



Nelson School News



Superintendent's Message

Dear Parents and Friends;

The 2009-10 school year is well underway after a smooth and successful beginning. Students and staff are very excited to be back at school. As I walk through our schools and observe, I am pleased to share that students are focused and fully engaged in the learning process.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the entire school family and community on continuous state accreditation and satisfying 145 of the 146 federal *No Child Left Behind* standard benchmarks. These accomplishments are extremely difficult to attain annually as standards move closer to 100% in all areas. I applaud the outstanding individual and collective efforts of every contributor as they work collaboratively toward success for every child within our learning community.

I again welcome the opportunity to help prepare students for the future. Nelson County staff is committed to working with you to address the intellectual, personal, social and career preparation needs of all students. As witnessed in the recent past, a quality education has never been more important. Career success in life will come to those families who make education a priority in their home and to those students who work hard to excel academically. Learning is a challenging, never-ending cyclical process that is to be taken seriously and thoroughly enjoyed. With your dedicated assistance each child can eventually meet their full learning potential. In this regard, our employees have developed the following strategic goal: ***Nelson County Public Schools will graduate all students, equipped with 21st Century skills, enabled to successfully transition into adult life.***

We have a lot to be proud of and I thank you for the opportunity to work with your children. Have a wonderful school year and plan to visit one of our schools soon.

Division Superintendent

"Smile, You're on Candid Camera"



Many remember Allen Funt and the infamous line he used to startle unwitting participants informing them that they had been filmed doing some bizarre act. Over the summer, new security systems were installed at both elementary schools which will allow video surveillance of outside entryways and strategic interior locations with monitoring capability in the main office. Cameras are already in place at Nelson Middle and Nelson County High School. Visitors will be filmed as they access and use the interiors of any school building. This information is maintained for an indefinite period of time and can be used as necessary to promote safety and protect student interests. Rest assured that the school board and administration place primary importance on the safety of all children entrusted to their care.



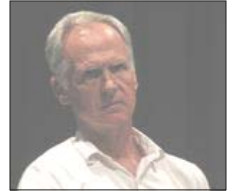
The Gap Project

Last spring semester, Nelson County High School advanced drama students collaborated on a project with members of the community for two months through a grant received by the Hamner Theater from the Nelson County Community Fund. With input from the drama class, Boomie Pederson and Peter Coy, co-artistic directors of the Hamner Theater, were the authors and directors of a unique play about social change.



Boomie Pederson

The initial idea was to use a play called The Gap; however, the drama students felt that they could not relate to the characters in an urban setting. Pederson and Coy began working with them in an improvisational setting, and after many changes during these sessions, a script gradually emerged. The end result was called The Gap Project, a play about bullying and relationship abuse to be performed in a discussion setting with audience involvement.

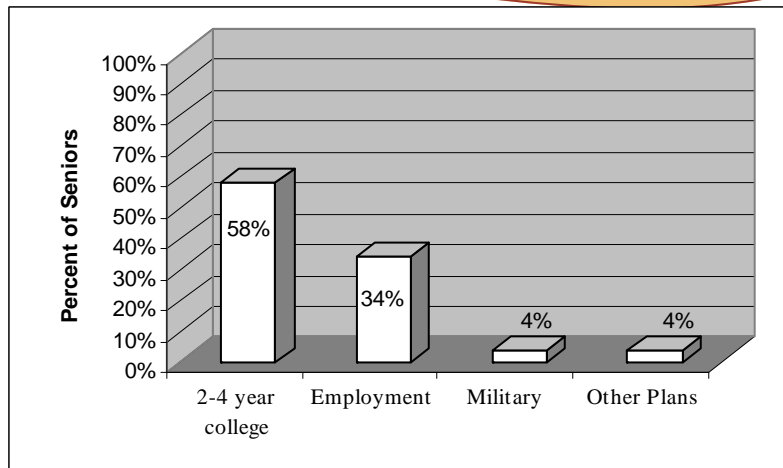


Peter Coy

For the first performance, the audience of students was seated on the auditorium stage, creating a black box theater effect. When the play ended, the students discussed its theme with the cast, directors, and playwrights. A second performance was given at the Hamner Theatre for the public. Bullying is a relevant and extremely sensitive issue. The discussion gave both groups the opportunity to tackle big issues in a safe place by examining their individual thoughts and reactions to the script as well as conversing about real-life situations where bullying and abuse occur. It was the hope of the drama students and the playwrights that all who watched would apply the lessons learned and stop potential abuse.

The high school drama department would like to thank the Nelson County Community Fund, Boomie Pederson, Peter Coy, and the Hamner Theater for this positive experience for everyone who participated: the students in the advanced drama class, the audiences, and the citizens of Nelson County.

Class of 2009 Post Graduation Plans



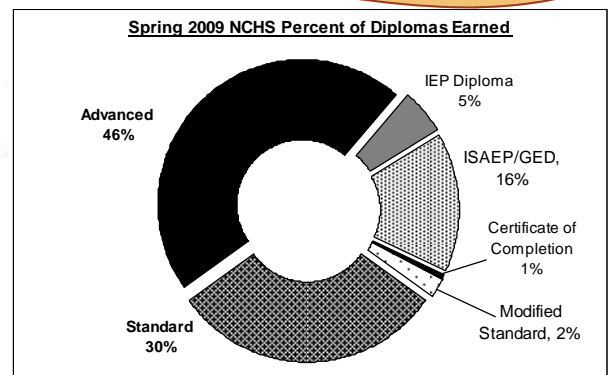
2-4 Year College	58%
Seeking Employment	34%
Military	4%
Other	4%



Scholarship Awards

During Awards Night last spring, scholarships in the amount of \$374,898 were given to Nelson County High School seniors to assist in achieving their goal of attending either a two or four year institution of higher education. One hundred and forty-one seniors graduated last spring, and 58% planned to further their education beyond high school. These monetary gifts included \$307,898 from local benefactors.

Percentage of Diplomas Earned



Assistive Technology Program at Rockfish River



This fall, selected students and teachers at Rockfish River Elementary School are collaborating with the experts at Piedmont Regional Educational Program, (PREP), to pilot a new project aimed at promoting literacy across the curriculum. With the use of text to speech technology, IPODs for access to MP3 files, and AIM-VA materials for students with reading disabilities, the teachers hope to increase their students' acquisition of knowledge in the content areas of science and social studies and to improve their reading skills.



The project was initially designed for students with special needs. Hannah Mathews, a special educator at Rockfish, and Andrea Johnson, an employee and technology coach from PREP, hope that the majority of the project resources will be used to reach both special education and general education students in the upper elementary grades who are struggling readers. Students who struggle to read on grade level will often struggle across the curriculum because they are unable to read social studies or science material. "We hope that this project will open the world of content literacy to those students," says Johnson.

The project will be implemented using text to speech technology which allows for any type of print information with proper copyright to be scanned or obtained in digital format. A speech synthesizer then "reads" the text to the student while highlighting the text on the screen. Comprehension aids, such as outline builders, other templates, and a built-in dictionary / thesaurus, are provided with a student's or teacher's prompting.

Text to speech software makes it possible for struggling readers to reach their full potential despite deficits in decoding, or word reading. It shifts the demand to listening comprehension, making it possible for them to work independently and helping them to become more engaged in class and motivated to learn. The efficacy of this technology has been backed by research from Kurzweil and Schwab. This research shows that the use of more advanced text to speech technologies can increase a student's ability to track on a page, increase fluency, and, with the particular software Rockfish will be using, improve comprehension.

While assisting students in the science and social studies classrooms is important, this pilot project hopes to go beyond these content areas. The teachers anticipate improved reading skills for all struggling readers at Rockfish River and eventually across the entire school division.

Fall Into a Good Book at Nelson Middle School



Walk through the front doors of Nelson Middle School, and you will notice that the media center is bustling with activity!

This year, students are jumping at the opportunity to become a part of several exciting new reading incentives. One of these is the Virginia Reader's Choice Program. Over one hundred of Nelson County's sixth, seventh and eighth graders will be reading a selection of ten books that have been nominated to win in the 2010 Reader's Choice Award. Students will be reading books like Miss Spitfire by Sarah Miller, a story based on the life of Helen Keller. Other books on the list include Edward Bloor's London Calling set in World War II and Gary Paulsen's Lawn Boy about a boy who becomes a millionaire with a lawnmower.

In April, the students will attend a *voting party* in which they will cast their vote for the book they liked best. The results will be sent to Richmond to be tallied along with other Virginia student votes to determine the winner of the award. For a complete list of the Virginia Reader's Choice nominees, please visit the Nelson Middle School Media Center Web-site at <http://nelson.k12.va.us/middleschool/> or read more about the program at <http://www.vusra.org>.

Teacher/Parent Language Exchange at Tye River Elementary



Students are not the only ones who are learning new things at Tye River. Teachers and staff are involved in learning as well. One of these learning opportunities is in the form of a language exchange between a Tye River parent and a retired teacher from Nelson County.

Marcy Gibbons is a retired teacher of Nelson County Schools who currently works part-time at Tye River as a **PALS** (Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening) tutor. While working in a Kindergarten classroom in the spring of last school year, she met Mrs. Blanco who was volunteering. Mrs. Blanco is a native Spanish speaker and did not know or speak very much English. She had volunteered not only to help the teacher in the classroom, but also to be exposed to English in the hopes of improving her language skills. Upon finding out that Mrs. Blanco was trying to learn English, Mrs. Gibbons came up with the idea of a language exchange. She would help Mrs. Blanco with her English if she would in turn help Mrs. Gibbons with learning Spanish.



Mrs. Gibbons has always wanted to know a second language and hopes to travel to South America one day. She previously purchased a copy of Rosetta Stone Language software and had progressed through the beginning lessons. This set the stage for her language sessions with Mrs. Blanco. Both agreed to meet weekly after school and Mrs. Gibbons provided English lessons from beginning reading materials, and then worked on her Spanish through conversations in Spanish with Mrs. Blanco and reading children's books in Spanish. This arrangement proved very beneficial to both and the two continued to meet throughout the summer. Because of Mrs. Blanco's patience, Mrs. Gibbons says she feels quite comfortable practicing Spanish with her.



The weekly lessons are continuing this school year but are becoming harder to schedule due to Mrs. Blanco's current employment. Her ability to attain this job is due in part to the language skills that she developed with Mrs. Gibbons. As for Mrs. Gibbons, she is almost ready to try out her Spanish on native speakers but admits that she is still a bit apprehensive about using her newly acquired language. However, that will be her final exam for this unique learning exchange.

Live "Tele-Person" Communication



Mr. McCann, agriculture teacher at the high school, faced a bit of a dilemma this fall. His star student from last year's state winning agriculture team is now at Va. Tech. and his new team was much less experienced. How could he arrange for last year's star to help train and tutor this year's team to get ready for the stiff competition they would eventually face at the national level?



His answer involved the use of technology now available to staff and students. He purchased a \$13 webcam and had Skype, a free voice and telephone program, installed on his and his past student's computers, along with a companion program that lets both computers share and control a single desktop. Now his former student is able to talk live and work in "tele-person" with the students from this year's team to help prepare for national competition.

This experiment in "live" communication shows what can now happen in classrooms across the entire school division. It is possible for teachers and students from two different schools to collaborate on a project on a "live" daily basis without leaving their school or classrooms. It means students can work with others in different parts of the state, the country, or even from around the world live and in "tele-person". Nelson County students continue to experience new technological advancements in preparation for the future.



Comprehensive Division Improvement Plan

Every two years a team of teachers, administrators, parents and school board office staff review and update the Comprehensive Division Improvement Plan. This plan serves as a guiding document for the school division to use to continuously build on strengths and improve upon identified challenges. The committee analyzes each goal in the plan and receives a status update as to whether the goal has been met, is in progress or if the goal should remain in the plan for further focus. The committee also considers whether there are other areas in need of improvement and will add additional goals as they deem appropriate. Once the committee completes their work, the document is taken to the school board who reviews recommended changes and provides input. Final approval of the plan is acknowledged by the full Nelson County School Board. The following is a list of the goals for the current Comprehensive Division Improvement Plan for 2009-11. Please see the entire plan on www.nelson.k12.va.us.

Nelson County Public Schools will:

- meet or exceed the academic standards necessary for student achievement as outlined in the Standards of Accreditation and the *No Child Left Behind Act*. In order to measure or evaluate achievement levels, the test scores of the students will be used.
- support accountability and equity for all students in all schools.
- continuously review, update and/or enhance the areas of curriculum to meet the changing needs of the diverse student population through a variety of mediums.
- support the hiring, training, recruitment, and retention of highly qualified paraprofessionals, support staff, teachers, and administrators.
- strive to continuously improve communication among students, parents, community, school personnel, and school board members.
- maintain, upgrade, and improve school division facilities and equipment.
- provide the safest possible environment for optimum learning and personal well-being.
- investigate, identify, and provide alternative revenue opportunities outside the normal stream of school funding.



Visit our website:
www.nelson.k12.va.us



21st Century Skills

To cope with the demands of the new century, students need to know more than core subjects. They need to know how to use their knowledge and skills-by thinking critically, applying knowledge to new situations, analyzing information, comprehending new ideas, communicating, collaborating, solving problems, and making decisions. To be successful, students will need to demonstrate expertise in information, media and communication literacy. Students must learn the importance of flexibility and adaptability as well as have initiative and self direction. Students must possess good social and cross-cultural skills to enable them to work with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Finally, they must recognize the need for productivity and accept the responsibility of being held accountable for their actions.

Join Nelson County staff as they prepare students to be the leaders of tomorrow.



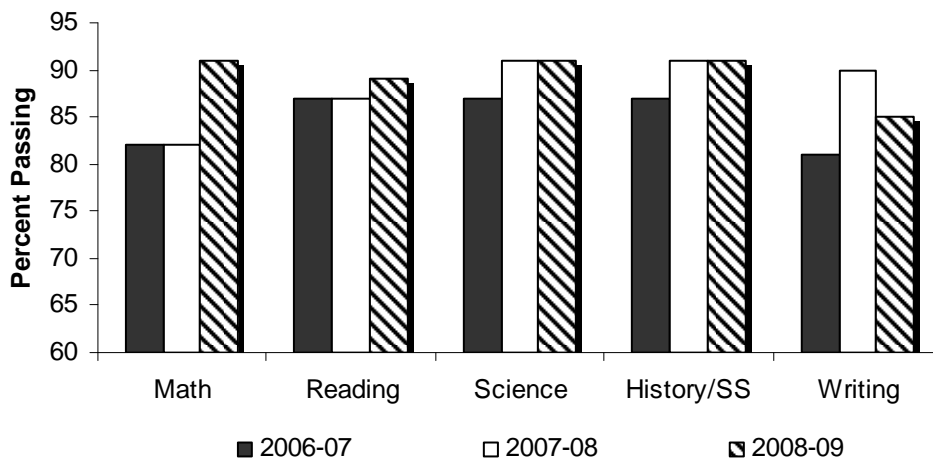
Students Again Meet or Exceed All State Accreditation Benchmarks and All Schools Make "No Child Left Behind" Annual Yearly Progress

All four of the Nelson County Public Schools met or exceeded all *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) objectives based on statewide testing during the 2008-09 school year as student achievement increased in reading and mathematics. In addition to making Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), the schools also satisfied Virginia's accreditation benchmarks. This is the fifth year in a row that all four schools have been "fully accredited" by the Commonwealth of Virginia. While AYP is focused mainly on reading, math, and other indicators of academic success, accreditation standards center on English (both reading and writing), math, science, and history/social studies.

There are 146 federally mandated benchmarks that the division and schools must meet collectively to comply with the AYP requirement of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Together, we have met 145 of the 146 benchmarks. The target pass rates set for all subgroups this year were 81% in reading and 79% in mathematics. For the first time since 2005, all four schools have successfully satisfied each one of their twenty-nine NCLB standards and, therefore, achieved AYP despite a four-point higher mandatory benchmark over last year's expectations. The division met twenty-nine out of their thirty benchmarks required by NCLB. Despite the successes at the division and school levels, the division missed one NCLB target in science, another indicator of academic progress, while satisfying the other twenty-nine requirements.

**Nelson County Public School Division
Standards of Learning Pass Rates
Spring 2007 to Spring 2009**

(based upon results from the State's Division Report Card as of September 10, 2009)



Meeting AYP becomes increasingly difficult as required pass rates increase an additional four points each year. This current school year, 2009-10, the federal pass rates expected are set at 85% in reading and 83% in mathematics. In the year 2013-14, required pass rates are set to climb to 100% passing on state assessments for all students. We will continue to look at individual student data, new strategies, and other resources to help all students achieve success as we move closer to this mark.

Despite the rising expectations, Nelson County Public School students in grades 3-8 and certain high school courses showed improvement in both reading and math. In math, students in grades 3 and 8 showed an increase of 8 percentage points; while students in grades 6 and 7 showed the most significant gains, by increasing 22 percentage points at both grade levels. All seven subgroups monitored by NCLB showed an increase in pass rates over last year, closing the achievement gap even more. Out of all seven subgroups, students with disabilities made the greatest gains in mathematics over the previous year with a 22 percentage point improvement.

AYP ratings and student achievement data are available on the VDOE website under the Virginia School Report Card section found at <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/src/index.shtml>.