

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

**Tuesday, September 20, 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. Patricia Wright, deputy superintendent for the Department of Education, was also present.

**Presentation: Overview of Richmond City Public Schools**

Dr. Emblidge opened the meeting and introduced Ms. Kathleen Smith, director of school improvement programs for the Department of Education. Ms. Smith presented a progress report of the school improvement plans related to Richmond City Public Schools. She discussed the division-level academic review process for Richmond City.

**Presentation by Representatives of Richmond City Public Schools**

Dr. Deborah Jewell-Sherman, division superintendent for the Richmond City Public Schools, gave additional details on the progress of the schools and an update on new programs for school improvement. Dr. Jewell-Sherman introduced the chair of the Richmond City School Board, Mr. Stephen B. Johnson, and the members of the central leadership team in attendance at today's meeting.

Dr. Jewell-Sherman centered her presentation around the goals set forth in the Memorandum of Agreement that was signed by her division and the Board last year when the division-level review process was initiated: 1) improve student achievement; 2) promote a safe and nurturing environment; 3) provide strong leadership for effective and efficient operations; 4) enhance capacity through professional development; strengthen partnerships; 6) increase parent and community satisfaction.

The division has focused its efforts on meeting the terms of the agreement and developed a comprehensive plan of action, set performance targets, and selected priority schools based on 2005 SOL and AYP data. Careful central office monitoring of the targeted schools was an on-going part of the evaluation process for the schools. Literacy and numeracy reforms were put in place kindergarten through grade 12. Teachers received intensive professional development and the curriculum was strengthened. Data was examined on an on-going basis to determine progress points and points needing further attention.

Dr. Jewell-Sherman explained the Balance Scorecard (BSC) system that has been implemented to provide feedback on instructional and business systems in order to continuously monitor and improve results. She also described the Project Management Oversight Committee that has been established to identify, approve, and oversee the progress on the projects necessary to carry out the objectives of the Balanced Scorecard program.

Dr. Jewell-Sherman reported that Richmond Public Schools is improving scores on the state's Standards of Learning (SOL) tests as 84 percent of the district's schools are now fully accredited, including all of the city's high schools. Results of the 2005 SOL tests indicate that 29 of the district's 31 elementary schools met the state's accreditation benchmarks. At the middle school level, five schools earned full accreditation. For the first time, all of the city's high schools met the state's benchmarks for full accreditation. The division's exceptional education schools, also met the state's benchmarks for accreditation. In the last four years, the number of fully accredited Richmond City schools has increased from 16 schools in 2002 to 43 in 2005.

Dr. Jewell-Sherman gave additional statistics showing that 41 (80 percent) of the schools in the division met AYP. That is an improvement over 2004, when 27 (51 percent) of the schools made AYP. In 2005, 12 of the 15 (or 80 percent) of the PASS schools made AYP and 12 of the 15 PASS schools made Full Accreditation. SOL pass rates have also shown impressive gains.

Dr. Jewell-Sherman closed by stating that this is a new age of accountability for the Richmond City Public Schools, and she responded to questions and comments from the committee members.

Dr. Emblidge thanked Dr. Jewell-Sherman for her though and encouraging report.

### **Presentation: Implementing Division-Level Accreditation Programs**

Dr. Mont Bush, Associate Executive Director for Operations for the Council on Accreditation and School Improvement, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and Dr. Peggy Siegel, Director, Strategic Alliances, NCA Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement, SACS Council on Accreditation and School Improvement, gave a presentation on the division-level accreditation process developed by their organizations.

Dr. Bush and Dr. Siegel explained that since the inception of the District Accreditation program in 2002, many school districts have made application throughout the SACS region and have received visits by regional SACS staff. Of those, ten districts throughout the southern states (e.g., GA, NC) have successfully hosted their first District Accreditation Quality Assurance Review Team visits. Each was awarded approval of the District Accreditation status for a five year period by the Board of Directors of the Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (CASI). Fulton County, GA was the first district in the nation to achieve this distinction.

### What is SACS CASI District Accreditation?

Dr. Bush explained that District Accreditation gives school districts the flexibility and responsibility to identify and implement their desired process of continuous improvement focusing on increasing student performance. It is a process that examines how all the processes and functions of a district work in concert to the benefit of student learning. School systems

pursuit of District Accreditation is voluntary. It is a process implemented and supported by SACS CASI, a non-governmental organization.

District Accreditation was developed by SACS CASI as a response to requests from superintendents whose systems were already engaged in quality strategic planning and who wanted to align more meaningfully their efforts, state and federal accountability requirements, and SACS accreditation. SACS CASI District Accreditation is a national protocol that is being emulated by other accreditors and of great interest by several state departments of education. As of January 1, 2005 there are 107 districts that have been approved to pursue District Accreditation.

Dr. Bush and Dr. Siegel emphasized that District Accreditation is not a stand-alone process or something 'extra' that a district must do; rather it serves as an umbrella or framework that supports systemic, substantive continuous improvement focused directly on improving learning for all students. Already, districts find it provides a cost effective methods for meeting federal *No Child Left Behind* and state accountability laws.

#### How does a district achieve SACS CASI District Accreditation?

SACS CASI District Accreditation requires commitment from the district's leadership and Board of Education. In order for a district to be eligible to apply, every school in the district must be individually accredited. Additionally, building upon that foundation of successful accreditation experience, the district must have in place or in development a quality strategic planning process focused on improving student learning.

An external quality assurance review team trained by SACS CASI makes a 3 one half day visit to the division. The Quality Assurance Team gathers data and evidence during the visit by interviewing a wide range of system and school level stakeholders.

Following the presentation the committee members asked several questions. Dr. Bush and Dr. Siegel indicated their strong willingness to work with Virginia to determine how Virginia and SACS can work together in the division-level review process.

#### **Overview of Proposed Permanent Regulations for Conducting Division-Level Academic Reviews (8 VAC 20-700-10 et seq.)**

Mrs. Anne D. Wescott, assistant superintendent for policy and communications, Department of Education, gave this presentation, summarized the proposed regulations. Ms. Wescott explained that the proposed permanent regulations do not deviate substantially from the emergency regulations. However, as a result of the department's experience with reviews conducted during the 2004-2005 school year, some changes were necessary to provide more flexibility to tailor reviews to the perceived needs of school divisions chosen for reviews in the future. The proposed changes include the following:

- The proposed regulation would remove the requirement that the school division be “in improvement” status under federal law and instead would permit the Board to review the overall accountability status of school divisions instead of only those designated as “in improvement.” Individual schools in the divisions may be underperforming but the division not designated as being “in improvement.”
- The proposed revisions to the Board’s accrediting standards for public schools include new ratings that may be awarded schools that are not fully accredited. The proposed language would not restrict the Board from considering school divisions that have low performing schools rated other than “accredited with warning”
- Some of the detailed structure of the review would be removed. The proposed regulation provides greater flexibility to the Board of Education and Department of Education to construct reviews to meet the perceived need of the school division being reviewed.
- The proposed regulation would require that the local school board hold a public hearing on the improvement plan prior to submitting it to the Board of Education and to make periodic reports on its actions to the public in addition to submitting reports to the Board of Education.

Ms. Wescott noted that the full Board of Education will review the proposed regulations at the meeting on Wednesday, September 21, 2005.

### **Overview of Modifications to the School-Level Academic Review Process**

Mrs. Kathleen Smith, director of school improvement at the Department of Education, presented this item. Ms. Smith explained that in the proposed modifications to the academic review process guidelines, the school-level review continues to focus on the development, monitoring, and implementation of the school improvement plan. In the first year, the academic review team will conduct an on-site review and assist the school in identifying areas of need and writing an effective three-year school improvement plan. In the second year, a school support team will provide technical assistance to the school to modify, monitor, and implement the school improvement plan. This assistance will continue until the school is no longer warned.

Ms. Smith described the school-level academic review process, which is tailored to meet the unique needs and circumstances presented by the school. The first year that a school is rated “accredited with warning,” the Department of Education assigns the school to one of three academic review “tiers” based on the circumstances of the school as described in the guidelines. An academic review team, either state or locally directed, will conduct an on-site review and assist the school in identifying areas of need and writing an effective three-year school improvement plan.

If the school is not fully accredited in the year following the academic review team visit, the Department of Education will assign the school to a level of intervention (technical assistance and support) and identify a school support team to provide technical assistance. Three levels of

intervention are described in the guidelines. The school support team will continue to provide technical assistance until the school is no longer warned.

Ms. Smith noted that the full Board of Education will review the proposed revisions to the guideline at the meeting on Wednesday, September 21, 2005.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Submitted by:  
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