episodes attributed to the masks.

“Who are any of us to tell anybody ‘your anxiety doesn’t matter; it’s unimportant -- it’s more important for you to make me feel safe?’

“You have forced our community to turn on each other with a vengeance -- neighbors and friends, judging each other over whether or not their concerns or mental health issues are ‘real.’

“We know these people; we talk and listen to every single person that comes to us in our local community -- all of whom have a right to an opinion and the right to voice their concerns.

“In addition -- we followed the CDC guidelines throughout most of last year because that’s what we were told we had to do. The CDC handed us the rules that all but forced the virtualization of our schools last year -- and that has now been generally accepted as a terrible decision.

“Your heavy-handed shutdown of the entire state at the beginning of this pandemic likely did more damage than good -- but there’s no study to determine that, just the aftermath.

“These guidelines and mandates have taken the control completely out of the hands of the local governments -- the very governments who know their people and know their local issues. But we’re supposed to trust you got it right this time?”

Before Friday’s meeting concluded, school board member Duke Bland (Marshall District) made an appeal to citizens that they use the opportunity to claim exceptions to the mask mandate carefully. He said, “I understand that parents have legitimate medical or religious exemptions ... I’m pleading with the public not to use it illegitimately.”

Pauling had her own message for residents. She said, “We have got to change how we communicate with one another.” Pauling referenced the jeering and shouting that disrupted the school board meeting earlier in the week, and said, “We have to change how we dialogue as grownups. Our children are watching.”

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P.B. Smith Elementary requires masks for all students, staff

After school board members allowed families opposed to mask wearing to skirt the statewide mandate requiring masks in schools by opting for an exemption, one elementary school principal is requiring all students and staff to wear masks inside. The move was an attempt to control multiple cases of COVID-19 and dozens of quarantines at the school, which have disrupted a school year less than a week old.

P.B. Smith Elementary School, outside Warrenton, had confirmed four cases of COVID-19 in students after just three days of classes. About four dozen students – more than 10% of all students -- were told to quarantine at home because of contact with the individuals who tested positive. In response, Principal Linda Payne Smith sent an email to parents and staff Sunday night asking them to wear a mask to school – or to stay home.

“If you filled out the form to indicate that you will opt your child out of wearing a mask in school,” Smith said in her email, “we respectfully ask you to choose one of the following options temporarily: 1. Have your child attend school in person wearing a mask. 2. If your child cannot wear a mask in school, we will provide them with asynchronous instruction to learn remotely.”

Currently, students and staff can claim a medical or religious exemption from the mask “mandate” by simply filling out a Google Form; school administrators have said they will not take any steps to require any sort of further documentation for parents opting their children out of mask wearing. Anti-mask proponents in the county and elsewhere have shared ideas widely on social media about how to use these exemptions, and board members seemed eager to make the process for opting out as simple as possible.

As of Tuesday morning, the school division’s COVID-19 dashboard listed 13 students who have reported active cases: four at P.B. Smith Elementary School (two reported Aug. 13 and two on Aug. 15); three at Greenville Elementary (two Aug. 13 and one Aug. 16); one at Auburn Middle School (reported Aug. 12); one at Fauquier High School (Aug. 16); three at Liberty High School (Aug. 16), and one at Grace Miller Elementary (Aug. 16). No staffers had reported active cases.