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Bessie Weller Now Accredited

Staunton City Schools Releases Division-Wide Accreditation Data

SEPTEMBER 27, 2018 — Staunton City Schools is pleased to announce that Bessie Weller Elementary School is now accredited after being denied accreditation by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) for three consecutive years and classified as a [focus school](#) for six years by the U.S. Department of Education. A focus school has one or more proficiency gap groups not meeting performance expectations in reading and mathematics.

Bessie Weller is accredited with no federal designations and has exceeded state benchmarks in every category.

“We are beyond excited to make accreditation. There are good things happening at Bessie Weller, and we always knew our students were learning and growing. Making accreditation validates the hard work of our teachers and students, as well as the support of our parents, school board office, and community,” said Rich Fletcher, principal of Bessie Weller.

Three other Staunton schools have maintained accreditation, including A.R. Ware Elementary, T.C. McSwain Elementary and R.E. Lee High schools. Shelburne Middle School is accredited with conditions.

[View a summary of the accreditation status for each school and data highlights.](#)

“We are pleased with the significant gains that are evident at each of the Staunton City Schools,” said Dr. Garrett Smith, superintendent of Staunton City Schools. “We appreciate the support of the community and celebrate our successes with them.”

Smith said news of Shelburne’s accreditation status this year was unexpected, given the significant strides students made over the last year and a preliminary report from the VDOE in January that provided guidance to school divisions on how to calculate accreditation.

“We were surprised to find out that we missed the mark in one area – mathematics for students with disabilities. Despite a substantial increase in the overall rate over the previous year in this category – 12 percent – growth was not factored into the calculation,” Smith said. “However, we are well on our way at Shelburne. We’re proud of our instructors and the tremendous growth our students have made. School improvement is a continuous process, and we believe that school improvement happens within the classroom.”

Some of the key initiatives in Staunton City Schools that promote school improvement include:

- **Observation and feedback:** Since the teacher has the greatest impact on student achievement, being in the classrooms and providing feedback on instruction is important. Both school and division administrators observe and provide individual feedback to teachers often (with a goal of 10 observations per administrator per week). In total, 1,761 observations were completed during the 2017-2018 school year.
- **New teacher mentoring program:** Reducing or eliminating teacher turnover is crucial to school improvement. Therefore, teachers have participated in an expanded induction process that also includes ongoing sessions with their mentors.
- **SCS University:** Each semester (fall, spring, and summer), SCS University sessions are offered to teachers and staff. These are often customized based on needs and interests of teachers related to feedback from observations. When adults get smarter, students get smarter.
- **Youth development:** One of SCS’ goals has been to find alternative means of handling suspensions in order to support continued learning for all of our students. Last year, SCS introduced the Alternative to Suspension Program, where students continue learning in an alternative setting for the suspension and participate in restorative practices that allow for social learning prior to return to the school setting. Students are remaining in school, getting caught up in their work, and learning from their mistakes.
- **Diversity/ inclusivity training:** All SCS staff have participated in diversity training. Equity teams have been formed at each school with a goal of ensuring an inclusive and welcoming environment for students, families, and staff.

Smith added, “We feel strongly that we will be at an even better place with student achievement by the end of the 2018-2019 school year.”

New State Accreditation System

The VDOE evaluated student achievement in a new accreditation system during the 2017-18 school year that was more rigorous and comprehensive. Students were evaluated on both pass rates and reading and math growth for students in grades 4 through 8 who showed improvement.

That's different from the previous system, which only reviewed pass rates in four content areas (English, Mathematics, Science, and History).

Under the new system, each school receives a color-coding in the various areas of the new accreditation model — green, yellow, or red — which is then used to determine the overall rating of either accredited, accredited with conditions, or denied accreditation. If a school has no red in any of the overall areas described above, they are accredited. If a school has red in any one of the areas, they are accredited with conditions. If a school does not comply with a corrective action plan, they are denied accreditation.

Factors in the new accreditation system include:

- **English achievement:** Overall English achievement for the school should be at 75% or greater.
- **English achievement gap:** There are seven reporting groups measured, each with a goal of 75% or greater.
- **Math achievement:** Overall Math achievement for the school should be at 70% or greater.
- **Math achievement gap:** There are seven reporting groups measured, each with a goal of 70% or greater.
- **Science achievement:** Overall Science achievement for the school should be at 70% or greater.
- **Chronic absenteeism:** This measures the percentage of students who were absent for 10% or more of school. Chronic absenteeism should be at 15% or lower.
- **Graduation Completion Index** (high school only): The average graduation completion index should be an average of 85. In this model, each student is calculated with a number based on the type of completion from high school (i.e., GED, diploma, etc.).
- **Dropout rate** (high school only): The overall dropout rate - students not completing high school - should be 6% or lower.
- **College and Career Readiness:** This will be calculated beginning in 2021-2022 and is related to the number of Advanced Placement (AP) and Dual Enrollment Courses, Career Technical Education (CTE) Completions, and Work-based learning experiences.

These criteria are described for all schools on the VDOE School Quality Profile website, which can be found at <http://schoolquality.virginia.gov/>. To view the VDOE school accreditation report, please visit <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/>.

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