Taking Steps Up the Academic Ladder

The two-year program at the school would culminate with an environmental project that draws on science and math and touches on concepts including reusable energy and recycling, said Bruce McDade, associate superintendent for curriculum and technology for Manassas Park schools and a member of the governor's school committee.

"What is particularly appealing to me is that the final project will have a connection to the environment, which is important today and something I think students will really grasp at," McDade said. "We are also looking forward to having our students work alongside students in neighboring jurisdictions. . . . This is an exciting opportunity that will provide so many more options for our students."

If the state approves the plan as written, it would be the first governor's school in Virginia to partner with a four-year university, Meyer said.

The school would initially open to about 60 juniors across the three jurisdictions, officials with the project said. During the second year, it would expand to include seniors and an additional 60 to 80 students. Officials said students would have to apply to the program and that they would accept motivated, well-rounded individuals who can handle the high-caliber coursework.

The school would be funded by the three jurisdictions and the state. Although the exact numbers are still being calculated, it would cost about $4,500 per student to operate. The breakdown for the first class would be five students from Manassas Park, 10 from Manassas and the rest from the county.

Separately, university officials said they have asked the General Assembly for $43 million to expand Bull Run Hall to accommodate new classroom, office and lab space for the high school students. But even if George
Mason doesn't receive the funding, it would have room for the school.

"Of course, we are all concerned with budgets this year and what that might mean in the future," McDade said. "But the goal now is to just get the school approved, and when it comes time to send the students, we will figure it out from there. We don't want to derail the planning process now."

Officials with the project said they have received numerous letters of support from businesses and endorsements from organizations, including the chamber sponsoring the March event. They will continue to promote the project and look for support until June, when they have to submit their final proposal to the state.

"We need letters of support from the general public," Grove said. "This community wants to strive to be the best it can be, and I think a governor's school will put us one step closer to achieving that goal."