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School Board May Combine Edgemont and Jeter-Watson

LOW MOOR — The Alleghany Highlands Public Schools Board considered a resolution on Tuesday, June 19, 2022, that recommends Edgemont Primary School and Jeter-Watson Intermediate School be combined under one principal for the coming 2022-2023 school year.

Consideration of the proposal by the Alleghany Highlands Public School Board follows a recommendation from the former Covington City School Board, via resolution on June 28, 2022.

The recommendation calls for Edgemont Primary School and Jeter-Watson Intermediate School to be combined into one school. Jeter-Watson Elementary School is the recommended name of the school. Both schools are situated at 560 W. Indian Valley Rd. in Covington, and they share certain facilities including a cafeteria and auditorium spaces.

Jeter-Watson Elementary School would serve approximately 600 students in grades JK-7 in the coming school year. In the fall of 2023, Grades 6 and 7 would be moved to the middle school in the joint school division. Covington High School will become Covington Middle School in the fall of 2023, and it will serve students in Grades 6-8 from Covington and Alleghany County.

Jeter-Watson Elementary school would join Callaghan Elementary School, Mountain View Elementary School, and Sharon Elementary School in serving students in Grades JK-5 when the realignment takes full effect in fall 2023. It is anticipated that Jeter-Watson Elementary would have an enrollment of approximately 600 students in the 2023-2024 school year.

“We understand that the Covington City Public School Board used much reflection and heartfelt consideration in making this recommendation, and we are eager to continue our preparations for serving the students and staff of Edgemont and Jeter-Watson schools in the coming school year,” said Alleghany Highlands Public Schools Superintendent Kim Halterman. “This proposed change does not involve any redistricting of students.”

Beginning with the 2022-2023 school year, Jeter-Watson Elementary School would be overseen by a principal and an assistant principal. Cynthia Morgan, who has served as the principal of

Edgemont Primary School since 2016, has been named the principal at Jeter-Watson on an interim basis. Her appointment could become permanent after the restructuring of Edgemont and Jeter-Watson is finalized, as a single school may be served by a single principal in Virginia.

“Mrs. Morgan has a vested interest in the continued community history of Edgemont and Jeter-Watson. She prides herself on knowing each student’s needs and works with the staff of the building to support each and every student. Her diligent work with the staff has provided a sound foundation for our youngest learners which will impact their success for years to come,” said Melinda-Snead Johnson, assistant superintendent of Alleghany Highlands Public Schools.

Snead-Johnson served as superintendent of Covington City Schools for six years. Covington City Schools, Alleghany County Public Schools, and Jackson River Technical Center merged on July 1, 2022, to form Alleghany Highlands Public Schools.

“This plan to restructure Edgemont Primary School and Jeter-Watson Intermediate School into one school will provide the necessary elements needed for the coming year and years to come. Alleghany Highlands Public Schools will continue with strong administrative leadership under Mrs. Morgan’s latest assignment,” Snead Johnson continued.

Under Virginia law, the public must be notified 10 days in advance of a public hearing on anticipated action by a school board to consolidate a school or change its name. The Alleghany Highlands School Board will hold a public hearing on Monday, Aug. 8, 2022, on the proposal for Jeter-Watson Elementary School.

In its June 28 resolution, the Covington City School Board expressed its desire to name the combined elementary school Jeter-Watson in honor of two men who had a significant impact on education in the Alleghany Highlands, James G. Jeter and William G. Watson.

Jeter began his career as an educator around 1890. In Covington, he served as a teacher and in 1901, he became principal of Covington Graded School. He later served as superintendent of Alleghany County and Clifton Forge Schools. Jeter’s career spanned into the 1930s and he strongly impacted the education landscape in Alleghany County during his time.

Watson, whose tenure as public educator also spanned many years, was an early pioneer in the education of African Americans in the Alleghany Highlands. He was one of two teachers who educated African American in a private home near the Wrightsville area of Alleghany County. In 1882, the school was moved to a private residence on South Lexington Avenue in Covington, where Watson taught 12 students.

Watson holds the distinction of having Covington’s first school for African Americans named in his honor. Watson High School and Elementary School on Pine Street became Jeter-Watson Elementary School after Covington schools were integrated in 1966. The name was later changed to Jeter-Watson Intermediate School. That name was maintained when the school moved in 2009 to its present location on West Indian Valley Road.

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