

September 29, 2020 – ‘School Division of Innovation’ Designation Brings More Opportunities to Students

Contact: Dr. Garrett Smith, Superintendent  
540.332.3920  
[gsmith@staunton.k12.va.us](mailto:gsmith@staunton.k12.va.us)

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STAUNTON, Va. — The Virginia Board of Education recently designated Staunton City Schools (SCS) a School Division of Innovation, an honor bestowed on just 15 of the 132 school divisions in Virginia. The designation lasts for three years and comes with a few perks, including a leg up in state grant opportunities.

SCS earned the designation for thinking outside the box, creating and implementing non-traditional instructional practices and school structures that improve student learning, promote college and career readiness and encourage good citizenship. Specifically, SCS has focused on the following three innovative goals and supporting strategies:

1. **Ensuring all students are reading on grade level by the end of 2nd grade.** SCS has been conducting classroom observations and providing feedback to teachers; providing instructional coaches for each K-8 school; offering SCS University courses taught by other SCS teachers and administrators for professional development; expanding SCS’ literacy program for grades K-5; and focusing on the retention and recruitment of high-quality teachers.
2. **Increasing the number of mentorships at the high school, developing career exploration opportunities, and exposing all high school students to work-based learning experiences.** SCS is using a 2018 High School Innovation Grant and the 2019 High School Implementation Grant to develop a new computer science career pathway for students; expanding work-based learning opportunities, including mentorships and paid internships for SCS students; and measuring students’ ability through hands-on tasks that test their skills and knowledge as opposed to traditional testing methods.
3. **Creating an inclusive and equitable environment in every school and increasing evidence of student voice in the classroom.** SCS has developed an ongoing partnership with the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities (VCIC) to provide diversity and inclusion training for teachers, staff and students. Other efforts include the renaming of the high school and facility renovation; the Alternative to Suspension Center; a new Equity First Fund to address issues of equity immediately; and increasing digital access with hotspots and laptops for all families who need them.

“I cannot overstate not only how exciting this recognition is for Staunton City Schools, but how important it is for the future of our students,” said Dr. Garrett Smith, superintendent of Staunton City Schools. “Being a school division of innovation has multiple positive ramifications for our students and teachers. It means that we will get prioritized when applying for future innovation grant opportunities from the state, and we can apply for waivers to work around traditional approaches to teaching and learning, encouraging further creativity and innovation. I’m thrilled that the state is recognizing our division for being on the leading edge of education in Virginia and that we can expand opportunities to help students achieve their full academic potential through this designation.”

Read more about SCS’ innovative efforts in the [application for school division of innovation](#).