

Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals (VAESP)

Good afternoon Madame Chair, members of the committee and Superintendent Wright.

It is a pleasure to be here this afternoon representing the elementary principals of Virginia as you begin your review of the Standards of Accreditation. We recognize that what you have been tasked to do by the General Assembly, which is to look at standards that meet both Federal and State requirements along with inclusion of growth measurements in the accreditation process may not fit within the accountability system we currently have. It may be that you need to start from scratch. However, if it is the intent of the Board to adjust or make changes to the current standards, we offer the following suggestions for now.

In looking at your guiding questions, I wish to start my comments around your guiding question, "Are other changes needed in the accreditation requirements?" Part III, Student Achievement, 8 VAC 20-131-30, Student achievement expectations, paragraph B on page 9, currently limits the number of tests that a student may take in a given year.

"No student shall take more than one test in any content area in each year."

VAESP has and continues to hold the opinion that children at the elementary and middle school level should have an opportunity to take an expedited retake of selected SOL tests. Therefore, we requests that all elementary and middle schools retest students that fail an SOL test with proficiency scores between 375 and 399 following an appropriate remediation process. Understanding that retesting all children within this range may not be appropriate, VAESP requests that the option to retest be determined at the local school level in situations identified as appropriate. Approval of this suggestion would necessitate deleting the last sentence of paragraph B as well.

Rationale:

Our focus is to afford students every opportunity to demonstrate what they know and for our teachers and schools to be accountable for it. With the advent of online testing, this option can be exercised within current testing windows. As a start, begin with Math and English-Reading to gather data on the success of this strategy. With teacher SMART goals; this is needed more than ever to demonstrate that students are mastering required information.

Part IV, School Instructional Program, 8 VAC 20-131-80, Instructional program in elementary schools, Paragraph B on Page 26 should be considered when deciding what tests should be administered to 3rd grade students.

"In kindergarten through grade 3, reading, writing, spelling, and mathematics shall be the focus of the instructional program. Schools shall maintain an early skills and knowledge achievement record in reading and mathematics for each student in grades kindergarten through grade 3 to monitor student progress and to promote successful achievement on the third grade SOL tests."

As you can see, the focus is as it should be on English and Math up through 3rd grade. VAESP recommends that this section specify that **only English and Math be assessed by SOL testing in the 3rd grade**. As you are aware, under School Accreditation, 8 VAC 20-131-280, Expectations for school accountability, Page 55, Section E,

“The Board of Education may adopt special provisions related to the administration and use of any Virginia assessment program test in a content area,” and “The board may add new tests or discontinue the use of existing tests in the Virginia Assessment Program by providing adequate notice to local school boards.”

Rationale:

In third grade, we test our 8-9 year old children more than at any other time in their public school careers. This is above and beyond the mandate in the SOA to focus on English and Math. We have students sitting for hours trying to do their best to prove what they know when we all know that it is often a challenge to keep this age group focused for 20 to 30 minutes. We need to reduce the number of tests taken at this grade to those already identified as essential for the future success of our students.

Finally, 8 VAC 20-131-240, Administrative and support staff; staffing requirements, page 46, paragraph B, *“The principal of **each middle and secondary** school shall be employed on a 12-month basis,”* should be revised to include **elementary** school as well.

Rational:

As previously noted, the role of the principal and assistant principal in each of the school settings is fundamentally different than it was a decade ago. While it is recognized that these roles differs at each school level, at the same time it must be realized that at all levels it is challenging and requires continuous learning as the demands change on a nearly daily basis. With this current review of the SOA, VAESP feels that it is essential that they reflect the similarities among all school administrators in such areas of accountability, social services and community involvement at all three levels.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present the views of elementary principals as you embark on your review of the Standards of Accreditation. It is a formidable task, and please know that we stand ready to assist you in any way that we may. Thank you.