



For Immediate Release: February 23, 2012

Contact: Charles B. Pyle, Director of Communications, (804) 371-2420
Julie C. Grimes, Communications Manager, (804) 225-2775

Board of Education Approves NCLB Waiver Application *Virginia Flexibility Plan Submitted to U.S. Department of Education*

The state Board of Education voted today to ask the U.S. Department of Education (USED) for a waiver from provisions of the 10-year-old federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law that have resulted in the misidentification as failing of successful and improving Virginia schools.

If approved by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, the waiver would allow the commonwealth to merge state and federal requirements into a single accountability system. Virginia schools and school divisions would no longer have to meet increasingly unrealistic annual yearly progress (AYP) benchmarks in reading and mathematics, nor the law's mandate that all students achieve grade-level proficiency by 2014.

"The model the board is proposing would relieve Virginia schools from the overly prescriptive and unworkable dictates of the federal law while maintaining a tough and transparent accountability program," said Board of Education President David M. Foster, who was unanimously elected by his colleagues today to lead the state board for the next two years. Betsy D. Beamer was elected vice president.

"Based on preliminary feedback from federal education officials, and the similarities between Virginia's waiver application and applications from other states that have already been approved, I am optimistic about federal approval," Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright said.

Currently, Virginia schools receive two annual accountability ratings: a state accreditation rating and a federal AYP rating under NCLB. School divisions also receive an AYP rating. Under the system outlined in the board's waiver application, schools would continue to receive annual state accreditation ratings based on overall achievement in English, mathematics, science and history, as they have since 1999 under Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOL) program.

Annual report cards would include a "dashboard" graphically illustrating progress toward closing proficiency gaps. The enhanced reporting would focus on the following "gap" groups:

- Gap group 1: Students with disabilities, English-language learners and economically disadvantaged students
- Gap group 2: African-American students, not of Hispanic origin, not already included in gap group one
- Gap group 3: Hispanic students, of one or more races, not already included in gap group one or two

"The new report cards will clearly show which schools are not making progress in raising the achievement of historically low-performing student subgroups to state standards," Wright said.

In its application, the Board of Education requests approval of the waiver in time for the calculation of accountability ratings for 2012-2013.