

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Nansemond County Training School  
other names/site number Southwestern High School (DHR # 133-5065)

**2. Location**

street & number 9307 Southwestern Blvd not for publication  
city or town Suffolk vicinity  
state Virginia code VA county Suffolk (Ind. City) code 800 Zip 23437

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination      request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant      nationally      statewide X locally. (     See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official                      Date  
**Virginia Department of Historic Resources**  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property      meets      does not meet the National Register criteria. (     See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official                      Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:  
     entered in the National Register  
     See continuation sheet.  
     determined eligible for the  
National Register  
     See continuation sheet.  
     determined not eligible for the National Register  
     removed from the National Register  
     other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property** (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property** (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>  2  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	buildings
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	sites
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	structures
<u>  0  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	objects
<u>  2  </u>	<u>  0  </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register   N/A  

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)  
Rosenwald Schools in Virginia (012-5041)

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:   EDUCATION   Sub:   School    
  EDUCATION     Education-related    
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:   VACANT   Sub: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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### 7. Description

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**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century American Movements

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**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

roof METAL: Tin

walls BRICK

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other WOOD

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**Narrative Description** (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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### 8. Statement of Significance

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**Applicable National Register Criteria** (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations** (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

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**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

Education; Ethnic Heritage: Black;  
Architecture

**Period of Significance** 1924-1955

**Significant Dates** 1924

1931  
1950; 1955

**Significant Person** (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation** N/A

**Architect/Builder**

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file** (NPS)

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary Location of Additional Data**

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** 0.99 acres

**UTM References** (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing    Zone Easting Northing

1 18 338683E 4056191N 2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_\_\_

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**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Mary C. Taylor, Assistant Architectural Historian

Organization: Virginia Department of Historic Resources date 4/14/04

street & number: 612 Court Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor telephone 757/396-6707

city or town Portsmouth state VA zip code 23704

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Additional items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Suffolk Public Schools

street & number P.O. Box 1858 telephone 757/925-5500

city or town Suffolk state VA zip code 23434

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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**7. Summary Description:**

Nansemond Country Training School is a brick structure capped with a tin hipped roof. It stands one story on a partial basement. Constructed in 1924, the building is comprised of a central block with a recessed covered porch and flanking wings. The interior is divided similarly to the exterior with three main sections. There is little ornamentation on either the exterior or the interior of the building. The plan of the school is very similar to the Six Teacher Community School Plan from S.L. Smith's *Community School Plans*.<sup>1</sup> There are three main differences, which include a hipped roof rather than a gable roof, no windows on the northern end of the wings and no office and library carved into the auditorium. In addition to the main building there is one contributing secondary structure on the property. This building is wood-frame with a front gable and was used originally as a cafeteria and later as a classroom.

**Detailed Exterior Description**

Nansemond County Training School was constructed in 1924 of brick laid in a seven-course American bond. The north façade features a recessed covered porch centered between two primary wings. Four complete turned wooden columns with engaged columns against each side wall support the beaded board porch roof. There are three sets of concrete steps separated by brick leading to the porch. The main entrance is centered and features double wooden doors with four raised panels topped by a nine light window with textured glass. The glass is now covered by wood. There is a sixteen light transom now covered with wood above the main doorway. Flanking the main entrance on each side is a triple window feature with three six over six double-hung wooden sash windows. These windows are only visible from the interior as they are covered with wood on the exterior. The two wings can also be accessed through single five panel wooden doors on each side from the covered porch. The hipped roof is standing seam tin with exposed rafter tails in the eaves.

The west elevation is unadorned and features four banks of triple windows on the first floor with a single window in between the first two banks and the last two banks. All of these windows have been covered on the exterior by boards. The basement level appears to also have two banks of windows that have been boarded up at the far southwest corner.

The design with two wings is carried over to the rear south elevation as well. The western wing features a single window on the first floor and two windows and a door at the basement level. The

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central portion houses three single six over six double-hung sash wooden windows. The west wall of the east wing contains three single window openings on the first floor and three small square vent-like openings at the basement level. This wing includes a 1950 addition at its rear and projects back significantly farther than the west wing. The south end of the east wing also features a wooden door reached by cement steps. The east elevation features five large banks of windows on the first floor. There are single or double windows in between the rear two window banks and following the first three sets of windows. All of these are covered by wood on the exterior. In addition to the windows there are concrete stairs descending to a wooden door partially below ground level. There is a boarded up window at ground level just south of the door. This elevation also features the square vent-like openings at the basement level.

**Detailed Interior Description**

The interior of Nansemond County Training School is divided into three main sections. The main doors lead into a large open auditorium space. The windows are visible from the interior and still retain most of their glass panels, although a few individual panes have been broken. The ceiling is covered with decorative molded tiles. Decorative crown molding featuring egg and dart and fern-like detailing encircles the room. The walls are plain with a simple wooden chair rail and covered with plaster. There are two metal heating units below the windows on the north façade and also on the south elevation. The floors are covered in tile. The basement is accessed from stairs that descend from the rear west side of the auditorium. Two classrooms on the west side have doorways opening directly to the auditorium. A third classroom, also the principal's office and library are reached through an arched opening at the rear of the auditorium. Two large classrooms can be reached directly from the auditorium on the east side as well. A third classroom is reached via a hallway projecting south from the rear of the auditorium. This hallway extends to include two restrooms and additional classroom space.

The basement contains two classrooms.

Overall, The school building has retained a majority of its architectural integrity while being in a state of slight disrepair. The original double-hung six over six wooden sash windows are visible from the interior, but have been boarded up on the exterior. Some of the individual panes of glass have been broken, but a majority remains in tact. The main level's floor buckles and is unstable in some areas, but also retains its historic tile material. In addition to a significant amount of original

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material, the building also retains the original layout of classrooms. The stage, however, was removed at an unknown date. It once stood between the classroom doors along the western wall of the auditorium.

**Cafeteria Building**

In addition to the main school building one secondary structure remains, which was constructed as the cafeteria and was later used as an extra classroom. This front gable wood frame building stands just to the west of the school. Sitting on a cinderblock foundation, the weatherboard clad building stands one story and is capped with an asphalt shingle roof with exposed rafter tails. The north façade features a centered wooden door with four raised panels and four lights across the top. There is a wooden ramp leading to the door, which is covered by a wooden pediment overhang. The west elevation includes four six over six double-hung sash wooden windows with a centered exterior brick chimney. The east elevation differs slightly with three windows and a door at the south end. The wooden door features two long vertical panels with two rows of three lights at the top. The door is reached by three cinderblock steps and is covered by a shed roof overhang. The south elevation has one window on the western half.

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## **8. Statement of Significance**

### **Summary Statement**

Nansemond County Training School was constructed in 1924 to serve the African American population of southwestern Suffolk. Built to house the first public black high school in Nansemond County, the school included both the primary and secondary grades. The school was largely funded by public money, but also used monies from the Rosenwald Fund to pay for construction. Standing one full story over a partial basement, the building is constructed of brick laid in a seven course American bond. A recessed porch flanked by two solid wings defines the north façade. The interior is broken into three main spaces, the east and west wings with classrooms and the central auditorium. The school is significant under criteria A for its history of serving the African American population of Nansemond County and for its association with the Julius Rosenwald Fund and under C for its retention of a substantial amount of architectural integrity.

This nomination is being submitted under the Rosenwald Schools in Virginia (012-5041) Multiple Property Documentation Form. Please refer to that document for more detailed information about the Julius Rosenwald Fund.<sup>2</sup>

### **Detailed Statement of Significance**

Nansemond County Training School was a six-teacher school built during the 1923-24-budget year. The total cost of construction was \$18,000. Of that amount the African American population provided \$5,000, \$11,500 was public money and \$1,500 came from the Rosenwald Fund.<sup>3</sup> It was established as the first black high school in Nansemond County, being certified by the State of Virginia in 1931. The Training School operated as a community school throughout the thirties and forties with a majority of the students arriving on foot or another self-provided method of transportation. In 1939 the parents of Nansemond County Training School pooled their resources and purchased the first bus.<sup>4</sup>

A normal day for students began at 9AM and continued until 3PM. In addition to the basic courses of reading, writing and arithmetic, students were offered studies in U.S. History, Biology, Chemistry, Geography, and Physical Education as well as French. It was typical for the girls to take home economics courses while the boys studied agriculture. Being a rural school, a majority of the

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students lived on local farms. It was common during the planting and harvesting seasons for many students to only attend school until noon and then return home to assist with the farming duties. Nansemond County Training School excelled in a Nations Judging Contest with Agricultural Projects in 1937-39, taking first place at Prairie View College in Houston, Texas and Savannah State in Savannah, Georgia.<sup>5</sup> This contest was part of the New Farmers of America club and involved students judging farm livestock, field crops, as well as fruits and vegetables. This organization was the African American counterpart to the Future Farmers of America club for white students.<sup>6</sup>

Nansemond County Training School provided students with a primary and secondary education. The northern most classrooms were reserved for the youngest students with the primer (known as kindergarten today), first and second grades meeting in one room and the third and fourth grades meeting across the auditorium. The age of students progressed towards the rear of the building with the southern most classrooms on the first floor housing high school classes in addition to the two classrooms in the basement. In 1950, an addition was added to rear of the east wing of the school to house two restrooms and additional classroom space for the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Along with the main school building there were a cafeteria building and an agricultural building on the property. The agricultural building was torn down when Southwestern High School was constructed on the property, but the cafeteria building still stands.

Nansemond County Training School continued operating as a community school in the historic building until a newer larger building was constructed immediately to the east. The first graduating class marched in this new facility in 1956.<sup>7</sup> Following this the school reorganized itself to use the two facilities and to include a twelfth grade. Students graduated from the 11<sup>th</sup> grade until 1957 rather than from 12<sup>th</sup> grade like today.<sup>8</sup> Then, in 1964 the entire school complex's name was changed to Southwestern High School. It operated under this name until closing as a high school following the 1969-70 school year. The newer building is currently operated as Southwestern Elementary School with the historic Nansemond County Training School building sitting vacant and used occasionally for storage.

Throughout the rural south, African American communities pooled their personal resources and were granted monies from the Julius Rosenwald Fund to assist in the construction of modern school buildings. Julius Rosenwald, the president of Sears, Roebuck and Company, officially incorporated the Julius Rosenwald fund in 1917 to assist in the improvement of education for African Americans

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in the South. However, the fund can trace its beginnings back to 1911 when Mr. Rosenwald first met Booker T. Washington. In conjunction with Mr. Washington of the Tuskegee Institute, Rosenwald helped fund 300 schools in Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia before Washington's death in 1915. Following this, the Rosenwald Fund continued to operate in conjunction with the Tuskegee Institute and had assisted in the construction of 5,357 new schools in fifteen southern states before it was closed in 1937.<sup>9</sup>

Rosenwald schools primarily followed architectural plans provided by the Rosenwald Fund. Typically these designs included large banks of windows to facilitate more light entering the buildings that commonly were without electricity. There were a variety of plans depending on the size of the school to be built and its orientation. Nansemond County Training School is oriented north-south and is very similar in design to the six-teacher school with auditorium provided by the Rosenwald office. The Training School has the same classroom layout and overall design with a recessed porch and flanking wings as well as the central large auditorium. While maintaining these similarities it also contains several differences including having a hipped roof rather than the gable roof in the design book. Nansemond County Training school does not have the windows featured on the north ends of the wings nor does it have the office and library in the auditorium space. It does, however, contain the large banks of windows visible on the east side of the building in the Six Teacher Community School plan by S.L. Smith.<sup>10</sup>

Nansemond County Training School is an excellent example of rural southern school architecture. The combination of public and private money and monies from the Julius Rosenwald Fund show how strongly the community wanted to be able to educate its African American population in a modern school building.

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Baker, Wardell. *Email Correspondence with Author*. April 14, 2004.

Copeland, James E., Sr. *Personal Response to Survey from Author*. March 2004.

Green, Bryan Clark, *Rosenwald Schools in Virginia (012-5041), National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form*. Richmond, Virginia, December 2003.

*Nansemond County Training School, Southwestern High School Reunion 1931-1970, "Strength Through Our Roots."* July 2000.

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

The Nansemond County Training School and its secondary building sit on the grounds of the Southwestern Elementary School. The two buildings along with a small area around them are being nominated. The Training School sits directly west of the Southwestern Elementary School building. Beginning in front of the main entrance, the boundary runs east along the curb of the parking lot to the Southwestern Elementary building. It then turns south running along the wall of Southwestern Elementary School and continues to the northern edge of the playground beyond the rear of the east wing. From here the boundary runs west along the playground to just beyond the west elevation of the secondary building. It then turns north and continues to the curb of the parking lot. Finally it turns east to return to the starting point in front of the main entrance. The nominated parcel includes 0.99 acres.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary was chosen to include the historic Nansemond County Training School and its supporting secondary structure and to include enough area around the buildings to retain the historic character of the setting. Please see attached diagram.

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Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Bryan Clark Green. Rosenwald Schools in Virginia (012-5041), National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, Appendix One: Rosenwald School Plans. Richmond, Virginia. December 2003. Figure 20.

<sup>2</sup> Bryan Clark Green. Rosenwald Schools in Virginia (012-5041), National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form. Richmond, Virginia. December 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Green. Appendix Two: Rosenwald Schools and Related Structures in Virginia: Report from Fisk University Special Collections, Nashville, Tennessee. Page 38.

<sup>4</sup> Nansemond County Training School, Southwestern High School Reunion 1931-1970, "Strength Through Our Roots." July 2000. Page 8.

<sup>5</sup> James E. Copeland, Sr. "Personal Response to Survey from Author." March 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Wardell Baker. Email Correspondence with Author. April 14, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Page 8.

<sup>8</sup> Nansemond County Training School, Southwestern High School Reunion 1931-1970, "Strength Through Our Roots." July 2000. Page 8.

<sup>9</sup> Green. Page 10.

<sup>10</sup> Green. Figure 20.