

Henrico County Public Schools

History

The free public school movement, required by the Virginia Constitution of 1870, resulted in funding for the construction of new public schools in Henrico County. A tax was collected in each district to finance the local schools. Later, a tax placed on railroads helped to increase the school funding. Each magisterial district was responsible for building its own schools and hiring its own teachers. Toward the end of the 1800s, additional taxes were directed into the school funds so that more public schools could be built to serve the increasing school population.

By the early 1900s, one or two-room public schoolhouses were predominant throughout Henrico. As Henrico's school population increased, the one-room schools were consolidated into centrally located multi-room structures. Henrico County had over 100 public schools, but the number decreased as schools consolidated. Consolidation of these one or two-room schools began to allow separate classrooms for students of similar ages. The position of a principal was created to lead the larger public schools.

Between 1912 and 1915, there were 14 new public schools built in Henrico County replacing many older structures. By 1930, Henrico County Public Schools had five accredited four-year high schools and one accredited junior high school. As school buildings evolved into graded elementary schools, many students often lived too far away from these schools to walk as they had previously done. Henrico County Public Schools began transporting some children using farm wagons, streetcars, and trains. In 1933, Henrico County Public Schools began operating school buses.

In 1940, sites were acquired for new public schools, but due to World War II, shortages of building materials prevented the construction of roads, water, and sewer lines. From 1945 to 1950, the population of Henrico doubled, requiring a significant increase in the number of County employees, primarily in the school system. The voters approved bond issues in 1947 and in 1949 to obtain the funds for school construction.

From 1950-1960, Henrico's public school enrollment increased by 1,000 students per year, putting increased pressure on the school system to expand existing schools, as well as build new schools. Accommodating the growing student population with the available funds led to the construction of many campus-style schools. Fairfield Junior High School opened in the spring of 1959, followed by Brookland and Tuckahoe Junior High Schools in the fall of 1959. These were the first campus-style schools in the

Commonwealth of Virginia. Campus-style schools were nearly 20% less expensive to construct when compared with more conventional buildings. This change in the architectural design allowed Henrico County to keep up with demand without going into too much debt.

The campus-style schools also allowed junior high/middle schools to be separated into clusters of buildings for each grade level with a separate dining facility for each. In some campus-style schools, lunches were made in a central kitchen off campus and then transported to these multi-purpose cafeteria buildings, also known as cafeteriums. These spaces had alternate uses during other times of the school day. By 1960, there were over 23,000 students enrolled in Henrico's 34 public schools.

In 1954, the Supreme Court case of Brown vs Board of Education ordered the desegregation of all public schools. Henrico County Public Schools began the process of integrating schools. During the 1960s, due to suburban, commercial, and residential development in the County, the student population quickly increased.

In the mid-1990s, technology began to change the face of public education in Henrico County. Computers were installed in many classrooms and computer labs were established in schools. By the year 2000, students were using computers as instructional tools. In subsequent years all middle and high school students were provided with a county-issued laptop for instructional use. High school students were also given more choices about their education with the creation of specialty centers in all the comprehensive high schools in Henrico County Public Schools.

In 2014, Dr. Patrick C. Kinlaw was named superintendent. The veteran administrator had previously served in HCPS for 17 years in various capacities, rising through the ranks along the way. Under his leadership, the school division began an ambitious rebranding effort, communicating its message using the slogan "The Right to Achieve. The Support to Succeed." This message signified a widely held belief among school leaders that every child has the right to achieve his or her highest potential, and that it is the role of the school division to support students as they reach for their goals. The work of the school division was further supported by four areas of focus: Student safety, academic progress, closing gaps, and relationships.

Using those areas of focus as a springboard, the school division in 2015 adopted an improved Code of Student Conduct which will more effectively serve all students and staff. A three-year strategic plan was put forward for adoption, and the school division continued its work on a wide range of capital improvement projects funded by meals tax

revenue. In addition, under Kinlaw's leadership, the school division successfully implemented a first-of-its-kind "Un-initiative", in which school division employees submitted ideas for tasks that no longer needed to be done because they had become outdated or inefficient. School division leaders selected winning ideas and took them "off the plate", leading to positive feedback from teachers and staff.

By the fall of 2015, Henrico County Public Schools enrollment had grown to more than 50,000 students attending 72 schools and program centers. The newest school, Kaechele Elementary School (which opened in 2013) was named after longtime Three Chopt District Supervisor David A. Kaechele.