

MINUTES
Virginia Board of Education
Standing Committee on the Standards of Quality (SOQ)
October 24, 2012
3:30 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. Atkinson, Ms. Mack, Mr. Braunlich, Mrs. Beamer, Mrs. Sears, and Dr. McLaughlin. Dr. Wright, Superintendent of Public Instruction, was also present.

Dr. Cannaday thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to continue the review of the Standards of Quality (SOQ) by reviewing a brief summary of the comments that had been received since the Committee's last meeting, including those heard at the four public hearings, discussing proposed revisions to the SOQ and considering what the implications are in terms of formal recommendations for the Board's consideration and deliberation at both the committee and full Board meeting.

Overview of Comments on the SOQ

Ms. Anne Wescott, Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communications, presented a brief summary of the public comments on the SOQ that were received since the last committee meeting, including those from the four public hearings that were held around the state. Mrs. Wescott noted that the Board received comments during the public hearings that were compelling, thoughtful and deliberative. Most of the approximately 50 comments concerned a need for additional funding and focused on:

- Increase teacher salaries
- Reduce class size
- School psychologists and including them in SOQ
- School nurses
- Math specialists
- School librarians
- Including a staffing standard for teachers of the blind and visually impaired
- Greater flexibility in implementing the SOQ
- Should reflect prevailing or best practices
- Lifting the cap on support positions
- Requesting a JLARC study to look at funding issues

Ms. Wescott further noted that the department is continuing to receive written comments and will compile a summary that will be provided to the committee at its November meeting.

Overview of Proposed Revisions to the SOQ

Ms. Westcott then presented proposed options to revise the SOQ that are based on the public comments, and a review of what the Board has looked at and recommended in the past. She explained that several recommendations were being proposed for policy directions, policy and staffing recommendations, and technical issues for further review.

Proposed Standards of Quality Policy Directions

- Enhance the SOQ so that the Commonwealth's basic foundation program for K-12 public education reflects a comprehensive educational program of the highest quality.
- Provide clarity and greater transparency in SOQ funding with the goal of maintaining the Commonwealth's commitment to public education funding at the state and local levels and encouraging a continued emphasis on school-based instructional services.
- Provide school divisions the flexibility to deploy required instructional personnel to the schools with the greatest needs, so long as they employ a sufficient number of personnel division-wide to meet the total number required in the current SOQ staffing requirement.
- Begin to address the Board's priorities of teacher effectiveness and more frequent performance evaluations of teachers by requiring a principal in every elementary school and increasing the number of assistant principals in schools with the greatest need.
- Set priorities for the Board's unfunded staffing recommendations from previous years so that these instructional staffing standards can be fully implemented in future years, especially in the focus areas of literacy, mathematics, science, and technology.
- Begin building a more comprehensive basic foundation program by including in the SOQ certain staffing ratios and categorical and incentive programs that have become core components of K-12 educational programs statewide and are currently funded in the appropriation act.
- Mitigate the perverse incentive of reducing a school division's special education funding when it mainstreams students with disabilities into general education classrooms or uses Response to Intervention (RTI) and/or other instructional supports to reduce the number of students identified as needing special education services.
- Shift the Board of Education's review of the SOQ so that it aligns more effectively with the legislative budget process and SOQ re-benchmarking.

Proposed Policy and Staffing Recommendations

Priority 1:

- Propose SOQ language to provide school divisions the flexibility to deploy required instructional personnel to the schools with the greatest needs, so long as they employ a sufficient number of personnel division-wide to meet the total number required in SOQ staffing requirements.
- Propose legislation to shift the review of the SOQ from even to odd-numbered years to be aligned more effectively with the legislative budget process.
- Include one reading specialist for every 1,000 students in grades K-12 in the SOQ.
- Include one mathematics specialist for every 1,000 students in grades K-8 in the SOQ.
- Include one data coordinator for every 1,000 students in grades K-12 in the SOQ, in addition to a dedicated instructional technology resource teacher.

Priority 2:

- Require one full-time assistant principal for every 400 students in grades K-12.
- Require one full-time principal in every elementary school.

Priority 3:

- Codify the provisions of the Early Intervention Reading Initiative and the Algebra Readiness program in the SOQ and require all school divisions to provide the interventions with funding currently appropriated for these programs.
- Set priorities for the Board's other staffing recommendations (i.e., speech-language pathologists and blind or vision impaired ratios) that have not yet been approved or funded by the General Assembly, so that these staffing standards can be fully implemented in future years.
- Propose SOQ language to allow school divisions to deploy required school-based clerical personnel to the schools with the greatest needs, so long as they employ a sufficient number of personnel division-wide to meet the total number required in SOQ staffing requirements.

Proposed Technical Issues for Further Study

Request the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to conduct a study of the SOQ to determine the feasibility of the following:

- Converting the prevailing costs for each major category of the "support services" positions into ratios and including ratios for some or all of the categories in the appropriation act;
- Establishing alternative staffing approaches to provide school divisions with additional instructional resources to address identified needs, which could include ratios based on positions per 1,000 students for assistant principals, school counselors, and library-media specialists that would reduce funding "cliffs;"
- Assigning weights for students who may be at-risk and require additional support, including special education services, services to English language learners, and services to disadvantaged students;
- Updating technology staffing ratios, taking into consideration the increased role of technology in instruction, assessment, and operations since staffing standards were first established in the SOQ; and
- Updating career and technical education staffing ratios, taking into consideration the implementation of new curricular pathways that require high-tech equipment and specialized instruction.

Mrs. Wescott offered to respond to questions.

Discussion

Dr. Cannaday opened the floor for discussion. Board members presented the following comments and questions:

- Would the flexibility in the first priority be limited to instructional areas, i.e. math, or could a school division hire a reading specialist instead of a math specialist. How will this be kept confined while still making it meaningful.

Dr. Wright stated that she would speak to the flexibility and also to how she arrived at the priorities Ms. Wescott presented.

She indicated that the thinking around the deployment of personnel is really school based. School divisions already have flexibility to deploy personnel based on division-wide ratios. In the past school divisions have been given flexibility regarding assistant principals. This would bring in other instructional personnel. The flexibility would not remove maximum class sizes or the flexibility around division-wide ratios. This flexibility has been recommended because the needs of schools differ and it would give the division superintendent the ability to deploy the personnel as needed. However, staffing ratios would remain. Specific ratios that drive funding would be maintained so that school divisions could depend on that funding. Maintaining the specificity of the staffing ratios sends a message about what is considered important for instruction in the schools while acknowledging there may be exceptions.

- Does the Board literally propose SOQ language before the review process is over or at least examples of what it has in mind?

Dr. Wright indicated that there would be a discussion during the committee meeting and then another full discussion at the Board of Education meeting to decide if the Board wants to add, remove or revise the recommendations for changes they received. She stated that by November, the department would come back to the Board with an SOQ bill that will mirror the recommendations that the Board makes. The policy directions are just there to explain her rationale and her thinking in the recommendations. She stated that she basically took into consideration the Board's comprehensive plans, its goals and priorities; the Governor's goals and priorities; and those she heard from the General Assembly over the years and public comment and added a bit of her professional judgment around some of the areas in terms of categorizing them.

Priority One is fairly standard and concerns the areas closest to the classroom. The requirement for reading intervention if a child is not reading on grade level by grade 3 provides a basis for continuing to advocate for reading specialists. The Board has rigorous college and career readiness standards, so it is also important to continue to advocate for math specialists. Data from various studies has shown that the mathematics achievement level is significantly higher in areas that have mathematics specialists in the classroom than in areas that do not. The Board also has the mathematics specialist endorsement which will make it possible to have qualified mathematics specialists to fulfill these roles. The third recommendation is to reinstate the requirement for one dedicated instructional technology resource teacher (ITRT) for every 1,000 students in

the schools in addition to the one data coordinator. In prior SOQ recommendations, the Board introduced one data coordinator at the building level. This would restore the requirement for the one ITRT while retaining the one data coordinator.

Priority Two concerns principals and assistant principals and the requirement for additional administrative personnel. The Board has approved a comprehensive teacher evaluation system that will require additional work to implement. As more frequent evaluations and feedback to classroom teachers is implemented, there will be a concomitant need for more administrative leadership support in the schools. Therefore, advocating for additional assistant principal positions with the flexibility to assign them where they are most needed is appropriate.

Priority Three includes recommendations from previous Boards. It does not require new funding but goes toward trying to shore up the SOQ. What is our core foundation program? What is essential for having a quality foundation program for K-12 education? Reading intervention and additional assistance for students struggling in mathematics is essential. These programs are important because they have become a part of the core foundation program and moving them inside the SOQ as a requirement would require that they be funded.

During one of the last cycles of the SOQ review, a recommendation was made to move the career and technical education, special education and gifted and talented ratios into Standard Two. At that time, the General Assembly and Appropriations staff did not choose to move them into the SOQ, but left them in the Appropriation Act. Therefore, it may be advisable to request that the General Assembly ask JLARC to conduct a study and make a part of the study whether these ratios should be included in the SOQ and if so, whether they should be adjusted.

- How will the comments be presented so that individuals will know their comments were received and heard?

Ms. Wescott said we had not received all of the comments as yet, but will do a final summary of comments once they are received. She explained that staff do make the summary available to everyone who made comments and will make it widely available to the public on the website. Board members suggested that the comments be categorized by the standard to which they apply to capture the volume and intensity of the comments. Dr. Wright explained that staff has ways of communicating with the public, including an email list of individuals and organizations, to ensure that the comments are available to everyone. Additionally, the meeting is videostreamed and archived. Anyone looking at the recommendations in the Board boilerplate will see whether their comments are included in the recommendations.

- A board member commented on the great educational experience attending a public hearing provided. He then asked about the flexibility issue and what is on and off the table for consideration. He also stated that when school divisions are given maximum

flexibility, the board must make sure that consequences are real and focused if the flexibility is creating a negative outcome.

Dr. Wright explained that a marked up draft of the SOQ will be presented at the November committee meeting showing the proposed language changes. The changes will be in Standard Two and will be very specific and will be school based. No changes to the class size ratios will be suggested.

- A Board member suggested that it might be helpful to have a conversation with those impacted, i.e. principals, division superintendents, teachers, to get some feedback on what school divisions would like to do and what their needs are while acknowledging that the Board cannot make recommendations that work for every school division. Knowing that funding is always an issue, the Board will have to retain certain portions of the SOQ as is, but give school divisions flexibility while holding them accountable. The greatest issue is technology since we are asking that students take one online course. Each school is going to determine what they offer and with whom. If there is flexibility, there should be flexibility that schools can use. The Board member suggested testing a model with a small group of school divisions to determine what works best and learn from the data the model produces. It was suggested that Board members look at some possible areas where ideas could be tested to determine what may be possible.
- The weighted ratio would address the perverse incentive regarding special education services in more inclusive settings. Is the request for weighted ratios geared to them?

Dr. Wright stated that the intent was to mitigate the perverse incentive of reducing a school division's special education funding when it mainstreams students with disabilities into mainstream classes or uses RTI or other instructional supports to reduce the number of students identified as need special education services.

- With the emphasis on IDEA and CTE requirements, the more accelerated students can get lost in the shuffle. With the focus on low performing students and schools, the Board does not want to lose sight of the high performing ones.
- As the report is compiled, it might be helpful to connect the priorities to the conditions and needs of schools. It would be helpful to connect the dots, and show they are tied to responding to the conditions and needs of schools across Virginia. It has to be framed in a way that it is understood why the priorities are placed where they are.
- A Board member stated that there is a great demand on the time of guidance counselors in most schools with academic and career plans and testing. She asked for clarification of the responsibilities in most schools for managing and coordinating the SOL testing program because her understanding was that most of that was done by the data specialists and the ITRTs.

Ms. Wescott explained that it varies school to school depending on the staffing they have.

The Board member indicated that given the complexity at every school level and the expectation of personalizing plans for academic and career development, she would like guidance counselors to be able to devote the appropriate amount of time to working directly with students, trying to reconcile balancing the flexibility and local autonomy against the real reason for having guidance counselors in the first place.

- The unfunded changes amount to \$226 million. How much funding does education receive?

Dr. Wright explained that these are Board recommendations and not unfunded mandates because they have never been adopted by the General Assembly and funded. She would like to make them requirements and have them funded. All of these are important, but some priorities had to be set because of the fiscal times. It is the responsibility of the Board to recommend what a quality program would look like.

Mr. Kent Dickey, Deputy Superintendent, explained that education receives over \$5.5 million in direct aid. The SOQ makes up 90% of it and the remaining 10% is categorical. Education constitutes a little under one third of the general fund budget.

Dr. Cannaday asked if anyone had any comments on the JLARC study recommendation, or anything they would like added. No recommendations were made. One Board member did comment on the experience of attending a public hearing and listening to the commitment of school personnel in caring and providing for the children in their schools, not just teaching, but providing food and clothing, as well. School division personnel explained the tough decisions they have had to make to balance their budgets and the real concerns they have. It is not just about money, but about service and what they can provide.

Public Comment

No one commented.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m.