

## **2018 State of the Schools Address**

**Jason Moretz, Chairman  
Roanoke County School Board  
Tuesday, November 13, 2018  
Holiday Inn - Tanglewood**

Thank you Chairman Hooker.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I'm Jason Moretz, Windsor Hills representative and chairman of the Roanoke County School Board. I'm happy to be with you this morning and I'm very proud to report to you on the state of Roanoke County Public Schools.

In many ways, this is kind of like a classroom. You're sitting there at your "desks," while I'm standing here at the front of the room. Twenty years ago, this would be what a normal school day would be like – me teaching and you sitting there passively learning. But this isn't twenty years ago. Today, students in our classrooms are active and engaged, participating in hands-on learning that is meaningful and purposeful.

So let's do that here. We're going to do a very brief exercise that our teachers use frequently. It's called think-pair-share. At your tables, find a partner and for the next 15-20 seconds, discuss one way education has changed from 20 years ago.

Got it? Discuss one way education has changed from 20 years ago. Go!

That was some great discussion and I'm sure you already discovered that education has changed tremendously in just 20 years. Normally, the teacher would have each group report out to identify common themes, but in the interest of time, we'll move forward.

I have the privilege of working with a fantastic team of fellow board members.

- Don Butzer, vice-chairman, from the Catawba District (Don could not be with us this morning)
- Tim Greenway from the Vinton District
- David Linden from the Hollins District
- Mike Wray from the Cave Spring District

Thank you for your dedication to our schools.

I'm also very proud to introduce you to our new superintendent. We say he's new, but really he's been with us for a long time. Please welcome the superintendent of Roanoke County Public Schools -- Dr. Ken Nicely.

I can speak for the entire board when I say we had the right person for the job right here. Dr. Nicely has been an instrumental leader for many years and was one of the driving forces in developing the district's strategic framework – in a nutshell, here it is.

You've seen this graphic for a few years now, but today we wanted to take a bit of a deeper dive into what this really means for our students

The strategic framework is the heart of instruction and how we support instruction. The heart of this framework is all about deeper learning. Deeper learning is learning that is engaging and purposeful.

Deeper learning is student-centered, personalized, and differentiated to meet the individual needs of students.

Deeper learning produces innovative students who are opportunity ready.

Deeper learning includes content knowledge as well as the development of key soft skills, or, more accurately, success skills. We know them as the five C-s.

These should be familiar to you – the five C's are Citizenship, Collaboration, Creativity, Critical Thinking and Communication. These are the skills many of you have told us our students need to master to be successful. We've talked about these, but what do they really mean for students?

Let's start with that first C: Citizenship. I want you to meet the Leading Ladies and Mentoring Men of Northside High School. They are mentoring students at nearby elementary schools. This is just one of several mentoring programs in our schools where older students provide support and guidance to younger students. This program is just one way we are helping our students understand the importance of giving back and being involved in their community.

Meet Hannah Melvin. She was part of an inter-disciplinary project at Glenvar High School called G-Bees. Science students collaborated with students in marketing classes to develop a real product that is then sold in the community. The money raised by the sales goes back to continue this and other collaborative projects. This is just one of many examples of how students collaborate with one another on projects to learn and succeed together.

Communication goes hand-in-hand with collaboration.

This is Ailynn, a fourth-grade student at Herman L. Horn Elementary. Here she is working with her group to recreate Jamestown using Minecraft E-D-U. Together, her entire team has to communicate with each other to ensure each member of the team is addressing a specific task, so they can build the Jamestown fort. Every day, our students are learning and practicing how to communicate. Our outstanding technology program helps facilitate communication both

physically and electronically. Just last week, Microsoft came to provide additional training because we are among the top school systems in the world using Minecraft EDU. Every day, our students are working to solve problems. Critical thinking is a key skill in problem solving and innovation. Meet Nabeel (Na-BEEL) Raza (Razz-a), Andrew Jerausek (Ja-RU-sek) and Joann Wang, students at the Center for Engineering at the Burton Center for Arts and Technology. These three are working on an ongoing project to develop a prosthesis for Spartacus, a dog that has a deformed leg, and has difficulty walking. Over the course of the year, the students have continued to develop different prototypes of the prosthesis so that Spartacus can walk. This is not something that you just follow the instructions out of some book. These students are creating an original design and have to think critically to meet and overcome each challenge.

The final C is creativity.

This is Ashley, a student at William Byrd High School. She created a painting of the sun setting over Carvins Cove. Our friends at the Western Virginia Water Authority were so impressed that they took her work and turned it into a massive mural that right now is on display on the side of the Water Authority's building in downtown Roanoke.

Creativity is more than just great artwork. Creativity is more than just outstanding performing arts. Our students display these attributes on a daily basis. Creativity is everywhere. Our students demonstrate creativity in how they write, in how they do math, in how they complete projects and so much more.

All these success skills are intertwined in each other and integrated throughout our instruction. But there's more to our strategic framework than the five C's.

The entire outer ring of the strategic framework sets up the environment for our schools. Notice some of the words around the edge? You'll see balance, school climate, professional growth, support services and learning culture. These are all the elements that go into creating the environment for outstanding teaching and learning.

One key element of that environment is safety. We've all seen far too many examples of why school safety has become the foremost of our priorities. Roanoke County Public Schools is among districts leading the way when it comes to our safety and security procedures and systems. Only now are other school systems implementing practices and capabilities that we implemented several years ago.

But we will not be complacent. Many years ago, we established the school safety task force in partnership with Roanoke County Police, Sheriff's Office, Fire & Rescue and the Vinton Police Department. Recently, we added the Salem Police Department to the team.

I want to take a moment and express our sincere thanks and appreciation to Chief Hall, Sheriff Orange, Chief Simon, Chief Foster and countless officers, SROs, deputies and staff who work every day to keep our schools safe. Let's hear it for our first responders.

Last spring, we established a new school safety advisory committee consisting of parents, teachers, counselors and administrators to help us find and evaluate ideas and options to further enhance the safety and security of our schools. Already, this group has had a profound impact.

From the start, the safety advisory committee said their top priority was to expand the mental health resources available to help students.

Done.

In September, the school board invested nearly half a million dollars to double the number of mental health counselors in our secondary schools and expanded our school counseling staff so that every school has a dedicated school counselor.

The safety advisory committee recommended increasing the law enforcement presence at our schools, especially elementary schools.

Done.

Through a partnership with the Roanoke County Sheriff's Office, we have two dedicated deputies to serve as school resource officers for elementary schools. Even more deputies, sheriff's office employees, and fire & rescue crews frequently visit our elementary schools so that there is a very visible and noticeable presence at our schools.

These are just a few of many steps we have taken just in the past year, and we'll continue to find more ways to make sure our schools are as safe and secure as they can be.

Another key element of creating an outstanding environment for learning are the school buildings themselves.

Many of our school facilities are getting older and are starting to show signs of age. We're not alone. Many schools in Roanoke County and across the state are generations old. In Roanoke County, we are very fortunate to have an outstanding relationship with the Board of Supervisors.

Together, we are being good stewards of the public's money. Stewardship rests on responsibility, a sense of the future, and a commitment to the common good. As citizens holding elective office, we have a responsibility to take long term care of the public schools and protect the community's investment and the interests of children. We should leave our schools in better condition than they were prior to when we held office.

And we're doing that.

Together we have developed a capital improvement plan for the renovation of several school facilities.

In about two months, we will begin the renovation and expansion of Cave Spring High School. While we did have a bit of a bump in the road, we are very excited to be moving forward with this long-needed update to a school that is 60 years old.

What is the end result of all this hard work?

It's students that are opportunity ready – ready to fully take advantage of whatever opportunities come their way.

What does opportunity ready look like?

Opportunity Ready looks like more than 11-hundred graduates from the class of 2018.

We are very proud that more than 95% of the class of 2018 graduated on time. Roanoke County Public Schools has one of the highest on-time graduation rates in the state. The class of 2018 earned more than \$13.4 million in scholarships.

Also our students are outperforming the state and national averages on college entry exams.

Opportunity ready looks like more than twenty student registered apprentices. Last year, we told you about our new program to provide opportunities for students to get a head-start on a future high-wage career in a high-demand industry.

This year, the student registered apprenticeship program has expanded four-fold. We're eager to expand this program even further and we encourage you to see how your business could be part of our student registered apprenticeship program.

Opportunity ready looks like a new Introduction to Nursing Careers program we have started this year at the Burton Center for Arts & Technology. This program, in partnership with Carilion and Medical Facilities of America, will train and prepare students to earn their CNA certification and beyond. And that's on top of our already very successful EMT program at Burton.

Opportunity Ready looks like many of our high school sports and athletic teams that are celebrating state championships. Just in the past two weeks, the Cave Spring High School competition cheerleading team and the Hidden Valley High School cross-country team both won state championships.

It also looks like many individual student state champions... and special athletes like the Northside High School unified track team. Earlier this year, the school was named a National Unified Champion School by the Special Olympics – a high honor!

These student-athletes are demonstrating their commitment to excellence. They created the opportunity to be the best in their sport and they took full advantage of that opportunity.

We may never know what opportunities our students will encounter during their lives. What we do know is that we are doing everything we can to prepare those students – your students – for whatever may come their way.

We invite you to join us.

We invite you to be a partner for student registered apprentices or student internships.

We invite you to be a partner in our science fair, academic teams, debate teams and other academically-oriented activities.

We invite you to support student performing arts and visual arts.

We invite you to support student athletes.

We invite you to be a part of Roanoke County Public Schools.

I'll finish where I began.

Back during that brief think-pair-share session, did any of you talk about some of the things I've discussed?

I hope you are excited about where education in Roanoke County is headed. We certainly are.

When you think about how far we've come in 20 years, it's amazing to consider how far we could go in the next 20 years and what opportunities we might discover along the way.

Thank you.