Meeting Minutes
Virginia Board of Education
Committee on the Lowest Performing School Systems

Tuesday, May 24, 2005

Dr. Mark Emblidge, chairman of the committee, opened the meeting. Committee members present were President Jackson, Mr. David Johnson, and Dr. Jones. Other Board of Education members in attendance were Mrs. Isis Castro, Mrs. Eleanor Saslaw, and Dr. Ella Ward. Dr. Jo Lynne DeMary was also present.

Dr. Emblidge opened the meeting and introduced Ms. Kathleen Smith from the Department of Education. Ms. Smith presented a progress report of the school improvement plans related to Sussex County Public Schools. She discussed the division-level academic review process for Sussex County and indicated that 100% of the schools in the division are warned. The graduation rate for the division is 87%, which is higher than the state average of 82%.

Dr. Charles Harris presented a detailed overview and provided a status for each strategy/action step included in the division improvement plan assessment. He indicated that the central office staff in Sussex have reviewed job descriptions and that the division has sought community involvement in the improvement process.

Dr. Emblidge inquired about the program with Longwood University and ways of ensuring that goals are met. Dr. Harris responded that any program could be made to work well with the right training. Mrs. Saslaw inquired about the division's step to add an instructional coordinator. Dr. Harris responded that the coordinator position will focus on elementary education and that another Assistant Superintendent will be hired within the division to focus on other issues.

Mr. David Johnson inquired about efforts to reach pre-kindergarten students. Dr. DeMary also asked whether Sussex was planning to participate in the Commonwealth's At-Risk Four-Year-Old Program. Dr. Harris responded that the division did not have capacity for the program but was looking at ways to provide it.

Dr. Emblidge inquired about faculty replacement within the division. Dr. Harris indicated that the high school program was very stable and that other programs had seen a replacement statistic of 50%. Mrs. Saslaw asked about the reasons for the turnover. Dr. Harris responded that the turnover was due to licensure and evaluation issues. Dr. Harris also indicated that he was working with Longwood University to offer a masters program to Sussex teachers that was tied to financial incentives.

Dr. Jones asked whether the local school board was supportive of the division's efforts. Dr. Harris indicated that the transition has been good with a great deal of support. Dr. Emblidge inquired about whether the division-level academic review was helpful, to which Dr. Harris responded that it was. The local school board chair in Sussex was also

present at the meeting to support the superintendent and the division's efforts toward improvement.

Mr. Jackson asked about community awareness. Dr. Harris responded that he intends to involve business/community leaders in the division improvement plan and implementation of it.

Dr. Linda Wallinger presented an overview of numerous programs in the department's instruction division that involve intervention in Virginia's schools. She presented program descriptions and funding information for the following programs:

- Turnaround Specialist Program
- Teacher Incentives in Hard-to-Staff Schools
- Virginia Middle School Teacher Corps
- Mentoring Beginning Teachers in Hard-to-Staff Schools
- Partnership for Achieving Successful Schools (PASS) – administered by School Improvement Office
- Early Intervention Reading Initiative and Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening
- Algebra Readiness Initiative
- Comprehensive School Reform
- Reading First
- High School That Work (HSTW)
- Project Graduation
- Academic Review – Selection of an Instruction Method - administered by School Improvement office
- School within a School
- Private Education Management Companies

Ms. Anne Wescott presented an overview of the Accreditation Denied status, which is defined in the Board's Standards of Accreditation (SOA) regulation. She discussed the current provisions of the regulations and mentioned that the first year that schools could be denied accreditation is the 2006-2007 school year. The rating would be based on academic performance in the 2005-2006 school year.

Ms. Wescott discussed options that the Board could consider in its revisions to the SOA:

- Option 1 – A school rated with Accreditation Denied would be subject to sanctions prescribed by the Board and affirmed through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Board and the local school board. The MOU might outline: 1) detailed implementation of a school's corrective action; 2) efforts to undertake an efficiency review at division expense; 3) the employment of a turnaround specialist; or 4) the use of the Board's authority to seek compliance with the provisions of the Code of Virginia.

- Option 2 – In addition to or as an alternative to Option 1, a local school board may choose to enter into an agreement with the Board to reconstitute a school. This agreement might involve: 1) replacing all or a majority of administrative staff and at least 50% of instructional staff; 2) hiring a private management company; or 3) converting a school to a charter school. Local school boards exercising this option make be able to receive a rating of Conditionally Accredited.

- Option 3 – A local school board would have the option of closing a school or combining the school.

Other issues to be considered when reviewing the Accreditation Denied status include an annual report to the General Assembly, appearance by the school division before the full Board to detail improvement plans, and sanctions taken by the Board against a division in accordance with the Standards of Quality.