

The Daily Progress

WINNER OF THE 2018 PULITZER PRIZE FOR BREAKING NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY



PARTLY SUNNY 59 • 38 FORECAST, A2 | **MONDAY, MARCH 8, 2021** | Charlottesville, Virginia | dailyprogress.com

Public housing redo under way

Groundbreaking held for first of multi-phase redevelopment plan

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City officials, public housing residents, donors and planners on Sunday turned dirt on what they hope will be not just 62 new affordable residential units but homes that provide security, safety and love to residents.

The Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority is constructing three new apartment buildings on a former ballfield on South First Street that will include one-, two- and three-bedroom homes and a community center.

The homes will feature amenities such as dishwashers and washers and dryers and will be built using durable, high-quality materials. The buildings also will feature solar panels.

Using authority land, the project is funded through Low Income Housing Tax Credits and private

donations, including money from the Dave Matthews Band's BAMA Fund. Charlottesville and the state are also providing fund.

The apartments are expected to be ready for residents by April 2022.

The project is a unique combination of government, private donors, nonprofit agencies and public housing residents, who were essential in designing the redevelopment of the property.

"For more than 25 years, redevelopment and public housing in the city of Charlottesville have

been conversations and promises to residents," said Audrey Oliver, one of the leaders of the Public Housing Association of Residents who worked to get the project under way. "The promises became broken and the residents became discouraged because the promises were never delivered."

Oliver said Sunday's groundbreaking represents the first of three phases to rebuild public housing in the city and that residents will be involved in all three phases.

"Our mission, and our goal, is to

build 370 new units that will allow all of our families new units," she said. "It will not happen overnight, but with everyone's support, we can make it happen."

Charlottesville's first public housing units were built in 1964 after the city tore down the Vinegar Hill neighborhood, where many African Americans lived and owned businesses.

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■ **WATCH NOW:** Find related video at DailyProgress.com.



ERIN EDGERTON PHOTOS, THE DAILY PROGRESS

Greenbrier Elementary PTO volunteers cut and place logs over muddy patches along the Rivanna Trail on Saturday morning. The path will be used by some Greenbrier students to walk to school as in-person classes start Monday.

FOREST LAKES AREA

Neighbors fight plan on whole new level

Developer deferred request after outcry

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"Gratified" was how a Forest Lakes Community Association Board member described neighbors' feelings after a proposal for a townhouse and apartment development on U.S. 29 was deferred last week.

"The objective was to send the developer back to the drawing board to start over, since there were so many deficiencies in the proposal, and that was accomplished," said association board member Scott Elliff in an interview.

Elliff and other residents of one of the largest developments ever proposed for Albemarle County spoke out against a rezoning request for a property at the intersection of U.S. 29 and Ashwood Boulevard at Tuesday's Planning Commission meeting. The proposal was for about 254 apartments and 108 townhouses on the 19.5-acre site, with at least about 190 of those apartments being affordable.

The months-long effort of neighbors against the project culminated at the meeting where 25 residents of Forest Lakes, Hollymead and Ashland spoke out against the proposal in a coordinated presentation — one of the more organized campaigns to oppose a housing proposal in recent years in Albemarle.

"Their proposal for affordable housing is laudable, as we said, but our analysis has not really changed whether the houses are affordable or not affordable, or

Please see **NEIGHBORS**, Page A8

Scrambling to get to school

City begins in-house learning today without enough buses for all

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With not enough bus spots for all Charlottesville elementary students heading to school Monday, schools and parents scrambled to organize carpools, put together walking groups and figure out other alternative modes of transportation for students.

Parent-teacher organizations sought volunteers to supervise children walking to school, and local nonprofits are using their buses to transport students. Volunteers also worked to clean up parts of the Rivanna Trail, which some students will use to walk to Greenbrier Elementary. Meanwhile, the city and school division are working to hire more drivers in order to add more bus routes.

"Everybody's been turning over every single stone we can to try to alleviate this problem," said Garland Williams, director of Charlottesville Area Transit. "We think we're pretty close on getting a third-party contract, so we're going to keep our fingers crossed. We don't want to jinx it, but we're hopefully rounding the bend and hope to get something in place."

Because of a shortage of drivers and the space constrictions



Burnley-Moran Elementary second-grader Sara Tatum rides her bike after picking up supplies at the school on Friday.

on the buses due to COVID-19 precautions, the division will be able to transport 653 students Monday, and 143 are on the waitlist, according to a presentation at Thursday's School Board meeting.

Clark Elementary had the longest waitlist among the elementaries, at 29, while 46 students were on the waitlist for Walker Upper Elementary as of Thursday.

"It's definitely an equity issue," School Board Chairwoman Lisa Larson-Torres said. "I think everybody is aware of that. It's a huge concern."

In a November survey, parents of 934 students requested bus transportation and 373 said they couldn't go without it. Last school year, 2,742 students went to school via the bus, not including preschoolers.

About 2,100 students are going to school in-person as part of Option A, which includes four days of classes for preschoolers through sixth-graders. That figure is based off the November survey. No newer information about the number and demographics of students attending in-person has been released.

More bus routes will be available March 15, city officials said, which will help with the waitlist.

The division has been encouraging families to either drive or walk their children to school, and the city has provided walking and biking routes for the schools. The scale of the transportation challenge became apparent in recent weeks as parents learned that the bus wouldn't be picking up their children.

That message led parent-teacher organizations and

nonprofits to start finding solutions until more bus spots are available.

The central CCS PTO Reopening Fund distributed \$3,378 to the pupil transportation program to help fund the cost of a qualified contract driving service that will be used to address special transportation needs, according to a report provided at Thursday's meeting. Donations to the fund are being accepted at ccspto-fund.org/donate.

Johnson Elementary is paying Abundant Life Ministries \$2,000 from its reopening funds to hire a driver and use the organization's bus to transport students to and from the school, per the report. Disbursements from the school reopening funds are made by a school committee.

At Greenbrier, 25 students are on the waitlist, including a group of students who live on Michie Drive. One option for those students is to traverse a 0.8-mile section of the Rivanna Trail to the intersection of Brandywine and Greenbrier drives as part of the roughly one-mile walk to school.

That path includes a creek that students cross with the help of a cable tied between two trees. Depending on the weather, the creek may or not be passable.

Please see **BUSES**, Page A7

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REDISCOVERING AMERICA | QUIZ

WONDER WOMEN

Test your knowledge on female achievements in celebration of International Women's Day

SARAH MORGAN SMITH | InsideSources.com

International Women's Day, which celebrates women's achievements, is March 8. With a woman vice president, a woman speaker of the House of Representatives, 141 other women serving in the House and Senate, nine women governors, and several dozen women leading Fortune 500 companies, the prominent role women play in U.S. society may seem evident today. But it wasn't always so.

The quiz below, from the Ashbrook Center at Ashland University, provides an opportunity for you to test your knowledge of women's achievements in the United States.

1 In 1848, suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott organized the first women's rights convention in American history, which was held in Seneca Falls, N.Y. The statement of Sentiments and Grievances, published at the end of the convention, used language from what historical document?

- A. U.S. Constitution
B. Declaration of Independence
C. Emancipation Proclamation
D. The Federalist Papers

2 Who was the first woman to testify on women's right to vote before a congressional committee, arguing that the 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution already gave them the right?

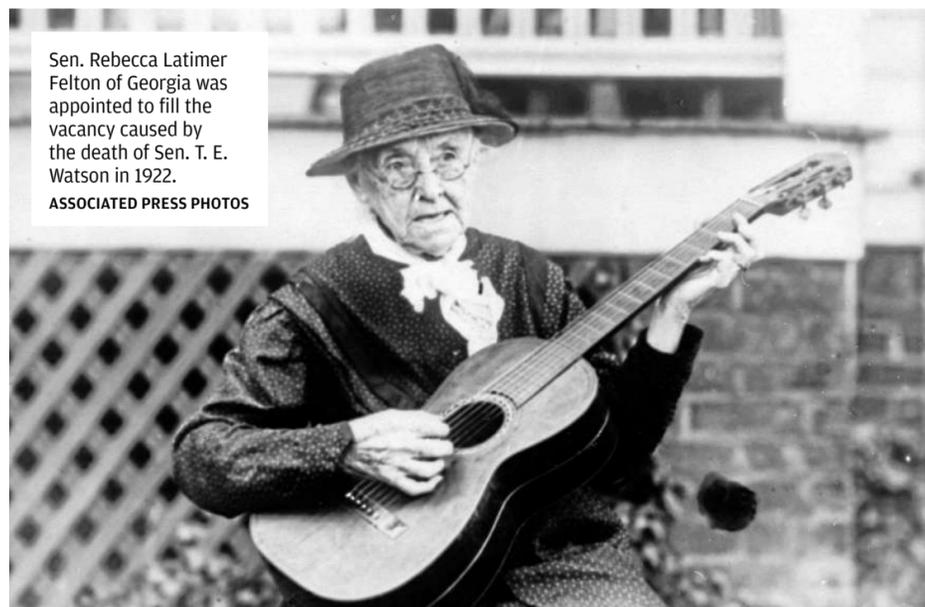
- A. Victoria Woodhull
B. Tennessee Clafin
C. Sojourner Truth
D. Catherine Beecher

4 Clara Shortridge Foltz is credited with which of these achievements?

- A. Creating California's parole system
B. Ensuring women the right to practice law in California
C. Pioneering the idea of a public defender
D. All of the above

3 Who is considered to be the first woman newspaper publisher and what was the name of the paper?

- A. Katharine Graham and The Washington Post
B. Mary Katherine Goddard and the Providence Gazette
C. Anna Zenger and the New York Weekly Journal
D. Elizabeth Timothy and the South Carolina Gazette



Sen. Rebecca Latimer Felton of Georgia was appointed to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Sen. T. E. Watson in 1922.
ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTOS



Laura Cornelius Kellogg was a leader in the Oneida Indian tribe as well as an author and activist.



Then-first lady Eleanor Roosevelt casts a vote Nov. 2, 1943, in Hyde Park, New York.



A portrait of Dorothea Dix hangs above her desk at St. Elizabeth Hospital in Washington, D.C.

5 Who was the first female U.S. senator and what state did she represent?

- A. Rebecca Felton of Georgia
B. Hattie Caraway of Arkansas
C. Rose Long of Louisiana
D. Dixie Graves of Alabama

6 Who was the first female CEO of a Fortune 500 company?

- A. Marion West at Golden West Financial Corp.
B. Linda Wachner at Warnaco Group Inc.
C. Katharine Graham at The Washington Post Co.
D. Jill Barad at Mattel

7 Dorothea Dix played an instrumental role in what area?

- A. Advocating for prison reform
B. Creating hospitals for the mentally ill
C. Recruiting nurses for the Union Army in the Civil War
D. All of the above

8 Laura Cornelius Kellogg was instrumental in what?

- A. Discovering chemotherapy
B. Preserving Native American rights and sovereignty
C. Integrating public schools
D. Spying during the American revolution

9 Which of the following women was instrumental in founding the Red Cross?

- A. Elizabeth Blackwell
B. Florence Nightingale
C. Clara Barton
D. Margaret Zanger

10 Which first lady served as the first chair of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights?

- A. Florence Kling Harding
B. Grace Goodhue Coolidge
C. Eleanor Roosevelt
D. Bess Wallace Truman

ABOUT THE WRITER: Sarah Morgan Smith is director of faculty at the Ashbrook Center at Ashland University.

ANSWERS: 1-B, 2-A, 3-D, 4-D, 5-A, 6-C, 7-D, 8-B, 9-C, 10-C

Most small businesses not requiring vaccines, tests

MIKE SCHNEIDER
Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — A majority of small businesses are not requiring their employees to get tested for the new coronavirus or get any COVID-19 vaccines, though the health care and hospitality industries are ahead of the curve on this requirement, according to a new report by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The bureau's most recent Small Business Pulse Survey showed 70% of the small businesses surveyed

said "no" when asked if they required employees to test negative for COVID-19 before coming to work in the last week. An additional 10% said "yes" and almost 20% said the question was not applicable.

Of the small businesses, two sectors, health care and accommodations/food service had higher rates than the national average — respectively 15.5% and 14.3%.

When asked if employees were asked to have proof of COVID-19 vaccination in the past week, 2.2%

of the small businesses answered "yes" and 78.4% answered "no," with 19.4% saying it wasn't applicable, according to the survey.

However, 62% of small businesses in the health care industry said they were requiring a vaccine, the survey said.

The latest Small Business Pulse Survey is among a series of surveys the Census Bureau has conducted since last spring to measure the effect of the pandemic. It was conducted February 15-21 when the

survey was sent to about 100,000 businesses. About 25,000 businesses responded.

The small businesses have fewer than 500 employees and are in a single location.

The latest survey asked the small businesses what changes they had made to their capital expenditures last year. Almost a quarter of respondents said they had postponed planned spending, 15.6% had decreased expenditures and 12.8% had canceled some spending, the

survey said.

When asked about what effect the pandemic has had on their businesses overall, responses by the small businesses were relatively unchanged over the past three months. Around 44% say it has had a moderately negative effect, almost 30% says it has had a large negative effect, 19% say it has had little to no effect, 5.6% say it has had a moderately positive effect and 1.7% say it has had a large positive effect.

Buses

From AI

Tom Connaughton, an English as Second Language teacher at Greenbrier, would lead the students to and from school as part of the current plan, and ponchos have been secured to protect them in light to moderate rain. He and other volunteers worked to clean up the trail Saturday, covering up the muddier portions with sawed tree branches.

International Neighbors stepped in last week to provide transportation for this first week, so that walking path won't be needed right away. The organization, which set up a virtual learning center for area immigrants and refugees, is paying a driver \$50 a day to drive a bus. To support the effort, donate at bit.ly/2Oxp04w.

Holly Hatcher, with the PTO at Johnson Elementary, said at Thursday's meeting that the group was told two weeks ago that the school would reopen with one bus, down for the typical three.

"We were asked to organize a volunteer corps of parents and assume liability for helping other parents get their children to school safely," she said, adding that the parents are committed to doing their part. "Unfortunately, we've learned that the transportation issue is a division-wide issue."

For the short-term, Hatcher asked the school division to work with the city government and police department to ensure that the larger community is aware of the return to school.

"And that we do everything we can as a community to keep the increased number of students walking to and being dropped off at school safe," she said.

Long-term, she wants the division to address the long-standing issues with the driver shortage and turnover and lead a community conversation about how to fix the system.

"While we understand that student transportation is a complex issue, the current system is inequitable and unsustainable," she said.

Schools Superintendent Rosa Atkins has been raising the alarm about the issue of transportation for several months.

"We have some students whose families do not get transportation and will absolutely need a seat on the bus," Atkins said at the School Board's Feb. 22 meeting. "So we're asking every family who can transport, please do so that we will have the capacity and the seating space to transport those students who absolutely need to be on the bus."

Bus spots were prioritized for students in preschool, who have

special needs or who need more academic supports. To maximize the capacity of the buses, siblings of priority students also were given spots because they could ride in the seat next to their sibling. Access to the routes or stops is also a consideration for waitlist decisions.

"We're not able to route people who want the bus right now," said Kim Powell, assistant superintendent for finance and operations. "We have to focus on people who need the bus."

Otherwise, mitigation measures call for one student per seat. That does mean that students won't be six feet apart on the buses. However, windows will be open and masks will be required to limit the spread of the virus.

"But with all the other mitigation measures in place, that's a reasonable tradeoff and one that needs to be made," Powell said of not spacing students six feet apart. "It's what the other school districts that are open have been doing."

In November, school officials had thought the division could only transport about 600 students. At the time, officials described a driver shortage and other issues hampering their ability to take more students to and from school.

"The picture looks grim, but it's not as grim as it was," said Sherri Eubanks, director of pupil trans-

portation for the city.

The division contracts with the city to provide student transportation. Initially, the city looked at contracting with a company to bring in more drivers, but that idea hasn't come to fruition yet.

Some schools only have one bus route while the only Clark Elementary bus is being used twice for a second route. The city can run 10 routes at the elementary level, for Walker Upper and Buford Middle and for Charlottesville High School, Eubanks said.

The city has lost 12 bus drivers since September, and potential drivers have seen long wait times at the Department of Motor Vehicles, preventing them from taking the necessary test. To drive a school bus, one must have a commercial driver's license and the S endorsement.

"So until we change something on a state level with DMV, it's going to be impossible for for us to get people in there," Eubanks said.

Five potential drivers weren't able to stay in the interview process because of the delay in getting an appointment at the DMV to take the writing test for the endorsement. One applicant was told the soonest he could get an appointment would be in July.

"They simply can't wait that long for employment," Powell said. "... That's five total drivers, and it would make a huge differ-

ence for us right now."

"I just find that so unacceptable," board member Sherry Kraft said of the DMV issues. "It's absurd to have that be the bottleneck when we have people who we think will be good candidates."

In response to the School Board's discussion, Del. Sally Hudson, D-57th, said she reached out to the commissioner of the DMV to work on finding solutions to the delay.

The school bus driver position is part time, and drivers get some health and retirement benefits, but not the same as a full-time employee. Atkins has wanted to provide full-time benefits for employees who work fewer than 40 hours. In Albemarle County, bus drivers qualify for benefits and retirement if they drive at least six hours a day.

Eubanks said Williams has "fought tooth and nail" to get full-time positions for pupil and CAT drivers. CAT drivers with the S endorsement do help with student transportation when able.

CAT, which is operating fare free right now, is an option for families to get to school. Williams added that his department is looking at the public transportation system to better facilitate movement to and from schools. At the very least, CAT buses are an option for families to cut down on some walking.

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Dispute brews over anti-bias lessons

Henley Middle School pilots classes dealing with race, gender ID

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Anti-bias lessons piloted this spring at Henley Middle School have prompted a range of comments to Albemarle County

School Board members and dueling petitions from parents for and against the lessons.

A group of parents' concerns, comments and criticisms come as the division's anti-racism policy, which was approved in February 2019 and drafted by students, is starting to make its way into classrooms. That policy calls for an anti-racist curriculum, and Henley's pilot program was the middle school team's answer to

that charge, Principal Beth Costa said.

The Courageous Conversations About Race lessons, created by county teachers and held during the Advisory block, started at the end of April following months of planning. The units walked students through discussions about race, identity, culture, bias and empathy with readings, activities and question prompts such as "What happens when people with

different cultures come together in a community?" and others about the cost of white privilege.

"At this age, you can't dive into anti-racism," Costa said. "You have to go all the way back to the concept of self in order to understand your community, your culture, then to understand race."

The content of the lessons has alarmed a group of parents who say the units overstep the school's role, discriminate against their

children who hold different beliefs, infringe on parental rights and create divisions.

Meanwhile, another group of parents says teaching students how to interact with their peers is essential to ensuring all students feel safe and supported, which can be a matter of life and death, given the suicide rates among transgender children.

Please see **LESSONS**, Page A7



ERIN EDGERTON, THE DAILY PROGRESS

Neil Wood and Faith Kelley, who both grew up in the Charlottesville area, are the entrepreneurs behind Civil Water, pure spring water bottled with fully recyclable materials.

A springboard to success

Area duo overcomes odds to launch water bottled with aluminum

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They wanted it, they went for it and they got it.

Faith Kelley and Neil Wood are the two young entrepreneurs behind the new spring

water company Civil Water. The aluminum-bottled and environmentally friendly beverage is popping up on shelves around the area, including at Kindness Cafe, Rebecca's Natural Foods, Market Street Market and Crozet Market, as well as Farm Fresh in Richmond.

The company is based in Charlottesville but the water is bottled in Tiger, Georgia, from Appalachian Mountain spring water. No chemicals are added

and no spring-imbued minerals are removed. It contains a pH of a near-neutral 6.6.

Although there are many brands of spring water on the market, the pair thought they could slice out a market niche.

"Water is convenient. It's an essential product," said Wood, who attended Charlottesville High School and grew up in the city. "If you take into account how many people buy plastic bottles on a regular basis

and you think about what the next step in the process is for that bottle, aluminum makes sense."

Wood, 22, and Kelley, 20, met at Piedmont Virginia Community College through friends. They found a shared interest in starting a business and in doing something good for society. That's not always an easy combination.

Please see **WATER**, Page A3

Haas gets contract extension

County schools chief's pay now about \$198K

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Superintendent Matt Haas is staying at the helm of the Albemarle County school division for at least another four years.

The county School Board recently voted to approve an addendum to Haas' contract, first signed in September 2017, that extends the agreement to June 2025. The contract previously would have ended June 30, 2022. Four years is the maximum term length allowed in state code.



Haas

The contract extension bumps Haas' annual salary up to \$197,889 from \$190,278, effective July 1, according to a copy of the addendum provided to The Daily Progress. The agreement was unanimously approved at the start of the board's May 27 work session following a closed meeting.

"Through my time here, I gain a greater and greater appreciation for the outstanding educators and support staff who are constantly striving to provide high-quality experiences for our students and families," Haas said in an interview. "I'm really glad that the board has decided to

Please see **HAAS**, Page A8



NICK CROPPER, NELSON COUNTY TIMES

Kimberly Lowe, who is running for the 2022 Republican nomination in the 5th Congressional District, addresses the crowd at Appomattox Court House National Historical Park.

Lowe kicks off run for 5th

Republican challenging Good for nomination

NICK CROPPER
Nelson County Times

APPOMATTOX — Amid the backdrop of gray skies at the Appomattox Court House National Historical Park, Virginia native Kimberly Lowe officially kicked off her campaign Saturday to challenge Rep. Bob Good, R-5th, and secure the Republican nomination in the 2022 primary.

"I'm a well-rounded candidate working on lots of issues, and I think that politics should be about making your life better and bringing people together," said Lowe, a resident of Brunswick County.

Having known since the seventh grade that she wanted to run for Congress, Lowe — a former educator, a farmer and policy adviser — said she has built a campaign on reforming the family court system and Child Protective Services practices that she claims unfairly target and take advantage of families for financial gain.

During her remarks Saturday, Lowe said billions of dollars are spent each year to separate American families when that money could be used to make families stronger.

Lowe wants to bring higher-paying jobs to the 5th District, protect constitutional rights and ensure election integrity, according to a news release from

her campaign. The 5th District stretches from Fauquier County to North Carolina and encompasses 22 localities, including most of the Charlottesville area.

She also said she wants to open a transitional shelter for survivors of domestic violence and focus on sustainability through education, job training, housing stability and issues around substance abuse.

Lowe spoke of her concern over the future and sustainability of farming in Virginia, an especially important issue for her given the quantity of agriculture in the 5th District. The release noted she wants to remove "burdensome regulations" that hampers farmers' ability to sell locally.

Please see **LOWE**, Page A7

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Lowe

From A1

Lowe's roughly two-hour kick-off event featured live music from Willows Branch Bluegrass Band and had several guest speakers, including Philip Hamilton, a Charlottesville resident seeking to turn the Democratic 57th House District red; Brandon Howard, president of the Second Amendment advocacy group Right to Bear Arms Virginia; and Mike Dickinson, who lost in

Tuesday's Republican primary for the 68th House District but announced Saturday his intent to run for sheriff of Richmond.

Dickinson described Lowe as a "true fighter" who will stand up against entrenched politicians and the establishment.

"She's someone who's going to get out there on the front line because right now that is what we have wrong in our country and in the Republican Party," Dickinson said. "We need less chihuahuas fighting for us and more junkyard dogs that will take a bite out of big

government, out of big establishment and out of corruption, and that's why I'm supporting Kimberly Lowe."

This is not Lowe's first pass at elected office. She previously ran a unsuccessful campaign for the Republican nomination for the 38th state Senate District and also lost a bid to represent the 75th District of the House of Delegates.

A former Democrat, Lowe left the party in 2016, stating she didn't feel it was the same party she grew up with, according to

the release.

Lowe said she thinks her experience can help her to reach across the aisle and foster communication and collaboration, if elected. She said she feels politics now are too divisive.

"I think it's so important that we pull together the right and the left and all the in-between because everyone deserves representation," she said. "I want to bring people together to solve problems. It's our job as a legislature to make people's lives better, not just a handful of people, and I

think what's currently occurring is too divisive."

Lowe is seeking the 2022 nomination over Good, a former Campbell County supervisor and former employee of Liberty University.

Good, a self-described "bright red biblical and constitutional conservative," won the Republican nomination in 2020 over then-Rep. Denver Riggleman in an unconventional drive-thru convention and beat Democratic candidate Cameron Webb in the general election.

Lessons

From A1

Sixth- and seventh-graders followed one set of lessons while eighth-graders had a different set that was developed by a division-wide team of middle school diversity resource teachers. Henley was picked to pilot the lessons over the course of six weeks. Feedback from students and teachers will inform work over the summer to prepare to roll lessons out to other county middle schools, Costa said.

Costa said the lessons also stemmed from conversations among teachers last June in the wake of protests over the murder of George Floyd and police brutality.

"We wanted to come back and make sure we have those opportunities to talk about what's going on in kids' worlds," she said.

The goal in talking about bias, privilege and dominant culture was not to make anyone feel bad, Costa said.

"It's just to raise an awareness of what privilege is, and what is important to know about it," she said.

Costa said that in a school like Henley, which is one of the division's least diverse, helping students to understand that people identify in different ways is important.

"The important thing was the impact," she said. "How do you become an ally for someone if you've never had that experience? You then can still become that person's ally ... whether that's about identity or culture or race. That's the part we're really going after in a school like Henley that really is not very diverse or representative of the world."

After listening to 54 people — most of whom were white and in support of the lessons — weigh in on the issue over the last two School Board meetings, board members said Thursday that they supported what Henley was doing but also want more information about the pilot.

"It aligns perfectly with our anti-racism policy," board Chairman Graham Paige said.

The pushback from parents comes as state lawmakers across the country are aiming to restrict the teaching of critical race theory, systemic racism or bias. At the same time, parents are speaking out at school board meetings about similar issues with the support of national conservative organizations.

In Virginia, this movement largely has been focused in Loudoun County over critical race theory and the suspension of a teacher who disagreed with a policy about transgender students, as well as potential changes to math courses, which state officials say are far from being adopted, and new standards for social-emotional learning.

CARE petition

More than 300 people have signed a petition seeking to pause the implementation of Courageous Conversations lessons at Henley Middle School to allow for a review and evidence-based analysis of the program, surveys and a public discussion.

In the petition, parents wrote that they support a learning environment free from discrimination, hate, exclusion and bullying of any kind.

"We are concerned about the new Courageous Conversations program being piloted at Henley Middle School, and whether it is the right way to achieve the above goals we are all united in supporting," according to the petition.

Parents also criticized the roll-out of the lessons as lacking transparency and communication, and questioned the level of teachers' preparedness to lead the discussions.

"What's the rush on this program?" asked Christy Cormons, a parent of two elementary stu-

dents, at last week's School Board meeting. "What's the big secret? Nothing is gained by rushing. Slow down, press pause and be transparent with parents."

Matt Mierzejewski, parent of a Henley eighth-grader, is part of Citizens Advocating for Responsible Education, the group opposed to the lessons. In an interview, he said he first became concerned about the lessons when he learned they would include conversations about identity, sexual orientation and gender. He and his wife pulled their son out of the class after the first lesson.

"Part of the issue that I have in some of the curriculum is that it is absolutely imposing a belief system as opposed to presenting different belief systems," Mierzejewski said. "What we asked of the administration at Henley is, let's present all sides for inclusion here. Let's present the fact that some religions and beliefs say that there are only two genders. This is a widely held belief; this is not a radical thought."

Additionally, he said the school setting is an inappropriate place for the questions and class discussion "without trained professionals, either monitoring or facilitating these conversations."

To Mierzejewski, trained professionals would mean that the right people have had the time to understand and manage the content and potential for student conversations before the rollout.

He said parents didn't have enough information or time to digest the lessons and what their students would be talking about. As an example of how the process should have worked, he pointed to the division's approach to sex education, in which parents can review the materials and opt out. Costa, the school's principal, said parents could opt out of the anti-bias lessons, and that no more than 20 did. Henley has about 885 students this year.

More broadly, Mierzejewski is taking issue with the anti-bias policy and how the division wants to go about becoming more equitable. The division has highlighted its plans through discussion of the policy, publication of annual reports and related presentations at School Board meetings over the last couple of years.

"There's an admission from a lot of parents that we haven't been as involved as we needed to be in the understanding and/or pushback on these changes to the mission," Mierzejewski said. "However, a lot of parents and community members are now waking up."

Mierzejewski added that he and other parents want positive change and do not want discrimination.

"The mechanisms to get there are what we need to now discuss and agree to," he said.

Mechanisms he would support include those that respect parental rights, provide teachers with

the proper training and time and offer a safe learning environment. He said natural conversations about race, bias and other topics most likely will come up in other subjects, and that's fine, as long as teachers are properly trained.

"But there has to be a place for every student's voice to be included," Mierzejewski said. "And that includes, as an example, someone who believes that there are only two genders, male or female. That is a belief system that my child subscribes to, and that he should not feel intimidated, unsafe, or discriminated against because of that belief and position."

His son has experienced discrimination in the school, he said, declining to provide further details.

His wife, Marie Mierzejewski, said at the May 27 board meeting that as a Catholic, the message to her son has been to keep his head down and shut up because his opinions aren't welcomed in the school.

"When did public schools truthfully only become welcoming if you're a Democrat?" she asked. "That's honestly what it's come down to — feeling that if you have conservative values, you are really unwelcome to express them at the school, and that you'll get ostracized. And that's already been happening to my son for saying to people he believes in male and female."

Support for CCAR

About 700 students, teachers, administrators, parents and community members have signed a petition calling for the Albemarle school division to continue the lessons and implement the anti-racism policy, to adopt policies to protect transgender students and support a curriculum that's inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community.

"I want to make it very clear that this school is in no way teaching us that white people are bad," said Madalyn Benedict, an eighth-grader at Henley. "The only purpose is to bring awareness to these kinds of issues. For those of you who think that the county is pushing a political agenda or narrative: The idea that being anti-racist is somehow an attack on your political or religious views because it promotes being against bigotry is disgusting."

Madalyn was one of several students who spoke in support of the lessons at Thursday's board meeting. Mary Govan, a student at Albemarle High School, said that growing up in the county's western feeder pattern, many of her classmates were white and some teachers would confuse her with the only other Asian American child in her grade. She said the anti-racism policy and lessons might make the schools more welcoming for people who aren't in the majority.

"Tonight, I am listening to a lot of adults who are scared of having students and teachers talk about

race and identity, but as an Asian American, I can't escape these topics," Govan said. "And I need my teachers and peers to know how to have those conversations with me when I'm around, and feel safe having them."

Julie Govan, Mary's mother, and Scott Guggenheimer, a Henley parent, are the justice, equity, diversity and inclusion volunteers with Henley's parent and teacher support organization and helped to write the petition as a way to express public support for the county and school.

Guggenheimer said he's sympathetic to people with whom the policy or lessons don't resonate.

"I certainly like the idea of a school system that is trying to figure out how to create the conditions in which every single student can thrive," he said. "And certainly, as a dad, I like the idea that my child and my children would be able to have conversations about identity across the curriculum. ... That would be a good learning experience for my kiddos, and hopefully would help build sustained positive relationships for children, regardless of identity, background or circumstances."

Govan said as a parent of several children of color, she has seen how different groups of students have different experiences in the school system.

"I'm really in support of what Albemarle County is doing here because I think that they're making it so that the standard for the school community is to be welcoming to and respectful to every single student," she said, speaking as a parent and not on behalf of the parent-teacher organization. "... to me, that's impossible to gainsay the value of."

For Govan's children at Henley, the lessons themselves haven't registered as anything particularly different from other conversations that come up in the Advisory block.

"Teachers have an almost magical ability to manage all the most complicated human things that happen to humans when they bubble up in their classrooms," she said. "And if this just gives them some additional tools and permission for supporting kids as they have conversations, to me, that's absolutely worthwhile. I'm never delighted that there's controversy but I'm delighted that people are digging into what does this mean for us as a school district."

Years-long effort

The lessons are part of a years-long, multi-faceted effort to eliminate racism in the school division and improve outcomes for students who have historically lagged behind their white, more affluent peers. The efforts include adopting the anti-racism policy, training teachers on culturally responsive teaching practices, changing discipline policies, updating the



ANDREW SHURTLEFF, THE DAILY PROGRESS

Courageous Conversations About Race lessons were taught to all grades at Henley Middle School in Crozet.

history curriculum and ending the use of school resource officers.

"We have crafted the anti-racism policy for a reason," School Board member Kate Acuff said at last week's meeting. "The reason is that racism in our schools does interfere with our academic mission."

The division's equity reports released in 2016 and 2019 highlighted achievement and opportunity gaps among student groups, as well as disparities in discipline, gifted education participation and enrollment in advanced courses.

In the 2018-19 school year, about 86% of white students passed the reading tests, compared with 54% of Black students, 55% of Hispanic students and 53% of economically disadvantaged students. That's the most recent state data available because the pandemic canceled testing last year.

Board members have said the schools are not teaching critical race theory, which is an academic framework that argues racism is embedded in legal systems and policies, according to Education Week.

The unanimous vote to adopt the anti-racism policy wrapped up a seven-month process of public meetings and work sessions that stemmed from conversations about the division's dress code and banning symbols relating to the Confederacy and white supremacy. During that process, most — if not all — of the public feedback was that the policy didn't go far enough.

The policy establishes reporting requirements on disciplinary actions and racial disparities throughout the division. It also mandates anti-racism training for staff and a more transparent process for class recommendations. Division staff have identified 27 action items from the policy and developed a multi-step plan for implementing the different parts.

Amanda Moxham, a parent with the Hate-Free Schools Coalition of Albemarle County, said at Thursday's meeting that the parent pushback resulted from the division's inability to engage the community.

"You reap what you sow," she said. "Because [Albemarle County Public Schools] is not fully and authentically grounded in intersectional anti-racist work, the rights of Black, Indigenous and people of color, as well as LGBTQ+ students and educators is at risk. It's time to reckon with the ongoing coddling of racist white families in this school system."

At the end of the meeting, board members said they want to know more about the lessons, how they were developed and what the communication to parents entailed.

"Dr. Costa and her team at the school really did do what we ask our principals to do and what we asked our teachers to do in communicating with families around programming," schools Superintendent Matt Haas said, noting that there's always room for improvement.

Costa discussed the plan for the lessons with parents during monthly town halls since January, according to a review of her presentations. The pandemic delayed the implementation by a few months.

Costa said in an interview that middle-schoolers are trying to figure out who they are and where they fit in, and lessons like Courageous Conversations help them learn about themselves and gain a better awareness of one another.

"These conversations can be challenging for adults, and so practicing them on a smaller scale in a safe space early on only can make that foundation for their continued ability to have these kinds of conversations with others later on," Costa said.

She added that the parent feedback is valuable and had been used to tweak the some of the lessons.

Volleyball: UVa dismisses entire coaching staff **B1**

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UVa now eyes in-person graduation

Change of course comes after Northam issued new guidelines

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There are graduation ceremony plans afoot at the University of Virginia.

Hours after Gov. Ralph Northam announced revisions

to the state-mandated restrictions on graduation ceremonies, UVa President Jim Ryan took to Twitter to announce administrators were looking into reopening commencement ceremonies.

The university had canceled graduation events as the state and the school recovered from a post-holidays surge of COVID-19 cases.

Ryan said he expects some sort of announcement regarding the ceremonies by April 2.

"I'm delighted to report that, earlier today, Governor Northam announced that COVID-19 restrictions related to graduation ceremonies have been substantially — indeed, dramatically — revised," Ryan tweeted late Wednesday.

"When we initially announced our plans for the Class of 2021 last month, ceremonies were classified as gatherings and subject to 25-person gathering rules, and we did not expect that restriction to

change," he tweeted.

Northam announced that in-person graduations would be allowed for elementary schools, high schools and colleges with outdoor ceremonies capped at 5,000 students or 30% of the venue capacity, whichever is lower.

Indoor ceremonies may have up to 500 people, or 30% of the venue capacity, whichever is lower.

"We are releasing this guidance early to allow schools to begin

planning for this year's events. While graduation and commencement ceremonies will still be different than they were in the past, this is a tremendous step forward for all of our schools, our graduates and their families," Northam said in a prepared statement.

Northam cited vaccination programs in the state that have given 21.3% of the population at least partial immunity to the virus,

Please see **GRADUATION**, Page A8

COVID-19: ONE-YEAR MARK



ERIN EDGERTON, THE DAILY PROGRESS

Like other Charlottesville High School seniors interviewed, Khamilo Mohamed said the many months of virtual instruction has been challenging, both academically and personally.

Reflecting on a hard year

CHS seniors feeling stressed by school, other responsibilities

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The year has been difficult for Khamilo Mohamed, a senior at Charlottesville High School, as she's seen her motivation and

work ethic drop and felt disconnected from peers.

"... I see myself as being not as good at math," she said. "To see how low my grades are, and not being as motivated and putting in as much effort as I can, is really upsetting for me because I know what I'm capable of. I don't feel like I'm giving it my all, but it feels like it."

Mohamed and other CHS students will have the chance to finish

out the year in-person when those classes start next month. Intent forms for students at CHS and Buford Middle School who want to attend in-person are due back to the school division by Sunday.

In deciding to offer in-person classes at CHS and Buford Middle, city School Board members said they were worried about students' mental health following a year of virtual school.

CHS students interviewed said adapting to all-virtual classes has been tough as they juggled schoolwork, jobs and helping family members, often while watching their grades fall. They miss seeing their teachers and other classmates not in their immediate circle of friends. Going back to school means a chance to connect with peers and the school.

Please see **CHS**, Page A6

County housing policy weighed

Minimum affordability periods now defined

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The Albemarle County Board of Supervisors still has decisions to make regarding an update to its affordable housing policy.

The board on Wednesday evening heard additional updates about the draft policy, which the county has been working on since 2019.

Since a work session in December, definitions for minimum affordability period have been added; the number of approved units in the residential pipeline has been updated; and a new proposed strategy was added to direct county staff to explore options for supporting homeowners' efforts to connect to public water and sewer systems.

The minimum affordability period for affordable owner-occupied units was defined as remaining affordable for at least 40 years, while the minimum affordable period for renter-occupied units would be 30 years.

Currently, the typical affordable period for renter-occupied units in Albemarle is 10 years for new developments.

The draft policy proposes that

Please see **HOUSING**, Page A8

Quarantine length differs for athletes, fellow students

UVa men's basketball team set to fly Friday to NCAA Tournament

ERIC KOLENICH
Richmond Times-Dispatch

RICHMOND — The University of Virginia men's basketball team is scheduled to fly to Indianapolis for the NCAA tournament Friday, seven days after many of its players entered quarantine. Under ACC guidelines, UVa has only a small window to finish its quarantine before its round-of-64 game against Ohio begins Saturday night.

The players are fortunate they don't have to abide by the university's student-wide policy: They

wouldn't exit quarantine until Monday and would miss the game.

Among universities, sports leagues and the NCAA, there is an assortment of rules for how long a college student must quarantine after being potentially exposed to the coronavirus.

How long the quarantine lasts depends on how much risk the organization is willing to tolerate, said Lisa M. Lee, a professor of public health at Virginia Tech.

For regular college students, there's little downside to a 14-day quarantine. But for basketball players preparing for the NCAA tournament, where seven days suffice and millions of dollars are at stake, the NCAA and its teams are willing to take a larger risk.

At UVa this semester, student-athletes who are potentially exposed don't have to quarantine as long as the rest of the student body. Regular students can test negative between Days 8 and 10 and return home on Day 11. Athletes operate on the Atlantic Coast Conference's schedule, which allows them to test negative on Day 5 and return to their teams on Day 7.

Virginia Commonwealth University's men's and women's basketball teams also are playing in the NCAA tournaments. The

Please see **QUARANTINE**, Page A6

■ **INSIDE:** Virginia forward Sam Hauser among school's all-time great shooters. **B1**



ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

Virginia guard Reece Beekman gets a hug from head coach Tony Bennett after sinking the game-winning shot during an ACC Tournament game against Syracuse. Hours later, UVa learned that someone with the program had tested positive for COVID-19.

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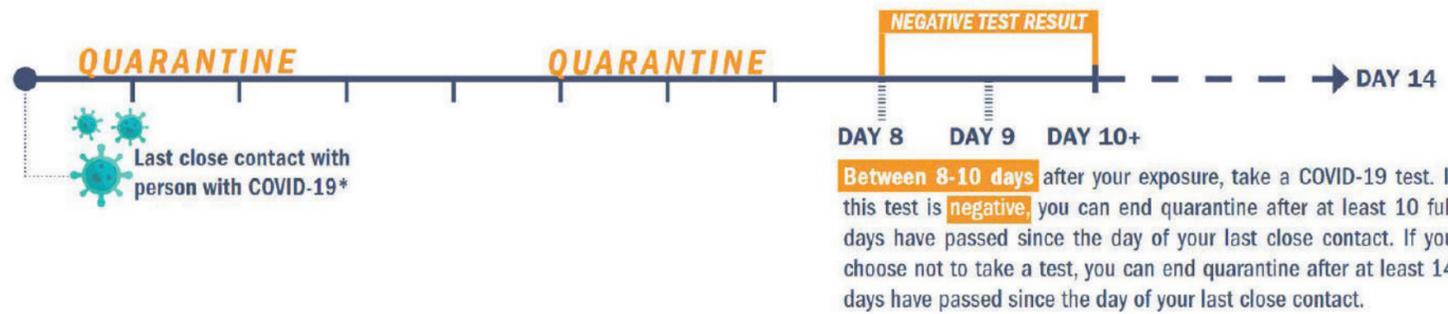


As soon as you know about a potential exposure, quarantine away from others in your room.



Call Student Health and Wellness (SHW) to review your exposure and potential testing needs.

PLEASE NOTE: These timelines are examples. If you have questions, please call UVA Student Health and Wellness at (434) 924-5362.



Quarantine

From A1

University of Richmond men's team is alive in the NIT. Both universities allow short quarantine times for their athletes.

Athletes are allowed shorter quarantines because they test more often, a UVA spokesman said. A slight reduction in quarantine is sensible with increased testing, Lee said.

"With frequent testing, quarantine can be shortened slightly because we can determine more precisely when a person is past the point of when they would be infected if in fact the exposure had infected them," Lee said.

The NCAA policy also allows for

a short quarantine. It stipulates that players must test negative for seven consecutive days before arriving in Indianapolis. The NCAA requires players quarantine upon arrival and test negative on two separate days before beginning practice, but The New York Times reported that rule has not been enforced.

UVa can depart Charlottesville on Friday, produce negative tests on Friday and Saturday and play Saturday night.

The problem public health officials face is that a person can unknowingly pass on the virus before he or she tests positive. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention initially recommended a 14-day quarantine. That's how long it takes to know if someone

is infected, and it's still the safest option, Lee said.

In November, the CDC allowed for seven-day or 10-day quarantines, citing the mental health concerns associated with living isolated. If a person tests negative, he or she can exit quarantine on Day 7, the CDC said. The Virginia Department of Health has issued the same recommendation.

But that leaves some room for error. According to the CDC, a potentially exposed person still has a 5% chance of passing the virus on Day 7 and a 1% chance on Day 10.

Colleges established an assortment of quarantine policies. James Madison University allows students to leave quarantine before 14 days if approved by a health care professional. Virginia Tech

lets a doctor approve a quarantine shorter than 14 days, allowing students to test on Day 3 or Day 4 and return to normal life once a negative test result is received.

College students across the state have complained about inconsistency and changing COVID policies.

VCU asks its students to quarantine a full 14 days, but athletes can test negative on Day 5 or 6 and exit after seven days, an athletic department spokesman said. The Atlantic 10, the conference in which VCU and the University of Richmond play, has no overarching policy like the ACC.

At UR, students-athletes follow the same guidelines as the rest of the student body, and those guidelines come from the CDC and state health department, assistant ath-

letics director Matt McCollester said.

According to an article last month in the university's student newspaper, The Collegian, while UR mandated a 14-day quarantine period, some basketball players quarantined for less time. McCollester said the article didn't have correct information, but he did not explain what portions were incorrect.

What length quarantine a college, league or the NCAA establishes comes down to risk, Lee said.

"These shorter quarantine periods do increase slightly the risk that a person is actually infected, so each program has to make the decision how much risk they can tolerate," she said.

CHS

From A1

Caroline Jaffe, a junior at CHS, also will be going back in-person. The mental health toll has been the hardest part of the last year.

"Because I haven't really been able to connect with people — but I still have all of the work part of school but none of the connection part," Jaffe said.

Her grades have been about the same as in previous years, she said, which she credits to her teachers' office hours in the morning before virtual classes.

"Without those, I would be totally lost," she said.

CHS and Buford started providing in-person assistance to about a third of their students earlier this month when preschoolers through sixth-graders started in-person classes as part of Option A. The School Board voted earlier this month in a late-night decision that was not on the agenda to start hybrid classes at CHS and Buford on April 12, after spring break.

Having the chance to go back to school means a lot for Mohamed.

"Because March 13, of 2020, might have been the last time that I would see some of my classmates, because some of us just don't have the same opportunities after high school," she said. "For us being seniors, we can't just count on the next few years, because we don't have any more years of high school."

Mohamed opted for the hybrid model and is hoping that in-person classes will help improve her grades, which have taken a hit this year. How her grades end up will influence her decision about college.

This school year, she also has helped her nieces and nephews with their online classes. CHS set up its virtual schedule, with classes starting after noon, in part to accommodate those who have younger family members to help.

"I had to help them, and then there's my schoolwork," she said. "And then, the internet crashes, so I don't know how to work around that."

Earlier this month, Mohamed was on the fence about going back.

"There's the safety aspects and only a few months left in the school year, so why bother going back," she said. "Then I have to remember that I'm a senior and this year counts and these last few months count the most."

She feels more safe about

going back than she did a few months ago.

"I'm concerned, but I try not to stress on it as much," she said.

CHS and Buford both have tweaked their hybrid learning plans to cut down on the amount of independent virtual work days students would have and to support virtual instruction. Instead of every other day, students will attend in-person classes on Mondays and Tuesdays or Wednesdays and Thursdays, according to information sent to families earlier this week. Fridays will continue as an asynchronous work day.

Under this plan, students can keep their current schedule and have more interaction with their teachers, who have both in-person and virtual students, according to the CHS presentation.

Students who remain all-virtual will continue to log onto Zoom for four days a week to attend classes.

'Really painful'

Niq Scott never expected their senior year at Charlottesville High School to end like this.

"When you're like a freshman, you always see the seniors graduating and walking down the graduation stage, and getting all these special things that you don't get any other year," Scott said. "Every year, I remember being like, I'm so excited to be a senior. But for it to end up this way, it's just really painful. It feels like I'm mourning the loss of what could have been."

Scott is planning to attend in-person classes once they start next month. Having that opportunity will help provide some closure to a disrupted senior year and make their time in the city school system not feel like it was all for nothing.

"Because going to school for 10 or 12 years, and having an end and such like a dud, it was just really sad to experience," Scott said earlier this month before the board's decision. "I just wish there was more that could be done for at least the upperclassmen to be able to go back."

Still, Scott's top priority is safety as their mother works at a hospital and their grandmother lives with them.

"But I really do want the opportunity to have some things in school because I know I'm not the only person this year who has struggled a lot with mental health and with staying up to date in classes," Scott said.

The beginning of the school year, from August

to October, was the worst of their life, Scott said, as they dealt with several depressive episodes.

"Since my eighth grade year, I have struggled a lot with depression and anxiety," Scott said. "But before, I've been doing a lot of stuff, like being in choir and band and theater things, so I had a lot of other things to do. So I had a way to root those negative emotions into something productive and something useful."

Those went away when the pandemic started and at the start of the school year. Virtual classes felt impersonal and fake, Scott said, despite teachers' best efforts.

"You just feel like pixels on the screen," Scott said.

Finding a therapist and getting on medication helped Scott turn a corner. Also, teachers eased up on the assignments.

"I feel like a lot more teachers kind of took a step back and realized that my class is not the only class that these people have," Scott said. "Especially because on top of school, we're in the middle of a pandemic, and school — obviously — isn't going to be everyone's top priority with this kind of stuff."

Virtual extracurriculars also boosted Scott's mood. Scott's involved in choir, band and theater. In the upcoming CHS productions of "Shrek," Scott will be the donkey.

Before the pandemic, Scott said they were a B student.

"I would even say I was in the honor roll most years, but now, my average is maybe in the middle of the low C's," Scott said. "Honestly, it's not even possible to get the grades that were expected of us beforehand. Unless school was the only thing I was doing ever, then maybe."

With virtual school, a job at Starbucks and being their grandma's primary caregiver, Scott just doesn't have the same amount of time to dedicate to school.

"Even getting in five to six [hours of school], including homework, is really difficult now, because there's so many more things to think about and so many more responsibilities," Scott said.

The last year also has given Scott more time to think about what's important and what they really want to do for a career. Before the pandemic, Scott was planning to either become a mechanical engineer or musical theater actor. Now, the plan is to go into agriculture and entrepre-

neurship.

"My goal is to have a homestead, which is basically to grow all my own food and stuff like that, and to also work with education," Scott said. "I want to sell my food to people who live in food deserts."

This year's virtual schedule also helped Scott explore other interests such as taking care of houseplants and knitting.

"It gives me more free time to do the stuff that I wouldn't otherwise get to do," Scott said of the virtual schedule. "... Beforehand, I would get to school, do marching band for an hour, do actual school, and then I have rehearsal for four hours after school. But now, I have

a lot more time to definitely just slow down, which is

nice. I didn't have that opportunity before."

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