

Meeting of the Superintendent's Leadership Advisory Council

Friday, November 21, 2003

Present: Superintendents' Group: J. Roy Geiger, II, Jonathan L. Lewis, Dale E. Sander, H. D. Northern, Jr., David G. Melton, Frederick S. Morton, IV, Samuel S. Cook, Gwen E. Edwards, Stewart D. Roberson, Margaret V. Blackmon, Alfred R. Butler, IV, executive director, and Andy Stamp, assistant executive director, VASS.

Department of Education: Jo Lynne DeMary, Lan Neugent, Dan Timberlake, Patricia Wright, Thomas A. Elliott, H. Douglas Cox, Shelley Loving-Ryder, Janet Christopher, and Harry L. Smith.

Dr. DeMary welcomed the members of the council, and called attention to the school accreditation scores that had been published. She noted that 78 percent of the schools were accredited, and she thanked the superintendents for their hard work and assistance. She also pointed out that Virginia made excellent gains on the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in mathematics, but said more work needs to be done on English Language Arts scores.

The state superintendent asked the superintendents to present their concerns before proceeding with the agenda for the meeting.

Dr. Geiger reported on an efficiency review conducted by state auditors and management specialists of his school division, New Kent County. Dr. Geiger said he was impressed by the technical skills of the personnel involved in the review and the recommendations that were made for saving money. The reviews were initiated by Governor Mark Warner to be conducted in three school divisions—New Kent County, Roanoke County, and the city of Richmond.

Dr. DeMary distributed copies of a booklet devoted to the Governor's Education for a Lifetime initiative to help build a Commonwealth of Opportunity for all Virginia public school students. She said Virginia hopes to become one of 10 pilot sites for an analysis of educational performance.

Returning to the discussion of the school audits, she said a number of school divisions have indicated their interest in taking part in the Governor's program. Requests to participate should be sent to the Governor's office, to Dr. DeMary, or the Department of Planning and Budget. During a discussion of dual enrollment expansion proposed in

the Governor's initiatives, Dr. Edwards suggested that if verified credits for dual enrollment were permitted she believed all school divisions would be involved.

Dr. Northern expressed concern about teachers who are called to active duty in Iraq, and suggested that a superintendent's memo be issued to clarify some issues involved. Discussion also was devoted to the need to centralize background checks on public school personnel which now take several months to complete. Dr. DeMary asked Dr. Elliott to look into this concern and see what can be done.

Superintendents also expressed concern about complying with a memorandum requesting an estimate of the cost of implementing the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Dr. DeMary said she understands the difficulty involved in providing this information, but a "reasonable estimate" is needed in anticipation of a request by the General Assembly. Dr. DeMary said the news media has asked for an estimate of the number of students who will not earn the total number of verified credits required for graduation. The Department of Education will provide the media, upon request, with the Project Graduation Survey data collected from school divisions.

A question was asked about data on paraprofessionals employed in school divisions. Dr. Elliott said this information has not been collected. Dr. Cook said his school division was having trouble submitting its report on fall memberships. Lan Neugent and Dr. Janet Christopher, data administration manager, responded to Dr. Cook's concern. Mr. Neugent is working to standardize data reporting and to help develop a statewide data warehouse to be available to school divisions within about two years.

In response to a concern expressed about information needed from division superintendents for the Discipline, Crime, and Violence report required from the Department of Education, Mr. Cox said the agency is aware of the problems involved and the school divisions should do the best they can with the information this year, and the agency will do what it can to fix the problems. Dr. DeMary said that any changes needed will be reflected in the memorandum due by July 1 from the Department of Education.

Another issue concerned an increase proposed by the Virginia Retirement System in the actuarial rate for retirement benefits for public school teachers in the 2004-2006 state budget. Dan Timberlake explained the reason for the VRS proposal and told the council that in his opinion some increase can be anticipated. He said he hopes to have more information within the next few weeks.

Dr. Elliott distributed information about the Governor's *Great Virginia Teach-In: A Call to Teach*, a new recruitment effort to bring representatives of school divisions, aspiring teachers, licensure specialists, and other individuals together to provide highly qualified teachers for all students in Virginia.

Dr. DeMary announced that Mr. Michael S. Myers, former division superintendent in Middlesex County, has been employed to be in charge of the federally funded Teacher Enhancement Grant.

Dr. Wright reported on the latest developments in the *No Child Left Behind Act*. She referred to revisions approved by the Board of Education to meet U.S. Department of Education conditions for continuation of funding for limited English proficient (LEP) students. Mrs. Loving-Ryder reported that Virginia is working with 11 states and the Council of Chief State School Officers to develop English language proficiency assessments for LEP students. She said tests are being developed for English and mathematics proficiency for lowest-performing LEP students. Dr. Wright reported positive responses to the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) forums held in November in Roanoke.

Dr. Edwards reported on student absences in her school division because of a severe influenza epidemic. She referred to days that were already lost because of Hurricane Isabel and asked what could be done to prevent these absences from having a negative impact on the division's AYP rating this year. Dr. DeMary said she would look into the problem.

Dr. DeMary concluded the meeting by calling attention to the importance of division superintendents keeping their Virginia PEN accounts up to date. VA.PEN is used to communicate with superintendents quickly and ensure transmittal of important information.

The next meeting of the council is scheduled for January 9, 2004.