

Virginia Board of Education  
Student Advisory Committee  
Minutes: April 23, 2008

Students in Attendance:

Anna Akers-Pecht, The Governor's School of Southside Virginia; Patrick Curtis, William Fleming High School; Christy Darling, Atlee High School; Shannon Farrow, Ni River Middle School; Daniel Jung, River Bend Middle School; Corinna Pan, Thomas Jefferson High school of Science and Technology; Sean Poppen, Greenbrier Middle School; Drew Proffit, John S. Battle High School; Brielle Spencer, Heritage Middle School; Sandy Suhling, North Stafford High School; Hannah Wagner, Western Branch High School.

Board of Education Members in Attendance:

Mrs. Eleanor Saslaw, Mrs. Isis Castro

Department of Education Staff in Attendance:

Michelle Vucci, Michelle Parker, Melissa Velazquez, Charles Pyle, Jere Kittle

Ms. Velazquez and Mrs. Parker welcomed the members of the Student Advisory Committee and reviewed the day's activities.

The Student Advisory Committee convened in their three work groups to discuss the research they had done since the last meeting and to develop their reports and recommendations for presentation to the Board of Education at its meeting on Thursday, April 24, 2008.

The members of Work Group One developed their position and recommendations regarding improving communications between teachers/administration and parents and students and expanding the role of technology. The members of Work Group Two developed their position and recommendations regarding methods for closing the achievement gap and administration/student relations. The members of Work Group Three developed their position and recommendations regarding promoting community service in schools and enhancing the promotion and communication of opportunities to students.

The entire Student Advisory Committee then convened to hear the presentations from the three work groups and to make any suggestions for changes to the final reports. The reports for presentation to the Board of Education at its April 24, 2008 meeting are attached. The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Eight of the students then attended a voluntary meeting with Mrs. Jean Bankos of the Office of the Secretary of Education to discuss a communications toolkit prepared by a committee of the P16 Council.

**Statement from the 2007-2008  
Student Advisory Committee  
of the  
Virginia Board of Education**

**Issue of Discussion:**

The improvement of the professional development and support programs to enhance the integration of technology into the curriculum

**Background:**

Over the past decade, technology has transformed the education process. Technology addresses a variety of student needs, and it helps bridge the achievement gap. While studies have shown that technology has a significant effect on teaching and learning, technology is simply a tool. The mere presence of technology in schools does not automatically improve education. If teachers are unaccustomed to using the latest equipment and programs, then the students do not reap the benefits of current technology. Without proper training and support, teachers who are uncomfortable with technology are unable to efficiently and effectively use it in the classroom.

**Position of the Student Advisory Committee:**

While many of Virginia's schools now have access to technology, the challenge of effective integration of technology into the curriculum remains. Today's world calls for the utilization of technological skills in all aspects of life. The Board of Education can take multiple steps to address technological proficiency that will also consider the needs of diverse school divisions.

**Recommendations:**

In accordance with the Board's Educational Technology Plan for Virginia, we recommend the following strategies:

- Provide more professional development to increase teachers' comfort levels with technology, as well as to keep them updated on the most current technology and uses of technology in the classroom.
- Compile and distribute statewide annual lists of available grants and opportunities for schools to acquire technology and training.
- Encourage the establishment of a mentor system to keep schools and educational staff aware of the latest technology programs and developments.

**Submitted by:**

Anna E. Akers-Pecht  
Patrick C. Curtis  
Christina (Christy) E. Darling

Corinna L. Pan  
Sean R. Poppen  
Andrew (Drew) L. Proffitt

Shannon E. Farrow  
Yon K. (Daniel) Jang  
Nitin R. Nainani

Brielle T. Spencer  
Sandra (Sandy) E. Suhling  
Hannah L. Wagner

**Statement from the 2007-2008  
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**Issue of Discussion**

Building positive student-faculty relationships and communication to improve student achievement

**Background:**

Studies and our personal experiences have shown that student-teacher relationships are crucial to closing the achievement gap. According to Kathleen M. Smith of the Office of School Improvement, relationships are one of the three most important aspects of school life that can be improved to bring Virginia students up to the high standards of learning expected of them. Additionally, a survey conducted at one of our schools proved that a student's teacher is as important to their success in a class as their affinity for that subject.

**Position of the Student Advisory Committee:**

The Student Advisory Committee believes that it is the duty of both teachers and students to communicate and develop relationships beyond the subject matter to broaden students' horizons. Improved teacher-student relationships create a healthier school environment and an atmosphere of trust, resulting in both higher achievement and higher morale.

**Recommendations:**

The Student Advisory Committee has compiled the following list of recommendations:

- Hold workshops or sessions for teachers that focus on how to:
  - communicate effectively
  - relate to different needs and respond to varied situations of students
  - cater to multiple learning styles
  - create an environment where the student feels comfortable approaching the teacher
  - express and demonstrate a vested interest in students as individuals
  - set and convey clear expectations to the student
  - create an atmosphere of trust
  - teach and implement mediation skills
- Find ways to teach students effective communication skills such as:
  - using an appropriate tone of voice
  - conveying their message clearly and politely to adults
  - listening actively

- having the message understood
- Communicate to teachers and administration the need to be open and receptive to student thought through the following means:
  - Allow for open dialogue between student body representatives and faculty
  - Foster open dialogue in the classroom
- Encourage schools to add a Life Skills class as an elective that would teach students how to:
  - conduct themselves during interviews
  - respond in different situations
  - use basic manners
- Recommend that schools establish a teacher advisory (TA) program that would meet with a group of students regularly.
  - The teacher advisory program would be the contact for personal student issues and character development; the TA would be a “secondary counselor.”

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**Statement from the 2007-2008  
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**Issue of Discussion:**

Enhancing the communication of opportunities to students through a student Web page on the Department of Education Web site

**Background:**

We conducted surveys to measure the quality of communication of opportunities between schools and students. An overwhelming percentage of students were unaware of these opportunities such as awards, scholarships, and summer academic programs. This issue may be a result of multiple levels of communication due to the bureaucratic nature of local school division structures. Starting from the Department of Education, information can be lost as it trickles down through superintendents and principals until it finally reaches the most important recipients—the students.

**Position of the Student Advisory Committee:**

Through the following recommendations, we wish to eliminate the “middle men” and enable students to acquire information directly from the top of this information hierarchy.

**Recommendations:**

We recommend that the State Board of Education enact a four-pronged initiative:

- Create a student Web page on the Department of Education’s Web site. The Web page will provide important information about opportunities in scholarships, online education, summer academic programs, etc.
- Provide a Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed to which the student can subscribe to receive emails about the updates made on Web page.
- Devise a communications plan to inform students about this resource. This plan could include a noticeable link to the Web page from school and district Web sites and the use of the webpage as encouraged by career counselors and librarians.
- Continue annual review of the student Web page by future Student Advisory Committees. Every year, the committee may give feedback to the Division of Policy and Communications in order to keep the Web site relevant.

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