

MINUTES
Virginia Board of Education
School and Division Accountability Committee
November 16, 2011
2:00 p.m.
Jefferson Conference Room, James Monroe Building

Welcome and Opening Comments

Dr. Virginia McLaughlin, Chairman, convened the meeting with the following members present: Mrs. Sears, Mr. Foster, Mrs. Saslaw, Mr. Krupicka, and Mr. Braunlich. Dr. Wright, superintendent of public instruction, was also present.

Dr. McLaughlin opened the meeting and indicated that its purpose was to hear key stakeholder input regarding the U.S. Department of Education proposal for all states to request flexibility from certain provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Stakeholder Input: ESEA Flexibility Application

The following organizations provided input on this issue:

Virginia Education Association (VEA) – The VEA President, Kitty Boitnott, provided written remarks. The VEA is “cautiously supportive” of Virginia’s decision to apply for flexibility but expressed concern that the federal government is over-reaching its authority. Geographic and financial obstacles must also be addressed for access to higher education. The VEA advocates for the use of realistic measures of progress at the federal level and expressed concerns regarding teacher and administrator evaluation.

Mrs. Sears asked if there was concern that stakeholder input would not be included and asked for clarification regarding VEA’s written remarks. She asked about collective bargaining and Mr. Foster clarified that employment issues are addressed locally. Dr. McLaughlin asked about concerns regarding the evaluation process.

Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals (VAESP) – The VAESP President-Elect, Deborah Frazier, provided written comments. The organization supports Virginia’s action to apply for a waiver in the areas of: 1) college and career ready standards and assessments; 2) differentiated accountability systems; and 3) teacher and principal evaluation and support systems. VAESP also voiced opposition to the Board of Education’s proposal to label the advanced score on the Standards of Learning (SOL) test for Algebra II as college and career ready. VAESP also favors re-testing students in elementary and middle school in the same manner as high school students are re-tested. In the area of teacher and principal evaluation, the organization advocates the use of multiple measures for assessing performance and the need for adequate training.

Mr. Krupicka asked about some of the concerns expressed by VAESP regarding increased rigor. VAESP responded that good rigor is already in place and more pressure is not necessary. Mr. Krupicka asked how schools should be held accountable, particularly in situations where a

student may be performing above grade level but held at grade level for the purpose of a high test score. VAESP responded that student progress at different levels needs to be measured.

Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals (VASSP) – The VASSP Executive Director, Randy Barrack, provided written comments. VASSP provided the Board with a chart displaying the organization’s advocacy activities related the recent Senate bill at the federal level on ESEA reform. Dr. Barrack indicated that flexibility would be helpful and indicated that multiple measures and thorough training regarding teacher/principal evaluation is important. VASSP supports increased focus on literacy and advocates for standards to adequately prepare students for college and for careers.

Mrs. Sears asked VASSP if it had any input when the evaluation initially issue arose. Dr. Barrack indicated that he was comfortable with the level of input. Mrs. Sears asked if there were other concerns and Dr. Barrack responded that appropriate training is needed.

Mr. Braunlich asked for a definition of appropriate training and how it could be measured. Mrs. Saslaw commented that VASSP may want all parties to be informed.

Dr. Wright commented that the exact timeline for ESEA reauthorization is not known, which is why the Board needs to move forward with an application for flexibility. Stakeholder input is needed in this process but exact details are unknown and will not be available until Virginia’s application is drafted and more information is known about the work of other states.

Dr. McLaughlin asked what advice could be offered to the Board in terms a new system. Mr. Krupicka emphasized that subgroups need to be addressed and there is a need to ensure that the current infrastructure, absent increased funding, will address teacher improvement. Dr. Barrack indicated that, since 2008, funding for professional development has been decreasing.

Mrs. Sears asked about the Board’s action in April of 2011, when it approved revised guidelines for teacher evaluation to address student growth. At that time, there was reported to a minimal impact on resources. Dr. Barrack indicated that some local school divisions provide ongoing training.

Virginia English Language Learners Supervisor’s Association (VESA) – The VESA President, Megan Moore, provided written comments. VESA continues to support the use of the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Proficiency standards for college and career readiness. VESA also supports providing measures to allow for English Language Learners (ELL) to have additional time to meet graduation requirements. The organization also supports the concept of expanding the Limited English Proficient (LEP) subgroup to include both ELLs and former ELLs to fully reflect student achievement. VESA also indicated that Virginia may want to consider using an accountability system where there are student growth percentiles for each federally-identified subgroup of students.

Mr. Foster commented about the need to address the older ELLs. Dr. Wright commented about the concept of aggregating all ELLs for accountability.

Virginia's Teacher of the Year (Margaret A. Smith) – Mrs. Smith discussed the challenges faced at the federal level for accountability because of each school's unique demographics. She indicated that the efforts of the Board to apply for a waiver will benefit Virginia public school students and that required federal sanctions are currently over-reaching. Mrs. Smith indicated that teacher evaluations need to be fair and reliable and should examine student growth variables. She cautioned that tests should be viewed as a 'snapshot' of a single day and fluctuations need to be considered. For teacher evaluation, Mrs. Smith indicated that one system should not be replaced with another that could 'mislabel' teachers.

Mrs. Sears commented that there needs to be focus on that fact that students come from adverse circumstances. In a business, if there is an inadequate supplier, then another is sought. She expressed concern about a system of "I am not responsible". Mrs. Smith commented that there are many factors to be determined in student performance.

Mr. Krupicka asked about what is necessary for the appropriate level of focus on children not making progress. Mrs. Smith indicated that there needs to be flexibility at the subgroup level. Mr. Krupicka asked how students should be evaluated when growth is not made and Mrs. Smith responded that recovery points for remediation should be considered.

Just Children – This organization's legal director, Angela Ciolfi, discussed four principles for the flexibility waivers. These principles are: 1) subgroup accountability; 2) high expectations for students with disabilities; 3) high schools making progress toward meeting graduation benchmarks; and 4) focus on schools needing improvement. Interventions for schools in need of assistance should be tailored and teacher variability needs to be examined. Ms. Ciolfi asked the Board to examine low performing schools when it looks at the Standards of Quality in 2012.

Discussion

Mrs. Sears indicated that the Board needs to be looking at its overall educational philosophy, not just as it relates to ESEA. Mrs. Saslaw indicated that there are many different steps to be examined. JustChildren commented that improved quality should be examined and the VEA emphasized achievement for all children and expressed concerns about the level of funding for professional development.

Adjournment

The committee meeting adjourned at 4:10 p.m.