

Virginia Board of Education Public Hearings *Meeting #4: Virginia Beach, August 9, 2017*

Overview

Between June and August 2017, the Virginia Board of Education (the Board) conducted a series of public hearings to obtain feedback from families, educators and community members on expectations for graduating students, how schools are accredited, and the conditions and needs of the Commonwealth's public schools. The hearings were held in five sites across the state: **Fairfax** (June 27), **Wytheville** (July 13), **Harrisonburg** (July 18), **Virginia Beach** (August 9), and **Mecklenburg County** (August 23).

The Board solicited feedback on the following topics:

- The proposed **Standards of Accreditation** including changes to high school graduation requirements aligned with the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate* and changes to how schools are accredited
- The **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)** state plan
- **Conditions and needs of public education** in the Commonwealth

This document provides information about participants at the fourth hearing in Virginia Beach on August 9, 2017, followed by a detailed summary of the feedback received. Similar summary documents were provided to the Board for the other four hearings along with a synthesis report highlighting common feedback and issues raised across the five hearings.

Participants

Approximately 92 participants attended the Virginia Beach public hearing. There were 36 participants providing comments, including administrators, representatives of educator organizations, teachers, parents, and community leaders. Represented organizations included the International Institute of Restorative Practices, Virginia Association of Library Leaders, Virginia Black Leadership Organizing Collaborative (VA-BLOC), Virginia School Boards Association, Virginia Coalition for Fine Arts Education, Virginia Counsel for Education, The Arc of Virginia, Virginia Partnership for Out-of-School-Time, Virginia Music Educators Association, and Norfolk Gains.

Summary of Public Feedback

Standards of Accreditation

A number of division representatives, community leaders, and private citizens expressed gratitude for the latest proposals for the Virginia Standards of Accreditation, and some offered suggestions for ways in which it could be enhanced.

Proposed Revisions

A representative of the Virginia Partnership for Out-of-School Time recommended that the Board consider out-of-school time programming as a means of providing academic credit outside the traditional academic day. For example, this programming could provide an alternate means to provide instruction to accommodate student needs under 8VAC20-120-180, and 21st Century Community Learning Centers could introduce credentialing strategies that support career and workforce readiness preparation as well as provide additional locations where students could earn academic credit.

An attorney specializing in public health and an advocate for safe and healthy public schools made several recommended changes to the *Standards of Accreditation*, including:

- Modify language regarding students who enter 9th grade in 2018-2019 to clarify that it includes students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan who graduate in 2022;
- Redefine recess to include an opportunity for supervised play and include it in the standard school day;
- Provide more specific guidance on how schools can implement credit accommodations somewhere between the extremes of life skills training and the Standard Diploma; and
- Provide language that requires classrooms to meet the needs of students with disabilities that are substantially equivalent to classrooms for non-disabled students.

A parent disagreed with the proposed accreditation levels which allow a school failing the state benchmarks for English and mathematics to be accredited based on improvements made (see handouts and presentation example).

A science teacher supported the inclusion of environmental literacy in the *Standards of Accreditation*, going beyond its promotion and support on the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) web site. A private citizen also advocated support for environmental literacy in accrediting schools.

A representative from the Virginia Coalition for Fine Arts Education as well as a fine arts teacher suggested that fine arts be assigned one full credit for graduation, versus sharing a credit with Career and Technical Education. It was stressed that fine arts is essential to a well-rounded education for students. It was suggested that the Board read the full document provided by the Virginia Coalition for Fine Arts Education for additional information on what other states are doing to address this.

Assessments

The Virginia School Boards Association as well as a local superintendent expressed the desire to see a reduction in the number of required assessments for students, and a reduction in the number of verified credits required for graduation.

A parent/teacher was critical of the use of standardized assessments to verify credits, arguing that many good students do not perform well on them. She encouraged the state to continue supporting other approaches to assessing student learning.

A local superintendent requested additional support for the implementation of locally developed assessments.

A parent stressed the importance of taking the “whole picture” into account when assessing student performance.

Special Education

A parent requested that schools be required to track special education complaints for both IDEA and Section 504, bullying accusations, and all disciplinary actions and factor these into accreditation decisions.

A representative from higher education was concerned about the apparent disparities in educational opportunities for different types of students. He recommended that the *Standards of Accreditation* should be based in part on the performance of traditionally underperforming student groups.

Capacity-Building

A local superintendent stressed that fully accredited schools also need support for implementation and continuous improvement.

A teacher and local superintendent expressed interest in receiving additional professional development for staff for the implementation of proposed changes in the *Standards of Accreditation*. The concern was raised that the proposed changes may negatively impact smaller divisions unless targeted support is provided.

A local superintendent and two teachers requested support from VDOE for teachers’ implementation of performance-based assessments. It was suggested that multiple professional development offerings be provided, and that they be sustained over time to support fidelity of implementation. It has also been requested that support be provided by VDOE for the communication of changes to staff, parents, and other stakeholders.

A local superintendent expressed the desire to meet with other superintendents to discuss potential growth measures, explore new indicators, and share practices.

Profile of a Virginia Graduate

5 Cs

A representative of the Virginia Partnership for Out-of-School Time suggested that there is a need under the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate* to connect and measure the 5Cs (critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, and civic/community engagement), social-emotional learning, and workplace readiness skills. Currently, the state ESSA plan and *Standards of Accreditation* do not account for the degree to which students acquire these skills over the entire 13 years of formal, public education.

A parent expressed concern over the teaching and assessing of citizenship, based on concerns about how citizenship is defined and the absence of assessments that measure this area of student achievement.

A private citizen supported the emphasis on civic involvement, and would like to see more inclusion of this topic.

Internships

A local school board member expressed concern that the internship programs being emphasized could pose a significant challenge for some school divisions where there are few opportunities for internships. Any assistance VDOE can provide in exposing students in remote areas to career opportunities would be appreciated.

Social Studies

Another commenter supported the development of performance-based assessments for history and social science, but was also concerned that currently these subjects are not part of holding schools accountable.

A teacher was critical of social studies assessments that test only facts and supported the development of performance-based assessments in this area.

Arts

A representative from the Virginia Coalition for Fine Arts Education would like to see an emphasis placed on Science Technology Engineering Arts and Math (STEAM) career experiences, versus Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM). It was suggested that the arts provides students with meaningful experiences that prepare them for both college and career and supports character-building. The coalition has offered to support the Board in implementing this.

ESSA State Plan

Out-of-School-Time

A representative of the Virginia Partnership for Out-of-School Time recommended that the state's ESSA plan explicitly include afterschool programming as an evidence-based intervention for Title I schools receiving comprehensive support, and also include it under Experiential Interdisciplinary Learning in Title II, Part A. This representative also recommended that VDOE consider this programming along with the Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports as an intervention strategy to reduce absenteeism, disciplinary actions, and dropout rates.

Equity

A representative from the Norfolk City School Board stressed the importance of focusing on equity in the Virginia ESSA plan. Revisions to the guidelines for short and long-term suspensions could support this, as certain subgroups have been over-identified.

Libraries

A representative from the Virginia Association of Library Leaders recommends VDOE add language about librarians being included in the “teams and educators” section of Title II, Part A. It was noted that librarians contribute to the education of the whole child. Maryland, New York, and North Carolina were recommended as example states that included library programs in their state plans.

A school librarian highlighted the benefits of library programs for students. Specifically, it was mentioned that librarians provide an essential supplement to the information students learn in core subjects (reading supports all subject areas). It was requested that library programs be specifically called out in the ESSA plan as a part of “external supports” that are provided to students.

Multiple librarians mentioned the benefit that library programs provide to students. It was noted that students depend on library for resources, collaboration space, safe environment, technology, digital citizenship, data-based instruction, access to the internet, understanding of current events, and exposure to new information.

Conditions and Needs of Public Education

Students with Disabilities

A parent encouraged the board to look critically at its policies for self-contained classrooms for Students with Disabilities (SWDs). She expressed the opinion that these students would benefit more from greater inclusion.

Another parent spoke out against the segregation of students with intellectual disabilities.

Environment

A teacher of environmental science argued for a greater focus on interdisciplinary team learning, environmental literacy, and civic action. Equal emphasis should be given to field and lab experiments that allow students to explore a range of economic, environmental, and social equity-based issues. Teams armed with lab and field data will be better equipped to form conclusions and make recommendations for appropriate civic action.

Funding

A member of a local school board requested that the Board/VDOE look at the Composite Index of Local Ability to Pay for the County of Northampton in light of the high level of poverty and its impact on the social emotional needs of its students.

A parent and speech pathologist called upon state leadership to increase the human and capital resources needed to ensure student success, educational equity, and accountable schools by working with state legislators to return to pre-recession funding levels.

A local school board member stressed the importance of additional funding to support rural schools with technology and resources to implement the proposed changes.

Multiple teachers suggested that funding be increased to ensure all students have access to music and arts programs. It was emphasized that music and arts encourage student creativity. It was noted that this offering is particularly important in Title I schools where students may not have access to such activities outside of school.

Underrepresented Groups

A teacher supported the role of arts education in achieving educational equity based on his belief that the arts improve student engagement for traditionally underperforming student groups.

A community organizer representing the Virginia Black Leadership Organizing Collaborative suggested a number of interventions that could be used as an alternative to school suspensions, for example, peer mediation, student-to-student mentoring, art therapy, etc., and recommended that many of these “interventions” could be made available to all students.

A local superintendent raised a concern about chronic absenteeism among newcomers, as frequent trips to their home country are taken. It was requested that support be provided to address this issue statewide, as this impacts student achievement.

A parent expressed a concern about how schools are responding to, and supporting, students who have faced traumatic circumstances. A representative from VA-BLOC suggested that teachers be trained in trauma-informed care.

A parent expressed concerns about the lack of supports for students who are living in poverty, particularly social-emotional supports. It was suggested that every school be provided a social worker and psychologist to assist in the schools in greatest need.

A representative from Hampton University would like to see additional opportunities available to support African-American students. It was also noted that a connection could be made for African-American students through the history of Virginia (presence of African-Americans in Virginia prior to the Mayflower).

A teacher referenced research that students of color respond well to having teachers of color and would like to see VDOE make more efforts to address this.

School Discipline

A parent asked the Board to instruct school divisions to end zero intolerance policies since they have been proved to discriminate against certain students.

A Norfolk City School Board member expressed an interest in additional state funding to support an implement ideas for reducing the number of short and long-term suspensions.

A private citizen and member of the International Institute of Restorative Practices would like to see the use of restorative practices in response to discipline matters, and mentioned the local school district has been unresponsive to their requests to provide additional information.

A parent, local school board member, and a mental health advocate requested the following mental health supports for students posing discipline challenges:

- Training in stress management, self-monitoring, impulse control and self-regulation
- Training for teachers on how to work with students dealing with trauma, and positive behavior supports to implement before removing children from class
- Peer mediation, student-to-student mentorship, conflict resolution, a safe room, mindfulness, yoga, tiered guidelines by grade level
- Incorporate meditation into school day (not just for punitive disciplinary actions)
- Social-Emotional Learning for teachers and students