

Doland reflects on more than 30 years in education

By Tom Doland
OUTGOING SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER

I would like to thank the students, parents and educators that I've had the privilege to get to know over the 36 years I have worked in Chesterfield County Public Schools (CCPS). I feel fortunate to have experienced education at the grassroots level as a school psychologist, as an administrator, and finally as a school board member.

If public education looks substantially different than it did three decades ago, it shouldn't come as a surprise.

COMMENTARY

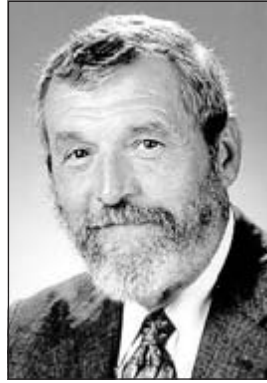
Schools are a reflection of the society in which we live. School safety has always been a concern, but has moved from the back to the front burner. CCPS has been a leader in crisis management for years and works collaboratively with other agencies to provide a safe learning environment for all students and staff. We hope for the best and prepare for scenarios that years ago we would never have believed could possibly happen. Columbine and the tragedy at Virginia Tech bring the issue of school safety home to all of us. Yet in all of my years in CCPS, there has not been one homicide or suicide on school grounds, but we have responded to many student suicides, fatal automobile accidents and deaths due to drunk driving or a drug overdose. The fact is schools remain a well-supervised and relatively safe environment for school children.

Chesterfield remains one of the fastest growing communities within the state. The county has a good reputation, and obviously is a top choice for parents with school-age children. So why don't we build more schools to relieve overcrowding and plan for the new

students coming? The answer is insufficient funding. Give the school system more money for the Capital Improvement Plan, and it will be done. Also, CCPS is seventh from the bottom of the state for public schools in Virginia in per pupil expenditure. We have low business tax revenues and have approved thousands of residential lots for new homes with no proffer money for schools, roads or the necessary infrastructure to support a growing community. Perhaps the old saying is true: you get what you pay for.

CCPS is one of the largest employers in the area and by and large has had a top quality workforce. Many of our educators have spent many years here in Chesterfield, and we will soon have to replace a high percentage of our leadership in the teacher and administrative ranks. Without a doubt there will be some tough shoes to fill, with some gaps and shortages in some critical areas. Competitive salaries for all employees must continue to be a top priority in order to attract and keep an excellent workforce.

When all is said and done, Chesterfield is a great place to live and to get an excellent education. Parents, stay involved in your child's education, they need your support. To all of you that I've gotten to know, thanks for the memories. Have a Merry Christmas and a very happy New Year.



Doland

starting at the sophomore and junior year respectively. Several of my clients chose AP over Z level classes during their junior year and ended up making their first "C" in one or both of the AP classes. This is goal displacement because the colleges that want to see AP classes on a student's transcript also want to see the minimum grade of a "B." These colleges also tend to be "C" intolerant, particularly during the junior year.

Honors level classes are usually the preparatory stage for AP classes. Without honors level English, history, chemistry, foreign language, advanced algebra/trigonometry etc., how will a student be prepared to take the sequential class at an AP level?

The Six-Year Plan will affect all students who are in the third-grade or above. The number of parents who are unaware of the proposed change in the high school curriculum is alarming. I encourage anyone who shares my concerns with the Six-Year Plan to both write or e-mail the school board and attend the meeting on Dec. 11.

Christel Milak-Parker, M. Ed.
College Connections
Midlothian

Letters to the editor can be e-mailed to letters@chesterfieldobserver.com, mailed to P.O. Box 1616, Midlothian, VA 23113, or faxed to 744-3269. Letters should include the writer's phone number and home address, but neither will be printed. All letters may be edited for clarity or space. For complete guidelines, visit www.chesterfieldobserver.com and click on "letters policy."

Business as usual is no longer possible for schools

By Dr. Jim Schroeder
OUTGOING SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER

One has to marvel at the determination and courage of past explorers. Take, for example, Hernando Cortez, a young man who left the comforts of his home to become a soldier and sail uncharted waters. In 1519, he landed near Vera Cruz. As the people prepared to move inland, Cortez ordered that their ships be set ablaze. Though his actions were extreme, his intent was to remind everyone that there was no turning back.

COMMENTARY

In the past 14 years as the Midlothian District representative on the school board, I have become keenly aware of outside influences and internal challenges that face our school system. These in turn affect our community. The perception that our school system impacts only students and their parents is false. A paradigm shift is taking place before our eyes. Chesterfield County Public Schools (CCPS) is a powerful force, which affects not only our 58,000-plus students, but also the economy, safety, property values and ability to attract families to the area. Everyone receives a return on their investment as our schools improve.



Schroeder

Chesterfield County has moved into uncharted territory. Voters have selected new leadership to navigate the changes our county will face. Both county and school elected officials will be required to work together to develop effective solutions as issues arise.

I would like to share some perspectives from my 14-year tenure on the school board. CCPS currently has more than 8,000 dedicated employees, including over 4,000 outstanding

teachers. Sustaining this in the future will require an aggressive investment. Currently, 70 percent of our budget goes to instruction, which includes teacher salaries and benefits. There is fierce competition to recruit and retain the best and brightest teachers and school leadership.

The demographic changes in Chesterfield have required offering a more diverse curriculum and teaching methodologies.

An explosion of information and advancements in technology has revolutionized the marketplace. We are charged with preparing our young people to be competitive in a 21st century global society. Data-driven and evidence-based decision-making and staff development to maintain an educational system that is second to none cannot be achieved with business as usual.

The culture of character as defined by our Core Values and the community will require greater intensity and effort than ever before. Without healthy relationships learning will not take place. To combat the negative breakdown of values and families, the entire community will have to step up to the plate.

Together, both the school board and board of supervisors must gather the brutal facts. What is necessary to provide services required – not just in new subdivisions but throughout the county? If we are unable to sustain our old neighborhoods and schools, we will all suffer. The shrinking world is not standing still... nor can we.

I have raised but a few of the changes we will be facing if we are to thrive in today's world. Comfort is the greatest enemy to change. We must understand that without healthy, well-designed change we will become a community of the past. We must continue to move forward. Whether it is the 15th or the 21st century, change requires moving from what is known to the unknown. As Cortez reminded us: there is no turning back!

This is an outstanding community filled with dedicated, engaged citizens. I want to thank you for the privilege of serving you as the Midlothian school board representative during the past 14 years. It has been a wonderful ride!

Web site offers mental health and other resources

Navigating the maze of behavioral-health information on the Internet is now easier. Just visit chesterfield.va.networkofcare.org.

Network of Care is a comprehensive resource for people with mental health, mental retardation or substance-abuse disorders, as well as their families and service providers.

Through a partnership with the Chesterfield County Department of Mental Health Support Services, the Web site offers links to community-based services, information about diagnoses, insurance and advocacy, and daily health news from around the world. The site is free, easy to use and can be translated into seven languages.

Holiday social for seniors

Join the Chesterfield County Department of Parks and Recreation for a holiday social for seniors on Fri., Dec. 14, from 7-9 p.m., at the Bensley Community Building, 2900 Drewry's Bluff Rd. Bring a friend or come alone to this evening of music and dancing featuring the Chicago Cy Band. Attire is semi-formal. Light refreshments will be served. Advance registration is required; tickets will not be

sold at the door. Tickets are \$7 and may be purchased at the Bensley Community Building or by calling 275-5321.

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to me by Mr. Miller at a board meeting. With a wave of his arm he proclaimed, "Deputy, remove the lady!"

Now, by their vote, the citizens have responded with a wave of their arm, "Bye, Bye!"

Eileen McAfee
Henrico County

Schools shouldn't eliminate honors classes

On Dec. 11, the Chesterfield County School Board will be voting on the Six-Year Plan to improve the quality of education in Chesterfield County schools. Overall, the Six-Year Plan is a move in the right direction to address the needs of our growing and changing school population.

There is a portion of the plan which proposes eliminating or severely reducing honors level courses in the high school curriculum. The wording which applies to honors classes in the Six-Year Plan is extremely vague. In fact, the words "honors classes" are not included in the verbiage. This proposal will have a very adverse effect on students who are not challenged by the current Z-level or college prep level courses but find AP classes too demanding for their abilities in certain subjects. In my opinion, this is a large percentage of high school students.

As an independent college planner/consultant, I have already seen the downside of eliminating honors level courses. There are high schools in our county which no longer offer honors level history and English classes