

School Board Opts not to Request a School Bond Referendum; Instead, Seeks \$5.4 Million in Capital Spending Next Year for Design Work and Land Acquisition
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The Albemarle County School Board has decided not to send a request to the Board of Supervisors this year for a November school bond referendum. Instead, the Board has decided to reduce its funding request in next year's capital budget from \$53 million to \$5.4 million to concentrate on design work and land acquisition for three high priority projects.

Those projects include \$4.9 million to support the Board's already approved 600-student learning center scheduled to open in 2021; \$300,000 for the design of a classroom addition and a new gymnasium for Scottsville Elementary School and \$200,000 for planning for renovations and improvements at Albemarle and Western Albemarle High Schools.

"Completion of this initial work would allow us to come back next year with more precise project specifications, costs and timelines," said Dr. Kate Acuff, Chair of the School Board. "This next year also will be used to increase our engagement with the Board of Supervisors and the community around the need for these improvements to be completed over the next five years and the benefits they will provide to students over the next 20 years," she said.

The student center and high school projects were recommended by an internationally renown education consulting firm that studied and evaluated the school facilities that will best provide students with the skills they need to succeed in college and careers in future years. These projects and the Scottsville addition also was approved by the school division's Long-Range Planning Advisory Committee and two county committees responsible for capital program reviews.

The completion costs for all three projects is \$81 million and were incorporated into the School Board's initial request to the Board of Supervisors for a \$96 million school bond referendum this year. The Supervisors voted earlier this month to authorize only \$47 million for school capital projects over the next five years.

"That vote was a disappointment," Dr. Acuff said, "These projects were thoroughly evaluated by several experts before we made the \$96 million request. They are needed to address overcrowding at

Albemarle High School and Scottsville that have forced some students to attend classes in trailers. It also would have avoided a similar situation at Western Albemarle High School, which is nearing its full student enrollment capacity,” she said.

“Beyond that, these improvements are directly tied to learning. We are using facilities designed for instructional models that existed as far back as 60 years ago. Today, with the power of technology applications in the classroom and more modern curricula, classrooms should reflect what students will experience in college and in their careers,” she said.

As an example, she noted that the use of virtual reality is a powerful instructional resource but the school division is limited in its use because of classroom spaces that are inadequate for the creative and collaborative learning made possible by virtual reality technology.

“The national leader in the evaluation of schools and school divisions, Niche, ranks Albemarle County as the third best school division out of 133 divisions in Virginia,” Dr. Acuff said. “The competition our students will face in college and in their careers, however, is not limited to people from Virginia. Our students will be competing against students from across our nation and all over the world. The strategic approach to serving their future interests cannot be one of standing still,” she added.

Specifically, the School Board’s revised capital budget request to the Board of Supervisors for next year includes \$3.6 million for land acquisition costs and \$1.3 million in design expenses for the student center; \$300,000 in design for Scottsville’s classroom addition and gymnasium with an opening in August of 2021; and \$200,000 in design costs for Albemarle and Western Albemarle High Schools that would include a community outreach and information program, the development of a master plan for both projects and an updated budget.