

Board of Education Agenda Item

Item: I.

Date: September 17, 2009

Topic: First Review of the Standards of Quality

Presenter: Ms. Anne D. Wescott, Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communications

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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: _____

Previous Review/Action:

No previous board review/action
 Previous review/action
date _____
action _____

Background Information:

The 2009 General Assembly added language in Item 140 of the Appropriation Act that says:

“The Board of Education shall review the current Standards of Quality to evaluate the appropriateness of the existing staffing standards for instructional positions and the appropriateness of establishing ratio standards for support positions, with the objective of maximizing resources devoted to the instructional program. The findings of this review, its associated costs, and its final recommendations for rebenchmarking shall be submitted to the Governor, the Chairmen of House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees and the Joint Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education Funding established pursuant to Item 1, paragraph H. of this Act no later than November 1, 2009.”

The Board of Education approved the work plan for this review on April 30. The work plan includes:

- Participation and involvement of education entities and the public;
- Collection and analysis of data provided by school divisions;
- Research and analysis by an outside independent consultant;
- Examination of all facets of the Standards of Quality (SOQ) staffing standards;
- Identification of best practices; and
- Formulation of recommendations.

The review is being conducted by the Board’s Standing Committee of the Standards of Quality, chaired by Mrs. Saslaw. The committee met on May 27, June 24, and July 22. During these meetings, the committee heard from a number of educational organizations, school divisions, parents, teachers, students, and other members of the public, including the following organizations:

- Virginia Association of School Superintendents
- Virginia School Boards Association
- Virginia Education Association
- Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals
- Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals
- Virginia Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development
- Virginia PTA
- Virginia Municipal League
- Virginia Association of Counties
- Virginia Council of Administrators of Special Education
- Virginia Association of School Nurses
- Virginia School Counselor Association
- Virginia Consortium of Administrators for Education of the Gifted
- Virginia First Cities Coalition
- JustChildren
- Petersburg Advocates for Children
- FACES of Virginia Families (Foster, Adoption, and Kinship Association)
- PLACE (Parent Leaders Advocating for Children’s Education)
- Fairfax County Public Schools

The first public comment period was May 1 through July 31. The Board received 31 comments at the SOQ Committee meetings; 1,130 people who signed and gave comments on JustChildren's petition; four comments at Board of Education meetings; and 14 comments via mail or e-mail from school divisions; organizations, and individuals via e-mail.

The second public comment period will be September 15 through October 4. Four public hearings will be held in Chesapeake City, Fairfax County, Pulaski County, and Richmond City on September 30.

Many of the comments were in opposition to any reductions to the Standards of Quality, as well as the staffing ratio for support positions. Several comments supported previous Board recommendations that have not been funded, especially one principal in every elementary school, one assistant principal for every 400 students; and one reading specialist for every 1,000 students. Several comments recommended increased flexibility. There were recommendations to review the special education staffing and funding mechanism to ensure that access to the general education curriculum is not hindered by funding incentives based on placement. Several comments made recommendations about

school nurses, school counselors, and gifted education teachers.

The SOQ Committee also received a report from Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates, Inc. on staffing standards, heard a presentation on rebenchmarking costs estimated for 2010-2012, and received the results of a survey of local school divisions.

The report from Augenblick, Palaich, and Associates, Inc. includes a review of the research about staffing ratios and staffing ratios recommended by established organizations, staffing ratios suggested in the efficiency reports of school divisions in Virginia, staffing ratios used in other states, and an analysis of staffing data reported by school divisions in the Annual School Report. The report included several ideas for the Board's consideration.

- School divisions employ more personnel than the SOQ ratios provide. The majority of the personnel categories with higher personnel were in the instructional categories. The numbers of elementary and secondary teachers actually employed by divisions appear to be related to division needs based on examining quintiles of school divisions organized by need.
- It appears that school divisions are using their support category revenue to employ more instructional personnel. This is permissible because prevailing support dollars may be used for instructional needs.
- One personnel category that may need to be examined is nurses, assuming that a shift in funding formulas does not detrimentally affect school divisions.
- All SOQ ratios could be expressed in personnel per 1,000 student terms, assuming that such a shift does not detrimentally affect funding or staffing and class sizes at the school and classroom levels. Currently the state uses both student personnel ratios and personnel per 1,000 terms to express SOQ ratios. Using one approach will simplify the SOQ process. Such an approach would avoid the "cliffs" built into some current SOQ ratios. The cliffs mean a school with a difference of just one student can be funded very differently. For example, a school with one more student than another school earns an additional half-time principal for that student.

Summary of Major Elements: The Board will consider policy directions for the Standards of Quality and options for revisions to the standards to address those policy directions. The Board will also consider issues for further study.

Superintendent's Recommendation: The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board accept this proposal for first review.

Impact on Resources: The impact of this proposal on state and local resources is to be determined.

Timetable for Further Review/Action: The Board will hold four public hearings on September 30 and will receive public comment through October 4. Following the public comment period, final review and approval will be requested at the October 22 Board meeting.