Why teachers leave

By Stephen Faleski Staff Writer

Malaika Wainwright loved teaching at Smithfield High School, but when the city of Newport News offered her an administrative job in February with a significant pay raise the mother of three couldn't say no.

say no.

Isle of Wight County Schools'
35-step pay scale had placed Wainwright at a salary of just over \$50,000
based on her seven prior years
teaching in Suffolk, but she ended
up working a second job at Walmart
to make ends meet

to make ends meet.

She's one of 13 former Isle of Wight teachers to resign before the end of the 2022-23 school year, up from an average of seven midyear resignations for the previous four school years

school years.

Isle of Wight, which participates in an agreement with area school divisions not to hire from one another after June 30, was only able to find three replacements who could start midyear to fill the vacancies, according to Human Resources Director Laura Sullivan. The other 10 classrooms have, for months, been staffed by long-term substitutes or Isle of Wight teachers who took on

additional duties.

Despite the uptick in mid-year resignations, Isle of Wight was on track as of May to see less turnover by June 30 than it saw by the same

date last year.
From the start of August in 2021 through the end of June in 2022, Isle of Wight County Schools saw 77 vacancies, including seven midyear departures and another 70 end-of-year resignations. From June 1, 2022, through May 31, the school division had filled all but one of the

prior year's unfilled teaching jobs.
From Sept. 6 through May 31, 56
teachers had sent Sullivan notice
that they would not be returning
for the 2023-24 school year. The total
includes 11 retirements and the 13

mid-year resignations.
By the same date, Isle of Wight had hired 32 replacements, leaving 24 vacancies.

As of June 8, the number of vacancies had increased to 27, accounting for 6% of Isle of Wight's roughly 430 teaching positions.

According to the Virginia Department of Education's staffing and vacancy report, the statewide number of unfilled public school teaching jobs rose from 2,815 in 2021 to 3,574 in 2022, an increase of 758 vacancies or 26%.

The report is updated annually

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Teachers

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on Oct. 1, but doesn't capture midyear resignations or new hires after that date until the following school year. In 2021, 3.1% of the state's roughly 92,000 teaching positions were unfilled. By the same date in 2022, the percentage had risen to 3.9% out of roughly 92,500 teaching jobs.

Of the state's 132 public school divisions, four of the five that border Isle of Wight were among the top 20 highest vacancy rates. Southampton County, which borders Isle of Wight to the southwest, was the worst statewide, reporting a 20.8% vacancy rate as of Oct. 1. Suffolk, which borders Isle of Wight to the east, had 8.7% of its teaching positions unfilled as of the same date.

Isle of Wight itself managed to buck the statewide trend last fall. According to school division spokeswoman Lynn Briggs, Isle of Wight lured "quite a few" teachers last year from Southampton and Suffolk. Isle of Wight surveyed its new hires at the start of the 2022-23 school year, which, according to Briggs, showed Isle of Wight's "climate and culture" as the top reason for teachers joining the division. "Competitive pay" was also frequently mentioned but wasn't the top response.

The 77 vacancies at the end of the 2021-22 school year, Briggs speculates, may have been an anomaly created by teacher burnout from the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. By August 2022, Isle of Wight students' reading and math scores on the state-required Standards of Learning tests were still below pre-pandemic levels, and school administrators had seen an uptick in discipline incidents as students adjusted to being back full-time in a classroom setting.

"Education has always been a demanding profession, and since the pandemic, demands on educators have drastically increased, specifically related to the behavioral and academic needs of students," said Isle of Wight Superintendent Theo Cramer. "Those needs are presenting new and increased demands on educators at all levels. While we know climate and culture are vital to retention, IWCS will conduct a compensation study in the coming months to ensure all positions throughout the division are compensated competitively.'

It remains to be seen whether recruitment bonuses will be able to recover the 2022-23 school year's losses.

Isle of Wight has offered a \$1,000 referral bonus to any staff member who recruits a new classroom teacher, and \$4,000 sign-on bonuses to any teacher hired in June who remains an employee of the school division for the entire 2023-24 school year. Suffolk is offering \$2,000 sign-on bonuses for certain positions hired by June 30, but offers a higher starting salary than Isle of Wight for entry-level

"We all know we have a teacher shortage in Virginia and the reasons for it aren't a mystery to anyone who's been paying attention," said James Fedderman, president of the Virginia Education Association, a union representing more than 40,000 teachers and school support personnel.

'Our teachers are not only underpaid, but do their jobs under almost unbearably difficult working conditions. They don't get the respect they deserve, and they aren't given the resources they need to most effectively serve our students," Fedderman said. "Far too many of our teachers must work second or third jobs to pay their bills."

Malaika Wainwright

Wainwright joined Isle of Wight County Schools in 2022 for the shorter commute to her home in the county's northern end, and for the opportunity to teach at the same school her daughter attends.

Wainwright's 6-11 p.m. shift at Walmart, a roughly half-hour drive from Smithfield, would often extend another 15 to 30 minutes past closing time and keep her away from home until midnight.

She'd be out of bed by 5:30 the next morning to get herself and her children to school by 7 a.m. An after-school faculty meeting at Smithfield High could easily keep Wainwright there until 4:30 or 5 p.m.

Unless the school happened to be closed, "I had virtually no days off," Wainwright said.

The special education teacher used to supplement her income at Suffolk with stipends for teaching summer school or tutoring students who couldn't be in class for medical or disciplinary reasons, but said she found fewer opportunities to do the same at Isle of Wight. Then, her work at Walmart started cutting into the time she would otherwise spend at home planning lessons.

"Planning for instruction is an extensive and often largely unpaid part of a teacher's day," Wainwright said.

State law requires school divisions to provide middle and high school teachers with one "planning period" per day "unencumbered of any teaching or supervisory duties." But special education teachers, Wainwright said, are expected to find time between classes to write individualized education plans, or IEPs, and other reports on students assigned to them.

When she started teaching in Suffolk, she'd be assigned up to a dozen students per school year. By the time she left Smithfield High, whose 1,275 students account for nearly a quarter of Isle of Wight's divisionwide enrollment, her caseload was up to around 20.

"The responsibility to these students is in addition to teaching and classroom responsibilities, so it really is like two jobs in one," Wainwright said.

She'd applied for the Newport News government job last year while between school divisions, but didn't hear back until six months into the current school year with an offer conditioned on her starting immediately. She took it.

Even if the offer hadn't come through when it did, Wainwright said she would have left in 2024 once her daughter graduates, citing the polarization that has gripped Isle of Wight's School Board since November's elections.

Last year's School Board races ended with wins by self-described conservative candidates Jason Maresh and Mark Wooster, who'd each campaigned against "divisive" and "sexually explicit" materials in schools.

Together with Board Chairman John Collick, who'd campaigned on a similar platform with the endorsement of the county's Republican Party in 2021, the three in December began discussing plans to restrict student access to books and other materials deemed "inherently divisive" under Gov. Glenn Youngkin's 2022 executive order aimed at eliminating "Critical Race Theory," or the idea that American institutions perpetuate inequalities among

minorities. Following fierce opposition from students and teachers who condemned the School Board's move as "censorship," the board voted 3-2 in March to instead modify its "controversial issues" to include a ban on teaching students about "systemic racism.'

"There is no systemic racism or bigotry perpetuated by the United States or any governmental entity," the policy now explicitly asserts. Though it no longer includes the word "divisive," the March 9 change still drew opposition from teachers, students and the board's two Black members, Denise Tynes and Michael Cunningham.

While it was finances not politics – that led Wainwright to leave in February. the then-proposed policy change "did create in me an overall desire to leave," Wainwright said, contending board members who supported the policy had "turned a deaf ear to the concerns of not only teachers but also students."

"The supporters of these policies seem less concerned with students receiving a well-rounded education and more concerned with partisanship," Wainwright said.

Having to plan alternative lessons should a controversial topic come up and any parent object creates "so much more work" for already overworked teachers, Wainwright contends.

While Wainwright said she "for the most part" received her planning period. Chenoah Kent can't say the

Chenoah Kent

Kent, a former Smithfield Middle School science teacher, said she was routinely 'expected" to use her planning period to substitute for other classes with vacancies.

School administrators, she said, would publish a list of classes without a teacher at the start of each school day and would ask her and other teachers to decide among themselves who would cover which vacancies.

Sullivan confirmed it has been the division's practice to ask teachers to use their planning periods to cover for vacancies when a substitute can't be found, and to pay them a stipend for the extra time. A single long-term vacancy with no substitute under the block

25%

cost of living.

The 2020 National Defense Authorization Act had eliminated the \$1.480-permonth "optional annuity for dependent children" her family had been receiving. Effective Jan. 1 of this year, the money reverted to the surviving spouse of Navy Chief Petty Officer Charles Findley, who had divorced Kent and remarried at the time of his 2017 line-of-duty

To make up for the lost income, Kent sold her home in November and moved more than 200 miles west to Henry County where she was able to find an elementary school teaching job that allowed her to start midvear.

"I almost didn't go back to teaching," Kent said, citing several factors, including run-ins with school administrators over teaching controversial issues.

When Kent planned to teach her seventh-graders how Black and white people were the same genetically, save for the melanin that determines differences in skin, hair and eye color, she said higher-ups shut her down.

She'd begun planning an entire unit of lessons on melanin after a student asked her in all seriousness to explain how mixed-race babies were possible. According to state data, minorities and mixed-race students account for more than 40% of the school's enrollment. Kent says she was told she "can't bring politics into the classroom.

Administrators, she said, nixed another of her lessons, this one on DNA editing technology known as CRISPR, over the "designer baby' controversy that emerged in 2015 when, according to reporting by National Public Radio, a Chinese scientist used gene editing to create the world's first genetically modified twin girls.

ficult when she couldn't see the tests prior to her students taking them.

"The test would come and I would realize I emphasized the wrong thing," Wohlgamuth said.

Wohlgamuth and Kent both expressed frustration with having to pay for lab supplies themselves and with their students' eyes being constantly fixated on their cellphones.

"Back when I went to school, if my cellphone was spotted it went to the principal's (office) and could only be returned when a parent got it, but these days you cannot touch a child's phone," Wohlgamuth said.

Cellphones have become "a nightmare," Kent agreed. If one teacher allows it, the students expect it of all their teachers, Kent said.

School Board members react to departures

vided with Isle of Wight's midyear and end-of-year resignation totals as of May 31, said he was "unaware" of any former teacher having left specifically due to the controversial issues policy change, or the ban on "sexually explicit" materials in elementary and middle schools the board had approved in February.

Of the five former teachers the Times interviewed, two of whom insisted on anonymity, only one cited the policy changes as a primary

these policies."

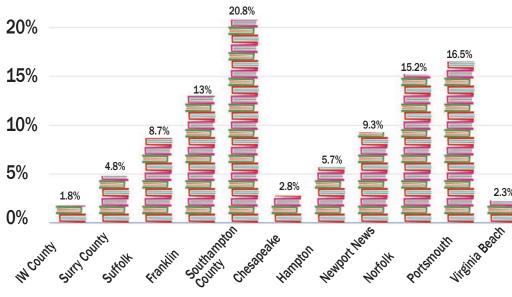
Collick, after being pro-

reason for resigning.

"From the beginning I have said we wouldn't lose teachers as a result, and I believe I was fairly accurate," Collick said, adding that "more than a handful of teachers have personally told me that, as both parents and teachers, they're grateful for

"I have been thanked

Percent of teacher jobs unfilled as of Oct. 1, 2022



schedule Isle of Wight uses in its secondary schools creates the need for six teachers to fill in throughout the year, Sullivan said.

"That's not a strategy that we want to use, it's just what we do when we can't fill a vacancy," Sullivan said.

During the first semester of the 2022-23 school year, five teachers covered an additional class block to fill in for vacancies. During the second semester, four teachers covered an extra block due to vacancies, and another teacher picked up an additional block to cover English as a second language, or ESL, services, Sullivan said.

Schools are sometimes able to dissolve a class without a teacher and reassign students, Sullivan said, but that increases class sizes for everybody else.

According to Briggs, asking teachers to use their planning period to cover a vacancy typically occurs at the high school level. At the elementary level, where students don't change classes, it's not an option.

When Kent received notice last fall that her two children would no longer qualify for military survivor benefit payments, it was the final straw that pushed her to begin looking for a new job in an area with a lower Paige Wohlgamuth Paige Wohlgamuth never

imagined she would become an educator, but was recruited by Isle of Wight County Schools in 2021 as a Smithfield High School science teacher for her background in wildlife biology. She left her classroom this January, citing frustration with an increasing workload.

"Classes are often 30-plus students and that is a lot for just one person to watch over," Wohlgamuth said.

Virginia sets a maximum of 29 kindergarteners per teacher, 30 students per teacher in grades 1-3 and 35 for grades 4-6. There's no upper limit for middle and high school classes provided the school maintains a 21-to-1 schoolwide ratio of students to teachers. Only English classes have a fixed maximum of 24 students per teacher in grades 6-12.

While the school provides its teachers with a curriculum, Wohlgamuth said teaching entails researching each topic, creating lessons and activities, and staying in frequent contact with each student's parents.

"Especially for new teachers with no experience, there needs to be more training," Wohlgamuth said.

Teaching to Virginia's tests, she said, was also difmore in the past two weeks for standing up for parents and teachers, than I have been vilified in the last six

months," Collick said. The controversial issues policy, Collick asserted, does not prohibit teachers from teaching anything controversial. Rather it "recognizes that controversial topics are vital to education," Collick said. "Teachers must maintain safe and respectful environments, using appropriate curriculum, based on students' knowledge and maturity levels, without bringing their personal biases or ideology into the classroom."

Maresh, who'd written the changes to the controversial issues policy, attributes Isle of Wight's midyear and end-of-year departures to statewide and nationwide trends rather than the policy change.

"Teacher attrition is, and has been, a growing trend across the country, not just Isle of Wight," Maresh said. 'We are very fortunate to have great teachers in our schools, and the IWCS staff works hard to retain those teachers and hire new [great] teachers as vacancies become available," Maresh said.

Smithfield High School junior Jasmine Johnson, at the School Board's June 8 meeting, presented results from her anonymous survey of 117 teachers divisionwide, two-thirds of whom indicated they planned to return to Isle of Wight next school year, and more than half of whom said the March 9 policy change had no impact on their decision to stay or go. Johnson, however, contended the policy had driven three history teachers at her school to resign.

Maresh, reacting to Johnson's presentation, asserted the policy change "in no way restricts the teaching of history" but contended "parents or guardians have the sole responsibility for guiding their children's views on controversial topics."

"I will fight for that until the end of my time on this board," Maresh said.

"I feel there is still a lot of misunderstanding when it comes to policy changes," Wooster told the Times. "One of the most important duties the teachers, staff and school board have is to protect the students in our school system from both external as well as internal threats."

Wooster said he began working in December with Isle of Wight's central office staff to revise the division's "instructional materials" policy, "to prevent students from being exposed to sexually explicit content that would be age inappropriate."

The "sexually explicit" policy change, which the board voted 3-2 to adopt in February with "nay" votes by Tynes and Cunningham, prevents student access to explicit content in elementary and middle schools and requires 30-day parental notification ahead of using any such material in a high school class.

Prior to the vote, the policy included only state-mandated language giving parents of students in all grade levels notice and the ability to opt their children out of

> reading the material. As of June 19, the only book listed as "sexually explicit" on Isle of Wight County Schools' website in accordance with the policy was George Orwell's dvstopian novel "1984," which is taught in advanced-placement and dual-enrollment high school English and journalism courses.

"I will state an individual's personal political viewpoints and beliefs should not be brought into the classroom, however the history and process of politics should be freely taught," Wooster said.

Cunningham declined to comment for this story. Tynes did not respond to the Times' requests for comments.

"Teacher salary does play a big role in retention," Wooster said, also asserting his view that under state law, teachers "should not be assigned other tasks or duties during their required planning periods."

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, average salaries for Hampton Roads area secondary school teachers were roughly \$11,000 lower than those of teachers in the Richmond metro area as of May 2022, though Hampton Roads' elementary school teachers earned more on average than their Richmond counterparts. Virginia K-12 teachers, however, earn a higher statewide average salary than their counterparts in North Carolina.

Despite the planning period issue and Isle of Wight having to compete with larger Hampton Roads school divisions with more money to pay their teachers, Wooster contends teaching in Isle of Wight still has its appeals. He attributes Isle of Wight's lower attrition rates than its neighbors to the county's "rural setting and lower number of students" compared to neighboring localities.

IWCS projects 1,000-plus new pupils

By Stephen Faleski Staff Writer

A study projects more than 1,000 new students will enter Isle of Wight County's school division upon the buildout of 13 housing developments, putting four of its nine schools over capacity.

Smithfield Middle School, which opened in 2005, is already at 95% of its 634-student capacity according to local enrollment data. Its 176-student share of the influx from more than 3,000

Students

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planned new houses and apartment units would push the school past its breaking point to 123%, according to a report by Ohio-based Cooperative

Strategies.

Carrollton Elementary, a circa-1993 school with capacity for 674 students, is also already feeling the squeeze with 563 enrolled as of Oct. 31 and another 158 expected from new housing, as is Westside Elementary.

Westside, a 1960s-era building and the most populous of the county's five elementary schools, is currently at 87% of its 849-student capacity and is projected to be at 110% when its 188-student share of the influx arrives.

Smithfield High School, which opened its doors in 1980, already has 1,305, or 84%, of its 1,560-student capacity. It's projected to see an additional 339 from new housing, pushing it to 105%.

The report lists three proposed developments and another 10, all within the county's northern end where the four schools are located, that have already received rezoning approval. Some, such as the 179-home, 2005-approved St. Luke's Village subdivision slated for 128 acres off Brewers Neck Boulevard near St. Luke's Church, were rezoned decades ago but still haven't broken ground. Others, like the 776-home Benns Grant development off Benns Church Boulevard are well underway, with roughly 240 units largely consisting of an apartment phase yet to be occupied as of this spring when Cooperative Strategies completed its study. Mallory Pointe, the larg-

est of the listed subdivisions, will add 812 homes at the 500-acre former Mallory Scott Farm off Battery Park Road. It broke ground this summer. Cooperative Strategies projects Mallory Pointe alone will bring 277 additional students, accounting for just over one-fourth of the countywide influx. Isle of Wight County

Schools was already projecting capacity issues at Smithfield Middle and Westside during Mallory Pointe's 2021 rezoning process, but the project's developer, Napolitano Homes, contended the School Board had plans in the works to replace Westside with a new middle school that would relieve overcrowding at both schools. Smithfield's Town Council approved the rezoning in a contentious 5-2 vote that same year. The division's plans for Westside, estimated in early 2022 to cost upwards

of \$66 million, are now on hold for lack of funding. School Board Vice Chairman Jason Maresh, at the board's Nov. 8 meeting, called upon town and

county officials to "start

saying no" to developers

"unless we know for a fact that we're going to grow facilities."

the projections? Isle of Wight County Schools previously re-

How certain are

tained Cooperative Strategies in 2018, at which time the consulting firm estimated nearly 900 students would enter the school system within the next 13 to pass.

years. Division officials estimated the same year that roughly one-third would arrive by 2022 - a projection that didn't come Divisionwide enrollment, which had fluctuated between 5,500 and 5,600 students in 2019 and prior, dropped to just un-

der 5,300 students at the

start of the 2020-21 school

year when Isle of Wight

became one of the first

Hampton Roads divisions

ing the nearly six-month state-mandated closure aimed at slowing the early spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. By the start of the 2021-22 school year, enrollment had bounced back to 5,487 students, but declined again to 5,481 in 2022 and 5,438 as of this September, according to enrollment data school officials shared in October. According to divi-

to reopen its schools follow-

sion spokeswoman Lynn Briggs, the declines are likely tied to an uptick in the number of parents choosing to homeschool their children. According to the division's enrollment data, there were 231 homeschooled students in Isle of Wight during the 2019-20 school year. That number nearly doubled to 404 by 2020-21. It fell to 379 in 2021-22, but rose again to 386 last school year. As of the end of this September, the number of homeschoolers had surged to 471.

"You have to look longrange at the growth that's happening; you just can't look five years and say it's fairly flat," Briggs told the School Board at its Nov. 8 meeting. Briggs said that when

she taught at Smithfield High in 1993, the school had roughly 800 students enrolled. In the 30 years since, it's seen a 63% population increase. Several of the develop-

ments Cooperative Strategies lists in its report are ones the county has deemed "dormant." In addition to the stalled St. Luke's Village, another subdivision that has yet

to break ground but could at any time is a 340-home "Timber Preserve" development slated for land near the Jones Creek Boat Ramp in Carrollton. According to The Smithfield Times archives, Isle of Wight County's Board of Supervisors approved Timber Preserve in 1986. Also dormant is "The

Park at Battery," a 150home development proposed for 18 acres off Battery Park Road behind Smithfield's Royal Farms gas station. The Town Council approved the subdivision in 2019 when Virginia Beach-based developer John Mamoudis proposed a series of condominium buildings. Mamoudis returned to the town's Planning Commission in 2022 with a proposal to swap the condos for 150 townhouses, which the commissioners frowned upon but took no formal vote to recommend approval or denial of the amendment. Cooperative Strategies' enrollment projections for The Grange at 10Main,

a mixed-use community slated for the western edge of Smithfield's historic district at Route 10 and Main Street, are based on a rezoning application developer Joseph Luter IV filed last December for 304 residences. Luter submitted revised plans in October that scrapped the fourth floor of controversial four-story apartment buildings and reduced the overall number of residences to 267.

It's also possible that Cooperative Strategies' latest projections reflect an underestimation. Not included in its report, which was completed this spring, is a 262-home subdivision Williamsburg-based Greenwood Homes proposed on Aug. 31 to build at the site of a reclaimed sand mining operation behind the Smithfield Tractor Supply. Plans for "The Promontory," as it's been dubbed, are currently under review by town staff and haven't yet gone before Smithfield's

Planning Commission or Town Council for a public hearing or vote.

According to Briggs,

county officials recently

alerted the division that

St. Luke's is again showing

signs of life, with a new proposal calling for up to 315 houses rather than the originally-approved 179. The updated count also was not included in Cooperative Strategies' report. The county did not immediately respond to The Smithfield Times' request for confirmation and details.

How can schools absorb the influx?

The School Board, in January, rezoned 75 Carrollton students to the newly built Hardy Elementary, which is designed to house roughly 900 students in preschool through fourth grade. The move reduced Carrollton from being at 93% capacity to 83%. It also reassigned to Hardy any prospective students from Mallory Pointe, the Grange and 225 unrestricted townhouses that would be built as a phase of the largely age-restricted, 615-home "Sweetgrass" development proposed behind the Sherwin Williams store just outside Smithfield.

Cooperative Strategies has proposed four options for again changing the grade levels housed within each school, and the attendance boundaries that determine which school children from the new and existing developments would attend. The first would involve

housing preschool through sixth grade in each of the five elementary schools. This would involve additions, and possibly replacing Westside with a larger school, or constructing a sixth elementary school somewhere in the county's northern end. The five or six elementary schools would be able to absorb the projected influx from the listed housing developments but just barely, reaching a collective 97% capacity.

The second option calls

for Carrollton, Carrsville,

Windsor and the newly built Hardy elementary schools housing preschool through fifth grade. Factoring in the projected influx, this would still leave them at a collective 110% of capacity, and would necessitate the construction of a new elementary school Westside would join Georgie D. Tyler and Smithfield middle schools in housing grades 6-8. The third option calls for Carrollton, Carrsville

and Hardy to house preschool through third grade, which would put the three right at their collective maximum capacities upon buildout, and necessitate the building of another elementary school. Windsor Elementary and Westside would each become grades 4-6 intermediate schools under this plan, and would reach 93% of their collective capacity with the expected influx from developments. The fourth option is the closest to what the School Board had proposed in

2021 for Westside. Under this option, Carrollton, Carrsville Elementary and the newly built Hardy Elementary would each house preschool through fourth grade. The move would collectively put the three schools at 106% of capacity under current enrollment. and 125% with the influx of new housing. Constructing a new elementary school would be required.

The fourth option calls for Windsor Elementary and Westside to each become grades 5-7 intermediate schools. The town of Windsor's Georgie D. Tyler Middle School and Smithfield Middle School would each become grades 8-9 junior high schools that, with the projected influx,

would become filled to over 90% of capacity. Smithfield High and Windsor High

would house grades 10-12.

License revoked for Teacher of the Year

By Stephen Faleski Staff writer

A former Smithfield High School Teacher of the Year has lost his teaching license but won't face criminal charges for an alleged sexual relationship with a former student.

Andrew Henson, who was honored by Isle of Wight County Schools as Smithfield High's top educator for the 2021-22 school vear, resigned on Feb. 18, 2022. eight days after one of his former students told school administrators of the alleged affair.

A record of the Virginia

Board of Education's March 22, 2023, licensure hearing, which a source obtained via Virginia's Freedom of Information Act and provided to The Smithfield Times, states that the former student, who's now in college, gave the board screenshots, pictures and messages from her time as



Henson

corroborate the "existence and nature" of the relationship.

A partially

an SHS junior

during the 2019-

20 school year to

A partially redacted inci-

dent report from the Isle of Wight County Sheriff's Office states the relationship may have begun as early as the student's freshman and sophomore years at SHS, where Henson taught world history and sociology.

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According to the same report, the Sheriff's Office's investigation concluded that "no felonious conduct" had occurred. Deputies' investigation into "potential misdemeanor violations" was "halted at the direction of the Commonwealth's Attorney's Office" due to the statute of limitations having expired, the report states.

Virginia limits prosecution of most misdemeanors to within one year of an alleged offense. For misdemeanor sexual abuse or consensual intercourse with someone underage, the statute is one year after the victim turns 18, or five years if the alleged offender is an adult more than three years older than the victim. This particular case "did not otherwise meet any of the other criteria with extended expiration dates," the Sheriff's Office report states. The most recent offense, the report states, allegedly occurred during the 2019-20 school year but wasn't reported until February 2022.

Isle of Wight County Commonwealth's Attorney Georgette Phillips told the Times by email on July 4 that she was "not aware" of any ongoing criminal investigation of Henson.

Henson did not respond to the Times' request for comments. According to his 2021-22 teacher of the year biography, Henson had been teaching for nine years as of 2021, seven with Isle of Wight County Schools. In addition to teaching at Smithfield High, he also coached the school's debate team.

The Times asked, but did not receive an answer

from Isle of Wight County Schools, about whether any parents or former students of Henson were notified after Henson's teaching license was revoked in March.

"The school division does not comment on specific personnel or student matters," said Isle of Wight County Schools spokeswoman Lynn Briggs.

According to the Board of Education record, Isle of Wight County Schools conducted its own investigation into Henson and provided a summary to the School Board by memorandum on April 21, 2022. Based on that memo, former Superintendent Jim Thornton filed a petition on May 16, 2022, seeking the revocation of Henson's teaching license.

Under state law, a petition must be sent by certified mail to the teacher, and the School Board must hold a hearing within 90 days of that notice.

Henson, according to the Board of Education record, indicated in correspondence with Isle of Wight County Schools that he "disputed the allegations" of Thornton's petition but offered to voluntarily cancel his license. State law, however, allows voluntary cancellation only when the license-holder does not contest the allegations of a petition.

According to meeting minutes, the School Board conducted a closed-session hearing on the petition on Aug. 11, 2022, by which time Thornton had retired and the school division was operating under the temporary leadership of acting Superintendent Chris Coleman. Eleven

days later, Superintendent Theo Cramer would assume his duties as the division's current leader. According to the Board of Education record, the Aug. 11 meeting resulted in the School Board accepting Thornton's petition and forwarding the matter to the state.

Five months later, a state investigative panel consisting of administrators from Norfolk, Charlottesville, Fairfax County and Prince William County public schools voted unanimously on Jan. 27 to recommend the Board of Education revoke Henson's license. Henson, according to the Board of Education record, was not present at this hearing.

According to Virginia Department of Education records, Isle of Wight County Schools has seen just two of its teachers lose or be denied a Virginia teaching license since 2000.

The second incident, which occurred on April 23, 2019, involved Sebastian Sebastian, a music teacher who'd joined Carrsville Elementary's staff in September 2018.

According to the Board of Education's record of Sebastian's hearing, the Department of Education received notice in October 2018 that Sebastian, formerly of Gwinnett County Public Schools in Georgia, had lost his Georgia teaching license after a law enforcement task force found child pornography on Sebastian's home computer, though he denied wrongdoing and allegedly told police customers of his private music lessons would sometimes use the computer.