

MINUTES
Virginia Board of Education
Virtual Schools Work Session
March 27, 2013
2:30 p.m.

Jefferson Conference Room, James Monroe Building

Welcome and Opening Comments

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

Mr. Foster provided welcoming comments and thanked staff for their work in coordinating the work session.

Overview of the Virtual Schools Work Session

Dr. Tammy McGraw, director of educational technology, provided an overview of the agenda for the work session and noted that the presenters will focus their remarks on accountability as it relates to virtual learning.

All meeting materials, including biographies and presentations of each speaker, were provided to the Board and are available online at

www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/meetings/2013/work_session/meeting_materials.shtml#03272013.

Review of the Scope and Authority for Amending the Regulations Establishing Standards of Accreditation to Include Public Virtual Schools

Mrs. Anne Wescott, assistant superintendent for policy and communications, noted that § 22.1-253.13:3.A of the *Code of Virginia* (the Standards of Quality) was amended in 2012 to state: "The Board of Education shall promulgate regulations establishing standards for accreditation of public virtual schools under the authority of the local school board that enroll students full time."

Mrs. Wescott's presentation included the following:

Applicability of laws and regulations

- Public virtual schools are public schools and must meet all of the laws, regulations, standards, and policies required of all other Virginia public schools, unless otherwise specified in the Standards of Accreditation.
- Instruction in a public virtual school must be designed to accommodate all students, including those identified with disabilities in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or § 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, those identified as gifted, and those who have limited English proficiency.
- Public virtual schools must meet the same accreditation requirements as any other Virginia public school and the students must meet the same graduation requirements.

- Like all other public schools in Virginia, at the request of the local school board, public virtual schools may be granted waivers from requirements of the Standards of Accreditation by the Board of Education and may be granted approval of an alternative accreditation plan.

Instruction

- Instruction provided by a public virtual school must comport with the requirements of the Standards of Learning and career and technical education competencies.
- The teachers must be licensed by the Board of Education and endorsed in the subjects in which they provide instruction.
- Students enrolled in a public virtual school are required to take all applicable Virginia assessment program tests in a secure, controlled and proctored environment.

Required clock hours and seat time

- The requirement for 140-clock hours of instruction to earn a standard unit of credit may be waived at the local level, pursuant to 8 VAC 20-131-110.
- Section 22.1-98 of the *Code of Virginia* requires the school term to be not less than 180 teaching days or 990 teaching hours in any school year unless there are severe weather conditions or other emergencies resulting in the closing of the school.
- If the school term is less than 180 teaching days or 990 teaching hours in any school year, the amount paid to the school division from the Basic School Aid Fund could be reduced.
- The students are subject to the provisions of the compulsory attendance law in § 22.1-154 of the *Code*.

Regarding the ability to waive the 140-clock hour requirement, Mr. Braunlich asked if the waiver could apply to an individual student or the entire class. Mrs. Wescott replied that the local school board can develop policies to allow for the waiver, and the superintendent can waive the requirement for a class or an individual student.

Virtual School Accountability—A National Perspective

Ms. Susan Patrick, president and CEO, Dr. Allison Powell, vice president, and Mr. David Edwards, quality assurance director, of the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL) lead the presentation on virtual school accountability from a national perspective.

Ms. Patrick commended the department, noting that the proposed amendments to the Standards of Accreditation are strong. She emphasized the following key points:

- Many policies are moving away from seat time inputs to requirements that award credit based on competencies. Ms. Patrick noted that this may not be possible in Virginia due to *Code* requirement for seat time.
- Virtual learning in the European Union, Turkey, the Middle East, India, China, Singapore, and South Korea provide student centered but teacher lead courses to better personalize learning and fill gaps for students that need more flexibility and access to learning.

- Nationally, online learning is growing faster than any other innovation in K-12 education, but the United States is still moving slower than other nations. Ms. Patrick provided data on online learning throughout the nation.
- Definitions of online learning and blended learning that may be considered for the proposed amendments to the regulations were provided.
- Recommended policy frameworks include:
 - move to competency-based education
 - accountability with level playing field for all models
 - funding models are student-centered

Discussion by the Board included the following questions and comments:

- Discussed the appropriateness of various definitions of online learning, blended learning, and public virtual school. Dr. Wright noted a distinction between defining the school as the mode of instruction and defining the school in terms of where the instruction is received. She posed the question of approaching the definition from the student perspective or the teaching/delivery/location perspective.
- Recognized that full-time virtual schools can have blended learning.
- The Board asked about the results of virtual learning programs. Ms. Patrick noted that each state is responsible for collecting their own accountability results and the majority of programs perform at high levels. Ms. Patrick also noted that like a traditional school, the success of a virtual learning program depends on the instructional model of the school.
- Acknowledged the importance of collecting entry level data to measure student progress in virtual programs.
- The Board asked how other countries address the seat time issue. Ms. Patrick noted that most countries' funding is based on a per pupil calculation, not on seat time.

Specific Policies Regarding Virtual School Accountability

Dr. Ann Flynn, director of educational technology and state association services at the National School Boards Association (NSBA), and Ms. Kimberly Bridges, governmental relations consultant for the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA), lead a presentation on specific policies regarding virtual school accountability.

Dr. Flynn indicated that NSBA's goal with regard to virtual learning is ensuring equitable service to all students and that the accountability and funding measures are not skewed to create divisions between profit and non-profit providers. She also acknowledged a recent report by NSBA's Center for Public Education which noted varying degrees of success for virtual learning programs. Much of the variation focused on accountability and funding structures.

Ms. Bridges discussed VSBA's Virtual Learning Task Force. She emphasized the following key points:

- School boards need to consider elements of accountability including student growth, graduation and course completion rates, college/career readiness, characteristics of virtual students served, and student progress compared to progress in traditional course offerings.
- Accountability attributes to consider are:

- participation and attendance metrics including time spent online, log-on activity, and course completion rate;
- academic including formative assessments, interim and final summative assessments, and satisfaction surveys; and
- course quality including design, instruction/assessment, and teacher integration

Discussion by the Board included the following questions and comments:

- Discussed what constitutes virtual learning.
- Discussed virtual learning from the "hard to staff" school aspect. Dr. Flynn noted that some of the most successful and earliest programs were in rural and remote areas.
- The Board asked what concerns the presenters have regarding virtual learning. Dr. Flynn noted that not every student thrives in an online learning environment, and virtual learning programs should be driven by education goals, not as a cost saving measure.
- Recognized the importance of access and resources to ensure virtual options are open to all students in an area.
- Clarified that the current Standards of Accreditation already support virtual learning, but requirements such as those related to facilities may not apply to full-time virtual schools.
- Indicated that licensure qualifications for teachers that only teach in an online setting will likely not differ greatly from traditional licensure requirements because teacher quality is a primary consideration in all education environments.
- Discussed the extent to which the Board should be specific in setting statewide policy for virtual learning.

Technology Systems that Support Accountability

Mr. Mark Nixon, vice president of sales for LoudCloud Systems, lead the presentation on technology systems that support accountability. He emphasized the following key points:

- Learning management systems give us ways to track behavioral analytics even in virtual learning settings. These measures include how long a student was online, did they open a video, how much of the video did they watch, etc.
- Technology systems also allow for social interaction between students and the teacher and among students through discussion forums and annotations.
- Technology systems should be seen as early warning systems which allow teachers to interact on a broader scale. Students can also track their progress in relation to other students. Administrators can also use the technology systems to see how teachers are engaging with students.

Accountability in Practice—Microsoft IT Academy

Mr. Kevin Dean, academic account manager for Microsoft Education, provided an overview of Microsoft IT Academies in Virginia. The goal of the academies is to fill skills gaps that exist in information technology.

Dr. Wright noted that the General Assembly funds IT academies for all the high schools in Virginia. The IT Academies are focused on demonstrating mastery of content, which is measured in obtaining an industry credential at the end of the program.

Accountability in Practice—Simulation-Based Training and Assessment: From the Military to Virtual Schools

Dr. Lewis Johnson, president and CEO of Alelo, demonstrated simulation-based training used by the military and discussed how the technology can translate to K-12 education. Simulations offer advantages as learning tools including:

- giving learners opportunities to learn in context, which helps with retention;
- learners who practice in simulations of real-world situations can easily transfer their learning to those situations;
- gaining self-confidence in ability to apply knowledge in real-world settings;
- promoting learner engagement and motivation; and
- making it possible to assess learners consistently, to make sure that learners' performance meets a common standard.

Discussion

Discussion by the Board included the following questions and comments:

- The Board asked what other states are doing to determine mastery of content. iNACOL provided five key components of competency-based learning systems:
 - students advance upon demonstrated mastery, wherein demonstration comes through projects, oral assessment, assignments, etc.;
 - includes explicit measureable transferable learning objectives that empower students;
 - assessment is meaningful in a positive learning experience for students;
 - students receive timely differentiated support based on assessment feedback; and
 - learning objectives emphasize competencies that also create the application of knowledge.

The Board also asked about the funding required for new test development. iNACOL discussed New Hampshire as an example of moving away from seat time regulations to define the Carnegie Unit in terms of competency. Teachers can be focused on a particular unit until the student has reached mastery, rather than redesigning new tests.

- Acknowledged that ultimately it is the classroom teacher who assesses daily and determines whether the student has mastered the content.
- Clarified that the revisions to the regulations are not standards of accreditation for blended learning; these are for full-time virtual schools.
- The Board asked how socialization issues (learning to work well with others, tolerance, team building, etc.) are addressed in a virtual setting. Dr. Flynn noted that some students may feel more comfortable and confident responding and interacting in a virtual setting versus a classroom.
- Board members asked the presenters to provide best practices and success stories. Dr. Johnson responded that assessments should be tied to competencies. Mr. Foster noted that a number of studies claim full-time virtual schools have lower test scores and graduation rates, and the 2011 SOL scores of students in Virginia's "Virtual Academy" were almost uniformly lower than SOL scores of students in the sponsoring division's brick and mortar schools.

- The Board asked about the response from parents of students in virtual learning environments. Dr. Flynn responded that students and parents have been very supportive of the alternative options provided by virtual learning.

The Board also identified several issues for consideration:

- What is the right balance of tracking every key stroke of a student and only tracking log-in time?
- Recognized that learning management systems are not addressed in the Standards of Accreditation, but should they be?
- Recognized that there are mechanisms, such as the truancy regulations, in place and applicable to all public schools to address some of the social and nonacademic concerns raised, such as attendance. Does there need to be a different definition of truant for virtual schools?
- What does the Board, as a policy-making body, need to do to encourage good results? If the Board believes there are certain processes/inputs that need to be in place in a virtual school to ensure quality, inputs can be added to the SOA.
- Acknowledged the Board cannot waive the 180 teaching days or 990 teaching hours requirement, but the 140-clock hour requirement can be waived locally. Does the existing policy offer enough flexibility or is additional flexibility needed, in return for other elements, such as those discussed by iNACOL.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.