

DRAFT MINUTES
Virginia Board of Education
Standing Committee on School and Division Accountability
Wednesday, September 21, 2016
12:00 p.m.
Jefferson Conference Room, James Monroe Building

Welcome and Opening Comments

The following Board of Education (Board) members were present for the September 21, 2016 meeting of the Committee on School and Division Accountability: Diane Atkinson; Dr. Oktay Baysal; Wesley J. Bellamy; Dr. Billy Cannaday, Jr.; James Dillard; Daniel A. Gecker; Elizabeth Lodal ; Joan Wodiska; and Sal Romero, Jr. Dr. Steven Staples, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, was also present.

Ms. Atkinson, chairman of this committee, convened the meeting at 12:05pm.

Approval of the Minutes from the July 27, 2016 Committee Meeting

Ms. Wodiska made a motion to approve the minutes from the July 27, 2016 committee meeting. Mr. Dillard seconded the motion, and the draft minutes were approved unanimously.

Public Comment

Ms. Atkinson opened the floor to individuals wishing to address the committee. There were no speakers during the public comment period.

Presentations

Beverly Rabil, Director of School Improvement for the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), made the following presentation:

[Review of Requests for Continued Rating of 'Partially Accredited: Reconstituted School' from Fourteen School Division](#)

The Board had the following comments and questions:

- How is a determination made for schools that are on the border of being approved or denied accreditation?
 - Dr. Staples explained that there are two different layers of review. The initial review comes from school improvement staff who identify which schools are not definitively in the approved or denied category. For such schools, a more in-depth, secondary review is required—additional data is pulled, and multiple reviews by different groups of VDOE staff members occur. In some instances, staff also has a consultation with the local superintendent.

- How does a school in denied status determine which factors will weigh more heavily against them, as compared with their peers?
 - Ms. Rabil answered that the most important information is the actual data and whether or not progress has been made in the data. Secondly, if a school is going to be denied, staff will call the local superintendent to inquire about any unusual circumstances occurring in the locality.
- The rubric should be added to the boilerplate with the elements outlined for each specific school. This would be helpful to the Board in providing context, and also to inform local superintendents.
- One Board member emphasized that, under ESSA, the Board has the opportunity to create a single accountability system in alignment with the accreditation system.
- Making the accreditation process more transparent would give the public a greater understanding of the system. It is important that the public understands how decisions are made and why those decisions are made. A succinct graphic could be helpful in aiding such transparency and informing the public.
- What is the difference between how the Board interacts with partially accredited schools and accreditation denied schools?
 - Dr. Staples stated that the closer a school gets to denied accreditation, the greater the interaction staff has with that school. If a school is denied accreditation, VDOE school improvement staff engage at a deeper level in the details of curriculum, instruction, and alignment with standards. Staff has quarterly meetings with these schools. At the division level, the number of schools in a locality not meeting accreditation dictates whether or not the Board intervenes with the local school board.
 - Ms. Rabil added that a diagnostic visit occurs when a school is denied accreditation. Staff do asset mapping in these schools. Asset mapping can identify many layers of programs that are well purposed, but not well coordinated. Asset mapping helps schools take a macro look at how they are allocating resources and why. The goal is to align the work in a way that is likely to achieve results.
- Tiered support and tiered intervention systems were discussed. Such systems are emphasized under ESSA. The Board commended VDOE staff for utilizing a tiered approach to support in school improvement and accreditation.

Beverly Rabil, Director of School Improvement for VDOE, made the following presentation:

[First Review of Requests for 'Partially Accredited: Reconstituted School' from Forty-Two School Divisions](#)

The Board had the following comments and questions:

- The 75% bench mark for accreditation in language arts was discussed. Many schools are failing to improve language arts scores. The trend in the standards towards more nonfiction and less fiction in language arts was discussed as a possible contributing factor.
- A potential correlation between large English language learner (ELL) populations and struggling scores in language arts was discussed. It was suggested that staff should do a data match with ELL populations and schools with low scores in language arts. The difficulty in teaching language acquisition simultaneously with literacy was discussed. One Board member noted that access to preschool is essential in leveling the playing field between ELL students and native English speakers.
- The difficulty of acquiring teachers in rural areas was discussed. One Board member noted that even superintendents, on average, remain in the position for a shorter time than in previous generations. The need to inspire and recruit more educators at all levels was discussed.
- The relationship between graduation completion rates and SOL passage rates was discussed. One Board member expressed concern that several schools with high graduation completion rates have low SOL scores.
 - Dr. Staples noted that some students who are graduating could have earned verified credits in middle school, and the middle school therefore gets the benefit of those SOL scores.
- It was noted that schools should be discouraged from manipulating data to the advantage of the school and the disadvantage of the students. The goal is to have well-educated students, not just for schools to pass benchmarks.
- What are the options or recourse for a school that is drastically sliding, by 50 to 60 points, in every subject across the last five years?
 - Ms. Rabil noted that staff has been in communication with this school, and is looking into federal funding from ESSA to help this school. The school has had a lead turn around partner for several years.
 - Dr. Staples added that the breadth of the struggles in Richmond City affects many different schools. Staff has been working directly with Armstrong High School, for example, on many issues, including special education services. A division level memorandum of understanding will be put in place; however, even more direct intervention will be necessary by staff.
- The effectiveness of the memorandum of understanding was discussed. Urban and rural education needs to be examined overall. A differentiated set of SOQs for certain areas of the state may be necessary. Without the tools to meet expectations, these schools will continue to fail. There is a need for systemic change in these institutions. These schools need to be addressed as a whole, not just one at a time.

- Treating each school the same way is ineffective. Data analytics are useful, but the Board needs to look at schools whose problems cannot be solved by a policy change or increase in funding. These schools have systemic problems that need to be addressed.
- Staff has a handle on those schools that are on the right path. The Board needs to focus on the schools that are failing by wide margins. The Board needs to identify the urban and rural centers that are struggling, and identify what can be done.
- Virginia is not the only state challenged by the needs of struggling schools. Strategies that other states have used should be examined for use in the Commonwealth.

Dr. Cynthia Cave, Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communications for VDOE, made the following presentation:

[First Review of Proposed Amendments to the Regulations Establishing the Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia, Parts I-VII \(8VAC 20-131\)](#)

The Board had the following comments and questions:

- Context is important—it is important to make the connection clear between what the Board is changing and why. Although the Board will be eliminating some of the verified credits, other requirements will be increased or added.
- Board members discussed the role of verified credits and what they do for teachers, students, and schools.
- The Standards of Quality (SOQ) set expectations, and the Standards of Accreditation (SOA) ensure that the SOQ is being followed.
- One Board member noted that test-taking is one of the skills that students should learn in school. Although it is not the only way to demonstrate proficiency, it is an important way to do so, and should not be eliminated entirely.
- Flexibility and locally-awarded verified credits were discussed. Several Board members voiced support for local flexibility.
- It is possible for students to earn all their verified credits before high school, yet ESSA requires students to be tested at least once in high school in English, mathematics and science. Federal standards must be satisfied as well as state requirements, and this needs to be reflected in the language of the SOA.
- One Board member voiced concern about students who pass courses, yet fail the SOL tests. What are alternate ways, outside of the SOL tests, to demonstrate confidence that

such students have learned the content? Confidence in the content knowledge is essential, and that should be acquired through classroom instruction.

- The wording of the 5 C's was discussed. Board members agreed that precision of language in the 5 C's is important, and should be examined carefully.
- The General Assembly passed a bill requiring that parents be notified if their children will be reading books with sexually explicit material. The bill was vetoed because the Board of Education has been considering this issue. Further consideration needs to be given to where these regulations should be placed.
- The Board discussed the waiver for the 140 clock-hour requirement of seat time instruction. One Board member stated that very few school divisions are utilizing the waiver.
 - Dr. Cave noted that the waiver was added to provide flexibility for demonstrating mastery without 140 clock-hours of seat time. However, school divisions may not be aware of the option. The Board voiced support for encouraging schools to use the waiver.

Dr. Jennifer Piver-Renna, Senior Executive Director for Research for VDOE, made the following presentation:

[Overview of System of Accountability and Update on Accreditation Matrix](#)

The Board had the following comments and questions:

- The effect of accountability was discussed. Which factors correlate with student achievement? Has there been an increase in student achievement since accountability measures have been put in place?
 - Both Dr. Piver-Renna and Dr. Staples stated that there has been an increase in student achievement.
- Is the data from school improvement used for identification of the academic outcomes in the accreditation matrix?
 - Dr. Piver-Renna explained that there is an inter-agency team at VDOE, which includes staff from the school improvement office, that is collaborating on the matrix.
- Priority should be given to collecting powerful metrics that demonstrate how accreditation is tied to the SOQ. The Board should be accountable for excellent, quality education in the Commonwealth.
- Focus should be made on the bigger picture—the Board should look at accountability first, and accreditation as a subset of that bigger picture. The purpose of the data collection is firstly for accountability, and accreditation is a subset of that accountability.

- The matrix and data provide context for why certain elements are included in the SOA, and that context is important in informing the public. It helps answer questions and demonstrate what is effective and what is not.
- One Board member noted that all the measures on the matrix were also federal requirements. There is an opportunity to step outside what is federally required, and identify additional elements the Board would like to be part of the accountability system—the federal standards are the minimum.
- Support was expressed for chronic absenteeism having been included in the accreditation matrix.
- One Board member emphasized that school leadership, teacher effectiveness, and school culture should be added to the matrix.
 - Dr. Staples noted that staff included data that was consistent and easily collected. Self-reported data can be difficult to obtain dependably. Subjective analysis can interfere with the consistency of such data. This is something that staff is working towards. The data currently included was chosen because of its reliability.
- If the Board desires a system of continuous improvement, then the matrix should also include measures of gifted and talented students and CTE students.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:15 p.m.