

Summary of Major Elements:

1. Promoting a Statewide Peer Mediation/Conflict Resolution Program

The Student Advisory Committee found that "...Peer Mediation Programs provide students with a comfortable and confidential environment in which they can arrive at solutions to their personal conflicts. Peer Mediation Programs teach lifetime skills such as problem solving and leadership, while also demonstrating the magnitude of social interactions. According to *Pathways to Peace*, a guideline provided at the Annual Northern Virginia Regional Student Mediation Conference, '[m]ediation is a voluntary process facilitated by a third party who helps students work through conflict. Mediators do not take sides; they help students come up with their own solutions.' ...Working with a student mediator reduces tensions between conflicting parties by addressing the issue in a non-threatening manner."

The committee recommended that the Board of Education promote Peer Mediation/Conflict Resolution Programs. To implement this recommendation, the department is convening a staff workgroup, led by the Office of Student Services, in order to:

- Draft guidelines for the Board's review and approval for schools and school divisions to establish a peer mediation/conflict resolution program.
- Identify information about best practices, resources, and professional development opportunities to assist schools and school divisions in establishing such programs.
- Provide schools and school divisions with technical assistance on program development and implementation.
- Showcase successful programs that can serve as models for other schools and school divisions.
- Create a Web page that would include video clips, teaching activities, and other available resources from the training institutes, so that peer mediation/conflict resolution resources are in one location online and easily accessible to school divisions.

2. Creating a comprehensive approach in Virginia Public Schools for a student's awareness of the real-world

The Student Advisory Committee found that, "An understanding of economics and career opportunities will help students become successful, functioning members of society. Currently, there are limited opportunities available prior to graduation to help students learn about and experience various career options. Furthermore, fiscal responsibility and financial literacy are lacking in the secondary school curriculum, leaving many graduates inadequately prepared for the real world. These skills and experiences are crucial to student success after graduation."

The committee recommended that the Board of Education approve objectives for economics education and financial literacy to be required of all students at the middle and high school levels, as required by SB 950 (2005), and to promote financial literacy and career awareness. Recent initiatives to accomplish this include the following:

- The Board adopted the Economics and Financial Literacy Objectives at its April 26, 2006, meeting.
- The department is conducting a series of training institutes for middle and high school teachers this summer, hosted by the Virginia Council on Economics Education.

- The department has issued *Guidelines for Banking-at-School Partnerships and Related Practical Experiences*.

In addition to what has already been done, the Division of Instruction plans to:

- Create a DVD of video clips, teaching activities, and other available resources from the training institutes.
- Create a Web page so that financial literacy resources are in one location online and easily accessible to school divisions.

3. Promoting academic and extracurricular well-roundedness in all Virginia public schools

The Student Advisory Committee recommended promoting student involvement in their communities to help students "...realize their civic responsibilities. This will eliminate civic apathy and will put students in touch with the realities of a dynamic society. The committee understands the importance of academic achievement but realizes the need to diversify public school education in Virginia as it pertains to the interests of students. The committee believes all Virginia students should have the opportunity to engage in extracurricular activities from sports and clubs to community services to civic involvement. Furthermore, the Board of Education should reward students who display these qualities while achieving academic success. We believe that maintaining a high level of involvement as well as intellectual endeavors embodies the spirit of the Commonwealth of Virginia as exemplified by historical and contemporary leaders. It is the belief of the committee that many Virginia students are deprived of academic equality as the result of their area's economic status.... In light of this, the Board of Education must take comprehensive action to fulfill the intention of the bylaws. It is our hope that the following suggestions will contribute to academic reformation and the promotion of well-rounded students in Virginia public schools."

The committee recommended that the Board create a recognition program, known as the "Spirit of the Commonwealth Award" to recognize:

- Student leadership in the school and community;
- Student involvement in clubs, sports, societies, and service organizations;
- Academic achievement; and
- Civic involvement.

To implement this recommendation, the Office of Student Services will:

- Propose criteria for the Board's review and approval for students, schools, and school divisions to qualify for the Spirit of the Commonwealth Award.
- Publicize the criteria and encourage schools and school divisions to participate.
- Recognize the achievements of students, schools, and school divisions that receive the award.

Superintendent's Recommendation: The Acting Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board receive the report.

Impact on Resources: The impact on resources is not expected to be significant.

Timetable for Further Review/Action: Guidelines for schools and school divisions to establish a peer mediation/conflict resolution program, and criteria for the Spirit of the Commonwealth Award will be developed and presented to the Board for its review and approval not later than the November Board meeting.