

COVERSHEET

1. **Fauquier schools brace for the unthinkable — an active shooter** (July 20, Colleen LaMay)

- BOXES: **Security tool box**

2. **Many students in Fauquier public schools feel safe but sad, reports show** (Nov. 30, Colleen LaMay)

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Fauquier schools brace for the unthinkable — an active shooter

Schools to add more combat tourniquets, cameras and secure entryways

By Colleen LaMay
FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF WRITER

Even before the tragic school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, the Fauquier County School Division was working to increase security at all 20 elementary, middle and high schools for the upcoming school year.

That work includes adding secure vestibules at the front entrances of schools, a work in progress due to funding and supply-chain issues. In addition, schools are putting more cameras inside and outside schools, adding new desktop and phone apps that teachers and staff can use to summon

police and training staff on how to use combat tourniquets on people with severe gunshot injuries.

“I’m almost sad that we have to talk about things like this and deal with things like this, but we ... just have to keep our kids as safe as we can,” said David Graham, assistant superintendent of administration for the Fauquier County School Division.

All school staff will be trained to use combat tourniquets to staunch the flow of blood from gunshots, Graham said. “If you can keep the bleeding stopped and get them care, there’s a chance they can make it.” Uncontrolled bleeding is the number one cause of death after a mass shooting. “I hope I am getting ready to spend money on tourniquets we never use,” Graham said.

See SECURITY, page 6



FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF PHOTO/ROBIN EARL
Sal Torelli, lead school security officer for Fauquier schools, is working at Grace Miller Elementary School this summer, while children attend summer school.



Barreling to the finish line

Catlett cowgirl Kyndal Waln guns for home in the barrel racing event at the Fauquier Fairgrounds arena July 15. The competition was part of the Tru Grit Rodeo, a highlight of the Fauquier County Fair last week.

See more rodeo coverage on page 45 and photos from the fair on page 4.

PHOTO BY BETSY BURKE PARKER

New online tool helps Fauquier Hospital patients estimate cost of care in advance

By Colleen LaMay
FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF WRITER

A new online tool aimed at centralizing hospital service prices from across the state was launched recently by the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association. The tool consolidates public access to online links to pricing at every hospital in Virginia, including Fauquier Hospital in Warrenton, to “help support patients’ health care decision-making,” according to the VHHA.

Here are the links to help patients and their families find cost information at Fauquier Hospital:

- **Cost estimator** allows patients to find the estimated cost of hundreds of procedures, based on their health coverage: <https://www.fauquierhealth.org/cost-estimator>
- **Financial assistance program** will help patients determine whether they are eligible for financial assistance if they cannot pay their bills: <https://www.fauquierhealth.org/financial-assistance>
- **Hospital charges listing** <https://www.fauquierhealth.org/hospital-charges-listing> is a complete list of all services and items provided by Fauquier Hospital, including the five most common charges for these services. The hospital recommends the Cost Estimator as a better tool for most patients.

See COST, page 13

SPORTS: Colleen Schaner and Jacob Robinson are 2022 Fauquier Times Kettle Run Athletes of the Year. PAGES 43, 44, 46, 47



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Fauquier schools brace for the unthinkable — an active shooter

SECURITY, from page 1

In addition, Fauquier schools are adding controlled entryways at all its 20 schools. Vestibules are one of the best investments the school division can make because they help control the flow of visitors and, if the unthinkable happens, may help contain a gunman, Graham said. “It’s a grim victory, but it’s a victory” if a gunman never makes it past the office, he said.

So far, seven schools have vestibule entries with two sets of locked doors. Four more schools have received funding for vestibules but are waiting for the materials to install them. The remaining schools are still waiting on funding. “We’ve got some to go, and because of what’s happening, I think additional money will come, and we will stretch it as far as we can,” Graham said.

Law enforcement officers are at the core of every school’s plan to keep children safe. At Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, “Law enforcement responders failed to adhere to their active shooter training, and they failed to prioritize saving the lives of innocent victims over their own safety,” according to a report on the shooting released July 17 by the Texas House of Representatives’ Investigative Committee on the Robb Elementary School Shooting.

Sal Torelli, lead school security officer for Fauquier schools, said he read the entire 77-page report and was deeply disturbed by what it described as the “systemic failures” and “egregiously poor decision-making” that ended in the deaths of 19 students and two teachers.

Almost 400 police officers responded to the massacre at Robb Elementary School that day, but 77 minutes passed before police stormed the classroom and shot and killed the gunman.

“If I hear gunfire in a school, I am going after the threat,” said Torelli, who carries the same Glock pistol he used as a sheriff’s deputy. “There is no waiting. There is no retreating. That is a price I am willing to pay.”

Active shooter training

Active shooter training has been an integral part of “hardening” schools nationwide since the Columbine tragedy in 1999. As part of that training, officers must be willing to risk their lives without hesitation. That failed to happen at Robb Elementary, the Texas report says.

After the Texas shooting, the Fauquier County Sheriff’s Office opened a conversation about active shooter training locally, said Sgt. Aaron Vescovi, in charge of all school resource officers in Fauquier schools. “We are still having a conversation about that,” he said.

Vescovi and Fauquier school officials declined to provide specifics on active shooter training, because of concerns that it could compromise student safety. “I feel confident we are trained to meet whatever threat faces our schools,” Vescovi said. “We are trained to meet the threat as fast as possible and

preserve life as best we can.”

“I am very happy where we are with school safety today here in Fauquier County,” Torelli said.

The findings of the Texas committee are the most complete outside account of what happened during the massacre on May 24. “We must not delude ourselves into a false sense of security by believing that ‘this would not happen where we live,’” the report says. “The people of Uvalde undoubtedly felt the same way. We must all take seriously the threats to security in our schools and the need to be properly prepared to confront active shooter scenarios.”

Fauquier County is one of just seven of 132 school divisions in Virginia with armed SSOs, said Torelli, who retired from the Fauquier County Sheriff’s Office in 2017 and joined the school division as an SSO a year later, in 2018, the same year a gunman killed 17 people at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Keeping doors locked and entrances secure

Other failures that cost precious time at Robb Elementary included doors that were left unlocked in violation of school policies, the report says. That gave the gunman “unimpeded access to enter” and cost the school precious minutes that teachers could have used to hide children and lock doors.

Torelli gets it. Most days, he walks about 10 miles through the buildings at sprawling Fauquier High School. He makes sure that doors that open to the outside of the school are always locked, not propped open or ajar.

“I spend most of my day walking the hallways, checking the doors, checking the parking lot, moving around constantly,” he said. “Your job is to move around and be visible.” His goal, he said, is to be “omnipresent.”

At Fauquier High School, the vestibule is a set of double doors at the entrance to the school. People can exit through the double doors, but they can’t enter through them. Visitors—including parents, contractors, substitutes or anyone else—must press a buzzer and show ID, generally a driver’s license, to school staff to get through the first set of doors.

Once through the first set of doors, visitors still cannot proceed into the school because the second set of doors leading into the school is locked. The only place to go is the school office, where visitors must sign in. IDs are scanned to create a visitor badge and to check against sex offender lists in all 50 states.

Threat assessments

Every Fauquier public school has a threat assessment team that is tasked with identifying and addressing threats or potential threats to school security. The shooter at Robb Elementary School shared his fascination with school shootings on social media and shared pictures of guns he bought, but no one relayed concerns to school officials.

See SECURITY, page 7

Security tool box

Safety and Security: 23 full-time armed officers

SROs: These are school resource officers employed by the Fauquier County Sheriff's Office. All carry guns and enforce local, state and federal laws. Each high school and middle school has a full-time SRO. Grace Miller and Claude Thompson elementary schools, at the most far-flung edges of Fauquier, also have full-time SROs. **Total number of school resource officers: 10**
SSOs: School security officers are school employees who also carry guns but can enforce only school-board policy. However, they train with the sheriff's office and must have worked for a law-enforcement agency within the past 10 years. All three high schools, along with eight elementary schools and Southeastern Alternative School, have SSOs. **Total number of school security officers: 13 plus two substitutes.**

School tip line

Anonymous tip line available to community members who may have a concern about school safety. The line is monitored by school administrators, student services and Fauquier County Sheriff's Office. Access it at <https://www.fcps1.org/Page/2696>. People who have a concern involving a life-threatening emergency should call 911.

School safety audits

All schools are inspected annually for safety and security readiness. SRO/SSO and office of the Fire Marshal participate in all inspections (Results are registered with the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services). All building principals complete school safety surveys as part of this process.

Security vestibules (controlled entryways to schools)

- Currently in seven schools
- Funding is available to add security vestibules to four schools. Installation is being held up by supply-chain issues.
- Grant applications are being submitted for all remaining schools. For security reasons, school officials declined to say which schools are still awaiting security vestibules.

Officer training

- Joint active-shooter training with the Fauquier County Sheriff's Office
- Firearms qualifications conducted with the Fauquier County Sheriff's Office

RAPTOR Alert System

Web and cell-phone notification system for school emergencies, directly linked with local law-enforcement agencies. Teachers and staff will be able to alert authorities to threats by using an app on their phones.

Combat application tourniquets (Stop the Bleed)

- Expanding the number of tourniquets in schools to staunch bleeding from severe wounds.
- Training all staff to use the tourniquets

Avigilon Camera System

- All school buildings have been updated to this surveillance system, with more cameras being added inside and outside schools.
- Real-time shared access with Fauquier County Sheriff's Office
- Digital building mapping of all schools has been completed as part of the Avigilon System for first responders. This allows law enforcement to quickly determine the layout of every school, reducing the time it takes to respond to crises.

Buses

- Location and speed of buses can be monitored via GPS
- Cameras to monitor all passengers
- All buses and buildings are part of a county-wide radio system and have access to emergency and law enforcement.

Mental Health Training

- All new staff will have a chance to receive youth mental health training before school starts.
- All current staff that already have been through training can take a two-hour refresher course online.
- All current employees who have not received the training will have opportunities for training several times throughout the year.

Fauquier schools brace for the unthinkable — an active shooter

SECURITY, from page 6

The motto in Fauquier schools is, "If you see something, say something," Torelli said. "It takes a whole community to work to make our schools safe."

Cameras

Cameras are located throughout the public areas of Fauquier public schools, excluding all restrooms and nearly all classrooms. Under Virginia law, cameras are required in some special education classrooms.

More cameras are being added since

the school division switched to the Avigilon Camera System. School resource officers and school security officers can access all the cameras not only at the school where they are working, but at all schools in the division. Camera footage is available in real time for emergency dispatchers and the Fauquier County Sheriff's Office.

Will all these efforts guarantee children's safety? "That's the crystal ball that nobody's got," Graham said.

Reach Colleen LaMay at clamay@fauquier.com

Fauquier SPCA

The Fauquier SPCA is a private, non-profit organization dedicated to providing a temporary refuge for stray, homeless and abandoned animals, and to placing such animals in a caring, appropriate home whenever possible.

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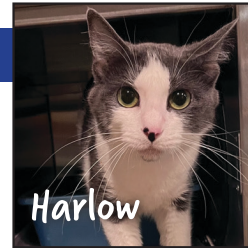
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See page 12 for gift ideas from local shops.

Warrenton Planning Commission did not have authority to table data center application, says town attorney



FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF PHOTO/ROBIN EARL
Warrenton Planning Commissioner James Lawrence

Town council will decide how to proceed at meeting set for Dec. 13

By Robin Earl
FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF WRITER

The Warrenton Planning Commission acted outside its authority last week when it indefinitely postponed a vote on Amazon's application for a data center on Blackwell Road, Warrenton's interim town manager said in a news release Monday.

In voting to put off the vote indefinitely, the planning commission ignored guidance from the town attorney, Interim Town Manager Christopher Martino said in the release.

Despite receiving legal guidance

warning that tabling the application indefinitely would violate Virginia law, planning commissioners decided the public hearing scheduled for that night was not necessary, arguing that they had the authority to tell Amazon to re-submit its application with more information. The 30 people who signed up to speak at the scheduled public hearing did not address the commission.

The town council, which has the final say on zoning matters, will discuss how to proceed at its Dec. 13 meeting.

See **PLANNING**, page 4

Sal Torelli is an SSO in the Fauquier school division.



Many students in Fauquier public schools feel safe but sad, reports show

By Colleen LaMay
FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF WRITER

Administrators at half of Fauquier County public schools say they are unable to provide sufficient mental-health support for students and staff, according to a recent report on school safety and climate presented recently at a school board meeting.

Even so, students say their schools' security staff makes them feel safe, and they believe adults at school "truly care" about them.

See **SAFETY**, page 6

Former Cedar Lee schoolteacher charged with child sexual abuse

Kaitlin Renea Grimley also active at Warrenton Baptist Church, Friends of Fort Liberté

By Coy Ferrell
FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF WRITER

A grand jury on Monday directly indicted 36-year-old Kaitlin Renea Grimley, a former math teacher for Fauquier County Public Schools, on four counts of felony child sexual abuse. The indictments stem from an alleged

See **INDICTED**, page 9



PHOTO BY CARSON MCRAE/MCRAE VISUAL MEDIA

Wanted: Bird lovers with binoculars

The annual Christmas Bird Count will take place this year on Dec. 18 at The Clifton Institute in Warrenton. Here is a scene from last year's event. For more holiday events and celebrations, see page 15.

KRHS senior Brayden Blocker remains in ICU

Jill and Larry Blocker are talking about their son's suicide attempt in hopes of helping other families. Their son Brayden, 17, a senior on the Kettle Run lacrosse team that his father helps coach, tried to end his own life Nov. 3. The teen remains in the ICU at Inova Fairfax Hospital, Jill Blocker said.

"Right now, it is definitely a fight for our son's life," she said.

Students have rallied around the family, bringing food every day to the medical staff treating their friend and taking to social media, including Facebook, to offer support and prayers, she said.

See **BLOCKER**, page 6

COUGARS WIN REGION FOOTBALL TITLE:

Trey Western's TD catch helped Kettle Run make the state semis. **SPORTS**, Pages 19, 20, 22



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Many students in Fauquier public schools feel safe but sad, reports show

SAFETY, from page 1

The report, presented by Nicholas Napolitano, executive director of Student Services and Special Education, was a summary of four school safety surveys and inspections conducted in 2021 and 2022.

School board members praised the thoroughness of the report and planned to discuss student behavior during a planning summit Nov. 30.

At the high-school level, 41.2% of students said that they felt sad or hopeless almost every day for two or more weeks in a row and that those feelings led them to stop some of their usual activities. That's a little more than 1% higher than the state average.

Student mental health is an ongoing concern that may, in part, reflect difficulties hiring school counselors, Napolitano said. To help, every high school this year for the first time has its own social worker. "They are there to support students," Napolitano said. "They are also there to support families." Other social workers split their time between elementary and middle schools.

"It's not just a community-wide issue," said Renee Norden, executive director of the Mental Health Association of Fauquier County and a member of the Safety School Audit Committee for Fauquier schools. "It's a national issue. We have a dearth of mental health providers, and there is no easy solution to that."

"During the pandemic, mental-health professionals in general left [the profession] and didn't come back nationwide," Norden said.

Norden outlined steps Fauquier schools are taking to address student mental health. Those include:

- **Teen Mental Health First Aid.** In 10th grade, three 90-minute class periods during driver's education courses are aimed at helping students recognize signs and symptoms of mental distress in their classmates, to learn how to talk about it and to learn how to approach a trusted adult.
- **Youth Mental Health First Aid.** This class helps teachers recognize and talk to students who may be experiencing mental-health issues. The class lasts eight hours.

"We need to do more work," Norden said. "We need to focus not only on our youth, but our families," Norden said. "We need to be comfortable talking about it. We need to take the stigma out," she said.

Safety at school

The report noted that all middle and high schools in the Fauquier division have school resource officers, or SROs, who are employees of the Fauquier County Sheriff's Office. They carry guns and enforce local, state and federal laws.

In addition, all high schools and elementary schools have school security officers, or SSOs, employed by the school division. They carry guns and train with the sheriff's office but can only enforce school policies.

Two elementary schools, Claude Thompson and Mary Walter, have SROs instead of SSOs because they are located farther from law-enforcement hubs.

In addition to ensuring the physical safety of

KRHS senior Brayden Blocker remains in ICU

BLOCKER, from page 1

"These kids are coming, and they are praying in the parking lot, and they are bringing posters," Jill Blocker said. "In his dark time, it seems that the community is really coming together for him. Kettle Run officials also have been very supportive, providing counseling and therapy dogs to students," Jill Blocker said.

Any attempt to end a life is deeply personal and difficult to reduce to a checklist of warning signs. "It's something that we never saw coming," Jill Blocker said of her son's attempt to take his own life. In her last text with Brayden, the teen said it was time to order his cap and gown for graduation.

"Even his closest friends had no idea," she said. "Nothing was on radars or anything. He is just one of those people who are friends with everybody."

The Blockers wonder if concussions that Blocker suffered as an athlete may have been a factor in his suicide attempt. His most recent concussion was in June. Some studies link concussions to increased risk of depression and anxiety.

A 2021 study published in the "Journal of Neurotrauma" said people under age 26 are especially vulnerable to psychiatric disorders and suicidal ideation after concussions.

The Blockers have chipped in to help ensure all the lacrosse players have helmets that offer better protection than their old helmets.

Note: If you or a loved one needs support, call the regional health line at 434-230-9704, or receive help via text at 741741. Help is available 24/7.

students, SSOs and SROs also work to develop relationships with students.

Threat assessments

A total of 172 threat assessments were conducted on students at Fauquier public schools during the 2021-22 school year. Threat assessments are conducted when students threaten themselves or others. For example, Napolitano said a threat assessment would be conducted if one student said to another, "I'm going to kill you."

Upon hearing about the threat, a team would delve into the details, including whether that student had made similar threats in the past. "Or was the student just saying that because they were stressed in the moment?" Napolitano said.

Earlier this year, a teenager drove a stolen car with a gun in the glove box into the parking lot at Kettle Run High School, triggering a partial lockdown at four schools, including Kettle Run. That student would not have undergone a threat assessment because he had been expelled prior to the incident, he said.

The boy was arrested.

Threats are classified on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being a "critical/imminent" threat and 5 being a routine threat. No critical threats were identified during the 2021-22 school year, Napolitano said.

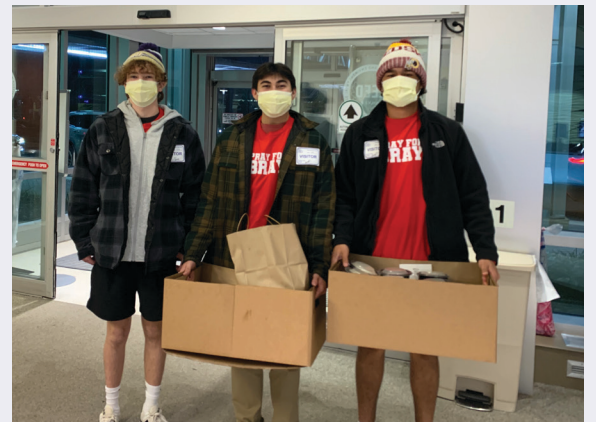
Cameras

In Fauquier high schools and middle schools, the biggest gaps in school safety are the quality and location of security cameras, according to the report. "I would say in the last three to four years,



COURTESY PHOTO

Brayden Blocker is a senior at Kettle Run High School. He wears number 7 on the school's lacrosse team.



COURTESY PHOTO

Brayden's friends have been delivering meals to the staff treating Brayden at Inova Fairfax Hospital.

Recommendations for cameras in Fauquier schools include:

1. Continue with planned timelines and projected funding requirements to expand camera coverage at schools that need it.

Completed: All video surveillance systems have been upgraded to produce clearer images, except at Auburn Middle School, where installation is expected to be completed by January 2023.

Goals: Continue to apply for grants for improvements to video surveillance systems. Some schools still need additional camera coverage. Staff will continue to research grant opportunities for cameras.

the number of cameras that each school has received has increased substantially," he said. Fauquier schools are upgrading cameras for clearer pictures. At elementary schools, school administrators are concerned about bus drop-off areas that are "dangerous" because of traffic, as well as a lack of secure vestibules (controlled entries) at some schools.

Bullying

A fight at Auburn Middle School in April 2022 shined a spotlight on bullying at Fauquier schools. What school officials said was a "fight" between two students led the sheriff's office to pursue action in juvenile court against one of the students.

Teasing and bullying were common concerns among administrators during the 2022-23 school year. Moving into the current school year, protocols are in place not only to address but to document and analyze the incidents. In the past, bullying and harassment paperwork was completed when problems arose, but the school division did not have a formal way to easily track the data.

This year, administrators are entering information into a digital form that can be easily sorted to analyze time, place and incidents. That will help address specific issues at each school, the report says.

Fauquier Times



SPORTS: Fauquier volleyball moves into third; Kettle Run football wins again.

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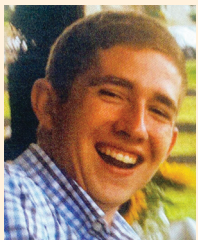
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Jury to decide fate of two men charged in 'Trip' Bopp's murder

Prosecution, defense delivered closing arguments Tuesday

By Coy Ferrell
FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF WRITER

After testimony from 20 witnesses over four days, a jury must decide this week whether José Pereira and/or Darren Davis is guilty in the botched burglary that led to the murder of Trip Bopp on April 22, 2021.



Charles William "Trip" Bopp III

See TRIAL, page 4

Local high school students stage walkout to promote 'safe spaces'

By Colleen LaMay
FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF WRITER

Students at Fauquier and Kettle Run high schools staged a walkout during the final class period Tuesday to protest new draft policies on transgender students. A protest also was planned at Liberty High School, but no information on a walkout there was available by press time Tuesday.

"I protested because I want everyone to feel safe and welcome in the world, because we are all human and should not be treated differently based on how we feel or who we love," said Emory, 17, a senior at Fauquier High. "I want to protect my underclassmen and create a voice for people who cannot speak," Emory said.

See WALKOUT, page 8



Emory, left, and Finn after the protest at Fauquier High School.

Fauquier school board directed to approve new policies on treatment of transgender students

Some call Youngkin administration's directive potentially damaging to vulnerable students

By Colleen LaMay
FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF WRITER

Fauquier County Public Schools face another policy challenge from the Youngkin administration — a directive to overhaul its policies on the treatment of transgender students. The goal is to ensure parents' "fundamental rights," the directive says. Every school division in Virginia faces the same task.

See POLICIES, page 8

Moms for Liberty says it has 'paused' all challenges against 'sexually explicit' books while school board updates policies

By Colleen LaMay
FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF WRITER

Moms for Liberty says it has "paused" all 17 challenges to books it considers too sexually explicit or sexually violent to be on the shelves of Fauquier County school libraries while the school division fixes "the problems in their book selection and contestation processes."

"The system in place for addressing parental concerns with explicit materials in school libraries is simply inadequate for the volume of material that is being contested," said Amie Bowman, treasurer for the Fauquier chapter of Moms for Liberty.

See BOOKS, page 6



Hazel Hall a 'game changer' for community college

Warrenton celebrated the addition of a new science and technology building to the Laurel Ridge Community College's local campus Sept. 21. The two-story, 40,000-square-foot Hazel Hall includes state-of-the-art classrooms and laboratories where health care, science and engineering students will receive hands-on training.

See page 3.

FAUQUIER TIMES STAFF PHOTOS/ROBIN EARL

Early voting has started. See page 10.



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Local high school students stage walkout to promote 'safe spaces'

WALKOUT, from page 1

About 200 students signed up to attend the walkout at Fauquier High, which was organized by Finn, 17, a trans man and a senior at Fauquier High. "Finn is the one that bravely organized this," Emory said. "We are all really proud of him for standing up for himself."

School administrators asked that press not attend the walkouts. "As you know, any possible walkout would occur during the instructional day," Fauquier County Public Schools spokeswoman Tara Helkowski said. "To protect student privacy and minimize distractions, we ask

that reporters not come to schools today. We decline the request for photos or interviews on school grounds," Helkowski said.

Fauquier High School had some "slight counterprotests" and some students came to skip class, Emory said. "There were about 200 students there and we had a lot of great support," Emory said. "Even the kids who came to get out of class or had different opinions cheered and showed support," Emory said. "I spoke to the one who wanted to talk, and he agreed that we did have good points, and should all come together as one, and he said in the future he will work with us to provide two dif-

ferent opinions, but be respectful." Views of other students at Fauquier High:

- "I think it's important for everyone to feel safe regardless of their gender identity or sexuality and that's the main reason we decided to stand up and use our voices today." — Lauren, 17
 - "I think today was a huge success. We created a safe space where kids could share their stories and find community among peers. I hope this can help show people how important it is to hear queer voices" — Hannah, 17
- Reach Colleen LaMay at clamay@fauquier.com



Kettle Run student Emily, 16, at Tuesday's walkout at Kettle Run High School.

Fauquier school board directed to approve new policies on treatment of transgender students

POLICIES, from page 1

The new policies require parental approval for changes to students' "names, nicknames and/or pronouns," direct schools to keep parents "informed about their children's well-being," including issues involving gender identity or sexual orientation, and specify that student participation in activities and athletics shall be based on sex. The policies also state that "students shall use bathrooms that correspond to his or her sex, except to the extent that federal law otherwise requires."

Earlier this month, Youngkin's administration directed Fauquier schools, along with every other school division in Virginia, to come up with a policy requiring teachers to notify parents if their children are assigned "sexually explicit materials" and allowing parents to request alternate assignments. Parents' rights were a cornerstone of Youngkin's campaign for governor in 2021.

Concern for transgender students

A trans man who is a senior at Fauquier High School opposed Youngkin's policies on transgender students for a variety of reasons but was especially concerned about the impact on trans and non-binary students who lack acceptance from their parents. School is the only safe space some students have, said Finn, 17, whose last name is being withheld at his and his parents' request, to protect his safety.

Some students may be "out" at school, but not at home, Finn said. That can create problems if trans students want their teachers to call them by names that fit their gender identity or if they ask teachers to call them by different pronouns. Teachers could be required to notify parents in such cases, according to the model policy.

The policy as it now stands has worked well overall for Finn, who said he emailed individual teachers at the start of every school year with his preferred name and pronouns. Within a week, most teachers got the message. "I am very lucky," he said. "I had teachers that were very accepting and accommodating."

To ensure that his name was right on his diploma, Finn legally changed his name before senior year began.

Finn had advice for the school board as they debate how to proceed in the coming months. "I think that they should try to remember that everybody's situation is different, and I feel like they should try to remember that safety is not (always) in the home, and the parents are not always the safest person, and that students try to find safety elsewhere."

The draft policies could result in students being "outed" by teachers who are required to notify parents. "Coming out is very important for people, and it is very important for them to de-

Model policies

Here is some of the language in the Virginia Department of Education document called "2022 Model Policies on the Privacy, Dignity, and Respect for all Students and Parents in Virginia's Public Schools:

- "The First Amendment forbids government actors to require individuals to adhere to or adopt any particular ideological beliefs. Practices such as compelling others to use preferred pronouns is premised on the ideological belief that gender is a matter of personal choice or subjective experience, not sex. Many Virginians reject this belief."
- "The First Amendment guarantees religious freedom and prohibits compelling others to affirm ideas that may be contrary to their personal religious beliefs."
- "Schools shall respect parents' values and beliefs: Parents have the right to instill in and nurture values and beliefs for their own children and make decisions concerning their children's education and upbringing in accordance with their customs, faith, and family culture."
- [School Division] shall change the legal name or sex in a student or former student's official record only if a parent or eligible student submits a legal document, such as a birth certificate, state- or federal-issued identification, passport, or court order substantiating the student or former student's change of legal name or sex.

The full model policy is here: <https://doe.virginia.gov/support/gender-diversity/2022-model-policies-on-the-privacy-dignity-and-respect-for-all-students-town-hall.pdf>

cide when that happens and taking that away from them is very wrong," Finn said.

Finn's mother, Cindy, said the model policy appeared skewed toward the rights of parents at students' expense. "And I'm confused," she said in an email after reading the model policy and the directives around it. "Does the new policy state that even if the parent says to call a student by their preferred name and pronouns, that school personnel don't have to comply? What!?"

(See box, Model policies.)

School administration's response to directive

Fauquier County Public Schools Superintendent David Jeck said he did not interpret the model policy that way.

Jeck said that adopting new policies usually takes two months, sometimes three for final approval. Jeck declined to share his view of Youngkin's directives, saying, "I'll support whichever policy the SB (school board) ultimately approves."

School board meeting

The next regular meeting of the Fauquier County School Board will start at 6 p.m., Monday, Oct. 10, in the Falcon Room at Fauquier High School, 705 Waterloo Road.

A 30-day public comment period on the draft transgender policies is expected to open Sept. 26, after which they will go into effect.

Two of Fauquier's five school board members responded to a request from the *Fauquier Times* for comment.

"I support a student's right to educational programs and services that does not discriminate based on race, religion, color, gender, national origin, disability, or any other basis prohibited by law," wrote Stephanie Litter-Reber (Lee District) in an emailed response.

"Our school board policy (7-1.2) reflects this position," said Litter-Reber, referring to the division's nondiscrimination policy, which deals largely with sexual harassment. "I also support and believe in our FCPS1 educators' ability to deal with individual situations based on the needs of that specific situation - something they have been doing, successfully, long before this subject turned into a political football."

"I do not foresee any significant changes to our existing policy," Litter-Reber said.

Fellow board member Vincent Gallo (Scott District) declined to address transgender policies. "I am looking forward to discussing this with my fellow board members during our scheduled meetings. I believe that is the best opportunity and method to engage and discuss this topic and your questions in detail."

'A political football'

Equality Virginia, an advocacy group supporting transgender and non-binary students, was critical of Youngkin's draft policies, saying they targeted vulnerable youth. "Some politicians are using marginalized youths and trying to score political points off their backs," said Narissa Rahaman, executive director of Equality Virginia.

Youngkin spends time campaigning for GOP candidates out of state instead of talking to people who will be affected by his directives, Rahaman said. "If he had general concerns about what our students are going through, he would be here meeting with us and talking with us and learning more about our lived experience," she said.

Republican-aligned parent group Fight for Schools and the Family Foundation, a conservative Christian-led group, both of which have been critical of the state's earlier policies on transgender students, applauded the draft policies.

See **POLICIES**, page 9

All Fauquier County public schools accredited for 2022-2023

Pearson Elementary School is accredited with conditions because science-test scores are below state standards

Fauquier Times Staff Report

The Virginia Department of Education has accredited all Fauquier County Public Schools for the 2022-2023 school year. Eighteen schools received the highest accreditation rating, and Pearson Elementary School was

accredited with conditions because of students' low science test scores.

"I am very proud of our teachers, staff and especially our students," Superintendent David Jeck said. "These results show that we have made huge gains in terms of addressing learning loss," he said. "Our

teachers and staff really pulled off a miracle during the pandemic and continue to do miraculous things."

Virginia's accreditation standards measure performance on multiple school-quality indicators of academic achievement, achievement gaps and student engagement and outcomes:

Elementary and middle school indicators:

- Overall proficiency and growth in English reading/writing and math, including progress of English learners toward English-language

See ACCREDITATION, page 30

Fauquier school board directed to approve new policies on treatment of transgender students

POLICIES, from page 8

"The Virginia Department of Education's new model policy restores parental rights, protects the First Amendment rights of teachers and students, while also providing all students the right to attend school in an environment free from discrimination, harassment or bullying," Fight for Schools said in a statement.

Youngkin's new policies overturn guidance laid out by a Democrat-backed 2020 law that required school districts to uphold student privacy about their transgender status, use pronouns and names requested by students and allow students to use restrooms and locker rooms that aligned with their gender identity.

Youngkin has been critical of those policies, arguing parents should be informed about students' gender identity or sexual orientation.

The model policies developed as a result of the 2020 law got a mixed reception from school districts, many of which refused to formally adopt them. That included Fauquier schools, which instead adopted updates from the Virginia School Board Association.

Equal Educational Opportunities/ Nondiscrimination Policy 7-1.2

This is the Fauquier County Public Schools Nondiscrimination policy that school board member Stephanie Litter-Reber (Lee District) says will address many, if not all, of the directives from the Virginia Department of Education under Gov. Glenn Youngkin: [https://go.boarddocs.com/va/fcps/Board.nsf/files/C9AMT6591700/\\$file/7-1.2.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/va/fcps/Board.nsf/files/C9AMT6591700/$file/7-1.2.pdf)

School officials declined further comment on policies regarding trans students, but Equality Virginia characterized the VSBA updates as a set of very minor language changes to existing non-discrimination codes.

Trans and nonbinary students are at higher risk of depression and suicide compared to cisgender students, studies show. The Trevor Project, the world's largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ youth, says acceptance from peers and from adults is associated with significantly lower odds of attempting suicide.

'I come at it as a priest first'


Nationwide, new policies curtailing the rights of trans youth create a climate of fear among kids who may already be vulnerable, said the Rev. Weston Mathews of Grace Episcopal Church in The Plains. Mathews ministers to many trans and non-binary people and their families.

"I come at it as a priest, first," Mathews said. "The teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and the witness of our biblical tradition beginning in Genesis teaches Christians that human beings are created in the image and likeness of a living God," he said. That means all human beings. "A child is not a pawn to rile up the base or to scapegoat or be bullied by the state. They are to be loved and understood." Most Virginians know that, Mathews said.

And requiring schools to track children's private information regarding gender is intrusive, Mathews said. "We have seen in history how that doesn't go well. We shouldn't be in the business of registering vulnerable people."

Reach Colleen LaMay at clamay@fauquier.com

The Virginia Mercury contributed to this story.




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