

under Gov. George Allen.

Formerly the school superintendent in Newport News, Newsome was hired following a national search by the Chesterfield School Board and recommendations from Cannaday, who encouraged Newsome to seek the post.

"Marcus Newsome is a perfect fit for Chesterfield County," says Cannaday, who met Newsome when Cannaday was Hampton's schools superintendent. "His leadership has led to increases in student achievement in both suburban and urban school districts. Marcus believes in accountability and knows how to inspire students and educators to meet high standards."

Newsome's first day on the job was Oct. 1. And whether he's ambitious about a higher post or not, his plan for his first 100 days as Chesterfield's superintendent certainly is: "I have developed a superintendent transition plan. ... It has five goals for my transition, 23 objectives and 27 activities. ... Once I gave it to the board, I thought this might be a little too ambitious for the first 100 days, but I'm going to give it my best shot."

He's already begun achieving many of those goals, such as introducing himself to government and community leaders like U.S. Rep. Eric Cantor or the group of local ministers he breakfasted with in October. He visited 10 of the county's 60 public schools in his first month, and has already set up a series of public forums to engage the community at large and find out what the public's concerns are. The first will be held on Dec. 4 at 7 p.m. at Cosby High School, and one will follow each month in each of the county's magisterial districts.

Those who worked with Newsome in Newport News, where he served as superintendent from 2003 to 2006, aren't surprised that he's hit the ground running in Chesterfield.

Former Newport News School Board member Effie Ashe was one of two members who visited the Maryland school district where Newsome was an assistant superintendent when Newsome was interviewing for the Newport News job.

"Have you ever had things that you said, 'This is too good to be true?'" asks Ashe. That's how she felt about Newsome after visiting some of the schools under his administration in Maryland. "We did not check the highest-performing schools. We picked one of the schools that had many challenges. Even there we heard nothing but great remarks about him."

Under Newsome's tenure, the school system went from having two out of 41 schools accredited under the state's Standards of Learning to having 38 SOL-accredited schools. Newport News' high schools were recognized by Newsweek magazine as among the top high schools in the nation. Newport News also doubled the number of children meeting federal No Child Left Behind standards as well as doubling the number taking middle school algebra.

"We came a long ways," Ashe says. "He did a lot of good."

Born and raised in a rural North Carolina town to blue collar parents (his mother was a school custodian), Newsome started out in public education in 1976 as an art and math teacher in Washington, D.C. public schools. (A semi-professional artist in the early years of his career, Newsome specialized in calligraphy and also painted landscapes and other subjects in oil and acrylics.) While in D.C., the former high school football and basketball player loved taking in Washington Redskins football (he describes himself as a "long-suffering fan") and Washington Wizards basketball.

He moved on to become an assistant principal in Prince Georges County, Md., in 1993 and worked his way up the ladder to become

essentially a regional school superintendent in the large school system.

Two of his three children still live in Maryland, but his youngest is a freshman at Virginia Commonwealth University. Newsome and his wife of 28 years, Patsy, are soon to be grandparents for the first time. She is a kindergarten teacher in Hampton, but will be moving to join him here soon and plans to seek a teaching job in one of the surrounding jurisdictions. They attend World Outreach Worship Center in Newport News, but are shopping for a new church here in Chesterfield, where they've purchased a home in the Summerford community.

One of Newsome's greatest challenges at Chesterfield, he says, will be coming up with a plan to handle the county's explosive population growth. The school system currently utilizes some 300 temporary classrooms. A

\$230 million bond referendum passed in 2004 will create two new elementary schools next year and two new middle schools in 2008, as well as additions to 10 existing schools, but Newsome believes even that won't be enough to keep up with the growth.

He's also concerned with "closing the achievement gap." As co-chair of the governor's education policy transition team, Newsome set up statewide education goals for the Kaine administration, and now he's planning to implement some of those goals in Chesterfield.

"I'm proposing that every child take at least one AP [advanced placement] course, an IB [International Baccalaureate] course or an industry certification or license in a trade. This way we can make sure every student is prepared for a four-year college, community college or the world of work."

## Community forums on schools begin Dec. 4

Chesterfield County Public Schools is hosting a series of community forums to discuss its six-year strategic plan.

A total of five community forums are planned. The first will begin at 7 p.m. on Dec. 4 at Cosby High School, 14300 Fox Club Parkway, in the Matoaca District. A forum will be scheduled in each magisterial district. Dates will be announced soon. Registration is not required.

During the meetings, Superintendent Marcus Newsome will give details about the school system's strategic plan, which

is titled "Design for Excellence." The plan sets out the steps that Chesterfield schools will take to achieve excellence. Design for Excellence goals include closing student achievement gaps, expecting more rigorous coursework including Algebra I for all eighth-grade students, continuing school safety efforts, supporting professional growth for all employees and keeping the community involved with Chesterfield schools.

The community forums will also include time for comments and questions from attendees.

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