

Virginia Board of Education
Special Committee to Review the Standards of Accreditation
Wednesday, September 16, 2020
2:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting

Welcome and Opening Comments

Pursuant to Chapter 1283 of the 2020 Acts of Assembly, the Virginia Board of Education (Board) convened in a virtual meeting of the Special Committee to Review the Standards of Accreditation (SOA) on September 16, 2020 at 2p.m. The meeting was open to the public via livestream on the [Virginia Department of Education \(VDOE\) YouTube webpage](#).

The following Board of Education committee members were present for the meeting: Pamela Davis-Vaught, Dr. Francisco Durán, Dr. Keisha Pexton, and Dr. Jamelle Wilson. The following Board members were in attendance: Mr. Daniel Gecker, Ms. Anne Holton and Dr. Tammy Mann. Dr. James Lane, Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Emily Webb, Director of Board relations for VDOE, were also present.

Introductions and Meeting Overview

Dr. Pexton, chair of this committee, convened the meeting at 2:01 p.m. and welcomed Board members and staff to the meeting. Dr. Pexton recapped the presentations that the Committee received in the previous meeting and offered an overview of the agenda for current meeting.

Approval of Minutes

Ms. Davis-Vaught made a motion to approve the minutes from the August 27, 2020 meeting of the Special Committee to Review the Standards of Accreditation. The motion was seconded by Dr. Durán and carried unanimously.

Overview of Virginia’s Accountability Model under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Ms. Shelley Loving-Ryder provided an overview of the content to be covered during the presentation. Ms. Molique then began with a review of the three primary assessment and data requirements under ESSA. Ms. Molique described indicator requirements under ESSA as well as the indicators Virginia uses to meet these requirements, including an example of the long-term goals and interim measures of progress.

Based on the state’s federal accountability plan, schools are organized into one of three federal designation categories – Comprehensive Support and Improvement, Targeted Support and Improvement, and Additional Support and Improvement – which indicate the scale of support and improvement needed. Not all schools have a federal designation.

Ms. Loving-Ryder provided historical context for the development of the state’s federal accountability plan under ESSA. The state’s methodology is integrated into the federal system when possible, with a goal of consistency in identification of schools under ESSA and state accreditation. Ms. Loving-Ryder highlighted the areas in which there are known conflicts between the federal accountability and state accreditation system.

- The types of outcomes accounted for in Virginia’s Graduation and Completion Index vs. Federal Graduation Indicator
- Assessments used in calculation

Ms. Loving-Ryder explained the original ESSA plan submission, which was rejected by U.S. Department of Education (USED) for the use of the combined rate; USED wanted the indicators of achievement, growth, and English proficiency to be considered individually. However, the combined rate is still a part of state accreditation.

Dr. Wilson inquired whether there is a statement or expectation on how to approach interim progress and long-term goals considering the interruption of learning and change instructional modality due to COVID-19.

- Ms. Loving-Ryder replied that VDOE is not required to identify federal schools for improvement for the 2020-2021 school year, but assessments have not been waived and so there will likely be the expectation to identify for 2021-2022. State accreditation has been waived for 2021-2022 based on data from 2020-2021. There will be an opportunity to request an amendment to the plan.

Panel Discussion with Virginia Division Superintendents and School Principals on the Positive, Negative, and Unintended Consequences of the Standards of Accreditation

Dr. Pexton reminded the Committee of the purpose of the presentation, which is to hear local perspectives and receive some empathy data on positive, negative, and unintended consequences of the new Standards of Accreditation (SOA).

Panelists include Dr. Dennis Carter, Superintendent of Smyth County Schools; Ms. Casey Conger, Principal of W.T. Cooke Elementary School in Virginia Beach; Ms. Maria Eck, Principal of Justice High School in Fairfax; Dr. Greg Hutchings, Superintendent of Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS); and Dr. Scott Kizner, Superintendent of Stafford County Public Schools.

Dr. Pexton presented the first question to panelists: What have been the positive, negative, and unintended consequences of the Standards of Accreditation?

- Dr. Carter noted that the new SOA system has been a positive step forward, emphasizing increased flexibility. Dr. Carter identified chronic absenteeism as a negative of the new system; despite strong foundational relationships and family engagement, there continue to be student groups that are difficult to reach.
- Ms. Conger prefaced that her comments were mostly specific to the elementary level. Ms. Conger recognized that growth and continuous improvement has been a notable plus as it supports English Learners (ELs), students with disabilities, and other students that struggled on Standards of Learning assessments. Dr. Conger highlighted some issues with the new SOA including the lack of funding to support the implementation of local alternative assessments and the practice that level two indicators become level three after several years of no change. The latter is problematic considering the ongoing prevalence of issues of transience and homelessness for the chronic absenteeism indicator. Dr. Conger added some issues related to test taking for federal accountability and non-participants.
- Ms. Eck began by providing some context for Justice High School, which has the largest population of ELs in the state and therefore, uniquely affected by the SOA. The revised SOA has encouraged the provision of additional supports for ELs students, including new approaches to academic plans for ELs and new/more support positions. Ms. Eck pointed to some data about their student demographic and dropout rates to highlight some of the difficulties with the SOA, notably those coming to Justice High School as students with limited or interrupted formal education and sometimes, at an older age, and often, are only with Justice High School for less than 4 semesters.
- Dr. Hutchings offered some of the positives of the new SOA including the emphasis on equity as well as changing calculations for accreditation indicators. The change in calculation now gives due credit to schools that are helping students make progress as well as identifying which subgroups need additional support. One of the unintended consequences is the overemphasis on Standards of Learning assessments in evaluating effectiveness. COVID-19 has forced schools and divisions to reconsider the role of assessments and given stakeholders an opportunity to rethink this system.
- Dr. Kizner echoed Dr. Hutchings comments. In disaggregating performance by subgroups, the new SOA helped Stafford County Public Schools (Stafford) better identify students in need of response and consider new approaches/supports. One potential negative consequence is how the new pass rate is understood or interpreted. Because accreditation uses a combined rate, this calculation may be considered inflated by including students making progress, but these students were still unable to

meet the benchmark. There may need to be additional conversation about the growth vs. achievement models.

Dr. Pexton presented the second question to panelists: How has your support of economically disadvantaged or English Learners students changed as a result of the new SOA? Dr. Duran requested that speakers include both improved/expanded services to these subgroups as well as the burdens of provision.

- Dr. Hutchings explained that services have not necessarily changed in substance, but ACPS's ongoing work with such students has been validated and that progress is being recognized and awarded. Not necessarily related to accreditation, but all schools in ACPS are required to have a school improvement plan.
- Dr. Kizner appreciated that the new SOA has elevated the equity agenda and celebrating certain subgroups of students, but has forced some difficult restructuring and reallocation of resources.
- Ms. Conger noted the work is ongoing and evolving and the new SOA has been a platform to provide targeted services to the student as well as the family. However, because plans are individualized, by the time a plan is established, families may have already transitioned.
- Ms. Eck highlighted that at the high school level, achievement still matters for graduation. In response, Justice High School has pursued needs-based staffing but there is still a need for more time to serve and support those students, which is not necessarily encouraged in the accreditation system.
- Dr. Carter added that the focus on subgroups has allowed Smyth County Public Schools (Smyth) to reallocate resources in a more targeted way.

Dr. Pexton presented the third question(s) to panelists: What policy or practices have you changed or put in place because of the new SOA. Have any initiatives been put in place to address chronic absenteeism?

- Ms. Eck described some of Justice High School's attendance engagement practices, including staff and teacher calls, attendance circles, outreach, etc.
- Dr. Kizner works with individual schools to identify troublesome patterns and has expanded some of their supports that had been used primarily for discipline to include attendance and creates more opportunities for personalized learning.
- Dr. Hutchings noted some of the root causes of non-attendance and how ACPS uses that data to support attendance and improve programs.
- Dr. Carter uses data to look at the impact of chronic absenteeism but there are still barriers to support because of the variation in underlying causes of absenteeism. In considering trauma-informed support, the division has rethought the engagement of law enforcement and using other resources for check-ins to avoid trauma, or at least, support the student in the aftermath of trauma.

- Dr. Pexton lauded the thoughtfulness of the impact of trauma in the approach.

Dr. Pexton opened the floor to the panelists for a general discussion.

- Ms. Conger expanded on some of the absenteeism work in Virginia Beach and the importance of follow-through in creating and executing attendance support work. This requires community engagement.
- Dr. Hutchings commended the Department and Board for their emphasis on equity.

Dr. Pexton opened the floor to Committee members for questions.

- Dr. Wilson asked for clarity on some of the responses to the second and third questions. She recapped that panelists had indicated divisions and schools were not necessarily required to do things differently, but the SOA encouraged them to “double down” on some of the existing practices.
 - Dr. Kizner expanded on the individual cultures of school communities. The SOA has been a helpful tool in prioritizing the “all learner” model, but this is also needs to be reflected in daily practice.
- Dr. Wilson asked Dr. Carter about his comment on the reallocation of resources for remediation.
 - Dr. Carter clarified it was a reallocation or repurposing of existing staff to meet student need.

Dr. Pexton asked panelists if there is anything missing from the SOA that the Board should be considering.

- Dr. Kizner noted that the requirement to meet a number of hours for core instruction, especially in the current context of virtual learning, is burdensome.
 - Mr. Gecker asked Dr. Kizner on how he intends to ensure they are meeting end of the year goals without such benchmarks.
 - Dr. Kizner replied that there are ongoing formative assessments, among other means, that allow school and visions to identify those students who are not progressing. Dr. Kizner was not sure the hour threshold is the right strategy or even evidence-based for ensuring progress and does not align with equitable learning.
 - Mr. Gecker reinforced the need to make sure there are checkpoints.
 - Dr. Kizner added that students transitioning to home instruction would not have these same checkpoints.
 - Ms. Conger added that their school improvement plans already include ongoing checkpoints so end of the year benchmarks are not the only tool.
 - Dr. Hutchings encouraged flexibility and alternatives in determining mastery for the Standards of Learning.

- Dr. Mann offered her thanks for Dr. Kizner's comments on balancing our response to an unprecedented circumstance with the realities of trauma and need for flexibility.
- Dr. Wilson commented that she hoped panelists would continue to serve as resources in ongoing discussions around these issues.
- Ms. Eck responded to the question about what is missing from the SOA and thinking about extended cohorts instead of limited to four-year comments.

Dr. Lane ended the panel discussion on behalf of Dr. Pexton. Dr. Lane noted some of the temporary waivers and flexibilities, including those for time-based requirements, which may necessitate discussion beyond the pandemic.

Ms. Webb reminded committee members to share if they had anything additional they'd like to learn about or discuss for future meetings.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:12 p.m.