

Wo7_education_DANIEL

COVERSHEET

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School superintendent: Local schools won't be impacted by state's slashing of equity initiatives

By Daniel Berti

FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF WRITER

State education officials have begun rolling back statewide equity initiatives aimed at fulfilling Gov. Glenn Youngkin's pledge to stop schools from teaching "inherently divisive concepts." But the rollback won't have any impact on Fauquier County schools, according to Superintendent David Jeck.

"It doesn't change anything that we're doing here," Jeck told the *Fauquier Times*, adding that the school division's focus on equitable instruction will continue unabated. "I read the memo from the new state superintendent, and it's tinged with this political element. And for us, it has zero to do with politics," Jeck said.

Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction Jillan Balow issued a report on Feb. 23 rescinding eight statewide equity policies she said fell under the definition of an "inherently divisive concept" – a broad term defined by the Youngkin administration as any idea that violates the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Among the policies that Balow said fall under into the category of "divisive concepts" were Virginia's EdE-

quity website and the "Roadmap to Equity," developed by the Department of Education under former Gov. Ralph Northam; both are focused on closing student achievement gaps in public schools.

The rollback followed Youngkin's first executive order directing state education officials to review and end "all policies within the Department of Education that promote inherently divisive concepts" including "critical race theory," an academic subject not taught in K to 12 public schools but that some believe has been used to guide state education policies.

Jeck has been a long-time proponent of equitable instruction in K to 12 schools. But he said the Virginia Department of Education's policy changes, while "far-reaching," have not yet trickled down to the local level and will not impact Fauquier County schools.

Most decisions about local programs and curriculum remain the purview of local school boards. Jeck



David Jeck, superintendent of Fauquier County schools.

said that, in Virginia, local school divisions and school boards have lots of autonomy and "can essentially do what they want."

"We're trying to take kids who have not traditionally been successful and give them what they need to be successful. We're trying to take kids who are English as a Second

Language students, students of color, students of poverty and disabled students and offer them programs to make sure that they're successful. Because ultimately, if they're successful, that helps the community," Jeck said.

Fauquier County schools' equity initiatives, Jeck said, include alternative programming options such as the Southeastern Alternative School's project-based learning, the Environmental Sciences Academy at Fauquier High School, the Cybersecurity Academy at Liberty High School and the school division's new Virtual Academy. All of those programs will continue.

It is unclear whether more changes will be made to state educational equity policies that could eventually impact the local school division. Youngkin's office declined to respond to

questions about whether the administration would seek to reign in local school division policies; the office of the Virginia Department of Education also chose not to comment.

Educational equity has traditionally been defined as providing equal access and opportunities for all students. The Virginia Department of Education defines it as "eliminating the predictability of student outcomes based on race, gender, zip code, ability, socioeconomic status or languages spoken at home."

It has largely avoided the controversy that has surrounded the debate about "critical race theory" and school mask requirements. But Balow's report vaulted the word "equity" into the midst of a heated political debate in Virginia by appearing to link equity initiatives to critical race theory.

In her report, Balow referenced reading lists on the EdEquity website that included "critical race theory authors ... who have moved CRT into education" and highlighted "a sampling of critical race theory-based materials."

Jeck, however, said the two ideas are unrelated.

"Unfortunately, what some folks have done is they've tried to connect CRT with providing equity to kids, and they're not even closely related," Jeck said. "It's just about serving kids."

Senior Suppers return to Fauquier Hospital's Bistro

Senior Supper events – suspended during the pandemic – will resume at Fauquier Hospital's Bistro (500 Hospital Drive, Warrenton) beginning Thursday, March 24. The complete, reduced price dinners are for community seniors.

Senior Suppers are from 4:30 through 6 p.m. During the months of April and May, senior suppers will be held every other week, on April 14 and April 28, then again on May 12 and May 26. Beginning in June, the expectation is that Senior Suppers will be held every Thursday.

Seniors 55 years and older are invited to choose from one entree, two sides and a fountain drink or milk – all for \$6 (tax included). Menus will be determined by the Bistro chefs.

The Bistro will accommodate guests based on capacity regula-

tions and will work to maintain social distancing measures. Seniors will be able to park and enter through the side bistro entrance area and self-screen at the temperature station. Since Fauquier Hospital is a healthcare facility, at this time, masking is still required unless seated at a table.

Isabel Maples, dietician with Fauquier Health, said, "For March, we celebrate National Nutrition Month and Senior Suppers bring the chance to again sit down, share a meal and socialize with our neighbors."

Lucy Mumo, dietary director of the Bistro, said, "We want to plan future events with themes, cookouts, and possibly explore musical options."

Registration is not required. Space may be limited based on facility discretion.

Save the moment

The photographers of the *Fauquier Times* capture unique moments in time -- a final game-winning goal, the faces of the Homecoming king and queen, a child's joy at their first parade -- in short, the joy of victory and the agony of defeat.

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COVID-19 snapshot Tuesday, March 8

New cases of coronavirus

Virginia: 520 Monday; 7-day average of 1,177

Fauquier: 1 Monday; 7-day average of 12; 12,834 cases to date

New cases data is from Monday, March 7.

Seven-day positivity average (total PCR tests vs. positive tests)

Virginia: 5.9%

Rappahannock-Rapidan Health District: 5.3%

Perspective: The Centers for Disease Control reports that the positivity rating for Fauquier County is at 6.6%.

New hospitalizations

Virginia: 9 on Monday; 7-day average is 49

Fauquier: 0 on Monday; 93 so far in 2022; 443 since the beginning of the pandemic

New hospitalizations data is from Monday, March 7.

New deaths

Virginia: 17 Monday; 7-day average is 41

Fauquier: None on Monday; 137 to date

New deaths data is from Monday, March 7.

Rates of transmission

Fauquier: Low (Rate of cases per 100,000 is 125; percent positivity is 6.6%)

Perspective: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has revamped its COVID-19 transmission metrics to focus on

COVID-19 hospitalizations rather than cases -- Fauquier is rated "low" according to the new guidelines, which means masks are no longer recommended indoors.

A statement from the CDC specifically affects school buses: "Effective Feb. 25, CDC does not require wearing masks on buses or vans operated by public or private school systems, including early care and education/childcare programs."

Vaccinations

Virginia: 81% of population have received one dose; 72.2% are fully vaccinated; 35% have received a booster

Fauquier: 75.8% of population have received one dose; 69.6% are fully vaccinated; 31% have received a booster

Breakthrough cases
The VDH reports that between Jan. 17, 2021, and Feb. 26, there have been 166,742 breakthrough cases of COVID-19 in fully vaccinated people (2.7% of vaccinated people); 4,145 fully vaccinated people have been hospitalized (0.067% of vaccinated people); and there have been 1,685 deaths in fully vaccinated people (0.0273% of fully vaccinated people).

The VDH website says that unvaccinated people have developed COVID-19 at a rate 4.3 times higher than fully vaccinated people, and 1.9 times higher than partially vaccinated people.

Source: Virginia Department of Health, unless otherwise noted.

Some COVID-19 restrictions lifted at Fauquier Hospital

As COVID-19 community transmission levels continue to decline, Fauquier Health announced March 4 that visitation restrictions for the Emergency Department, Family Birthing Center and second floor and third floor inpatients have been largely lifted. Limited visitation restrictions still apply to outpatient and procedural areas within the hospital and in the Intensive Care Unit.

More about updates to the visitation policy may be found at: <https://www.fauquierhealth.org>.

Some precautions remain in place throughout the hospital. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention still recommends that healthcare settings follow more stringent infection prevention and control guidance, which includes masking for all to reduce the spread of illness. At this time, Fauquier Health will still require patients, providers, employees and visitors to wear masks inside Fauquier Health facilities.

Upon entering the hospital, visitors may expect to receive an approved visitation sticker; it must be worn visibly at all times.

The front entrance will be open Monday to Friday, 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Saturday, 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside of the main entrance hours, the ED entrance will be available for entry.

Sarah Cabbage, spokeswoman for Fauquier Health, said, "We will continue to evaluate our policies based on CDC guidance and the evolving situation in our community and will share any updates as we have them."

Fauquier Head Start still requiring mask-wearing for students and staff

By Daniel Berti

FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF WRITER

Students and staff at Fauquier County's Head Start program will continue to wear masks at school even as masking rules have been relaxed by state and federal health agencies, according to the program's executive director Pat Washington.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention eased its guidelines on mask wearing on Feb. 25. But Washington told the *Fauquier Times* on Friday that the federal Office of Head Start is continuing its rule on mask wearing "inside Head Start buildings, classrooms and vehicles owned, leased or arranged by Head Start program" for the time being.

"Fauquier Community Action Committee Head Start is still requiring that children and staff continue to wear masks," Washington said.

The continuation of the masking requirement at local Head Start programs appears to be temporary, however.

Dawn Ault, executive director of the Virginia Head Start Association, said in an email to Jake Ritchie, a concerned Fauquier County parent whose daughter is in the Head Start program, that the former federal guidance on masking remains in place because "it takes longer ... to 'undo' this enacted regulation than it does for the CDC to post guidance."

Additionally, Ault said there are "no punitive measures" for a child in the program that does not wear a mask. And she said, if a child does not wear a mask, "a staff member could encourage, but not require, the child to put it back on."

"[The Office of Head Start] wants us to be clear in educating everyone



Fauquier Head Start has remained COVID-19 free. Social distancing and mask use have been mandatory since the pandemic started.

FAUQUIER TIMES
STAFF PHOTO/
ROBIN EARL

that masking for our unvaccinated population of young children is an excellent mitigation strategy from the spread of COVID-19, especially for classrooms containing young children with immunocompromised systems," Ault said.

Fauquier Community Action Committee Head Start serves around 150 Fauquier County students between the ages of 3 and 5 years old.

Ritchie told the *Fauquier Times* he is considering pulling his 4-year-old daughter out of the Head Start program if the mask-wearing policy is not changed. He said he doesn't believe COVID-19 "really affects these kids" and that the disease can't be transmitted between children and adults.

"We're not even convinced that she can learn anything if she can't see the teacher's face," Ritchie said.

According to the CDC, children can be infected with COVID-19, and the disease can be transmitted between children and adults. Children with underlying medical conditions face an increased risk of getting very sick from COVID-19 compared to children without underlying medical conditions, the CDC guidance states.

Ritchie said he could not get a clear answer from Washington or Ault on when or why the masking policy remains in place in Head Start even though CDC guidance has changed in recent weeks. "It seems like everyone's hands are tied," Ritchie said.

The federal government and many state governments, including Virgin-

ia, have rolled back long-standing indoor mask requirements as cases of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 have declined in recent weeks.

Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin issued an executive order declaring masks optional in local school divisions beginning Jan. 24. The Fauquier County School Board voted to make masks optional in Fauquier County schools at that time. The Virginia General Assembly subsequently passed a bill requiring all schools to make masks optional beginning March 1.

The CDC issued new guidelines on mask wearing on Feb. 25 that classifies localities into low, medium and high levels of disease. Only people in areas with high levels of COVID-19 are recommended to always wear masks indoors under the new guidance.

Fauquier County's current COVID-19 level is "low," according to the CDC's website.

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Superintendent of Schools David Jeck speaks Monday with school board members about the budget.
FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF PHOTO/DANIEL BERTI

School officials consider hiring freeze to pay for teacher raises

School board members: Freeze on vacant positions could increase class sizes

By Daniel Berti
FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF WRITER

Fauquier County is grappling with a teacher shortage, and school administrators are now considering a hiring freeze on more than 70

vacant teacher and staff positions to free up money for a 13% teacher pay raise next year.

A hiring freeze would halt the search to fill 47 teacher vacancies and more than 20 staff vacancies at Fauquier County Schools heading into the 2022-2023 school year, according to school Superintendent

See **RAISES**, page 4

Fauquier deputies violated man's constitutional rights with 'unlawful' arrest, judge rules

Court rejects 'qualified immunity' defense

By Coy Ferrell
FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF WRITER

A federal judge has ruled in favor of a man who claimed deputies from the Fauquier County Sheriff's Office illegally arrested and assaulted him in violation of the Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The parties may now settle out of court or, if negotiations fail, let a court decide the deputies' financial liability, which would be paid from a state insurance fund.

Fauquier deputies Creston Irby, Andrew McCauley and Lucas Jacobs arrested Matthew Souter, of The Plains, on Nov. 10, 2018, after a dispute between Souter and one of Souter's tenants. Souter was

"The defendant police officers violated Plaintiff's constitutional rights when they unlawfully arrested Plaintiff and used force to effect that arrest."

— U.S. DISTRICT JUDGE
T.S. ELLIS, III

charged with violating a protective order and fleeing from law enforcement; those charges were ultimately dropped.

U.S. District Judge T.S. Ellis, III ruled last week that the charges

See **FSCO**, page 6

Fauquier deputy involved in fatal crash was driving 100 mph with emergency lights off, state police says

No criminal charges filed, civil litigation may be imminent

By Coy Ferrell
FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF WRITER

Now-former Fauquier County Sheriff's Deputy Brock Smith, 25, is the focus of a criminal investigation after his cruiser struck a civilian vehicle on U.S. 17 Feb. 25, killing Mary and Brian Dangerfield a short distance from their home. Smith had not been charged as of Tuesday. An attorney for the couple's estate said March 23 that the family plans to pursue civil litigation.

Smith is no longer employed with the sheriff's office, according to an email sent by Sheriff Jeremy Falls on March 23.

Smith was driving his department-issued 2014

Dodge Charger northbound on U.S. 17 "at a high rate of speed and was found not to have emergency equipment activated at the time of the collision," according to a search warrant affidavit filed March 1 by a state police investigator. The search warrant cites an investigation into alleged "reckless driving."

A March 7 state police crash report obtained by the *Fauquier Times* said that Smith was driving 100 m.p.h. on a section of highway between Morrisville and Goldvein when his vehicle struck a 2018 Toyota Camry occupied by Mary and Brian Dangerfield, both of whom died as a result of their injuries. The speed limit on that stretch of U.S. 17 is 55 m.p.h.

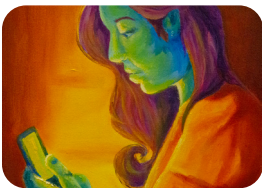
See **CRASH**, page 10



This photo of Mary and Brian Dangerfield was posted with an obituary notice. The Dangerfields were killed in a car crash on Feb. 25.

Fauquier student art show draws crowds.

See page 2.



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With \$77 million in school repairs needed, school officials discuss holding a bond referendum

By Daniel Berti

FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF WRITER

As Fauquier County Schools face the prospect of addressing \$77 million in school repairs that will be necessary in the next few years, a county supervisor has floated an idea to pay for it with a voter-approved bond referendum. But school board members and school officials are split on the issue, so far.

At a Monday, March 28 school board work session, School Superintendent David Jeck appeared open to the idea, while school board members and some administrators said they didn't have enough information to make a decision.

"The way I look at it, \$77 million in projects to help our schools is probably a pretty darn good thing. I can't imagine how else [the board of supervisors] would pay for \$77 million of projects unless they took a bond out," Jeck said. "There's a long way to go before that. We don't know any details. We don't know exactly how that bond would work."

The \$77 million in school improvements were outlined in a county-commissioned report by Downey & Scott LLC, published in January. The list of repairs includes an estimated \$28 million to update mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems, \$25 million for courts and fields and \$11 million in roof repairs. Of those, the construction firm estimated that more than \$8 million are "critical" and "potentially critical" repairs.

Supervisor Chris Granger (Center) floated the bond referendum proposal several weeks ago. Granger told the *Fauquier Times* that, if the school board agreed to the referendum, then \$2.7 million from the school division's facility maintenance budget could be freed up to supplement a partially state-funded 5% raise for teachers, assuming some maintenance projects are delayed.

At Tuesday's board of supervisors' budget work session, Granger said that he would like to begin the process of working with the school board to draw up a bond referendum for up to \$50 million in school repairs.

"If we're going to do major repairs to our school infrastructure, I don't want to skimp on asking the right questions or fixing the right or wrong thing," Granger said.

Granger's initial proposal, however, met with skepticism from Denise Sandlin, the school division's assistant superintendent for business and planning, at Monday's school board work session.

The school's \$3.9 million facility maintenance budget will provide \$600,000 in funding for critical school repairs next year. The rest, however, is allocated to items like bus and transportation costs, technology repairs and instructional costs — things that Sandlin said can't be delayed.

"I don't know if all of that is really feasible," Sandlin said. "I would have to find additional funding within the budget elsewhere."

School board members generally agreed that there was not enough information to move forward with a referendum proposal yet. Any bond referendum proposal would need to be agreed upon by the school board and the board of supervisors before receiving final approval from Fauquier County's Circuit Court to appear on the November 2022 ballot.

School Board Chair Donna Grove (Cedar Run) did not say whether she would support a referendum, or what projects she would like to see included if it were to move forward. But Grove appeared apprehensive about the possibility that the public could vote against the plan, leaving the school board to fund the repairs.

"What happens if it fails? And then we have nothing. Then we have all the work that still needs

to be done," Grove said.

School board member Susan Pauling (Center) said she didn't yet have an opinion about the referendum. But she added that, "Right now, I'm glad that they're hearing some of the issues that we have and some of the things that we're facing, and they're taking it seriously."

School board member Vinnie Gallo (Scott) did not say he opposed the idea but said, "Infrastructure repairs aren't the place for referendums."

County Administrator Paul McCulla told *Fauquier Times* last week that a bond referendum could "more than likely happen in November." But he noted that it could take place as early as this summer if the board of supervisors could agree on what school improvement projects they would like to fund.

The board of supervisors would then need to pass a resolution requesting that the Fauquier County Circuit Court add the referendum onto the 2022 general election ballot, and the courts would need to quickly sign off on it, McCulla said.

At least two other localities in Virginia — Chesterfield and Henrico — are planning to hold bond referendums this November to fund school repairs and other public infrastructure needs. Henrico County is asking voters to approve \$514 million in bonds, while Chesterfield County is requesting \$540 million.

Fairfax County voters approved a \$360 million bond referendum in November 2021 for school repairs on a two-to-one margin.

The Fauquier County Board of Supervisors had been scheduled to adopt a final budget April 4. However, at a Tuesday work session supervisors agreed to delay adopting a budget until at least April 12. (See box.)

Reach Daniel Berti at dberti@fauquier.com

School officials consider hiring freeze to pay for teacher raises

RAISES, from page 1

David Jeck. The hiring freeze would be in addition to previously reported proposed cuts to middle school sports programs, bus routes and the school division's virtual academy.

Jeck told *Fauquier Times* on Wednesday that he and County Administrator Paul McCulla discussed the school division's budget cuts on Tuesday, March 22. Altogether, Jeck said the proposed cuts would set loose nearly \$7.4 million in funding needed to provide 13% teacher pay raises. But nothing has been finalized.

"No promises were made," Jeck said.

The immediate impact of a hiring freeze on vacant teaching positions would be a potential increase in class sizes beginning in the 2022-2023 school year, according to School Board Chair Donna Grove (Cedar Run) and School Board member Duke Bland (Marshall). Both school board members said it's a risk they are willing to take to increase teacher salaries.

See RAISES, page 13

Budget adoption delayed

Just before press time Tuesday, county supervisors agreed to delay adopting a budget until at least Tuesday, April 12. They had previously been scheduled to adopt the county budget on Monday, April 4.

The Virginia General Assembly did not agree on a state budget before its regular session ended on March 12; state lawmakers are scheduled to convene again beginning April 4. Supervisors said Tuesday that they would like to give state lawmakers time to work out budgetary matters on the state level before passing a local budget.

The state budget could have major implications on the county level, as Gov. Glenn Youngkin's proposal to eliminate the state grocery tax would deprive Fauquier County of \$2.5 million annually.

Board Chairman Chris Granger (Center District) said at Tuesday's work session that he is confident that proposals by some state lawmakers to reimburse counties for two years for

lost grocery tax revenue would pass the General Assembly.

Added to the fact that the school division's health care costs are now expected to be \$1.5 million less than initially expected, that could free up a total of \$4 million to go toward giving public school teachers an average 13% raise this year. School officials have repeatedly signaled that those raises are a top priority, even if it means cutting programs like middle school sports or the Virtual Academy.

At least one county supervisor expressed skepticism about committing to use reimbursed grocery tax revenue for school funding, however. "Those salaries are permanent. What happens at the end of 2 years? We don't have anything to give," said Supervisor Mary Leigh McDaniel (Marshall District) on Tuesday.

Supervisors will convene again on Monday, April 11 to discuss the proposed budget.

—COY FERRELL



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School officials consider hiring freeze to pay for teacher raises

RAISES, from page 4

Grove said “nothing is off the table” to boost teacher pay next year. “We’ll do whatever it takes to stop kicking that can down the road,” Grove said, adding that “There may be some instances where some class sizes increase.”

“If you don’t have the number of teachers for the classrooms, then class sizes increase. It’s inevitable,” Bland said.

Fauquier County teachers are among the lowest paid on average in Northern Virginia. Fauquier teacher salaries have fallen behind Prince William County, Loudoun, Stafford, Spotsylvania and Manassas, according to the school division. Starting pay for Fauquier County teachers is \$44,800.

Teachers are increasingly leaving Fauquier County to work in neighboring jurisdictions with higher pay, according to school board members. So far, 19 teachers have already said they intend to resign at the end of the 2021-2022 school year.

By boosting teacher pay, school officials hope they will be able to retain the county’s existing teaching staff, lower the teacher vacancy rate and reduce the school division’s reliance on long-term substitute teachers.

‘This is in the supervisors’ hands’

What remains unknown is whether county supervisors, who have the ultimate say over how much local tax funding the school division receives, will adjust the amount of money allocated to the school division as budget talks grind toward the finish line.

County Administrator Paul McCulla’s proposed \$409 million budget, which acts as a baseline for the supervisors’ budget negotiations, did not provide any new funds for teacher pay raises in the school division budget next year. That left the school board to come up with their own cuts to fund long-sought teacher pay raises.

McCulla’s proposed budget would reduce the local real estate property tax rate from 99.4 cents to 93.3 cents per \$100 in assessed value next year. The average annual residential tax bill would still increase by \$539 due to increases in the value of real estate since 2017, when the last reassessment took place.

But county supervisors could decide to take the tax rate even lower, forcing additional cuts to the proposed budget. And already, at least one supervisor has expressed an interest in going lower than McCulla’s tax rate.

“This is not going to be easy, and we certainly won’t make everyone happy. Bottom line, folks ar-

en’t good with the budget proposed by [McCulla], and we need to find ways to the cut the rate,” said Supervisor Rick Gerhardt (Cedar Run). Asked where cuts to the budget would be made if the tax rate were lowered below 93 cents, Gerhardt said, “That’s what we’re wrestling with. Like I said, not everyone is going to be happy.”

Supervisor Chris Granger (Center) has offered up a separate plan to use money in the school board’s budget that is currently allocated to repairs and maintenance to partially fund teacher pay raises – but only if both boards agree to hold a bond referendum later this year that would ask Fauquier County voters to approve funding for critical school repairs and building improvements.

“They [supervisors] could decide to give more or less money to the schools. That’s entirely up to them,” McCulla told the *Fauquier Times* on Wednesday.

The board of supervisors will adopt a final budget on Monday, April 4. Until then, the Fauquier County School Board’s proposed cuts – and raises – remain a tentative plan.

“This is in the supervisors’ hands at this point,” Grove said.

Coy Ferrell contributed to this report.

Reach Daniel Berti at dberti@fauquier.com

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