

MINUTES
Virginia Board of Education
Standing Committee on the Standards of Quality (SOQ)
May 23, 2012
3:20 p.m.
Jefferson Conference Room, James Monroe Building

Welcome and Opening Comments

Dr. Billy Cannaday, Chair, called the meeting to order with the following Board members present: Mr. Foster, Mrs. Beamer, Mrs. Atkinson, Ms. Mack, Mr. Krupicka, Mr. Braunlich, and Mrs. Sears. Dr. Wright, Superintendent of Public Instruction, was also present.

Dr. Cannaday provided welcoming remarks and referenced the discussion that took place at the April 25 meeting in terms of formulating a workplan and developing guiding questions. Dr. Cannaday explained that the purpose of the May meeting was to receive stakeholder feedback and to give consideration to the [guiding questions](#) and finalize these questions. Public comment was also received.

Public Comment

Ms. Jeree Harris, representing JustChildren of the Legal Aid Justice Center, spoke before the committee and provided written comments. Her comments were made on behalf of the Alliance for Virginia's Students, whose membership includes the following organizations:

- Virginia Municipal League
- Virginia Parent Teacher Association
- Virginia Education Association
- Voices for Virginia's Children
- Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis

Ms. Harris indicated that the guiding questions were appropriate and helpful. She recommended that each question be framed to address the top priority, which is the needs of the students. For the first guiding question, Ms. Harris indicated that the SOQ should address the academic, behavioral, and emotional needs of students, particularly students who are part of low income and vulnerable student populations. For the second guiding question, Ms. Harris indicated that school division accountability should be addressed in the SOQ, especially where such accountability can improve outcomes. Ms. Harris also recommended that the committee review past recommendations made by the Board and/or by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) in cases where there are recommendations that have not been implemented and these recommendations address unmet student need.

Ms. Harris also commented on the need for a reliable and independent method for providing cost estimates as they relate to the reallocation of resources. It was recommended that the Board and JLARC collaborate to conduct studies and reviews to ensure that the funding of the SOQ is realistic and takes into account the actual educational needs of students.

Dr. Ben Kiser, Superintendent of Gloucester County Public Schools, then spoke before the committee and provided written comments. He was speaking in his capacity as President of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS). Dr. Kiser commented that, for the first guiding question, the “direction of public education” needs to be clarified before the question can be answered. VASS supports an open conversation about the future of public education and Dr. Kiser indicated that the SOQ review should examine processes and not just outcomes. Dr. Kiser mentioned that the third guiding question also needs to address the clarification of the “direction of public education.” Dr. Kiser commented that the first three guiding questions provide an opportunity for individuals to provide the Board with a framework for specific feedback.

In regards to the fourth guiding question, Dr. Kiser indicated that it was more ambiguous and appears to address two topics, which are flexibility and funding. Dr. Kiser recommended that this question be separated so that there would be one question regarding flexibility and one question regarding funding. He also suggested that the Board may wish to clarify what is meant by flexibility and suggested that flexibility could examine broad policy issues that impact assessment, evaluation, reporting, and increased local control. Dr. Kiser also recommended that, in terms of funding, the Board focus on either unfunded or inadequately funded provisions within the SOQ. He indicated that VASS is concerned about unintended consequences. Dr. Kiser also indicated that it would be helpful to know to what extent the Board intends to look at “prevailing practices” in local school divisions.

Dr. Kiser also suggested that consideration may want to be given to a fifth guiding question, which could address updates to the SOQ that result from current school division practices being used to meet student academic expectations.

James Regimbal, representing Virginia First Cities Coalition as well the Virginia Municipal League and the Virginia Association of Counties, spoke before the committee and provided written comments. He emphasized that good policy decisions are data-driven and detailed expenditure information from school divisions would be valuable in the context of reviewing current SOQ requirements. These data would also be helpful in determining what is required to provide an education that meets the Standards of Learning, the Standards of Accreditation, and graduation requirements.

Mr. Regimbal cited the Department of Education’s most recent report of required local expenditures (Required Local Effort), which indicated that local school divisions spent \$3.1 billion beyond their required local expenditures for fiscal year 2011. He indicated that more information was needed to understand why school divisions were incurring expenditures beyond the requirement. He indicated that school divisions may be spending increased local funding for at-risk programs and more data are needed to understand these local decisions. Mr. Regimbal recommended that the Department of Education conduct a detailed school expenditure survey that examines spending for the SOQ and actual school division expenditures.

Discussion and Approval of the Questions Guiding the Review of the SOQ

A comment was made that survey data make sense in the context of the SOQ review. There was also a recommendation that the issue of a data collection be addressed through a study resolution

directing JLARC to undertake this effort. This recommendation was made because of concerns related to the capacity of the Department to undertake this study and JLARC's role as a third party. It was suggested that an outside entity would bring external validity to a study. There was also a comment that the Board needs to determine what data elements should be collected and the Board should be open to all ideas and suggestions. Given the timing of this review and the consideration of the next biennial budget in 2013, the Board has time to consider a comprehensive study.

There was a comment about the need to be able to use data to examine performance and possibly instructional expenditures. There was also a comment about separating the guiding questions into subparts, with one subpart examining how legislative and Board mandates relate to what is in the SOQ. This relationship could be reviewed in terms of how the SOQ is tied to issues such as increased rigor in the Standards of Learning and new requirements for students in the area of virtual learning and economics and personal finance.

A comment was made regarding the need to understand the context in which data may be collected and analyzed. The Board needs to take into consideration factors that influence the direction of the SOQ, such review by the General Assembly and the Executive Branch. There was also a comment that the SOQ needs to be examined not just for funding but also for its intent to set out a minimum education foundation of quality for Virginia public school children.

A comment was made that school division expenditure information would be helpful in understanding outcomes but that it is recognized that this would take long-term study. There was also a comment that there needs to be an understanding there are scarce resources during the time that the SOQ is being reviewed and that this tension will always exist because the SOQ is tied to expected funding.

A comment was made regarding the degree of flexibility that is needed to provide school divisions with more choices to achieve desired outcomes. Incentives needed to be examined and local flexibility should allow for the reallocation of resources. There was a suggestion that rewards and consequences need to be examined that recognize differentiation for both high and low performing school divisions.

There was a question regarding what is meant by flexibility and what is meant by outcomes. In response to this question, there was a comment that outcomes should be further defined to address 'learning outcomes' in the context of the Board's goals. Barriers that limit school division flexibility also need to be examined and well as both state and local expectations regarding the reallocation of resources.

A comment was made regarding how to reallocate resources for more significant priorities and how to frame the SOQ review to make informed decisions. A comment was also made about the educational progress made in Louisiana since Hurricane Katrina and how this progress is tied to flexibility/freedom at the local level. Another comment was made that Louisiana school divisions have opportunities to 'opt-out' of certain regulations as long as specified benchmarks are met. Louisiana also has an option for state takeover if schools are not performing. A comment was also made that the Board should examine these practices.

There was a comment that the committee needs to consider how students are prepared and how resources can be re-aligned and leveraged. There could be a prioritization of needs that examines what must exist for students to achieve and what resources would be considered ‘nice-to-have.’

A comment was made that the SOQ needs to be examined as the foundation program for education in Virginia. The SOQ was never intended to be ‘line-item’ funded and the question of whether school divisions would want staffing ratios removed when they are currently the basis for funding needs to be examined. There also needs to be a review of those programs funded outside of the SOQ, such as early reading and Algebra readiness, and those SOQ initiatives that have not been funded, such as reading specialists and possibly mathematics specialists. There was also a recognition that funding based on prevailing practice has been under scrutiny in the past and would need to be examined in the context of what is appropriate. There was also a comment that cost drivers should be recognized and certain initiatives cannot be ‘costed-out.’

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:20 p.m.