

## 2019 State of the Schools Address



**Don Butzer, Chairman  
Roanoke County School Board  
Tuesday, November 20, 2019  
Holiday Inn - Tanglewood**

Good morning, it's my pleasure to be here this morning to present the state of Roanoke County Public Schools. In short, our schools and our students continue to excel in all areas. Once again, our students exceeded state and national averages in college entrance tests including SATs, ACT's as well as Advanced Placements exams. We are proud of the consistently high on-time graduation rates our students have achieved since this measurement was introduced.

Our students are earning millions of dollars each year in scholarships and earning thousands of certifications as well. I'm proud to say that when our students graduate from Roanoke County Public Schools, they have received an outstanding education.

Our citizens are getting an incredible return on the investment. Of the 132 school districts in the state, only five school districts have higher student performance and lower per pupil spending than Roanoke County Public Schools.

But we're also preparing those students for life after high school in many other ways.

Before I get to that, though, allow me to introduce my fellow school board members.

- Vice Chairman Tim Greenway, from the Vinton District
- David Linden from the Hollins District
- Jason Moretz from the Windsor Hills District
- Mike Wray from the Cave Spring District

I'd also like to introduce our superintendent, Dr. Ken Nicely.

For those of you who were here last year, we asked you a question – how has education changed over the past 20 years? This year the question is – how has your business changed over the past 20 years? More importantly, what kind of skills do you need to see in your future employees?

Find some folks around your table and discuss for about a minute. Thank you. May I have a few of you share what you discussed?

Here are some of the key skills we think our students need to develop: Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, Creativity and Citizenship.

We call these the Opportunity Ready skills, because you've told us before that these are the skills our students need to develop to become Opportunity Ready – ready to take advantage of the many opportunities that come their way. You've heard us discuss Opportunity Ready for several years during these events. We believe so strongly in helping our students become Opportunity Ready that we've included this phrase in our newly redesigned seal.

Through the development of these skills, our students ultimately experience deeper learning – learning that is engaging and purposeful. It's through deeper learning experiences that our students begin to apply instruction.

Deeper learning involves the purposeful use of a variety of instructional strategies such as problem-based learning, and design challenges that focus on problem solving. Our superintendent's 2020 Vision is to see deeper learning be the consistent experience of every student in every school and in every classroom so that our graduates are Opportunity Ready.

This year, we are focusing on exploring innovation in our instruction at Roanoke County Public Schools. But how do you teach innovation? Remember those opportunity ready skills I mentioned earlier? That's where innovation is born.

Innovation requires communication, creativity, critical thinking and collaboration. And we must always remember that innovation should be grounded through good citizenship including coming to school on time and being respectful of one another.

Roanoke County Public Schools is part of the new, Virginia is for Learners Innovation Network, where we are working with the Virginia Department of Education, James Madison University and the Virginia School Consortium for Learning to develop a statewide innovation network that promotes implementation of deeper learning, expanded school equity and increased learning engagement strategies aligned with the statewide Profile of a Virginia Graduate.

Innovation takes many forms. We're innovating education beyond the core curriculum because we know that learning does not happen in a vacuum. Culture and climate play a huge role in the student experience. We are implementing a nationwide program called Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, or PBIS.

The goal of PBIS is to create a culture of kindness in our schools and in our community. PBIS is an evidence-based prevention and intervention practice that supports the academic, social, emotional and behavioral competence of all students. There are three main priorities of the PBIS program at Roanoke County Public Schools – Be Safe, Be Respectful and Be Responsible.

The more we create a culture of positivity, the more we can help students more easily and more readily overcome negative behaviors and influences such as bullying.

While our school system is outstanding, like many school systems across the state and the nation, we also face challenges. Nine of our schools are in need of significant renovation. We have an obligation to provide our students with schools that afford the best instructional experience. About half of our schools were constructed or last renovated more than 20 years ago. Six schools have not seen any significant improvements since the late 1960s or early 1970s.

State funding has not kept up with inflation, and especially construction costs.

We are operating, essentially, at the same level of funding from a decade ago, when accounting for inflation. That places the burden for funding on the localities to cover the gap.

At the current funding levels, it will take decades to update the nine schools that are most in need of renovations. By that time, many of our other schools will start to need significant updates. We are working with the Board of Supervisors to explore options to accelerate the renovations. We are thankful for the strong partnership we have with the Board of Supervisors. We have been working together for the past several months to solve the school renovation issue.

Speaking of updating our facilities – we are making very good use of our existing funding to make some significant improvements at some of our facilities.

We're well on our way with the complete renovation of Cave Spring High School. You can see here just how far we've come on this project. When students return for the start of the 2020-2021 school year, they will be walking into what will essentially be a brand-new school.

I'd like to thank board member Mike Wray for his dedication on this project. Also, I'd like to commend the students and staff at Cave Spring High School for their perseverance as we complete this renovation.

We're in the process of planning our next major project – the renovation of William Byrd High School. We made a few small improvements back in 2011, but now the time has come to bring this late 1960's era high school up to modern standards. We will begin construction on this project in 2021.

In closing, we are committed to providing the leadership and resources to maintain a strong, competitive and effective school system here in Roanoke County.

This will be key in economic development, as businesses want to locate in communities where there are strong educational opportunities for their employees and their families, and we need to be the county, and the school system of choice.

And now I'd like to turn it over to Phil North, chairman of the Roanoke County Board of Supervisors.