

Virginia Board of Education Hearings: Expectations for Students and Schools Meeting 2: Williamsburg, July 19, 2016

In July and August 2016, the Virginia Board of Education is hosting a series of meetings to gather information on expectations for students, school accreditation, and school resources. Each event consists of two feedback sessions: a stakeholder roundtable and a public hearing. The stakeholder roundtables include 15–20 invited attendees who represent school and division leadership, teachers, parents, students, higher education institutions, and employers. The public hearings, which follow the roundtables, give all interested community members the opportunity to provide feedback. Public hearing participants may include school and division leaders, teachers and other educators, representatives of educator organizations, parents, students, and other concerned citizens. The roundtables and public hearings are intended to solicit feedback on the following topics:

- **Conditions and needs of public education.** Views on current education conditions and needs in Virginia public schools.
- **Profile of a Virginia Graduate.** Reactions to the proposed redesign of the high school experience guided by a draft Profile of a Virginia Graduate and proposed revisions to high school graduation expectations and requirements.
- **Accountability system changes.** Suggestions for the development of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) state plan, as well as responses to proposed changes in school accreditation, state support for schools needing improvement, and public reporting of school information.
- **Standards of Quality revisions.** Recommendations for revisions to school quality standards that align with the Profile and the accountability system.

This memo summarizes feedback from the second event in Williamsburg on July 19, 2016, as well as written comments submitted to the Board. A similar memo was developed for a previous event that took place in Manassas on July 14, and memos will be developed based on upcoming events in Abingdon (August 24) and Lynchburg (August 25). A synthesis of feedback from all four events will be provided after the Lynchburg event.

In this memo, summaries are provided for each feedback session, organized by the four topics outlined above. These summaries are followed by a synthesis of key themes from the Williamsburg roundtable and public forum.

Stakeholder Roundtable

Dr. Billy Cannaday, President of the Virginia Board of Education, facilitated the roundtable. Participants are listed in table 1.

Table 1. Stakeholder Roundtable Participants, Williamsburg

Name	Title	Jurisdiction
Dr. Billy Cannaday	President	Virginia Board of Education
Mr. Wes Bellamy	Member	Virginia Board of Education
Mr. Dan Gecker	Member	Virginia Board of Education
Dr. Steven Staples	Superintendent of Public Instruction	Virginia Department of Education
Mr. Steven Constantino	Superintendent	Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools
Ms. Kimberly Hundley	Teacher	Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools
Dr. Cheryl Askew	Principal, Landstown High School	Virginia Beach City Public Schools
Ms. Liz Parker	Coordinator of School Counseling Programs	Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools
Ms. Barbara Haywood	Local School Board Vice Chair	York County School Board
Mr. Aaron Hairston	Business Representative and Parent	
Ms. Laura Tripp	Parent	Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools
Macallan Cruff	Student	Poquoson Public Schools

Michaela VanWicklin	Student	Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools
Dr. Genevieve Siegel- Hawley	Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership	Virginia Commonwealth University
Dr. Lisa Rhine	Provost	Tidewater Community College - Chesapeake
Mr. Anderson Bradshaw	Business Representative	

Conditions and needs of public education

Participants identified three major needs for public education: supporting and strengthening the educator workforce, supporting high-needs schools, and strengthening K–12/higher education partnerships.

Supporting and strengthening the educator workforce

Participants discussed the importance of hiring highly qualified, diverse teachers who understand different learning styles and can customize instruction to student needs. When asked for input on how to attract more teachers of color to the profession, roundtable participants suggested the following:

- **Bring passion back to the profession.** Take steps to ensure that teaching is an attractive profession to high school and college students. Demonstrate to prospective teachers that they can make a difference in the field.
- **Invest in additional compensation for teachers** so that more candidates are attracted to teaching and have an incentive to stay in the field throughout their careers.
- **Focus on recruiting and retaining effective administrators** who, in turn, can recruit highly qualified, diverse teachers.
- **Provide incentives for teachers to teach at, and remain in, challenging schools.**

Support for high-needs schools

A business owner and parent said that associating the word “needs” with specific divisions and schools often connotes limitations. He noted the importance of also acknowledging the strengths of these schools’ students, teachers, and administrators, many of whom achieve

great things despite challenges. He added that Virginia should invest in additional capacity building for those who are doing well.

Dr. Cannaday asked which types of support the state should provide for challenged schools with large low-income populations. A parent stressed the importance of equal instructional resources and facilities, noting that low-quality facilities and equipment lower student morale.

A local school board representative advocated for decreasing class sizes and ensuring that teachers have high expectations for students at all achievement levels. She also stressed the importance of a strong early academic foundation and ensuring that students are able to read on grade level by grade 3.

A university faculty member said that many White teachers attend White-majority schools and encounter students of color for the first time when they enter the classroom. She emphasized the importance of intentionally fostering student diversity within schools, which she said may contribute to improved student outcomes. She also said that the socioeconomic status of a student's peers is the most important predictor of achievement. In light of this information, she suggested that policymakers think creatively about policies to improve racial and socioeconomic integration, which works best on a metropolitan scale. She advocated for open enrollment—whole-school magnet programs that attract students from a range of socioeconomic and racial backgrounds.

K-12/higher education partnerships

A community college provost advocated for additional partnerships among high schools, community colleges, and industry to leverage what each institution has to offer. She noted that such partnerships increase opportunities for students to take dual enrollment courses and earn industry-recognized credentials. Students participating in the roundtable also expressed support for dual enrollment courses and the opportunity to earn college credit.

Profile of a Virginia Graduate

Roundtable participants spoke about the Profile's career readiness focus, topics related to curriculum and instruction, student-to-counselor ratios, and appropriate educational settings for implementation of the Profile.

Career readiness

Multiple roundtable participants expressed support for the Profile's emphasis on career exploration. Participants agreed that it is important for students to be exposed to a wide range

of careers. A student proposed quarterly electives that would expose students to a range of subject areas. Others said such exposure is particularly important for students who ultimately choose not to attend college. Participants agreed on the importance of equitable exposure to high-quality career and technical education (CTE) programs. They reported that currently, there are large differences in availability and quality of CTE throughout the state, and said that partnerships among high schools, colleges, and industry are essential to strengthening CTE.

A high school principal expressed support for expanding internship opportunities for high school students to help them develop critical thinking skills and allow them to apply academic and technical skills in real-world contexts.

Curriculum and instructional areas

Students emphasized the importance of computer coding skills for college and career readiness. One student said that coding is particularly valuable for students because it promotes critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

A teacher spoke about the importance of project-based and hands-on learning for the implementation of the Profile.

Student-to-counselor ratios

A division counseling coordinator advised that lowering the ratio of guidance counselors to students will be important to effectively implement the Profile. School counselors understand how the Profile sections are related and can offer guidance on how to measure Profile skills. Currently, however, counselors have very limited time to provide individualized guidance to students.

Appropriate settings for the implementation of the Profile

A university faculty member said that the skills in the Profile are best nurtured in diverse schools, and advocated for increasing the racial and socioeconomic integration within all schools. She noted, however, that implementation of magnet programs requires a large investment of resources.

Standards of Quality revisions

There was relatively limited direct discussion of revisions to the Standards of Quality (SOQs). A superintendent proposed developing individualized and customized contract SOQs between the

Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and divisions and schools, which would allow for different staffing levels across divisions, depending on context.

Public Hearing

There were more than 135 attendees and more than 40 speakers at the Williamsburg hearing. Speakers included division leaders and administrators, teachers, librarians, nurses, other school staff members, business representatives, parents, students, and other community members.

Organizations represented included:

- The Virginia Association of School Superintendents.
- The Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals.
- The Virginia Mathematics and Science Coalition.
- The Virginia Association of Science Teachers.
- The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis.
- The Virginia Council on Economic Education.
- The Virginia Association of School Librarians.
- The Virginia State Reading Association.
- The Virginia Association of School Nurses.
- The Virginia Society of Certified Public Accountants.
- The Virginia Association of Counties.
- The Virginia Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance.

Conditions and needs of public education

Participants identified the following major needs and priorities: increasing funding for schools, training culturally responsive teachers, providing professional development for school leaders, focusing on teacher quality and training, and focusing on pre-K and early learning.

Increased funding for schools

The Director of Government Affairs for the Virginia Association of Counties urged Board members to increase funding for schools. She praised the General Assembly for investing additional resources in education during the 2016 session, but said that more work is needed. According to the Association's data, state per-pupil direct aid funding, when adjusted for inflation, is lower in FY 2017 (\$4150) than it was in FY 2006 (\$4215). Meanwhile, school divisions are serving increasing numbers of high-needs students.

A Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis researcher advocated for additional funding to support low-income students. He noted that although Virginia provides 14–19 percent more funding per low-income student than for more advantaged students, this amount is still less than the support provided in many other states. He suggested specifically that the state should increase support for the at-risk add-on program.

Training culturally responsive teachers

An educator urged the Board to pursue initiatives focused on helping teachers respond effectively to the growing cultural and racial diversity in schools. She noted that many teacher preparation programs struggle to help preservice teachers learn how to work effectively with all students, and recommended including anti-bias and cultural competency curricula in all teacher training programs. She also recommended that each school division appoint a multicultural coordinator responsible for strengthening teacher competency to engage students in all socioeconomic and racial groups. Finally, she encouraged the Board to promote social justice education and culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy. She cited Gloria Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant pedagogy as an approach that facilitates students' academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness.

Professional development for school leaders

A representative from the Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals (VASSP) encouraged Board members to take advantage of section 2101(c)(3) of ESSA, which allows states to reserve up to 3 percent of division allotments for statewide school leadership activities and training. According to the speaker, school leadership is the second most important predictor of student achievement, after direct classroom instruction. He said that leaders need more time and funding for the recruitment and professional development of school leaders. Possible investments could include:

- Revising principal certification requirements.
- Developing targeted programs to recruit and develop principals in high-needs schools.
- Establishing a statewide regional professional development community.
- Enabling school principals to participate in the National Institute for School Leadership professional development program.

Teacher quality and training

A college of education dean recommended the following additions to the Board's Comprehensive Plan:

- Hold all teacher preparation programs, including alternative routes to licensure, to the same standards for accreditation and approval.
- Invest additional resources in the Virginia Teaching Scholarship Loan Program.
- Increase support for clinical faculty and mentorship programs for education students and new teachers.
- Enable teacher education programs to access data on their graduates through the Virginia Longitudinal Data System.
- Seize opportunities to change perceptions of the teaching profession and to advocate for additional resources for teachers.

Focus on pre-K and early learning

A representative of a child development nonprofit urged the State Board to prioritize funding and support for pre-K programs, noting that students begin developing many of the skills outlined in the Profile of a Virginia Graduate at an early age. She added that public pre-K programs lay the foundation for learning later in school.

Profile of a Virginia Graduate

Participants expressed support for Board policy proposals related to the Profile and addressed existing and proposed graduation requirements, the professional development that will be necessary to implement the Profile effectively, and the inclusion of subject matter experts in the Standards of Learning (SOLs) revision process.

Support for the Profile of a Virginia Graduate

Participants expressed support for the following aspects of the Profile:

- Reducing the number of verified credits required for graduation and expanding locally developed assessments.
- Increasing internship and work-based learning experiences and career exposure, exploration, and planning. Some participants urged Board members to ensure equitable exposure to high-quality CTE and workforce readiness programs.
- Including personal health and wellness, which one participant said aligns well with ESSA's goals to educate the whole child.

Graduation requirements

Participants urged the Board to maintain the following graduation requirements:

- The course in economics and personal finance.
- Two years of health and physical education.
- The required social studies sequence of two years of world history, United States history, and government.

Representatives of science educator organizations emphasized that new science courses need to incorporate the breadth and depth of content necessary for success in both postsecondary education and careers. Teachers were particularly concerned that the two-year sequence of semester-long courses in earth science, biology, chemistry, and physics would not provide the necessary breadth and depth of content, and that it would be challenging to decide which content to cut. In addition, they noted that VDOE will need to identify or develop a science assessment for the two-year course sequence that satisfies the ESSA requirements for a verified science credit. A final concern expressed by this group was that the sequence of courses may not adequately prepare students for postsecondary education.

Professional development for implementation of the Profile

Several educators and representatives of educator organizations discussed the need to provide ongoing professional development to support educators in implementing the Profile. School leaders expressed concern that full implementation of the Profile by the 2018/19 school year may be a challenge. One principal said that implementation will require additional capacity and hinge on the revisions to the SOQs.

Representatives from both the Virginia Mathematics and Science Coalition and the Virginia Association of Science Teachers noted that both preservice and in-service science teachers will need professional development to implement the proposed instructional changes in the Profile. They emphasized the importance of professional development that is research-based and adequately resourced.

An elementary teacher recommended additional support for specialists and coaches to help teachers provide effective instruction in the Profile's 5 Cs (critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, communication, and citizenship). A coaching model currently used in the Isle of Wight Schools was provided as an example.

Subject matter expert input in revising the Standards of Learning

A science expert who had served on a committee that conducted a gap analysis for the SOLs in physics, chemistry, and engineering submitted a proposal to include subject matter experts in SOL review and revision. He described the main features of the proposal as follows:

- Create a standing advisory committee on STEM standards that includes working scientists and engineers as well as experienced science teachers.
- The committee would include twelve subject matter experts representing life sciences, physical sciences, Earth and space sciences, and engineering.
- The committee would also include six teachers representing high school, middle school, and elementary school.
- Finally, the committee would include nonvoting liaisons from VDOE (math, science, and CTE) and the Board of Education.

The speaker and other participants stressed the importance of providing ample resources and support for ongoing SOL revision.

Accountability system changes

Participants expressed support for a revised accountability system incorporating multiple measures and focusing on student growth, discussed the importance of locally developed assessments, and proposed several priorities for ESSA funding.

Support for a redesigned accountability system

Participants expressed support for expanding the accountability system beyond content area standardized assessments to include multiple measures for school accreditation. They urged the Board to adopt rigorous, varied assessments. A number of participants would like to limit the number of standardized tests students take. Participants also expressed support for an accountability system based on student growth and improvement.

A community member urged Board members to consider subgroup sizes of fewer than 30 for ESSA reporting to assess achievement gaps more accurately and to more effectively plan instruction to close gaps.

Alternative and locally developed assessments

A superintendent expressed support for using more locally developed and alternative assessments. She would also like flexibility to use industry-recognized certifications and workforce readiness certificates as alternatives to the SOL assessments. Capstone projects could also serve as alternative assessments and provide a way for divisions to measure civic responsibility and engagement.

A school administrator stated that the 5 Cs are already embedded within the SOLs in English language arts. She asked the Board to give divisions and schools autonomy to develop their own approaches to teaching and assessing the 5 Cs within English language courses.

Proposed priorities for ESSA funding

Participants recommended the following as priorities for ESSA funding:

- Leadership training and professional development for school principals and assistant principals.
- Programming for gifted students and professional development for gifted teachers.
- Student mental health programs.
- Student health promotion through additional school nurse staffing and through programs in nutrition, physical education, and bullying prevention.
- STEM resources, programming, and professional development.
- Effective school library programs.

Standards of Quality revisions

Representatives from several educational organizations discussed the need for additional support staff members, and librarians in attendance urged revisions to the SOQs to support school library programs. A math educator proposed revising the SOQs related to math curriculum requirements and investing more in professional development.

Additional staff

Representatives from various organizations advocated for increased staffing levels, particularly for support personnel. A researcher from the Commonwealth Institute said that that the staffing levels in the SOQs do not reflect recommendations for support personnel.

Participants noted the need for additional staff in the following areas:

- **School psychologists.** Participants recommended establishing a minimum staffing requirement for school psychologists, who are critical in promoting students' social and emotional development.
- **Reading/support specialists.** Other participants voiced support for additional reading specialists and other content support specialists. The Virginia State Reading Association urged the Board to maintain a ratio of one reading specialist for every 1,000 students.
- **School nurses.** A representative of the Virginia Association of School Nurses recommended requiring at least one school nurse at every school. Nurses participating in the hearing recommended a student-to-nurse ratio of no more than 750 to one.
- **School counselors and social workers.** Participants recommended lowering the ratio of school counselors and social workers to students.

Increased support for school librarians

School librarians who participated in the meeting urged the Board to:

- Maintain and strengthen the SOQs concerning library staffing levels, support personnel, resources, and facilities—with special attention to ensuring equity across grade levels.
- Add language that defines a curricular role for librarians.
- Dedicate funding to maintain robust, up-to-date school library collections.
- Work with the Virginia Association of School Librarians to adopt definitions of effective school libraries, with a focus on instructional design, inquiry, reading and digital literacies, professional development for library staff, and equitable access to programs and resources.

Proposed revisions to SOQs related to mathematics curriculum

A math teacher would like to amend Standard 1 of the SOQs to introduce requirements for students to transition into advanced mathematics courses. She said that some students are currently advised to skip the grade 7 math course so that their schools do not have to report their SOL assessment scores. She would also like to amend the SOQs to allow high schools to offer math courses below the Algebra I level if students need it.

Proposed revisions to SOQs related to professional development

The same participant who requested revisions to the math curriculum SOQs requested additional resources for professional development through Standard 5 for school divisions with fewer resources.

Key Themes

Several key themes emerged from the stakeholder roundtable and public hearings:

- **Recruit and retain effective and teachers.** Roundtable participants supported investing in additional compensation for teachers to incentivize them to enter and stay in the profession. A public hearing participant offered several suggestions for strengthening teacher quality and training.
- **Promote racial and socioeconomic diversity in schools and strengthen teachers' cultural competency.** Participants urged the Board to work to increase student diversity in schools and to support teachers in engaging in culturally responsive instruction to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds.
- **Increase funding and resource support,** particularly for under-resourced schools and divisions serving high-needs populations.
- **Support for Profile.** Both groups were generally supportive of the Profile of a Virginia Graduate and related Board policy proposals. Participants were particularly supportive of the Profile's emphasis on career readiness and exploration. They sought to ensure equitable access to high-quality CTE programs.
- **Provide high-quality professional development to teachers and administrators,** both to support instruction generally and to support the implementation of the instructional requirements of the Profiles of a Virginia Graduate.
- **Carefully consider the proposal to offer a two-year sequence of semester-long science courses** to ensure students are adequately prepared for postsecondary education.
- **Support for revisions to the accountability system,** particularly for multiple measures and locally developed assessments.
- **Increasing collaboration between K–12 schools and higher education institutions** to enhance students' postsecondary readiness.
- **Add staff in key areas.** Both groups recommended reducing the ratio of school counselors to students. Public hearing participants proposed revising the SOQs to increase staffing levels for school psychologists, nurses, social workers, and librarians. School librarians offered several additional suggestions for SOQ revisions to support school library programs.