

THE MAGAZINE OF THE
VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE

Words of wisdom

Our essay contest
winners have
real solutions
for local issues

Inside:

Let's build better
school facilities

How to pay for school
construction

Get to Know: VML's
education Community
Business Members



Statewide Winner

Charlotte Lieu



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ABOUT THE COVER

It's the May issue! So...May we present the statewide winner of this year's VML "If I Were Mayor" essay contest: Charlotte Lieu of Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School in Falls Church. Astute readers may remember that Charlotte's brother Preston graced the cover of *VTC* in May of 2020 for his winning entry. But while she certainly comes from a talented family, Charlotte's achievements – and her great ideas – are all her own! Learn more inside.

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**VML did not receive any entries from Region 7 this year.*

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Getting together to connect the Commonwealth

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS, many of our staff have traveled around the state to present “If I Were Mayor” essay contest awards to the deserving 7th graders from each region. I have to tell you it is incredibly gratifying to watch these kids get their awards. It’s always great when the teachers can attend as well, and it shows how hard teachers work and care for their students. In many cases, the winners read their essays in front of the council and it’s probably one of the few times that people applaud after getting told how to do their work better!

So it was, last week, that I was lucky enough to attend the Saltville Town Council meeting to present the award to the Region 1 essay contest winner. As I was planning my trip, I decided to make a side trip to visit Pennington Gap. During the portion of my drive that kept me on I-81 I listened to the Apple country music stream and I caught a great interview with Morgan Dealie Wade – an up-and-coming singer/songwriter from Floyd. In one of those moments of serendipity that happens on road trips, Morgan began talking about her hometown just as I passed the exit for Floyd! While she didn’t mention Floyd Fest (happening July 27-31 this year), she did talk about the many, formative Friday nights she spent in Floyd and the influence that they had on her music. Of course, I then had to listen to her album *Reckless*. It’s great. Morgan Dealie Wade was making my drive so much easier until...I left I-81 and there was no more streaming service!

I’ll admit that my little disappointment was just that: a little disappointment. But there are so many ways that a spotty signal or complete lack of access to broadband isn’t a little thing at all. Healthcare, education, work, and so many other things are increasingly dependent on having a reliable broadband signal. This is why VML, VACo, and the Broadband Association of Virginia are working together to fix this issue in the Commonwealth. As many of you know, we recently hosted a two-day “Broadband Together” conference to highlight how important it is that localities, industry, and home builders work together to solve connectivity issues. One of the most interesting sessions dealt with telehealth and I was reminded that when I was in Pennington Gap, I happened to meet a therapist who said that

on a good day her closest client is a two-hour drive! Thanks to her and her colleagues for their willingness to go to such lengths (literally) to help people.

Other topics included connectivity, affordability, equity, telehealth and even how broadband affects the cost of real estate. Albemarle County gave a great presentation on their VATI 2021 project. Dr. Tamarah Holmes from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) announced that the guidelines for the Virginia Telecommunication Initiatives (VATI) will be published next week – so please be on the lookout as there is a lot of money in this grant program.

Dr. Holmes also spoke about the new Line Extension Assistance Program (LECAP) which is for the subset of Virginians for whom broadband connections are not attainable because their home exceeds an internet service provider’s standard connection drop length from a roadway or easement containing telecommunications infrastructure. The cost incurred by homeowners to extend broadband infrastructure to these locations, referred to as “special construction costs,” range from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars, depending on the distance and cost to connect the location. There is a map on the program’s website – www.dhcd.virginia.gov/lecap – that outlines the maximum income household thresholds by zip code to determine if you are eligible for assistance.

As a conclusion to the event, the Broadband Advisory Council met and heard from Virginia Tech as they introduced the new broadband mapping tool: Commonwealth Connection (www.commonwealth-connection.com). This is a very cool interactive map that will help localities determine where there is connectivity and what is lacking. Please share this with your councils and citizens!

All told, “Broadband Together” was a great networking opportunity for local government officials and broadband providers to meet and discuss how to work together to solve these issues in the Commonwealth. Thanks to everyone who attended “Broadband Together” and thanks to the Broadband Advisory Council for supporting this successful event. Thanks also for the warm welcome I received in Pennington Gap, Saltville, and the City of Chesapeake during my recent travels.



Aronhalt is Ashland's new chief of police



- Aronhalt -

On April 22nd, the Town of Ashland was pleased to welcome **Troy Aronhalt** as the next chief of police for the Ashland Police Department. Aronhalt, who previously served as a major, took over as chief following the retirement of Chief Goodman.

"Serving under Chief Goodman and working within this community for the last 24 years means a great deal to me personally and professionally," Major Aronhalt said in a press release. "I am honored to serve as Ashland's next chief of police and look forward to continuing and expanding our focus on community-oriented policing and upholding the highest levels of professionalism at all times."

Chief Aronhalt joined the Ashland Police Department on January 2, 1998, as a patrol officer and proceeded to rise through the ranks, achieving the rank of major and being named deputy chief in 2021. Over the course of his more than two-decade tenure with the agency, Chief Aronhalt supervised the Patrol, Special Operations, and Investigations divisions, among other duties, and received numerous awards and commendations, including Excellent Police Duty, the Harry V. Smeeman Leadership Award, and Officer of the Year in 2001 and 2006.

Chief Aronhalt holds a bachelor of sci-

ence in Criminal Justice from Virginia Commonwealth University, a graduate certificate in Administration from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Academy, Professional Executive Leadership School, and is currently enrolled in the leadership program at the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at the University of Virginia.

Manassas selects Kirven as new social services director



- Kirven -

Effective June 6, 2022, **Nicole L. Kirven**, LPC will be the director of the City of Manassas' Social Services Department. Kirven comes to the city with more than 20 years of clinical experience in understanding the intricacies of abuse, poverty, and strategic planning to ensure community success.

Kirven's professional history includes work as the assistant director of Stafford County Department of Social Services (DSS) with focus on the Self Sufficiency and Benefit Programs. Prior to her tenure with Stafford County, Kirven served as program manager for the Marine and Family Behavioral Health Branch of the United States Marine Corps Headquarters where she drafted policy establishing the framework for community coalitions and providing funding for prevention services to 17 installations (CONUS/OCONUS). She is a licensed professional counselor and has an

extensive background of direct services, case management, and policy review for adults, families, and child populations inclusive of serving the City of Manassas. Additionally, Kirven has experience with the elderly and with those who suffer physical, and intellectual disabilities through managing programs within the Northern Virginia area, including Prince William and Fairfax Counties.

Kirven successfully completed the Virginia Department of Social Services Director Mentorship Program and is an active member of the Virginia League of Social Services Executives (VLSSE). She has received certifications for Leading, Educating, and Developing (LEAD) programs through the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, Excellence in Leadership and Foundations of Executive Leadership through VLSSE.

Kirven holds a bachelor of science degree in Psychology, and a bachelor of arts degree in Sociology, both from Wofford College. She has a master's of arts in Counseling from Hampton University.

Hopewell hires Ruppert as new fire chief



- Ruppert -

On April 25th, the City of Hopewell welcomed **Benjamin M. Ruppert** as the city's permanent fire chief. In this role, Chief Ruppert will be responsible for the day-to-day operations of Hopewell's two fire stations and Hopewell Fire and Rescue personnel.

Chief Ruppert brings more than twenty-three years of knowledge and experience in multiple areas including emergency management and EMS and has most recently served as Interim Fire Chief in Hopewell since November 2021.

"Chief Ruppert brings more than twenty-three years of knowledge and experience in multiple areas including emergency management and EMS and has most recently served as Interim Fire Chief in Hopewell since November 2021."

"Chief Ruppert is an outstanding choice as fire chief for the City of Hopewell," said Hopewell City Manager, March Altman in a press release. "Chief Ruppert not only possesses the education, real-world experience, and leadership skills, but he also has a true passion for our Hopewell Community."

Chief Ruppert has previously served as chair of the Emergency Management Alliance of Central Virginia and is currently completing his 5th term on the board of the Virginia Emergency Management Association. He has worked in the City of Hopewell in many capacities including coordinator of the Hopewell Local Emergency Planning

Hampton History Museum names courtyard for former mayor and wife

IN MARCH, THE HAMPTON History Museum honored two of its founders by naming the museum's garden courtyard for former Mayor **Jimmy Eason** and his wife, Midge, who helped raise funds to build the museum, which opened in 2003.

The founding of the museum was a public-private partnership, with the mayor championing the project for the city and Midge Eason among the founding members of the non-profit Hampton History Museum Association.

As mayor, Eason's vision included not just the Hampton History Museum, but also the Hampton Roads Center business parks, reclaiming the downtown waterfront, and improving the Coliseum area. Mayor Eason not only had vision, observed Former City Manager Bob O'Neill, but he ensured "the connection of the vision and execution."

Mayor Donnie Tuck thanked Jimmy Eason for the tremendous role he has played "in respect to the very fabric of this community."



PEOPLE

Committee (LEPC) since 2006 and as lead coordinator for the City of Hopewell's COVID-19 Emergency Response team.

Chief Ruppert is a certified instructor for FEMA in the National Emergency Management Basic Academy and for the Virginia Department of Fire Programs and Virginia Department of Emergency Management.

Roanoke County names Sefcik as assistant to the county administrator



On April 25th, Roanoke County Administrator Richard L. Caywood, P.E. was pleased to announce the appointment of **Madeline Sefcik** as assistant to the county administrator.

- Sefcik -

In her role, Sefcik will assist county administration with constituent concerns, strategic planning, policy issues, and operational initiatives. Most recently, Sefcik served as clerk to the Franklin County Board of Supervisors and manager of public affairs since 2018. Prior to that, Sefcik served nearly two years as deputy clerk to the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors & County Attorney Paralegal.

Sefcik holds a master's of Business Administration from Bowling Green University and a bachelor's of Business Administration from Roanoke College. She also holds a graduate certificate in Local Government Management from Virginia Tech and is a certified municipal clerk through the International Municipal Clerks Association.

Sefcik was named in the Roanoke Valley's "40 Under 40" Class of 2022. She is also a 2019 graduate of Leadership Roanoke Valley.

Farmville hires Moore as director of finance



The Town of Farmville has hired **Julie A. Moore** as its new director of finance. Moore, who began in her new role on April 25, will oversee the areas of finance, procurement, and utility billing. With 20

- Moore -

years of accounting and auditing experience, Moore has audited various size towns, cities, and counties, public housing authorities, electric cooperatives, manufacturers, merger and acquisitions, and employee benefit plans. She has worked at three accounting

and auditing firms with the most recent being Brown, Edwards, and Company, L.L.P. With these companies, Moore served as an in-charge associate and manager responsible for overseeing multiple engagements, supervising and mentoring staff, directing the planning process through the successful completion of each engagement, communicating with clients, and preparing and reviewing annual financial reporting packages.

Moore holds an associate degree in Accounting from Danville Community College and a bachelor's degree in Business Adminis-

Movers and shakers

Do you know someone who's on the move? Send your announcements about new hires in local government, promotions, retirements, awards and honors to Rob Bullington at rbullington@vml.org.

tration from Averett University. She is a Certified Public Accountant and Certified Fraud Examiner. Moore most recently completed testing and is awaiting confirmation from the board of the Association of Governmental Accountants for the Certified Governmental Financial Manager designation.



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Virginia Beach’s Ingram receives LGA award



- Ingram -
Roderick R. “Rod” Ingram, deputy city attorney for Virginia Beach.

During its spring conference in April, the Local Government Attorneys of Virginia, Inc. (LGA), awarded the A. Robert Cherin Award for Outstanding Deputy or Assistant Local Government Attorney to

The Cherin Award recognizes a deputy or assistant local government attorney for exemplary public service and unwavering commitment to the highest ethical and professional principles. As cited in the press release, “Mr. Ingram has spent his entire legal career in public service, beginning his local government journey with a summer clerkship in the Virginia Beach City Attorney’s Office and, after judicial clerkships, returning to serve the citizens of Virginia Beach faithfully for almost 25 years. He is regarded statewide as an expert on the Virginia Free-

dom of Information Act and the Conflict of Interests Act. He has served as Chair of the Board of Governors of the Virginia State Bar Local Government Section and as President of LGA.”

Chochran will be Abingdon’s new town manager

On June 13th, **Michael “Mike” Cochran** will be the new town manager of Abingdon.



- Cochran -

The previous manager Earl Mathers is acting as a consultant during a transition period ending June 15.

Cochran comes to Abingdon from Hanahan, SC, a community of 25,000 in the Charleston metro area, where he is currently employed as the city manager.

Prior to his appointment as the Hanahan city manager in 2018, Cochran had a career in law enforcement, with leadership positions as assistant chief of police in Lauderhill, FL, as chief of police in Hanahan and as chief deputy sheriff in Berkeley County, SC.

“I am honored to have this opportunity to be of service to the Town of Abingdon,” Cochran said in a news release. “From all that I have learned, Abingdon is really something special; it is a community with the great quality of life that I and my family are looking for. I am thrilled to be coming back to the hills to continue my career in public service. I appreciate the confidence that the council has shown in me and look forward to engaging with the community and working for the citizens of Abingdon.”

Cochran received a bachelor’s degree from Western Carolina University and a master’s degree in Public Administration from Florida Gulf Coast University. He also holds a doctor of education degree from Barry University and a graduate certificate from the University of Virginia School of Continuing and Professional Studies.

Gate City Town Manager Jones receives ICMA designation

Greg Jones, town manager of the Town of Gate City, recently earned the Credentialed Manager designation from ICMA, the International City/County Management Association. Jones is one of over 1,300 local government management professionals currently credentialed through the ICMA Voluntary Credentialing Program.

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sional local government through leadership, management, innovation, and ethics and by increasing the proficiency of appointed chief administrative officers, assistant administrators and other employees who serve local governments and regional entities around the world. The organization's 13,000 members in 27 countries also include educators, students, and other local government employees.

To receive the prestigious ICMA credential, a member must have significant experience as a senior management executive in local government; have earned a degree, preferably in public administration or a related field and demonstrated a commitment to high standards of integrity and to lifelong learning and professional development.

"The Town of Gate City is not only proud of Greg's most recent achievement but realize how fortunate we are to have someone of his qualifications and dedication as town manager," stated Gate City Mayor Bob Richards in a press release. "Since I have been mayor and have worked with Greg, I have known him to be one to not only con-

tinually improve his skills but also keeps current with information that helps him achieve the best outcomes for our community. It is my understanding there are only two other town managers in Southwest Virginia who achieved this status. We congratulate Greg on this prestigious designation."

Portsmouth has appointed Graham-Williams as city attorney.



- Graham-Williams -

On June 13, **Lavonda Graham-Williams** will begin as Portsmouth's new city attorney. She was appointed with a unanimous council vote following the April 26 Portsmouth City Council meeting.

Graham-Williams began her law career as a litigation associate with Huff, Poole and Mahoney, PC. in the Tidewater area. After returning to the Washington D.C. area, she

served as a hearing officer for the D.C. DMV adjudicating traffic and licensure offenses followed by work as a criminal defense attorney. Graham-Williams subsequently started her own to focus on those with special needs. Over the years, the firm hired, trained, and supported over a dozen attorneys who were mostly women and people of color. It also proudly employed individuals with special needs. This work allowed her firm to continue to share its specialized knowledge with others seeking direction and support in these areas of expertise. Thereafter, her career focused on criminal justice reform which led her to join forces with a Commonwealth Attorney in this area.

Graham-Williams holds a Juris Doctorate from William & Mary Law School and a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice/English from George Washington University. She is a member of the Northern Virginia Black Attorneys Association and is a board member of the ACLU of Virginia.



The VML Voice is the official podcast of the Virginia Municipal League. Each episode explores a different locality or issue but the focus is always on Virginia and the local governments that make the Commonwealth work for everyone.

Contact Rob Bullington, rbullington@vml.org to suggest topics, ask questions, or inquire about sponsorship opportunities.

Listen to our newest episode at www.vml.org.

City of Newport News celebrates grand opening of Huntington Village

ON APRIL 5, NEWPORT NEWS Mayor McKinley Price; Virginia Housing CEO, Susan Dewey; Virginia DHCD Sr. Deputy Director of Community Development and Housing, Sandra Powell; Newport News Redevelopment and Housing Authority Executive Director, Karen Wilds, and representatives from real estate developer Dakota Partners celebrated the official grand opening

of Huntington Village. This new multi-family community supports the city's important revitalization and offers much needed affordable housing for the growing population. Interest from the community has been high, evidenced by the fact that the entire development is fully leased.

"This new and affordable housing is a place where individuals and families not just live but thrive. A site where dreams are made and then realized and where families can come together to renew and recharge...these 96 multi-unit apartments are a welcome and much needed addition to our city," remarked Newport News Mayor, McKinley Price in a press release.

Comprised of four 3-story garden-style buildings, Huntington Village features 96 spacious, open-concept apartments that are ideally suited for families. It was designed and constructed to be Earthcraft gold certified, which addresses a wide range of sustainability considerations, including environmental performance, indoor air quality, building durability, comfort, and affordability. Located steps from public transportation, residents have easy access to area shopping, entertainment, and amenities. The development also features a community building with shared spaces including a gathering area, fitness center, on-site laundry facilities and a playground.



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Town of Dumfries awarded Technical Assistance Grant from Urban Land Institute

THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE of Virginia (ULI) selected the Town of Dumfries for their Technical Assistance Panel Award. ULI will assist Dumfries in furthering Comprehensive Plan goals by providing direct technical assistance and guidance on specific development within the town.

Dumfries Mayor Derrick Wood commented that he is "grateful for Town Manager Keith Rogers and his team for their proactive approach to find resources to accomplish the goals we have created through our comprehensive plan. This grant will be used to continue making the Town of Dumfries a destination place."

For his part, Town Manager Rogers observed: "ULI is a highly regarded organization, and we are honored to have been selected as one of the three award recipients for this year. I commend our town planner, Mr. Nick Cicero, for his coordination and we look forward to working with the panel, as we focus on strategic development."

Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) provide expert, multi-disciplinary advice to local governments, public agencies, and nonprofit organizations facing complex land use and real estate issues in Virginia. ULI Virginia offers objective and responsible guidance on a variety of land use and real estate issues ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions.

For more information about the Urban Land Institute of Virginia or the Technical Assistance Panels, visit www.virginia.uli.org.

LGA elects new officers, presents Special Projects Award at spring conference

AMONG THE HIGHLIGHTS of the Local Government Attorneys of Virginia’s spring conference in Harrisonburg in April was the election of new officers and the presentation of the Erwin Special Projects Award to the Collective Bargaining Committee. This committee produced a comprehensive guidance document to assist local government attorneys in this new area of law for public employers.

Members of the Collective Bargaining Committee are Cynthia E. Hudson, Sands Anderson PC, Chair; Wade T. Anderson, Division Counsel, Prince William County Public Schools; Adonica Baine, Newport News Senior Assistant City Attorney; Derek G. Challenger, Portsmouth Assistant City Attorney; Theresa J. Fontana, Loudoun Senior Assistant County Attorney; Andrew “Andy” Fox, Norfolk Deputy City Attorney; Megan E. Kelly, Prince William Deputy County Attorney; Brandi A. Law, Hampton Deputy City Attorney; Timothy M. McConville, Praemia Law PLLC; William E. “Will” Moore, Jr., Spotsylvania Senior Assistant County Attorney; Sharon E. Pandak, Pandak & Taves, PLLC; Marjorie A. Smith, Virginia Beach Assistant City Attorney; and Jeffrey D. “Jeff” Wilson, Pender & Coward, P.C.



The following officers and directors will lead LGA for the 2022-23 year, beginning September 1, 2022:

For a one-year term as officer:

- President – Mark C. Popovich, Covington City Attorney
- Vice President – Lesa J. Yeatts, Herndon Town Attorney
- Treasurer – Andrew H. Herrick, Albemarle Deputy County Attorney,
- Secretary – Kelly J. Lackey, King George County Attorney

For an initial two-year term as director:

- John C. Blair, Staunton City Attorney
- Brandi A. Law, Hampton Deputy City Attorney

For a second two-year term as director:

- Michael H. Abbot, Wise Senior Assistant County Attorney
- Ryan C. Samuel, Arlington Deputy County Attorney

These newly elected LGA leaders will join sitting directors Courtney R. Sydnor, Loudoun Senior Deputy County Attorney; George Lyle, Henry County Attorney; Alan B. Spencer, Danville Deputy City Attorney; Tyler C. Southall, Dinwiddie County Attorney; and Michelle R. Robl, Prince William County Attorney, who will be the immediate past LGA president.

About the LGA: LGA promotes common interests and an exchange of information among its members on legal issues that are particularly relevant to Virginia’s counties, cities, and towns. The LGA’s member services include conferences, a legal handbook, a monthly newsletter, and other services.

For more information on LGA and its programs, visit the LGA website at www.lgava.org.

Emporia breaks ground on new gaming facility

ON THE MORNING of Thursday, April 24th, representatives of the City of Emporia’s local government gathered at 700 West Atlantic Street with shovels in hand to ceremonially break ground for the Rosie’s Gaming Emporium location coming to their city.

On hand to move some dirt and celebrate the occasion were Mayor Carolyn Carey, City Manager William Johnson, and Councilmembers Dale Temple, Carol Mercer, Jim Saunders, and Woody Harris.

In an interview with the *Independent Messenger* newspaper, Mayor Carey stated, “We look forward to Rosie’s boosting our economic development and being an integral part of the community. Rosie’s will be providing jobs and an outlet for entertainment. This will be a game-changer, and the best is yet to come.”

In the same interview, City Manager Johnson observed, “With the new money we’re going to create something for our youth, as well as our senior citizens. We must continue to support the new businesses and our existing businesses for this community to thrive.”

With plans to open by the summer of 2023, Rosie’s is expected to generate \$1 million annually in tax revenue for the city. Moreover, the 21,000 square-foot site is on track to employ 100 people with an average salary and benefits package of \$47,000.

In addition to gaming, the Emporia location, like all Rosie’s locations, will also feature a stage with live entertainment and a full-service restaurant.



City of Waynesboro receives Virginia Tourism Corporation grant for marketing

THE CITY OF WAYNESBORO has received a \$20,000 Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) grant for its Family-Friendly Waynesboro project. Waynesboro partnered with the Wayne Theatre and Plaza Antigua to supply \$20,000 in a mix of in-kind and cash matching funds for the project. The program will showcase Waynesboro as a family-friendly destination for visitors from three target markets to drive tourism spending and help aid in Waynesboro's economic recovery as it continues to navigate the pandemic.

The city will be working with an experienced and talented content creator based in the Hampton Roads area to utilize creative video content that will highlight three main pillars of tourism in Waynesboro with a family-friendly spin: delicious dining, outdoor adventures, and the arts. The videos will be shared across several platforms with a robust marketing plan to support and promote them to the target audiences.

"We are excited to be able to leverage this grant funding from the Virginia Tourism Corporation to further expand Waynesboro's marketing reach and elevate Waynesboro's status as a premier tourist destination for adventure-seeking families," said Jennifer Kiser, tourism and marketing manager for the City of Waynesboro in a press release.

About the program: The VTC Regional Marketing Program aims to help Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) drive overnight visitation and to supplement funding for economically significant special events and festivals to increase overnight visitation. The DMO funding is projected to drive more than 125,000 room nights over the next 18 months.

More information on VTC's Regional Marketing Program can be found at www.vatc.org.

Environmental literacy in Richmond gets a boost

THE CITY OF RICHMOND Department of Parks, Recreation, and Community Facilities (PRCF) has received funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) program. These funds will support a two-year project called The Richmond Environment: Students as Teachers in Their Watershed (REST) whose primary objective is to give Richmond Public School (RPS) students a greater understanding and sense of ownership of their local watershed. The project's key partners, James River Park System, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, and RPS, will engage the community to develop an Environmental Literacy Plan (ELP) for RPS that is rooted in environmental justice and is specific to this unique urban landscape, fraught with historic inequity and gifted with wild land.

"We're thrilled that this funding will continue the work of making environmental literacy part of every public-school student's education in Richmond," said Chris Frelke, Director of PRCF in a press release. "This project aligns with Richmond's existing initiatives to improve the health of each city resident through access to green spaces."

Working closely with students, teachers, and community members, the key partners on this project will create an ELP for the entire RPS school district rooted at the hyper-local level that centers black and brown voices that have historically been suppressed throughout Richmond. This kind of comprehensive planning document will positively impact science education for all 24,000 RPS students in the years to come, seeking to determine what environmental literacy and justice mean for the community.



These kids all write!

By Rob Bullington

IF YOU ARE OLD ENOUGH to identify the British-invasion song I've mangled in the above title, then you're probably old enough to remember when the act of writing wasn't associated with a screen or a device. It also used to be the case that the act of writing typically meant taking the time to form complete thoughts, often in solitude, in service to a larger purpose – to persuade, inform, entertain, etc. etc. Nowadays, most of the writing we do (present company included) takes the form of short messages dashed off in response to queries that arrive almost continuously throughout the day on small screens we carry with us everywhere we go.

To appreciate how much the act of writing has changed, consider the fact that it wasn't that long ago that the idea of writing "Stuck in traffic" or "Where are you?" would have made zero sense. But such weighty compositions are *de rigueur* now.

And yet, the essay format persists.

The essay is still taught (thank heavens) in schools, and still practiced by dedicated writers in magazines, newspapers,

and (yes) online. As someone who makes a living in part by helping really smart people hone their writing, I'm always pleased to review the entries for VML's annual "If I Were Mayor" essay contest for 7th graders. Being reminded that really smart people as young as these really smart people are still interested in the craft of essay writing gives me hope. It gives me hope that young people still take an interest in their community and have ideas about making it better. It gives me hope that teachers still insist that students take time to form complete, supported arguments in prose. And it gives me hope that tomorrow's great writers will one day make the job of tomorrow's editors that much easier.

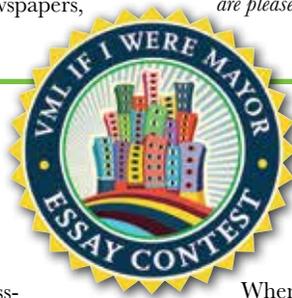
So, here's to the kids! They're alright.

Editor's Note: *To my knowledge we've never included an "Honorable Mention" essay among those published in the magazine. However, when I saw that Eliezer Ramirez of Roanoke had taken the time to compose a rhyming poem, I felt it merited inclusion. So, with Mr. Ramirez' permission, we are pleased to present his ode to pollinators in peril.*

Eliezer Ramirez

James Breckinridge Middle School
Roanoke, VA

The Bee's Deeds (If I Were Mayor)



Honorable Mention



IN THIS CITY, there has been a mass-extinction of the bee. And I, the Mayor of the city, will make them free! After A.D, the birth of Jesus Christ, A new insect was going to come to life. 130 million years ago was beginning of bees here, A small creature in an environment in the biosphere.

Bees have a major job in the economy, pollinating is one of their jobs for agronomy.

If there was a world without them all, food, plants, and jobs would deflate like a flat ball. Bees have pollen when collecting nectar to make honey, and that pollen is used to throw to plants and flowers, and then it's like money.

Before, these bees populated everywhere, making food and having normal lives nobody could barely bear. But unfortunately, as everyone has been viewing, graphs show how the beehive population has been doing.

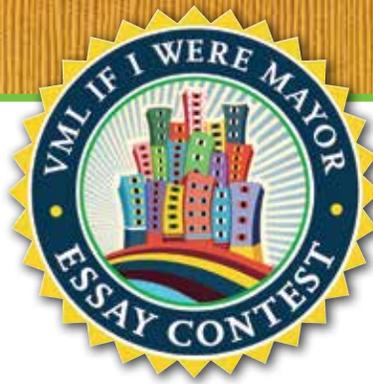
While I was sitting in my office reading some paperwork, I decided to look in the news to see anything that lurks. I saw "No Bees, No Honey, No Work, No Money," then I looked more but to me it wasn't funny.

When I investigated it some more,

I learned it is called Colony Collapse Disorder. One reason is because of the fossil fuels, coal, and petroleum which are so cruel. Another problem is on my hands, the products used on living plants. But the scariest I have seen are living mites. That word is like a bite. Mites are a bacteria-like animal which at play, affect bees in the most terrible ways.

The way I would fix all this is first create a legal mixture, that prohibits the use of bee sprays on agriculture. I then would make a team and plant flowers around the area, to keep it full of beautiful aroma. This is so that they can help with the bee's jobs, maybe with queen bees or flowers without anything robbed. I will then reduce the use of coal and use natural gas (though it may seem very bold). Lastly, with the mite problem on the side, I will make a product called "Miticide."

We must keep bees alive because losing them means losing food. I hope we fix our mistakes now for the common good.



President's Award Winner

Charlotte Lieu

Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School
Falls Church, VA



If I Were Mayor

FALLS CHURCH CITY is a warm and welcoming city, filled with kind people and remarkable services. However, when I find myself getting up to throw away a wrapper during my school lunch break or when I go out to eat at restaurants in my hometown, I commonly notice significant amounts of food being thrown away. This issue is unfortunately under-discussed as food waste is a major problem in my city, and our squandered food should be put to much better use.

To investigate, I first asked my mom about her views on food waste as a Falls Church City resident. She told me that she estimates that the equivalent of two to four meals weekly goes to waste when she cooks at home; feeling guilty about this, she wishes there was a better way to save the food. She also pointed out that she had never really considered food waste at home before. Considering the restaurant perspective, I also interviewed Rebecca

Tax, an owner of local restaurants Claire & Don's and Lazy Mike's, and she conveyed how she believes food waste is a serious problem, as many customers tend to leave a lot of food uneaten. She added that she's used composting to reduce her restaurants' food waste. Finally, I questioned a local Giant grocery worker, Anant, who told me his store throws away a good amount of food because all items that are not purchased one week before expiration dates are thrown into the trash.

Evidently, food waste is a problem that can be tackled. If I were mayor, I would propose many solutions for this problem. I would first organize a food donation program throughout the city, incentivizing grocery stores and farmer's markets to donate non-perishable, unsold food that is within a safe expiration window to the program. Individual citizens would also be able to contribute food donations, and a public social media campaign would spread the word. From there, the collected food would be prepared for redistribution to local homeless shelters, food banks, and charities. To get students interested in volunteering, and to fund the program's management, I would talk to the school board to negotiate a partnership with private corporations headquartered in northern Virginia to set up a scholarship initiative for Falls Church City high school students who dedicate a minimum of forty outside-of-school volunteer hours to the donation program annually.

Furthermore, as mayor, I would position compost bins outside of all our restaurants and schools. Over time, the organic compost would be sent to nourish our city's local garden and to support our urban forestry initiatives. Lastly, all constituents would be required to watch an informative PowerPoint on food waste, including what food can be composted, while also spreading awareness about how to help with at-home composting tutorials.

With all these ideas, I know Falls Church City can implement practical solutions to decrease food waste in our city, and as mayor, I would lead the way in our efforts to become more food conscious.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 1 Winner

Olivia Wyatt

Northwood Middle School
Saltville, VA



If I Were Mayor

SALTVILLE IS A SMALL TOWN in southwest Virginia with several scenic views and good people. It does not have many places for recreational activities, but it has a lot of potential. However, Saltville is not perfect. There are some problems, perhaps the most important being that there is less care for the environment than needed. Saltville is a beautiful town, but litter is slowly consuming it.

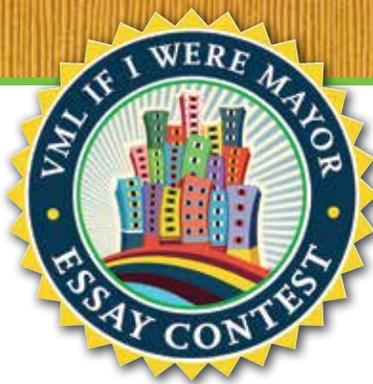
Saltville's litter problem is more important than people realize. If I were mayor, I would take the initiative to fix this issue. I interviewed my parents about this issue, and they said that they have noticed that this has become a serious problem – and I agree. They said that trash cans and garbage pickup should be more widespread and accessible. If litter was reduced in Saltville, it would help a lot of people, plants, and animals to thrive. Not only would it help the environment, but it would have many other benefits. Property value would increase, it would make the town look better, and it would set a good example for the future generations of the town.

As mayor, I would fix this problem and take the advice of the citizens. I would hold public surveys to see in what ways the people of Saltville would prefer these problems to be handled – and to see if they approve of my ideas of ways to handle the problem. I would enact higher fines for littering in the town, make trash cans and recycling bins more accessible, and increase funds for garbage pickup around the town. I would hold a fundraiser for the town and organize an annual event to encourage the citizens of the town to help pick up trash. I hope that the people of Saltville would do their best to reduce the amount of litter by taking on the responsibility of waiting to get rid of their trash until they find a trash can, and disposing of recyclable materials such as plastic, paper, aluminum, metal, etc.

If I were mayor, I would try my best to do what is best for the citizens of Saltville: cleaning up the town.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 2 Winner

Jordin Hernández Machuca

Martinsville Middle School
Martinsville, VA



If I Were Mayor

ACCORDING TO AMERICAN COMMUNITY Survey Reports, five percent of all workers in the United States used public transportation in 2019. However, relying on public transportation for daily commutes and extracurricular travel can be very expensive for some people. This is particularly true for economically depressed areas like Martinsville, Virginia, where the charges for public transport have proven to be burdensome for many residents. If I were the mayor of Martinsville, I would make public transportation more affordable by marginally augmenting local taxes.

While speaking with my father, Walter Hernandez, about the cost of public transportation in Martinsville, he agrees that it is costly. In fact, he states: “Yes, it [public transportation in Martinsville] is expensive due to various taxes levied in the country.”

Ironically, however, as the mayor of Martinsville, I would slightly increase local taxes to reduce public transportation costs overall. More specifically, the money collected from the extra taxes on food and personal property would subsidize the price tag of using public transportation, such as the bus system, in the city. In so doing, the overall expense for utilizing any form of public transportation in Martinsville should decrease significantly. Therefore, the city residents would be able to keep more money in their pockets and pay for things they really need, such as food, clothes, housing, and health-promoting products and activities. However, my father offers another solution: “Well, what I would do to make public transportation less expensive is to maybe lower it to half the price.”

In conclusion, as the mayor of Martinsville, it would be a priority of mine to make public transportation more affordable for my constituents. One way I could accomplish this goal is to use increased tax revenue to lower the cost of public transportation by at least half of its current charge. Regardless of how the cost of public transportation is reduced, one thing is clear: it needs to be done to make transportation more affordable for all Martinsville residents.





Region 3 Winner

Elizabeth Loring

Sacred Heart Academy
Winchester, VA



If I Were Mayor

HELLO, MY NAME is Elizabeth Loring. I live in Winchester Virginia, and I am a seventh grader at Sacred Heart Academy. I want to tell you about one major problem Winchester is facing and how, if I was Mayor, I would solve it. The main problem I believe Winchester is facing is homelessness.

The biggest causes of homelessness are mental illness and addiction. According to the director of the Winchester Rescue Mission, ninety percent of people in the homeless shelter in Winchester have a mental illness. People with mental illnesses or addictions might struggle to keep a steady job or take care of themselves.

Another cause of homelessness is inadequate education or poor money management skills. This could be because they did not complete their education or were not taught to manage money correctly. Without these skills, people might not have the right credentials to get a job. People might not spend money on things they need, like food, and instead spend it on things they don't need.

A third cause of homelessness is a lack of affordable housing and increasing rents. The higher rents and housing prices go, the fewer people will be able to afford them. Even if people have a steady income, they still might not be able to pay rent or afford a house because their wages are not enough.

Since homelessness is caused by many factors, the solutions must be diverse. As Mayor, I would address this problem through indirect and direct solutions. I would encourage the City Council to allocate more money towards addiction and mental health services. I would also apply for government grants to fund these services. I would help raise awareness to help people understand more about homelessness. I would make sure the zoning and planning codes allowed for homeless shelters and affordable housing. I would also encourage construction companies to consider building more affordable housing.

There are many organizations that help with the homeless population, such as homeless shelters, churches, and social services. Schools also help homeless children. It's important to work with these organizations because they will have a lot of experience in this area. I would work with these organizations so they can give me ideas for more ways to solve homelessness. I would also encourage the nearby community college and banks to help people get better education and financial training.

In conclusion, I think some of the best ways to help with homelessness would be raising awareness, allocating more money towards mental health and addiction centers, ensuring zoning and planning codes allowed for homeless shelters and affordable housing, and working with other organizations. I would do this because as Mayor, I have to help everybody in my city as much as I can.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 4 Winner

Kailey Krotzer

Kenston Forest School
Blackstone, VA



If I Were Mayor

“If we’ve learned any lessons during the past few decades, perhaps the most important is that preservation of our environment is not a partisan challenge; it’s common sense. Our physical health, our social happiness, and our economic well-being will be sustained only by all of us working in partnership as thoughtful, effective stewards of our natural resources.”

- Ronald Reagan, the 40th president of the United States.

Keeping our town clean is as important as our health and wellbeing. When we keep not just our homes but our community clean, our town is not only safer, but people become more lively. Therefore, if I were a mayor, I’d keep our town clean.

One way we can keep our town clean is by acting in the present. Gandhi said, “The future depends on what we do in the present.” It means that we need to act now, not tomorrow or the next day. We keep saying that we need to clean the environment, but when we keep delaying it our environment’s cleanliness rate declines. We need to all work together now to start our long journey to clean our town.

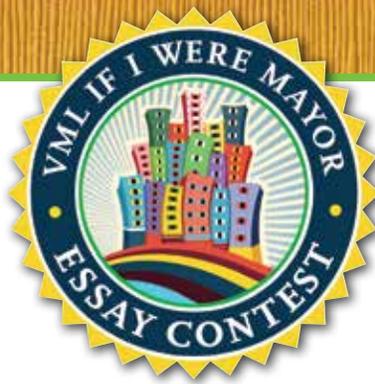
Another way that we can keep our town clean is by making a monthly pick up around the town. A local resident suggested this idea, and I believe it would be successful. It is our job to not get too proud and take care of what takes care of us: nature. We need to keep it clean so it can continue to thrive and help us go on with our daily lives. As the population grows nature experiences more neglect from us. We need to take care of our community because once it is gone, we won’t be able to get it back.

Although it’s a great idea, many people argue that it takes money from more crucial things. When we spend money cleaning our towns and neighborhoods, we lose focus on more important things like helping residents find homes and jobs. But when we clean our communities, we open more space for jobs and homes for residents. To help residents find jobs and homes we need to first clean up the communities we live in to give our residents a reason to enjoy and want to continue living in our town.

Cleaning up the environment is very important. We all know sadly that there will always be people who think that littering is okay. We also know though that there will always be people who want their hometown clean. As mayor, I will begin programs that keep my community clean and appealing.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 5 Winner

Rose Weatherly

Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School
Falls Church, VA



If I Were Mayor

FALLS CHURCH CITY, a 69.4% white town of 15,000 is exclusively affluent, inclusively minded, and values diversity. Every year, it's becoming more expensive to call it home. As mayor, my top priority would be to increase diversity by increasing affordable dwelling options. I would focus on two issues – the currently small number of affordable units and the condition of the few that do exist.

Falls Church has a handful of affordable units, but the number is shrinking due to the rise in house prices and affordable housing units expiring. The median sales price on houses in Falls Church increased by \$80,000 from 2021 to 2022 and from 2020 to 2021 the assessment on residential real estate rose 4.07%, resulting in increased property taxes. Rising prices make Falls Church more exclusive to affluent people. My solution is to increase the average percentage of proffers for affordable living from 6% to 9% and negotiate with developers for the units to remain affordable as long as the building stands. Proffers are money a developer gives a city following the construction of their building. Redirecting proffers towards affordable housing would result in less going towards schools, libraries, and sidewalks, but they have been recently updated here. If the increased proffers going to affordable units were negotiated to last for as long as the building stood, Falls Church would have more affordable units available and for a longer time. Vice Mayor Hardi, a long-time advocate for affordable housing, supports my proposal saying that as more developers come to Falls Church, proffers could dramatically increase the amount of affordable housing.

Secondly, as mayor, I would address the state of existing affordable dwellings. Some affordable units in Falls Church are unsafe but the landlords say they can only fix problems about which their tenants tell them. Sometimes this is hard for tenants because of their job schedules, language barriers or not being able to pay for a lawyer to help them. Some affordable units have been reported for rodents and mold, making for an unsafe home. Because Virginia laws protect landlords more than tenants, the city is powerless to force improvements. The existing Health and Human Services Department helps tenants talk to their landlords but it's not well-known. My solution is to remind tenants in unsafe homes of the assistance they can receive. I would also create and publicize a list of pro-bono lawyers willing to help tenants hold landlords accountable for their living conditions. Having the resources accessible would hopefully encourage tenants to demand safer living conditions. Vice Mayor Hardi supported my solution and said the city was working to be able to better support tenants, and a case has been taken to Richmond.

In conclusion, if I were mayor, I would help continue to build a more diverse and inclusive community by increasing the number and condition of affordable housing which would allow lower-income families to live in our town.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 6 Winner

Hayley Lumpkin

Culpeper Middle School
Culpeper, VA



If I Were Mayor

CULPEPER, VA DOESN'T HAVE many well-known recycling plants, and the plants we do have make us deliver our recyclable items to them. This causes people to think recycling things is a waste of time and resources, making our county less eco-friendly. If I was the mayor, I could find a solution to this problem, and hopefully help the town grow in a positive way.

I interviewed a community member and asked what they think we should do to save vital resources for both parties. They suggested that we repurpose the unused space at Culpeper Middle School's car-rider drop-off to make it easier to lessen recyclables and get students to school at the same time. You could say this would cost the companies time and money by having to take the time to drive out to us, but the benefits of the materials we provide should be sufficient cause to pick up our recyclable items.

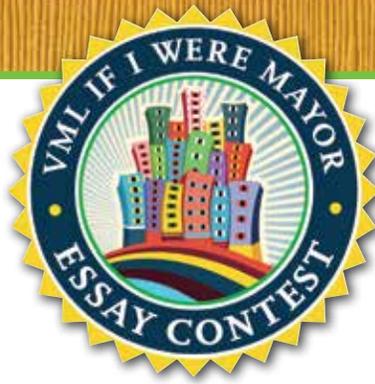
Our recycling plants don't accept smaller items, they recycle cars, wood, metal, and things normal households don't usually have. This makes it hard to recycle and makes people think there isn't a place to put items that could be recyclable. Mayors have lots of different departments to run, and people could say this idea would waste a mayor's time, but this project could help small businesses in the recycling industry get out there and help people around the globe.

My last idea is to have recycling bins in areas with high foot traffic. Areas they could put these bins are public parks, movies, the downtown area, elementary schools, and fast-food chains/restaurants. These bins could be collected by volunteers and could help students in the National Junior Honor Society or the National Honor Society by adding to their hours. You could say relying on volunteers could end the process before it begins, but this idea could pull people in the community closer together, bringing up everyone's spirits.

In conclusion, helping the recycling community could bring great benefits and opportunities for everyone involved. If we go through with this plan, our recycling plants will get more use, and there will be less unnecessary waste at landfills. I hope that if I were mayor people would be more conscious of our waste issue.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT



Region 8 Winner

Sophia Buckley

Hugo A. Owens Middle School
Chesapeake, VA



If I Were Mayor

SINCE 1960, HABITAT LOSS has negatively affected natural ecosystems, biodiversity, and global warming. It is the 2nd largest human contributor to global warming. Recently in Chesapeake, a road was closed due to a mother bear and her 3 cubs napping in a nearby tree. Habitat loss is becoming a major problem, not only does it affect animals, but it also affects humans. If I were a mayor, I would do everything to protect my community.

Habitat loss is a problem because it decreases the range of certain populations of organisms. It can result in genetic diversity and the production of infertile youths. Land is being changed so we can use it for more intensive uses. Woodlands and pastures are being converted into subdivisions and shopping centers. It is estimated that over 93,000 acres of Virginia are converted to non-renewable uses each year.

Habitat loss affects humans by causing economic disruption and an increase in poverty. It also causes people to push into natural habitats and humans will start relying on wildlife for subsistence. It increases the spread of life-threatening diseases including malaria and dengue fever. Habitat loss affects animals by causing them to have no safe place to live, no healthy lifestyle, or no home at all. It increases the risk of predation, their food availability is reduced, and many of them are dying. This is one of the main causes of extinction and it is affecting the circle of life.

The person I asked said they would make places for certain animals to live, like shelters. I think this could work but I believe there are too many different animals and variations in their lifestyles. Doing this would not create a “wildlife” like lifestyle, it would be more of a house pet style. I think the best solution for this would be to make reservations where you are not allowed to build or visit. This is the best solution because this leaves plenty of room for growth for the animals and room for the humans to function in their daily lives. Making wildlife reservations that would be especially restricted for the animals to have their part of the world would be ideal. I think my idea is better because it leaves enough space for everyone, and it is a lot easier to conduct. While the other opinion is still good, it’s less ideal and harder to do and it would change the way the animals function.

I believe that we should share this world with wildlife because habitat loss affects a lot more than you would think. When we take part in a solution to help solve this problem, we are positively changing our community. We have plenty of space to share with wildlife and we can create a happier, healthier, and better functioning community. As a mayor, I would create a better community starting with addressing habitat loss.



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH
SOUND GOVERNMENT

2022

VIRGINIA MUNICIPAL LEAGUE INNOVATION AWARDS

Complete rules and entry form are at www.vml.org



RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE IN VIRGINIA LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Virginia needs better school facilities. The time to build them is now.

By Dr. Peter Gretz

A GOOD VISUAL REPRESENTATION of the history of support for school construction and maintenance in Virginia would be that of a flowing faucet being slowly turned off until only drips remain. The faucet was flowing freely in the early 1900s when the state was an active participant in school construction and maintenance. However, the first turn of the screw came in 1932 when the General Assembly passed the Byrd Road Act which stipulated that the state would handle county road construction while localities assumed the primary responsibility for school maintenance and construction. At the time, this was not as significant a hardship on localities as one might imagine because the federal government was much more involved in creating new schools than it is today. In fact, in the late 1930s the feds supported almost half of local school construction costs. However, in subsequent years federal support dwindled to less than 1 percent of local costs with some additional but irregular support in the form of changes to tax policy and limited grant opportunities.

As the federal funds dwindled, however, Virginia's support of school construction didn't ramp back up. Indeed, during the 1950s and 1960s, state support came primarily in the form of grants and by the early 1990s, state funding for school construction was mostly in the form of loans to localities through the Literary Fund and Virginia Public School Authority (VPSA).

In 2001, a one-time federal program to address emergency school renovation and repair was targeted to high poverty and rural districts. Virginia saw a little over \$12 million of the \$1.2 billion dollars disbursed by the program. This infusion of funding, while welcome, was still just a drop in the bucket. In the end, the funds helped 17 localities address renovations.

The last significant offering of support for school construction in Virginia came in 2009 when the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided \$54 billion through the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund (SFSF). Thankfully, most of that funding was allocated for schools and localities were given flexibility to use some of it for modernization, renovation, or repair of school facilities. However, during the 2008-10 recession, the General Assembly revised its Standards of Quality (SOQ) funding formula such that it reduced the percentage of funds available to support school facilities' needs.

Recent developments

The Commission on School Construction and Modernization

Created by legislation in 2020, the Commission on School Construction and Modernization was tasked with assessing the extent of Virginia's school construction and modernization needs. Additionally, the Commission was asked to identify funding mechanisms that could support resolving those needs. The results of that work were summarized in a report made available in June 2021.

It is not an understatement to say that the findings were staggering. The challenges identified in the report can be divided into three main areas:

Capacity. Forty percent of the schools in Virginia are currently operating at or above capacity with another 30 percent bursting at the seams by operating just below capacity. From 2009 to 2019 Virginia's school enrollment grew by 54,112 students and is projected to continue to grow. Moreover, if Virginia provides universal pre-kindergarten, reliable estimates project that statewide enrollment would increase by a little over 37,000 early childhood students.

Condition. Half of the state's schools are over 50 years old. Unsurprisingly, the largest portion of those older buildings are in the most economically distressed parts of the state where revenue and funding opportunities to support school construction and renovation are scarce. A prime example is a school in Bristol that was built in 1916 and has been deemed unsuitable for habitation... but continues to house students!

Cost. The Commission's report estimated it will cost nearly \$25 billion to address the needs of school facilities across the state. In fact, it will cost well over \$200 million just to address the 20 percent of Virginia's schools that are not ADA compliant due to structural issues. Again, it won't come as a shock that most of the non-ADA compliant school buildings are in the less affluent regions of the state.





COSARS and the “Crumbling School Tour”

The Coalition of Small and Rural Schools (COSARS), which includes 80 school divisions, advocates for attention to the disparate condition of schools in small localities and rural regions across the Commonwealth. During the summer of 2021, COSARS invited policy makers and state officials to participate in a “Crumbling Schools Tour” of the eight regions represented by the member superintendents. The tour highlighted the pressing infrastructure needs of school facilities in Petersburg, Cape Charles, Mattaponi, Waynesboro, New Castle, Luray, South Boston, and Radford.

Design to educate

To bring us to the present day, the 2021 Commission on School Construction and Modernization report tells us we now have a \$25 billion problem to solve. And as the Crumbling Schools Tour so clearly demonstrated, the problem isn’t going away. In fact, it’s only getting worse as Virginia’s schools continue to age and the student population increases.

Those of us dedicated to improving Virginia’s schools obviously want them all to be ADA compliant. Indeed, the fact that so many don’t meet even that basic standard is shocking. But our aspirations don’t stop there. We want our state’s schools to be modernized to support the kind of relevant, 21st century learning that Virginia’s students will need to compete and succeed in the rapidly evolving economy.

To get there, we’ve got to do more than just address leaky roofs, asbestos-laden classroom walls, and clogged pipes. Now is the time to work to bring all our schools up to “code” for the type of learning and assessment the 21st century demands.

When it comes to building the schools for Virginia’s future, we must begin by identifying the activities and skills we need students to be practicing and mastering and then design and construct their learning environments accordingly. During the past several years Virginia has redesigned its vision for what a public-school education should entail and, specifically, what skills should be emphasized throughout the curriculum. Many are familiar with the “Five C’s” that have become a central aspect of Virginia’s (relatively) new “Profile of a Virginia Graduate”: Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, Critical thinking, and Citizenship are among the most important skills Virginia’s students need to master to be successful.

As these skills have been introduced and emphasized, so, too, the types of learning experiences that allow students to practice these skills and the assessments that enable teachers to evaluate how they’re doing have evolved. Learning in the 21st century means students working together to write, design, build, present, perform, and/or create something. Modern schools need classrooms that include spaces for presenting, displaying, and collaborating, with many of these activities often all happening at once.

School building design has a significant impact on learning. Unfortunately, many Virginia students are at a significant disadvantage because of the very design of the buildings in which they learn.

As mentioned earlier, most of Virginia’s schools were designed and built more than a half century ago. The buildings were created to move large groups of students in vast hallways from one small, isolated space to the next, where they lined up in rows of heavy, immovable desks pointed toward the teacher. These classrooms make

many of the “Five C’s” impossible. Indeed, the schools were designed specifically to deter two of the skills now deemed essential: communication and collaboration.

Some have argued that great teachers are still great no matter how outdated, dilapidated, moldy, or otherwise compromised the school building in which they teach. And it’s true. A great teacher is always a great teacher. In the same sense, it’s true that Mario Andretti is a tremendous race car driver no matter what kind of car he drives. But Mario Andretti in a 1961 Chevy Corvair (famously dubbed “unsafe at any speed”) would undoubtedly have a very different race than he did in the Brawner Hawk that he drove to win the Indy 500 in 1969.

So, yeah, the design and condition of the school building matters!

One of the most compelling studies demonstrating how learning environments can affect the quality of education was completed in the UK in 2015. Over the course of a year, the “Clever Classrooms Project” tracked elementary school student performance in reading and math using a theoretical model identifying several aspects of the physical learning space that could affect learning.

Incredibly, after accounting for differences in demographic characteristics and applying the model, it was determined that students in a physical environment that was designed with the tested physical variables in mind gained over an entire year of academic progress in reading and math. In fact, the physical space accounted for nearly 17 percent of the variance in academic performance.

Beyond the empirical evidence demonstrating the impact school facilities have on student learning, there’s overwhelming anecdotal support that leads us to the same conclusion. In designing and constructing physical spaces, form typically follows function. Facilities are built to facilitate what’s going to happen inside them.

Reasons for optimism

Considering that Virginia’s Literary Fund, originally created to support school construction, has spent \$790 million on teacher retirement in the last five years but only \$24 million on school construction, it’s not hard to see how much (or little) importance has been placed on supporting school facilities.

But things are changing. The General Assembly is finally listening, and many policy makers and legislators have championed the effort to improve our schools. Indeed, a measure of the success of the “Crumbling School Tour” can be seen in the flurry of legislative responses during the 2022 General Assembly session. Indeed, these have been unlike anything in recent memory.

The Senate is proposing \$500 million in one-time grants that are to be distributed on a per-pupil basis. The House is proposing \$500 million in recurring rebates that would be distributed based on localized need. Both approaches are a great step in the right direction. COSARS has proposed doing a little of both by splitting the funding equally between the two methods.

While we wait to see what ultimately comes out of this year’s state budget process, it’s important to recognize that there’s been tremendous bipartisan support to address school construction and infrastructure needs. We can only remain hopeful that this represents a new trend, rather than a one-time “nod” and that before too much more valuable time passes, we’ll see all of Virginia’s children learning in modern facilities designed to support 21st century learning, regardless of the zip code in which they live.

Learn more about the Coalition of Small and Rural Schools at www.vacosars.org.

About the author: *Dr. Peter Gretz is the superintendent of Fluvanna County Public Schools and is the vice president of the Coalition of Small and Rural Schools.*

How to pay for school construction? A one percent local option sales and use tax makes a lot of sense.

CHILDREN FLOURISH in a positive learning environment that begins with a welcoming building. Unfortunately, many children across the Commonwealth attend school in buildings with cracked walls, black mold, leaking ceilings, broken windows, limited internet, and faulty HVAC systems. According to a recent study conducted by the Department of Education, over half of Virginia schools are more than 50 years old with nearly every school facility needing some form of renovation.

The estimated price tag to make Virginia's schools right: \$25 billion!

It's no secret that school divisions across the Commonwealth have been significantly (and increasingly) underfunded by the State. As a result, school construction projects, new construction, and general maintenance needs have been severely neglected. To address this growing problem the General Assembly created the Commission on School Construction and Modernization, a bipartisan group of legislators and other school advocates. Chaired by Senator McClellan, the Commission presented a total of six recommendations to the General Assembly.

Among the funding recommendations suggested by the Commission was the implementation of a statewide local option sales and use tax. This suggestion received a unanimous vote from the Commission and was also a top item in VML's 2022 *Legislative Program*.



A good idea gets its day...

The idea of using a local sales and use tax to address school maintenance and construction is not new. In fact, Halifax County was given this authority in 2019 and subsequently eight other localities (seven counties, one city) were also granted this authority.

For 2022, however, the Commission recommended granting every locality in Virginia the authority to impose a sales and use tax of up to one percent designated solely for school construction. Approval to implement the tax would be granted via ordinance and a local referendum. This approach would ensure that the governing body and the citizens of each locality could decide whether they wanted to tax themselves to support school construction.

Furthermore, the option to create a local, dedicated revenue stream for school construction would allow local governing bodies to slowly fix facilities as needed rather than waiting for an "all at once" funding solution. This approach has the added benefit of lowering the cost of projects in the long run. Finally, by having a dedicated funding source, local governing bodies could have the option to spend the money on other necessary projects such as road maintenance when school construction is not a priority.

Bipartisan legislation granting localities this taxing authority was introduced during the 2022 session by Senator McClellan (Chair of the Commission on School Construction and Modernization), Delegate Hudson, and Delegate LaRock.

...but fails to see another day (for now).

Despite an overwhelming show of support from a variety of localities across the Commonwealth and school advocacy groups, the legislation only passed in the Senate. The statewide authority as well as bills granting authority to three individual localities (two counties, one city) failed to report out of the House subcommittee.

This was a disappointing outcome for the many local officials who had supported the legislation. Charlottesville City Council Member Sena Magill, who had voiced her support of the legislation in committee, observes: "The .01 cent sales tax has been a bipartisan initiative, worked on across the aisle, its fall only hurts the children of the Commonwealth."

Magill went on to say:

"Many Virginia legislators ran on returning control to local governments by keeping local taxes local. However, when given the chance to do so, these legislators refused. As a mother of a child in public schools and as a local elected official, I hope that each member of the House who refused to give the people a chance to vote on the sales tax increase for their schools will take some time out of their day to participate in the Crumbling Schools Tour across Virginia. House of Delegates members need to see what their decision has cost our children."

If given the opportunity to revisit the idea, the General Assembly should not balk again at giving localities the option to implement a one percent tax to build to mend the cracked walls, eliminate the black mold, repair the rooves to stop the leaky ceilings, replace the old windows, improve internet connections, and replace the antiquated HVAC systems that are in too many instances the defining characteristics of Virginia's schools.

School buildings cannot be built, renovated, and or repaired overnight but providing a new, local funding mechanism will help significantly. For this reason, VML will continue to support the one percent local option sales tax to address crumbling schools in the Commonwealth.

About the author: *Josette Bulova is the Virginia Municipal League's policy communications coordinator.*



Get to know the Virginia Tech Graduate Certificate in Local Government Management

IN 2008, BOB Stripling (former manager, City of Staunton) and Bonnie Svrcek (former manager, City of Lynchburg) worked to create a partnership between the Virginia Local Government Management Association and the Center for Public Administration and Policy at Virginia Tech. The purpose was to develop and implement a new masters level graduate certificate program to prepare the next generation of local government leaders and managers. In 2010, the first cohort of the Graduate Certificate in Local Government Management completed the program. Since then, over 450 students have earned their certificate.

The certificate program in local government management provides the next generation of local government managers and leaders with the tools to provide exceptional leadership to their communities. The central goal of the program is to offer graduate-level training in local government management that enhances the capacities of existing local government employees who aspire to advance in their careers. It also prepares students who have recently completed a bachelor's degree for capable and ethical public service at the local level.

The certificate program offers five 3-credit hour courses: Local Government and the Professional Manager; The Context of the Local Government Organization; Finance, Human Resources and Performance Management; Planning Administration, and Economic Development and Planning.

As part of the program, students are exposed to a full spectrum of local government issues, service delivery options, and management tools. The analysis of a real-life, local government case study is central to each classroom experience. Case studies are used within the courses to emphasize the relationship between the political and management worlds that all local government managers must understand and navigate to be successful.

All courses, which are conveniently offered via Zoom where students meet once a week in the virtual classroom, are taught by experienced, highly qualified Virginia local government practitioners. Students are required to complete four of the courses and earn a GPA of 3.0 or better to earn the certificate.

As part of the program, students are afforded opportunities to build connections in the local government community. These include attending the Virginia Local Government Management Association annual conferences, free membership in ICMA through the Virginia Tech ICMA Student Chapter, and monthly webinars with local government managers throughout the State. Furthermore, Virginia Tech is an affiliate member of the Virginia Municipal League and the Engaging Local Government Leaders Association.

Both full-time and part-time employees of Virginia local government are eligible for financial assistance through VLGMA's Bob Stripling Scholarship for the Advancement of Local Government Management. Funds available are dependent on donor contributions and are approved on an annual basis.

For many of the alum, the Certificate provided them with the skills needed to grow within their current organizations or other local governments. For others, they have continued their education and completed their Master of Public Administration (MPA) at Virginia Tech or other institutions of higher education. The MPA is also offered via zoom and is available to students across the Commonwealth.

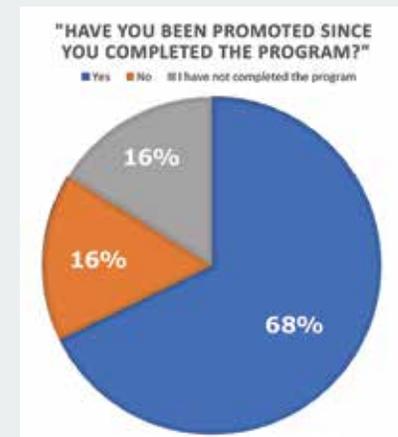
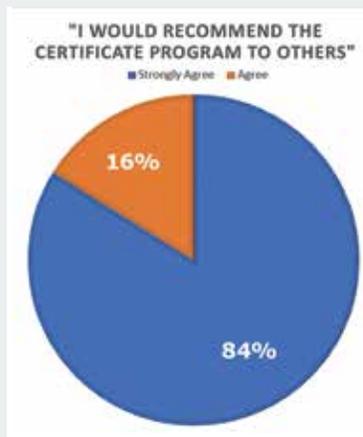
About the author: *Stephanie Davis, Ph.D. is a collegiate assistant professor and program director of the Virginia Tech Graduate Certificate in Local Government.*



Here's what Certificate in Local Government Management graduates say about the program

"The instructors and their experience in local government is what makes these classes fantastic. Learning through and from their experiences and drawing out real world applications is extremely valuable and allows one to see how things happen in local government. The classes are also a great opportunity to meet peers from across the state and it's never a bad thing to network."

"I really enjoyed the certificate when I was enrolled. I really liked learning a lot from other cities and counties."



*Data provided through an alum satisfaction survey that was distributed during the month of February 2022.



Get to know American Public University Countering the “Great Resignation”

THE “GREAT RESIGNATION” is in full swing with large numbers of people quitting or changing jobs during the pandemic. Furthermore, many of the experienced baby-boomers are retiring – leaving massive skills gaps to fill essential government and private-sector roles. It won’t be easy, but it’s vital that local governments ensure continuity of service by nurturing the next generation of leaders.

American Public University (APU), which is part of the accredited American Public University System, is part of bridging this growing skills gap by educating its nationwide community of service-focused learners online.

Buster Nicholson is APU’s senior manager of public sector outreach. “APU is proud to collaborate with the Virginia Municipal League as our individual missions align so well,” states Nicholson. “Education and communication are key to the league’s outreach efforts to public servants, and we have enjoyed working with the VML team to communicate the many opportunities the partnership has to offer.”

VML’s Director of Communication Rob Bullington notes that “people who work for local government are incredibly busy; the opportunity to gain skills and knowledge is sometimes not possible through a traditional educational experience, so the opportunity to study online and from a distance – and on their own schedule – makes all the difference.”



APU is a great match for government workers

APU offers unique programs that reflect real-world practices and emerging strategies with more than 200 online degrees and certificates. Many of these are related to government employment in disciplines such as public service, leadership, succession planning, and more. The University, an early adopter of online learning, has a long history of helping the nation’s military personnel – a mobile population with changing schedules – attain degrees while deployed at home or anywhere in the world. The online classes are asynchronous – so an individual can easily fit their schoolwork into their busy schedules.

One of APU’s goals is to reduce the burden of student debt so workers can plan the next chapter of their professional lives with less financial anxiety. APU offers a 5% tuition grant – along with a book grant whereby undergraduate students are provided with their textbooks (or ebooks) at no charge.

Examples of degree programs that complement many of the day-to-day activities of municipal staff and leaders include:

- Business Administration (bachelor’s and master’s)
- Government Contracting and Acquisition (bachelor’s)
- Management (bachelor’s and master’s)
- Reverse Logistics Management (bachelor’s and master’s)
- Transportation and Logistics Management (bachelor’s and master’s)
- Emergency and Disaster Management (bachelor’s and master’s)
- Criminal Justice (bachelor’s and master’s)
- Public Administration (master’s)

With a student body and alumni of more than 80,000, APU is a five-time winner of the Online Learning Consortium’s (OLC) Effective Practice Award.

Faculty with real-world experience

APU’s faculty are not only credentialed in their academic disciplines, many of them also have real-world experience in the various fields they teach.

For instance, Dr. Christopher Reynolds, APU’s dean and vice president of academic outreach & program development, was among the first people mobilized in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks on the United States. In addition to his military career, Dr. Reynolds is a dedicated public safety professional with more than 33 years in emergency management, fire-rescue, homeland security, and military emergency management.

“APU is the perfect setting for any government employee to attain a quality, respected education,” states Dr. Reynolds. “Many of our professors have experience working within local, state, and federal government, so they understand the daily activities that government employees undertake.”

APU also offers a vibrant mentoring program that empowers students and alumni to share their knowledge through peer mentoring. Mentors and mentees benefit from participating in the program through educational achievement, professional development, and seizing networking opportunities.

Filling the skills gap through education

The famous proverb “give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime,” holds true today. Put in modern vernacular, that adage might translate to:

Give your employees training, and they’ll acquire new skills; give your employees the opportunity for education, and they’ll acquire broad knowledge of a discipline that supports your mission.

A post-covid world will usher in a new way of approaching upskilling, and a pandemic contingency plan undoubtedly now appears in every workforce strategy. Further, the pandemic has rewritten how companies – and governments at all levels – conduct their day-to-day activities. Access to career-relevant education and training remains a vital component for success.

APU assists professionals, including VML members, by providing a near-term and long-term flexible education solution to help workforce planners solve for their diminishing bench of talent.

Learn more about APU at www.apus.edu.

About the author: Glynn Cosker is the content strategy manager for American Public University.

Check out the May 6, 2022 episode of the *VML Voice* podcast “Speaking of Speaking (Part 1)” with public speaking instructor Myeisha Grady from the American Public University System. Visit www.vml.org/vml-voice.

Get to know the Carter School Political Leadership Academy at GMU

AMERICAN POLITICS IS facing multiple challenges caused by political polarization increasingly driven by identity conflict by those who stoke it for popularity and power. While some have pointed to this situation as an existential threat to democracy, it's also true that conflict itself is necessary for democracy to flourish. A major attribute of democracy is that citizens can engage in peaceful debate about what is best for society. Without debate, without conflict, there is no dialogue, and without dialogue, there is no democracy. As such, conflict should be approached constructively among active citizens hoping to make the United States and its communities more vibrant, inclusive, and ultimately, peaceful.

Unfortunately, many Americans feel increasingly ill-equipped to handle conflict. Contested spaces are often dominated by those who are the loudest and least interested in compromise. This “my way or the highway” sentiment in others often leads to feelings of both hopelessness and exclusion among people who might wish to transform their community, state, or the country. This is true of everyday citizens, elected officials, and those aspiring for elected office.

Improving democracy by nurturing better conflict

In 2020 the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University founded the Political Leadership Academy (PLA). Launched in partnership with the Bipartisan Leadership Project, the PLA equips participants with meaningful conflict analysis and resolution ideas, skills, and experience to pursue more effective and peaceful political relationships, processes, and governance. It brings together leading scholars in the field of peace and conflict resolution and practitioners in the professional political community to deliver a curriculum that prepares those interested in affecting change in politics. Those who attend the PLA are better

equipped to navigate conflict and more able to teach others to make use of conflict.

From school boards to the White House, from corporate corridors to dinner tables, students at the PLA explore the role of conflict analysis and resolution as a lens to diagnose the problems facing U.S. political dialogue as well to explore responses to bridge entrenched political views from both sides of the aisle (and beyond).

Those who attend the PLA learn that they are not alone in their desire to strengthen processes within their communities. In fact, they learn that there are others who, though they may hold different political views, also haven't been equipped with the right skills and ideas to bring about constructive conversations. Developing these skills not only leads to efficacy in their personal and professional lives but also fosters boldness to act and to inspire others to speak up.

Serious study to find real solutions

The PLA occupies a unique space in that it not only analyzes the problems facing the American political process, but it also provides real-world solutions for those problems. It addresses nuanced, contemporary sources of political challenges that plague both the political professional and the everyday citizen.

Political Leadership Academy students learn from and dialogue with scholarly and practical thought leaders regarding conflict resolution in the American political context. We cover topics such as:

- Strengthening and preserving democracy
- Conflict resolution strategies for collaboration
- Personal and professional communication skills
- Leadership in public policy
- Group dynamics and networking

Though the bulk of our students are political professionals we also welcome anyone with a special interest in learning more about American political conflict analysis and resolution. Sustainable solutions require dynamic application at multiple levels of American society.

To learn more about the Political Leadership Academy visit www.carterschool.gmu.edu/professional-education/political-leadership-academy.

About the author:

Charles Davidson, Ph.d is the director of the Political Leadership Academy.



CITY OF HOPEWELL

By Kemi Okeowo

The 'Well at Hopewell

Wisdom
Equity
Love
Laughter

AFTER YEARS OF BRAINSTORMING and planning, the 'WELL has officially opened its doors in Hopewell! A truly unique offering in the Tri-Cities of Central Virginia, the 'WELL is a free, after-school program for school-aged youth. Developed through a partnership between the Hopewell City Council and Hopewell City Schools, the 'WELL Youth Center provides Hopewell children with opportunities to enrich their education, cultivate creativity, build positive and healthy relationships, and (of course) have fun!

The 'WELL's mission is to provide a safe, equitable, and nurturing community space that will empower Hopewell youth to learn, laugh, and love. The vision is to infuse hope into Hopewell youth so they will then pour that hope back into the Hopewell community. This attractive program is designed to provide a caring and supportive alternative environment for youth during after-school hours. The 'WELL's facility is equipped with a state-of-the-art game room, movie theater, quiet study room, workout room, kitchen, multi-purpose room, and a café.

Housed in the Hopewell City Public Schools administrative building, transportation is available to take students from school to the 'WELL and then home in the evenings as needed. Food is included for participants through the 'WELL café. This includes smoothies, snacks, and occasionally evening meals. While at the 'WELL students can receive assistance with homework and participate in outdoor activities including volleyball, basketball, racquetball, and other outdoor sports. The 'WELL periodically has a boxing coach and personal

trainer to teach students in the workout room and a chef to conduct interactive culinary courses.

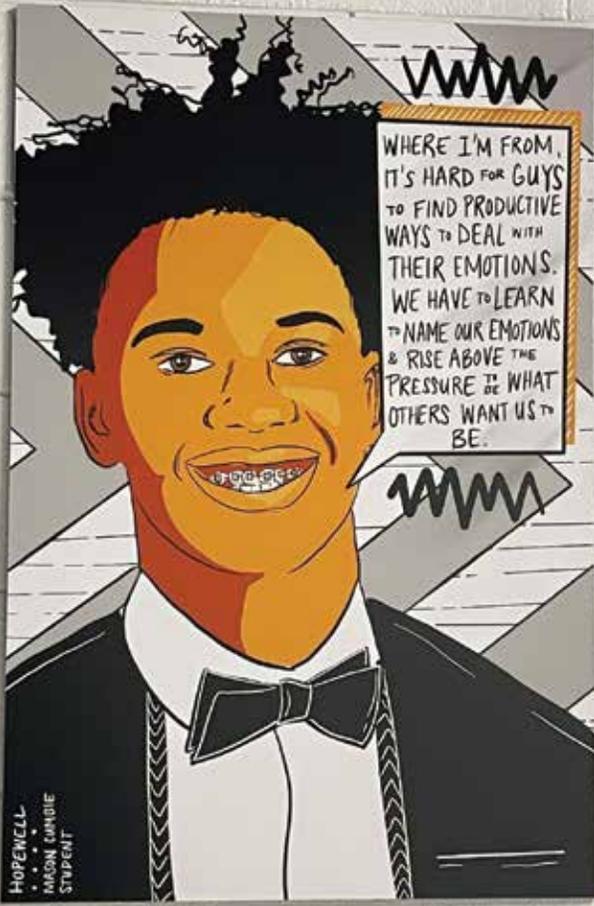
The 'WELL is available Monday through Thursday from 3:00 pm to 9:00 pm. Doors close at 5:00 pm to ensure the safety of the students. Hopewell High School students are permitted to attend the 'WELL on Mondays and Wednesdays while Carter G. Woodson Middle School students can attend the 'WELL on Tuesdays and Thursdays. All secondary school children are welcomed upon successful completion of the application and registration process.

While the facility is currently only available for middle and high school students, the 'WELL is a comprehensive program that offers opportunities and events for Hopewell students grades K-12. This spring the 'WELL hosted an Easter Egg Hunt for all students and this fall will host the Miss Autumn Apple pageant for students ages 5-18.

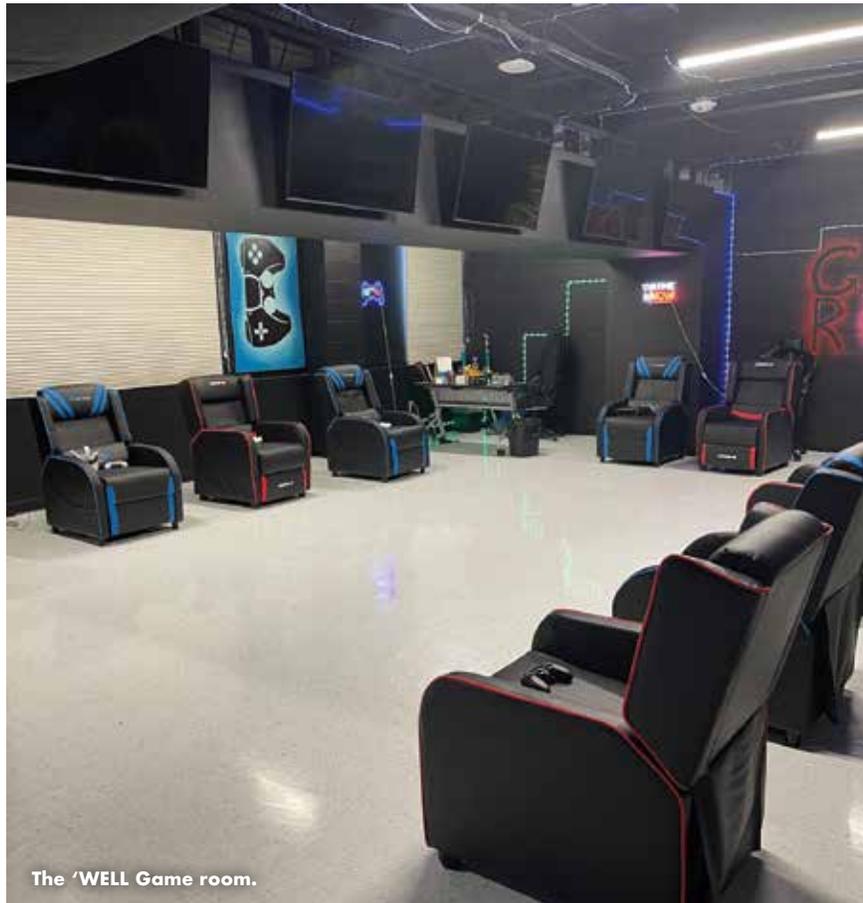
Since opening, the 'WELL has received overwhelming community support and an influx of positive feedback on the program and new facility. To learn more about the 'WELL and Hopewell City Public Schools, visit www.hopewell.k12.va.us.

About the author: Kemi Okeowo is the public information officer for the City of Hopewell.





Artwork displayed throughout the halls of the 'WELL.



The 'WELL Game room.



(L-R) Hopewell City Public Schools Superintendent, Dr. Melody D. Hackney, and The 'WELL Coordinator, Gerald Napper, during the grand opening ceremony.

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