



**VA PTA Statement
Virginia Board of Education
Committee on School and Division Accountability
Wednesday, June 26, 2013
Anne Carson, President, VA PTA**

Good afternoon, thank you Mrs. Atkinson and committee for the opportunity to speak with you today and discuss the important issues of accreditation and accountability - from the parent's perspective. The Virginia PTA is an association rooted in advocacy and represents approximately 300,000 parents, teachers and citizens from across the Commonwealth.

Parents occupy a unique space in the make-up of our public schools. They spend less time in the buildings than the students, faculty and staff, they get their information often times through their 7 year old...or 17 year old, and they don't usually relish taking apart the DOE standards to determine where certain requirements are outdated and how those requirements might be tweaked or tossed out entirely.

But what they do know, better than anyone, is the effect their schools, teachers and policies have on their children, our students. This is where we are an invaluable resource - in the measurement of how you are measuring our students.

Ask a group of 10 parents what makes a successful school and you'll likely get 10 different answers, like dynamic teachers, thoughtful real-world curriculum, supportive administration, reasonable class size. But one thing you will likely hear is uniform frustration with how our current reliance on standardized testing, and the numbers and frequency of these tests are eclipsing all other valuable measures.

From Texas to California to New York, PTA's are mobilizing to roll back our reliance on standardize testing and forcing the conversation about meaningful measures of school, student and teacher achievements.

The Virginia PTA member-adopted position on assessments reads in part:

"Virginia PTA supports a program of assessment for Virginia public schools which objectively measures the academic progress of students against the established standards for public education, which is designed to identify areas of deficiency in order that the instruction needs of students may be addressed...and which uses a system of

multiple criteria, including, but not limited to assessments, resources available to the schools, demographics and family and community involvement.”

So our assessments, our tests, should be used to pinpoint problems or gaps in our schools. But they cannot solve those problems or fill those gaps. Narrowing the achievement gaps requires individual, local solutions - built by qualified administrators and knowledgeable teachers - with the support of the parents. A laser focus on testing as the only solution drastically reduces the creativity in methods we so value in our teachers.

Here are some viewpoints from your parents:

1. Flexibility in school calendar. Allow schools to create schedules that suit their community and the needs of their students from year to year.
2. Incorporate growth measures so that the effect of a teacher is measured over the course of the year, rather than from year to year.
3. Connect experiential learning with academic learning. Empower teachers to create experiences that will prepare students for life after school - be it career or college. Create a measure for this type of creative curriculum so that teachers are encouraged to use their skills - and build on the skills of their individual students.
4. Sponsor school accountability meetings in order to review data and engage the parents in plans for continuing growth of the student body.
5. Create school improvement teams effectively representing the diversity of the school in order to share power in policy making and ensure that parents are vested and reinforcing the goals and principles in their own homes.
6. Provide funding, support - and most importantly, time - for teachers and administrators to engage in meaningful training to continue learning about teaching.
7. Encourage the inclusion of community involvement projects into assessments. This brings the community into the building so that a more vibrant, individual educational experience is achieved.

If we could find ways to bring the element of time back as a resource for our schools, teachers and administrators would be afforded the opportunity to review the results of tests and design strategies suitable for their students. They would have time to teach rather than drill, time to absorb, time to observe and time to respond. The result of this kind of reinvestment in time will likely yield an individual, multi-faceted picture of a school, rather than a single letter grade.

During the last General Assembly session, we heard a LOT about the parents of students in the Commonwealth. And the parents supposed needs were used to push through legislation that this parent association believes do not effectively serve our schools and students. Imposing a single grade score on any school only serves to dumb down the criteria each parent requires in order to fully understand a school. Please do not assume that parents are confused when faced with multiple measures - because, in fact, we are comforted.

We understand the need for assessing our schools, our teachers and our students. We eagerly await those assessments of our own students - and when the report card comes, we see multiple grades, multiple scores - so that we can form an accurate picture of our students. That picture is a sum of parts that we can see - not a single measure that obscures their individual nuances. If we are going to grade schools, can we grade all the parts that go in to the school - each on their own merits? Parents are looking to this board to insure that they have as much data as possible and as varied as possible in order to make informed decisions.

In closing, we can all agree, I hope, that our children are more than a number and a score - same goes for our schools and our teachers. But our current system removes any chance of developing important facets of their personalities. Are we really seeking to help each student become a productive citizen? Are we giving all of our children the tools that entice them to pursue promising careers? Do we keep in mind that not every child is a great test taker but may be able to express his/her knowledge and abilities by a different measure? Are we testing to identify each student's talents and strengths?

The "what if's" are endless - and full of potential for the parents of Virginia. But there's no time for what if's, because we are bound by simply testing what is. We are limiting the potential of our teachers by only measuring how much information gets out of the student - rather than committing to the true nature of education...how to interest the student in information, stimulating them to want more of it.

Parents understand that schools are going to test students. But parents want the results of these tests to yield meaningful instruction, not more tests. Focusing entirely on pass rates and not on achievements shortchanges all of us.



National Standards for Family-School Partnerships



What parents, schools, and communities
can do together to support student success

PTA
everychild. one voice.[®]
(800) 307-4PTA (4782)
info@pta.org • www.pta.org

PTA
everychild. one voice.[®]

A New Way of Leading

Building family-school partnerships for student success

In the 2002 research review *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*, Anne T. Henderson and Karen L. Mapp conclude that there is a positive and convincing relationship between family involvement and student success, regardless of race/ethnicity, class, or parents' level of education. To put it another way, when families are involved in their children's learning both at home and at school, their children do better in school. The report also points to specific types of involvement as being especially beneficial to children's academic success.



Finding 1: Involvement programs that link to learning improve student achievement. It's simple: The more parent and community involvement activities focus on improving student learning, the more student learning improves. Learning-focused involvement activities may include

- * Family nights on math or literacy.
- * Family-teacher conferences that involve students.
- * Family workshops on planning for college.

Finding 2: Speaking up for children protects and promotes their success.

Children whose parents are advocates for them at school are more confident at school and take on and achieve more. The more families advocate for their children and support their children's progress, the longer their children stay in school and the better their children do. Families should



- * Become knowledgeable about the operations of schools and the laws that govern those operations.
- * Be confident about their ability to work with schools.
- * Expect only the best from their children and for their children.
- * Join PTA.

Finding 3: All families can contribute to their children's success. Family involvement improves student success, regardless of race/ethnicity, class, or parents' level of education. For involvement to happen, however, principals, teachers, and parents themselves must believe that all parents can contribute to their children's success in school. Parents can promote their children's academic success by



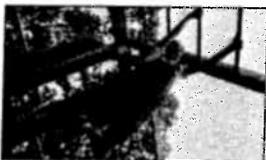
- * Teaching their children the importance of education.
- * Finding out what their children are expected to know and to be able to do and reinforcing lessons at home.

- * Sending their children to school ready to learn every day.
- * Principals and teachers must support parent involvement by
 - * Making parent involvement a priority.
 - * Recognizing and removing barriers to parent involvement.
 - * Sharing decision-making power with parents and community members.
- * Working to understand class and cultural differences.

Finding 4: Community organizing gets results.

Engaging community members, businesses, and organizations as partners in children's education can improve the learning community in many ways. For example, community partners may be able to

- * Provide expanded learning opportunities.
- * Build broad-based support for increased school funding.
- * Provide quality after-school programs.



The findings presented by Henderson and Mapp provide a framework for strengthening parent/family involvement programs. PTA, working with leading experts on parent involvement and school-community partnerships, has updated its National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs to reflect recent research and improve parent and community involvement practices. The updated National Standards shift the focus from what schools should do to involve parents to **what parents, schools, and communities can do together** to support student success. To reflect this change, the standards have been renamed the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships.

PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships

- Standard 1:** Welcoming all families into the school community—Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.
 - Standard 2:** Communicating effectively—Families and school staff engage in regular, meaningful communication about student learning.
 - Standard 3:** Supporting student success—Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.
 - Standard 4:** Speaking up for every child—Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.
 - Standard 5:** Sharing power—Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.
 - Standard 6:** Collaborating with community—Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.
- For more information about the National Standards and PTA programs that promote family-school partnerships, visit www.pta.org.