THE 2013 GRANT – CIVIL RIGHTS PIONEERS COME TO SPOTSWOOD:

In 2013, an educational grant from the Rockingham Educational Foundation, Inc. (REFI) made it possible to transport and accommodate three pioneers of Virginia’s civil rights movement in order to have them speak at Spotswood High School last Spring. These guest speakers previously attended R.R. Moton High School when it was a segregated school that was overcrowded and underfunded. After several attempts to petition the Prince Edward County School Board for the facilities that were enjoyed by their white counterparts at Farmville High School, the Moton students decided to organize a walk-out on April 23rd, 1951 in order to protest for an equal education. A few weeks after the strike, NAACP attorneys Oliver Hill and Spotswood Robinson decided to represent the Moton students. The case they filed in a small courthouse in Southside Virginia later became one of the five cases that went before the Supreme Court in 1954 as Brown v. the Board of Education.

During an hour-long assembly, these civil rights veterans personally testified about their experiences with Jim Crow segregation and how they sparked a thirteen-year struggle to attain an equal education in Prince Edward County. The audience was intrigued by their bravery, they were shocked by the injustices they faced, and they became filled with empathy for their cause. It was particularly satisfying to see Spotswood students rise to their feet and give a standing ovation to these honored guests.

THE 2014 GRANT – THE STUDENT-LED FIELD TRIP:

I am pleased to announce that the 2013 REFI grant has been renewed in order to build upon the success of last Spring’s assembly. Given that we previously heard first-hand accounts of the Farmville story, Mr. Longacre and I feel that there’s no better way to augment this experience than by traveling to the actual grounds where these events unfolded. However, rather than limit ourselves to a simple bus tour, we would like to completely transform the fieldtrip experience by challenging you to become the tour guides for the day. This “student-led fieldtrip” will require you to select a specific component of the Farmville story, conduct in-depth research, and then present it to your peers at a historic site related to your presentation. For example, students choosing to research Barbara Johns will tell her story while standing on the very auditorium stage where she called her classmates to action in the Spring of 1951; students choosing to research Attorney Oliver Hill will tell his story from the pews of Farmville’s First Baptist Church where the NAACP held mass meetings on school desegregation. In addition to the historic surroundings, we plan to invite last year’s guests and other former Moton students to accompany us! The trip will culminate with a private tour of the Moton Museum - a civil rights museum that is housed in the former R.R. Moton High School.
DIRECTIONS:

This project requires you and your fellow group members to research a particular aspect of the Farmville story in order to give a 10 to 15 minute presentation at a historic site related to your presentation. Given that this will require considerable research, the grade you receive for this assignment will replace the lowest “test grade” that you receive in your Social Studies class during the 2014-15 school year. Make sure you exhibit your best work because our expectations will be very high. This may not be an easy “A”, but it should certainly be a challenge that is personally rewarding.

REQUIREMENTS:

1) Form a group of 3-4 students and apply for a spot on the trip via the following Google Form: [http://goo.gl/forms/q8EeGmXfX2](http://goo.gl/forms/q8EeGmXfX2)  
   The deadline for submitting applications is Tuesday, November 25th!
2) Choose a topic to research from the 9 that are listed below.
3) Conduct detailed research and equally divide duties with your respective group members.
4) Organize this information into a 10 to 15 minute presentation.
5) All presentations must have at least one visual, one relevant quote, and each group member must speak at least once.
6) Be professional, but you can be as creative as you like in order to effectively tell your story. For example, feel free to contact persons related to your presentation in order to interview them via phone or email. Many students are hesitant to pursue this, but you will be surprised by how eager most folks are to share their story with you (just make sure that you’re prepared with good questions in advance of contacting them).

*Please feel free to contact Mr. Longacre or Mr. Dickenson if you’re having any trouble getting started. We can answer questions, direct you to resources, help you develop interview questions, etc.

TOPICS TO CHOOSE FROM:

**Group #1 = The Vernon Johns Gravesite in Darlington Heights:** Vernon Johns was Barbara Johns’ uncle. He was born in the Darlington Heights area of Prince Edward County in 1892. He was an accomplished minister and a respected theologian in the Baptist Church. His Christian principles largely informed his civil rights activism and many of his sermons addressed the immorality of segregation and discrimination. Despite false rumors of his involvement in the R.R. Moton student strike, he was likely a powerful influence over his niece, Barbara. This presentation will be given at his actual gravesite that is located on land that he once owned. Your group should address his life and legacy as a reverend and civil rights leader. In addition to information available online, Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63 by Taylor Branch is an excellent source of information related to Reverend Johns. The Vernon Johns Story is a made-for-T.V. movie that stars Oscar-winning actor, James Earle Jones as Reverend Johns.

**Group #2 = Barbara Johns and the 1951 Student Strike:** Barbara Johns was the sixteen-year-old Junior that organized the student strike at R.R. Moton High School. She formed an inner circle of student leaders and spent weeks secretly organizing the demonstration. On April 21st, 1951, she took to the stage of the school auditorium and spoke fervently about the educational inequality that she and her classmates were subjected to. Her speech ended with a walkout and student strike that lasted two weeks. When the white Superintendent of Schools refused to respond to the students’ demands, Barbara contacted NAACP attorney, Oliver Hill and appealed to him for legal representation. The NAACP agreed to take the students’ case on the condition that they change their demand for equal facilities to the integration of public schools in general. Despite strong support for the students’ case from Farmville’s black community, Barbara’s parents feared for her safety and sent her to live with her Uncle Vernon in Montgomery, Alabama. This presentation will be given from the...
very stage where Barbara Johns stood when she called the student strike in 1951! Your group should address her involvement in the strike as well as the various life experiences that led her to take such bold action. In addition to information available online, The Girl from the Tar Paper School by Teri Kanefield is an excellent source on Barbara Johns and her role in leading the student movement in Prince Edward County. Simple Justice by Richard Kluger also has a chapter titled “Stick with Us” that details the origins of the student strike and its evolution into a court case. The video, Strike: a Call to Action dramatizes the student strike and gives viewers a glimpse of the speech that Barbara Johns gave to her classmates from the auditorium stage at R.R. Moton High School.

Group #3 = John Stokes and the 1951 Student Strike: John Stokes was the President of the Senior Class at R.R. Moton and a co-planner of the 1951 student strike. He was a leading voice on the strike committee and helped coordinate efforts to maintain the student movement in Farmville. He later served as a plaintiff Brown v. Board of Education. Following graduation, Mr. Stokes served two years in the U.S. Army and then attended and graduated from Virginia State University. He went on to become a teacher and administrator in the Baltimore Public School system. Mr. Stokes has dedicated his retirement to speaking about the Farmville student movement and the subsequent court case that emerged from Prince Edward County. This presentation will be given from the former site of the bleachers on the grounds of R.R. Moton High School where Barbara Johns first revealed her plan to John Stokes and his sister, Carrie. Your group should address his involvement in the student strike as well as the various life experiences that led him to take such bold action. In addition to information available online, Students on Strike: Jim Crow, Civil Rights, and Me is Mr. Stokes’ autobiography about his experiences growing up in Prince Edward County. He is also featured prominently in two documentary films, Farmville: An American Story & Mr. Stokes’ Mission.

Group #4 = The Tar Paper Shacks: Most segregated school facilities throughout the South were extraordinarily unequal. State funds for education were often disproportionately divided in favor of the white schools. Black schools were grossly inadequate and the buildings were often dilapidated and in disrepair. In Prince Edward County, Virginia, some black schools were denied even basic facilities like indoor plumbing, cafeterias, gymnasiums, and black boards. Four hundred black students at R.R. Moton High School in Farmville, Virginia were overcrowded in a building that was designed to hold less than two hundred. The white school board responded by constructing cheap overflow classrooms that were drafty and cold. The Moton student disparagingly referred to them as the “tar paper shacks.” A replica of these inadequate facilities now stands on the grounds of the Moton Museum – this will be the site of your presentation! You are encouraged to use the various features of this replica as examples of the educational inequality that black students were subjected to. Your presentation should not only address school inequality in Prince Edward County, but you should also explore how the ruling in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) resulted in de jure segregation and state-sanctioned inequality throughout the South. Almost any book on the student strike and the subsequent school closures will surely address the unequal conditions in Prince Edward. Farmville: An American Story is an excellent documentary that features interviews with former Moton students that testify about the substandard nature of school facilities.

Group #5 = Massive Resistance and the Defenders of State Sovereignty: Two months after the Brown decision, a group of segregationist politicians and white businessmen formed the first chapter of the White Citizens’ Council (WCC) in Indianola, Mississippi. Members of the WCC used their political and economic power to prevent integration and black independence in the South. The WCC soon spread throughout the Deep South and became the primary institution in defense of white supremacy and racial segregation. Dependence on the white power structure meant that any black citizen that challenged the status quo risked eviction from their homes and the loss of their jobs. One WCC member said that they aimed to “make it difficult, if not impossible, for any Negro who advocates desegregation to find and hold a job, get credit, or renew a mortgage.” A very similar group was formed in Farmville, Virginia known as the “Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberty.” This group was strongly supported by Senator Harry F.
Byrd and thousands of Defender memberships were filed throughout the state. The “Defenders” played a central role in raising the funds to construct the “whites-only” Prince Edward Academy in 1959. The name of this organization was actually borrowed from the Confederate Monument in Farmville (pictured on the left). This presentation will be given in front of the actual memorial located on High Street across from Longwood University. Your group should address the campaign of Massive Resistance and how these policies attempted to prevent the integration of public schools throughout the Commonwealth. In addition to exploring school closures by the State, your group should also focus on how this subsequently led the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors to shut down its school system from 1959 to 1964 – the longest in U.S. history. In addition to information available online, They Closed Their Schools by Bob Smith is a book by a journalist that covered the school closures. Cradle of America: Four Centuries of Virginia History by Peter Wallenstein also has a few chapters that address the Massive Resistance campaign in Virginia.

Group #6 = Reverend L. Francis Griffin and the First Baptist Church: Known as the “Fighting Preacher,” Leslie Francis Griffin was a leader in the black community and the Reverend of Farmville’s First Baptist Church. He strongly supported the strike and met with the student leaders in the basement of his church. He helped coordinate their efforts with the NAACP and later became the president of the Farmville chapter of this civil rights organization. Reverend Griffin became the undisputed leader of the black community as the student strike evolved into a thirteen year struggle for equal education. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. described Griffin "as a giant among men" and "a modern social prophet." Prince Edward County Schools were finally forced to reopen on an integrated basis in 1964 as a result of the Supreme Court ruling in Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County. Rev. Griffin later stated, "I’m certain by remaining adamant through the long struggle, Prince Edward blacks saved public education in this nation." This presentation will be given at Reverend Griffin’s former pulpit – the First Baptist Church on Farmville’s Main. Your group should address his life and legacy as a civil rights leader with particular focus on his leadership during the school closures of 1959-64. In addition to information available online, They Closed Their Schools by Bob Smith prominently features Reverend Griffin’s story.

Group #7 = NAACP Attorneys Oliver Hill & Spottswood Robinson: Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson were passionate civil rights attorneys that built careers battling segregation within their native state of Virginia. As law students at Howard University they had been classmates and colleagues of Thurgood Marshall. A month after the initiation of the R.R. Moton student strike, Hill and Robinson filed the case of Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County. After defeats in state courts and Federal District Court, they appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The case was later consolidated with four other school segregation cases and it went before the Supreme Court in 1954 as “Brown v. the Board of Education.” This presentation will be given in Farmville’s First Baptist Church – the location of mass meetings that were held by the NAACP in order to build community support for the students’ case. In addition to discussing the role that Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson played in Farmville, your group should address the legal strategy that was devised by the NAACP to use the 14th Amendment to overturn Plessy v. Ferguson. It is important to note that the initial demand of the Moton students was equality and not integration – the NAACP convinced them that the former was not possible
without also insisting upon the latter. In addition to information available online, *Simple Justice* by Richard Kluger has a few chapters dedicated to the Prince Edward case.

**Group #8 = Dr. C.G. Gordon Moss and Longwood University:** Dr. Moss was as a Professor of History at Longwood College that is located within Farmville. He was the department chair from 1947 – 1960, and Dean of the Faculty from 1960 – 1964. Despite criticism from his colleagues at Longwood and the Farmville community, Dr. Moss publically criticized the school closings and spoke out in favor of integration. He declared, "I've been teaching American history for forty years. I've been teaching that democracy and social justice are the greatest ideals of the American nation. I'd be a traitor to the thousands of students I've taught if I didn't take a stand for these ideals when the opportunity comes." This presentation will be given on the grounds of Longwood University in Farmville. Your group should not only tell the story of Dr. Moss, but you should address how the rest of the University responded to this crisis as well. Longwood has recently issued an institutional apology for its "conspicuous silence" during the civil rights era. In addition to information available online, *They Closed Their Schools* by Bob Smith discusses Dr. Moss several times.

**Group #9 = The Light of Reconciliation:** The school closures in Prince Edward County, Virginia represented the greatest resistance to public school integration in the history of the United States. An entire generation of black students were denied education for five years while segregationists established the Prince Edward Academy as a private school for whites (it actually operated until the late 1980s). Despite the deep scars this inflicted upon the community, many black and white residents have recently sought to reconcile the tragic events of this troubling past. For example, R.R. Moton High School has been transformed into a civil rights museum that memorializes the student strike and the thirteen year struggle for an equal education; the *Farmville Herald* that once erupted with segregationist vitriol now editorializes in support of state scholarships for former students impacted by the school closures; the Prince Edward County Board of Supervisors that once closed schools, issued an apology and erected a "Light of Reconciliation" on top of the county courthouse in 2009. This presentation will be given on the very courthouse grounds where this apology is inscribed on a historic marker (pictured above). Your group will be responsible for discussing how the people of Farmville have started to embrace this history and learn lessons from it. Your research for this subject will likely be limited to recent newspaper and magazine articles (online and print) published within the last 10 years. It would also be a good idea to conduct interviews with black and white residents that currently live in the community. They have likely witnessed these changes and can offer personal testimony regarding the extent of social progress.