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Madam Chair Atkinson, President Foster, Dr. Wright, members of the Board

I am Keith Perrigan, President of the Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals and principal of Patrick Henry High School in the Washington County School Division. Our organization has represented middle level and high school principals and assistant principals since its founding over a century ago in 1906. I am here speaking on behalf of VASSP in response to questions regarding the Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia.

Successful schools promote student achievement and growth in safe and effective learning environments where each student is expected and encouraged to achieve to his or her highest potential. Emblematic of such schools is that they have:

- Dedicated instructional leaders supported by assistant principals working together to guide school management and teacher evaluation
- Qualified, effective teachers who are supported by leadership, provided opportunities for professional development and who are enthusiastic about their school and their students
- High expectations for all students and an atmosphere that supports positive student/teacher relationships
- Appropriate technology to provide data to improve student learning, assessment and opportunities
- Time to provide quality instruction in an atmosphere that encourages learning and rewards innovation and students' individual talents
- Enthusiastic parental involvement based on strong student/teacher and principal relationships and opportunities for all children to learn – and to enjoy the learning experience.

This model represents a number of ways we can close the achievement gap. We should also promote flexibility in the school calendar to allow additional instruction time for those students who are not achieving at their peer group level. In order to close the achievement gap and to help all students reach their potential, schools must have sufficient support staff, opportunities for professional development, more time for meaningful interaction with students and the list goes on. Funding is important, but it is not the only solution. Educators should be able to spend most of their time teaching and leading, not completing forms and testing their students over and over so they can pass tests that are often one-shot high stakes barrier examinations.

A school is not simply a compilation of test scores, and success is not measured so much by a composite of grades as an amalgam of educational opportunities, growth, involvement, enthusiasm and the creation of an environment that can stimulate a prodigy and at the same time inspire a mechanic or an aspiring author. Accreditation should be based on growth indicators that reflect how students respond to the opportunities to learn, to lead and to advance. The measurement of success can be gleaned from classroom performance, test scores, participation in advanced courses as well as other activities and learning experiences that benefit students. If information provided to parents and the public does not quantify growth in meaningful, multi-faceted ways or contribute to school and student improvement, it is not defensible as a measurement of success or failure.

This is the 21st century, and educators today must prepare students to compete in the global society. In order to be successful, we must embrace higher learning strategies and decrease our dependency on standardized tests that report on one, rather small aspect of the learning experience. Memorization is a process that does not necessarily equate to a lasting skill whereas higher learning competences give students the tools to understand many types of problems – and to find solutions that may not have been specifically taught. When the concept is learned, the student has an invaluable tool to apply in many situations. Good teachers can test these skills in a variety of different ways but too often find their hands and time tied to an outmoded system of teaching students to answer questions rather than teaching students to learn what questions to ask and then helping them to solve many different problems from one concept.

There is certainly a role for standardized tests to measure essential teaching and learning skills and to support a prescribed standard of learning. The Standards of Learning were instituted in 1998 in response to demands for measurable accountability in the form of testing in the four major common core areas to assess achievement and to assure parents and politicians alike that all students are given the opportunity and the tools to learn a comparable set of skills. These tests are high stakes for students, teachers and schools and figure prominently in the evaluation process both for educators and, as of 2013 action by the General Assembly, the “grading” of schools. Problematic in this environment of high-

stakes testing and high-stakes effects is the fact that the SOL do not apply to subjects and teachers across the board, and may not be adequate for the 21st century student. Application of critical thinking skills, as opposed to memorization of facts, is what is essential for today's skilled workforce. Creating more challenging assessments that include the use of technological advances, and holding students and teachers accountable to higher standards, do combine to address, to a degree, the issue of the need for higher order teaching and assessment; however, without requisite planning, funding, staffing and professional development, these efforts cannot be successful. Even if these endeavors are fully supported, fundamental concerns surrounding too many tests, less time for innovation and intervention and the need for teachers to have the time to connect with students remain. If the standardized testing template stays the same, teachers will continue to find themselves spending more time on testing than on teaching and providing a rich atmosphere for student learning.

Educators have long recognized and embraced their major role in accountability for student growth and learning; but success in these endeavors should be based on a number of valid measurements if they are to be used as accurate qualifiers of school and student success. Major dependence on one dimensional techniques, such as standardized tests, will not suffice in this global, multi-dimensional society, where the workforce is expected to be able to demonstrate critical thinking skills. Our students must learn to think for themselves – outside prescribed boxes and in today's world where problem-solving skills, creativity and innovation are a must. Businesses aren't looking for answers to questions that have already been asked; they are looking for those who can ask the questions and work through to the answers.

With your thoughtful leadership, we can start today with a step in the right direction by putting emphasis back on the classroom teacher and the evaluations derived from classroom participation and innovative testing of critical skills (the classroom report card), and less on standardized tests, until such time that a more uniform method of testing such skills can be developed statewide (such as a PISA-type model). This will take time but it would be time well invested as it is better to get this right than to simply get it done. Our students' futures depend on our next step, so let's begin in the classroom right now. Our principals and teachers are trained professionals and should be given the opportunity to use their knowledge and background to create innovative ways to teach higher order skills and to test them in unique ways. Multiple measures of assessment will also add value to the evaluation process by putting emphasis on a larger body of work rather than overdependence on standardized tests. Only four core subjects are included specifically in SOL testing; therefore, multiple measures, particularly in high schools where there are many "stand-alone" courses, are critical to evaluation. Additionally, if added measures were employed in models for accreditation in a more integral way, fewer schools "making

progress” by multiple standards would find themselves in “warning” status based on standardized tests to the exclusion of other important measures. Learning and growth are valuable outcomes that we should reward and outcomes we must measure in multiple ways – over-reliance on numerous multiple choice tests dims creativity and takes precious time away from innovative classroom activities that we must employ to challenge all of our students. A good example of trying to fit new accountability criteria into a dated system of assessment that relies so heavily on standardized testing is the A-F legislation that very narrowly passed during the 2013 General Assembly Session and which was opposed by every major education association in the state, including VASSP, as well as the VaPTA. If you just consider high schools in this unproven system of accountability and assign grades based on the legislation’s criteria (heavily dependent on results of ever-changing standardized tests), you will be hard-pressed to find more than a few that qualify for an “A” – in fact, most seem to be in the “average” category, in the state ranked #4 in the nation. There are even examples of Blue Ribbon Schools in the Commonwealth, judged under the strictest standards and based on national comparisons with every high school in the country, which would not qualify as excellent state schools under the newly proposed A-F system. Over-reliance on standardized tests, seen as a “simple” way to measure by those who are seeking easy solutions, will continue to spawn this type of legislation if we do not embrace proven and tested, as well as innovative, education models that support a myriad of options for evaluation.

As you know, educators have stepped up to the plate in countless ways and have risen to the challenges associated with assessment, accountability and evaluation, and we continue to be expected to do more with less, and we do; we ask that you reward that dedication and innovation. Honor the professional career commitment of countless educators who can succeed if they are simply and fairly allowed the time needed to make the requisite adjustments to the drastically and rapidly revised high-stakes expectations and measurements imposed on students and educators in just this past year. Without that time for student and teacher preparation, we are setting educators and students up to fail; and in a high-stakes world, that is not acceptable.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I will be happy to entertain any questions you might have at this time.

May 22, 2013