

Board of Education Agenda Item

Item: _____ J. _____

Date: November 20, 2008

Topic: Report on the Statewide Dropout Prevention Summit Held on October 28, 2008

Presenter: Cynthia A. Cave, Director, Office of Student Services

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Origin:

Topic presented for information only (no board action required)

Board review required by
 State or federal law or regulation
 Board of Education regulation
 Other: _____

Action requested at this meeting Action requested at future meeting: _____ (date)

Previous Review/Action:

No previous board review/action

Previous review/action
 date September 25, 2008
 action Received report on plans for the summit

Background Information:

On October 28, 2008, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) hosted a statewide summit addressing dropout prevention and promoting collaborative partnerships of cross-sector leaders to increase public awareness of the issue of high school drop-out and school completion. In Virginia, 10,540 students dropped out of school in the year 2006-2007. The ongoing priorities of the Governor, the General Assembly, the Board of Education, and VDOE are to establish strong policy and programmatic frameworks for the achievement of increased high school graduation rates. As part of the effort to promote student graduation, VDOE received a grant from America's Promise Alliance to work in partnership with them to address high school dropout prevention on a statewide basis. America's Promise Alliance is the nation's largest multi-sector collaborative dedicated to the well-being of children and youth and is supporting similar leadership summits in states and cities across the country. Subsequently, State Farm Insurance and AT&T, part of the collaborative, provided financial support for the summit and follow up activities.

With the theme of *Learning, Working and Living: Keeping Promises to our Youth*, the Virginia summit promoted information sharing and action planning among the sectors about implementation of best practices and policies that increase the number of students who complete school. Summit participants included school personnel and members of local school board officials, representatives of the juvenile justice system, state and local legislative and appointed officials, business representatives, and service and community organizations. Over 500 persons attended the summit. Preliminary review of evaluations indicates that the summit was very well received.

Summary of Major Elements:

The program for the summit (attached) included four strands, with three sessions each:

- *Engaging the Student, Engaging the Family: Going Beyond the School Door*: Presented effective practices involving schools and community partners that provide supports, such as mentoring, after-school and service learning programs
- *Counteracting Loss: Making a Living, Making a Difference*: Presented effective programs initiated by schools, businesses, community colleges and other organizations that provide opportunities to regain lost academic ground and prepare for continued education and meaningful work
- *From the State House to the School House: The Intentional and Unintentional Impact of Policies*: Addressed legislative and administrative policies at the state and local level that promote student support and persistence to graduation or may have negative consequences for students
- *Maximizing Resources: Knowing What is Available, Combining Resources*: Presented information about public and private resources available to support programs for students

The Superintendent of Public Instruction welcomed the participants and introduced the Governor, who brought greetings through a video. The Governor referenced research findings that students dropping out of school are twice as likely as high school graduates to continue the poverty cycle; three times as likely as high school completers to be unemployed; eight times as likely to be imprisoned; and more likely to rely on public assistance for supports such as health care and housing. Students who remain in school and graduate are more likely than those who do not complete school to vote, to volunteer, and to engage in civic activity within communities. The Board of Education President, Dr. Mark Emblidge, set the stage for the keynote speaker, Bill Milliken, founder of Communities In Schools and author of *The Last Dropout*. Mr. Milliken spoke from his heart about the stake each community has in every child, and adult responsibility to provide a “safety net of support to keep kids safe, healthy, and motivated.” Additional highlights of the general session were the comments of current and former students as they answered questions about what motivated them to remain in, or to return to, school, as part of the Youth Panel “What We Want to Tell You.”

Breakout sessions included presenters Dr. Thomas Brewster and Dr. Deborah Jonas, speaking about “Graduation Rates, State Policies, and State Resources for Taking Action.” Senator Harry Blevins and Delegate Robert Brink, of the Commission on Youth, joined their staff in a presentation of their current studies of alternative education, dropout prevention, and truancy. Dr. Ruth Neild, from Johns Hopkins University, presented research findings on early warning indicators of dropout and how to use them to target interventions. Parents shared their thoughts as part of a panel “What Parent Need to Assist Their Children.” Other sessions featured best practices in community and school collaboration from within and without of the state, nontraditional educational pathways to student academic success, and resources available to schools and parents from the various sectors.

John Bridgeland, co-author of *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*, shared findings from his report as part of his luncheon address. The afternoon general session featured a panel discussion by representatives from the various sectors. Dr. Loujeania Bost, Director for the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities at Clemson University, served as moderator. Members of the panel were Dr. Mark Emblidge, Senator Harry Blevins, Jen Alvarez, public affairs

assistant manager for State Farm Insurance, Kerri Wilson, chairman of the Harrisonburg City School Board, Samuel Hayes, director of the Virginia Department of Minority Business Enterprise, and Judge Elizabeth Kellas, Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, Winchester, Virginia. The panel discussed collaborative and coordinated action needed to respond to the dropout issue. This panel's discussion set the stage for action planning in the afternoon by summit participants.

Superintendent's Recommendation: The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board accept this report.

Impact on Resources: The summit was supported by nonstate funds, and planned regional activities and follow up activities will be supported by nonstate funds.

Timetable for Further Review/Action: A proceedings document will be prepared from the summit, based on the action planning templates completed by summit participants. The document will provide the goals and associated activities that will be undertaken to sustain the efforts to address dropout prevention. Regional meetings are being planned in follow up to the summit. In addition, the cities of Norfolk and Richmond are presenting summits in 2009 under the sponsorship of America's Promise. Virginia Department of Education staff are serving on those planning committees.