

**Advisory Commission
Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind
December 1, 2005
10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.**

Summary of Meeting

Members Present: Senator Emmett Hanger, Jr., Delegate Mayme BaCote, Delegate Chris Saxman, Senator Harry Blevins, Senator Mamie Locke, Citizen Member Gordon Landes and Citizen Member John Pleasants

Others Present: Karen Trump, Director of State Schools, DOE
Doug Cox, Assistant Superintendent for Special Education & Students Services, DOE
Darlene White, Superintendent, VSDBM-H
Nancy Armstrong, Superintendent, VSDB-S

Members Absent: Delgate Rob Bell, Delegate Glen Weatherholtz, Delegate Lionell Spruill, Board of Education member Mark Emblidge, Parent Representative Maureen Hollowell

Opening remarks were made by Senator Hanger welcoming meeting attendees. He also described the history of the creation of the Advisory Commission, the purpose of the commission and focus of the meeting. Senator Hanger also stated that the commission does not have decision making authority regarding the schools but makes recommendations to the Board of Education regarding the schools. Senator Hanger requested to have the minutes from the January 10, 2005 meeting approved. He also requested approval of the meeting agenda. Both documents were approved.

Status Report of Schools:

Dr. Armstrong distributed packets of information to the Advisory Committee and reported that VSDB-S currently serves 123 students who are deaf and blind. She indicated that there had been more staff turnover recently than in previous years. She expressed her belief that the situation was a result, in part, of the uncertain nature about the future of the two schools. She reported that VSDB-S has recruited 33 staff positions in the past year. Her update about enrolled children indicated that the youngest blind student is a 4th grader and there is currently 1 kindergarten student enrolled. The majority of students are in middle and high school.

A question was asked regarding whether students who leave the school were ever transitioned back into regular public school and Dr. Armstrong responded that some of the students return to the public schools after they leave while others move out of state. Another question was posed to the Superintendent regarding the number of families who have moved to Staunton area to enroll in the locality to be day students and the Superintendent stated that 8 families have moved to the Staunton area for that purpose.

Dr. Armstrong spoke of the training activities since the beginning of the school year which included training on the Standards of Learning, Clarity (the IEP Online System) and gang related

workshops. She explained that there are now Smart boards in every classroom in the Deaf department and in some classes in the Blind Department. She reported that the HI and VI teachers will meet the Highly Qualified standards by the end of the year either by taking the Praxis or other training relating to the areas they teach. Also courses have been provided in the area of Learning Disabilities that teachers can use to obtain dual licensure.

A commission member asked Dr. Armstrong about the current need for services of students who fit into the category of Deaf and Emotionally Disturbed. Dr. Armstrong responded that the program is definitely needed particularly since the closure of the Grafton School in Richmond that formerly served students who are deaf with emotional problems. The Superintendent then continued discussion about the schools activities by stating that four visually impaired students had gone to Huntsville Alabama Space Camp this year. She also mentioned use of Black Berry and Sidekick electronic devices which are available to staff and students. A boys and girls basketball and goal ball team tournament is planned for this school year.

Dr. White reported that as of December 2005, there are 60 students enrolled at VSDBM-H compared to approximately 18 more students last year. There are 26-day students and 34 residential students. Dr. White pointed out that like VSDB-S, VSDBM-H also serves students throughout the State of Virginia. Dr. White reviewed the staffing of the school and dormitory programs and emphasized the need for additional teacher assistants and residential staff. Students in wheelchairs as well as those who require personal assistance need additional support. Dr. White also mentioned the need to use less part-time employees and have more classified employees so that VSDBM-H can maintain better stability of staff for student programs.

Dr. White then spoke of the program improvements including an additional Auditory/Oral preschool classroom, making it a total of 2 preschool classes. The school received 35 additional computers last year and 25 additional computers have been purchased for installation in January 2006. She noted that Sidekicks have been assigned to staff to facilitate better communication on campus between hearing and deaf persons. Sidekicks are also used for student training. Cameras are available at designated computers for the use of video relay services. During the first semester there has been a focus on reading & writing literacy for students and in the second semester there will be a focus on math literacy. Ongoing training has been provided for teachers on Thinking Maps, a brain-based learning strategy.

Dr. White summarized the staff development activities for this year and stated that CPR/First Aid Training and American Sign Language (ASL) was required for all staff. She also noted that the number of CDL driver trainers has increased from 1 last year to 3 this year. She also pointed out that training in the state assessment system (VAAP) has been provided for teachers. VSDBM-H purchased the Clarity program, which will be launched later this month. She noted that Clarity encompasses the IEP development and managing of some special education requirements. Dr. White also mentioned that VSDBM-H is organizing a Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI) team and that the projected team training date is scheduled for the first week in February. VSDBM-H is currently revising the alignment documents for the Life-Centered Career Education Curriculum and Standards of Learning (Sols). Dr. White emphasized the need for more ramps on campus and stated that although ramps are accessible in each building, several are located at side or back entrances and in order to give individuals with

disabilities the same respect as that given to the non-disabled, ramps should be installed to the main entrances as well.

A board member then asked Dr. White if the decrease in enrollment was the result of people moving out of state or from military families or was there a decrease also as a result of students returning to the public schools. Dr. White responded that all students come from the mainstream and local school divisions because VSDBM-H has the resources to better accommodate these special need students. She concurred with Dr. Armstrong that the decrease appears to be related to the ongoing uncertainty of consolidation. Mr. Pleasants then asked if there were concerns regarding the eVA system and Dr. White responded by highlighting the buying options using eVA and the impact for purchasing some items that are available from limited suppliers.

Senator Locke asked Dr. White why VSDBM-H was asking for \$300,000 but there is more than \$300,000 in needs. Dr. White responded by emphasizing that \$300,000 was asked for each year over several years to address timelines needed to complete work. Another question posed was if there were currently any projects in process and the Superintendent stated that the Education Road Project is in process however the Bradford Hall renovation projected costs have exceeded the amount previously budget. Senator Hanger asked Dr. White what was the percentage of students being prepared for employment and Dr. White emphasized that all students 16 years and over are involved in pre-employment training through transition planning and community-based work experience. The job training process gives students a good foundation for adult employability skills and many students secure employment from their student placement.

Public comment was received from the following individuals:

Delegate Flora Crittendon
Former Delegate Mary T. Christian, Coalition for Preservation of VSDBM-H
Mayor Joe Frank, City of Newport News
Dr. Patrick Russo, Superintendent, Hampton City Schools
Councilman Charles Allen, Newport News City Council
Dr. Marcus Newsome, Superintendent, Newport News Schools
Congressman Bobby Scott
Storey Smith, Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities
Rufus Easter, Peninsula NAMI
David Spratley, Director, MR Services, Newport News Community Services Board
Mayor Ross Kearney, City of Hampton
Harriet Storm, Hampton-Newport News Community Services Board
Rudy Langford, President, Coalition for Justice
Ralph Shelman, Coalition for Preservation of VSDBM-H

Public Comment:

- Former Delegate Dr. Mary Christian, 92nd District
- Mr. Joe Frank, Mayor of Newport News
- Dr. Marcus Newsome, Superintendent of Newport News City Public Schools
- Dr. Patrick Russo, Superintendent of Hampton City Public Schools
- Mr. Joseph Johnson, Director of New Horizons Regional Education Center

- Mr. Ross Kearney, Mayor of City of Hampton
- Mr. Joseph Spencer, Vice Mayor of City of Hampton
- Mr. Rhet Tignor, Member of Hampton City Council
- Mr. Turner Spencer, Member of Hampton City Council
- Ms. Ruth Kellum, Hampton City Public Schools Board member, New Horizons Regional Education Center Board member, Downtown Hampton Child Development Center - Board member
- United States Congressman Robert “Bobby” Scott
- Mr. Story Smith, Chairman of Hampton Mayor’s Committee for People with Disabilities
- Mr. Rufus Easter, speaking on behalf of National Alliance for the Mentally Ill and Peninsula Center for Independent Living
- Former Delegate Flora Crittendon. Mrs. Crittendon requested that a written copy of her comments be included in the meeting record and distributed with all meeting minutes.
- Dr. Judith Brook Bucks, Hampton University
- Mr. David Spratley, Community Services Board
- Ms. Harriett Storm, Resident of City of Hampton; Community Service Board member. She read a letter from Delegate Phil Hamilton and asked that it be included in the meeting record.
- Delegate Tom Gear, 91st District
- Mr. Rudy Langford, community member, President, Coalition for Justice
- Ms. Louise Hudson, Parent of VSDBM-H Alumni and Community member
- Mr. Reagan Brown, VSDBM-H Alumni
- Ms. Catherine Tyler-Northan, VSDBM-H Alumni and Community Action Specialist of Insight Enterprises Inc.
- Mr. Ralph Shelman, VSDBM-H Alumni, Director of Insight Enterprises Inc., Co-chair Coalition for Preservation of VSDBM-H
- Mr. Charles Adams, Vice Mayor of City of Newport News
- Ms. Sherri Livingsfield, Disability Advocate, community member

After lunch, Dr. Karen Trump distributed copies of the October, 2005 report to the Governor and General Assembly. She also provided a brief historical overview of actions from 2003 to date regarding the consolidation project. Clarification was requested from Delegate Mayme BaCote about the intent of the appropriation language regarding whether the language directed consolidation of the two schools or permitted leaving them both open. She responded that the appropriation language directed a plan for consolidation of the two schools at one location. There was discussion between Delegate Saxman and Delegate BaCote about the intent of the language.

It was determined by the Commission that another meeting would be desirable prior to the beginning of the General Assembly session. The group agreed that Tuesday, January 3 was a possible meeting date in either Richmond or Staunton.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.

