



For Immediate Release: March 27, 2014

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

Board of Education Approves Significant Actions to Address Franklin City Public Schools' Shortfalls

The Virginia Board of Education today approved a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between it and Franklin City Public Schools on actions that must be taken by the southeastern Virginia school division to address systemic deficiencies in student achievement, instruction and governance.

Under the MOU — following approval by the Franklin School Board — Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright will assign a chief academic officer to monitor and coordinate the actions of division instructional staff and the school turnaround partners assigned to the district. The chief academic officer also will have administrative oversight of federal and state funds that support programs to raise the achievement of the division's at-risk and low-income students.

In addition, the MOU requires the Franklin School Board to provide the state superintendent with the names and credentials of its top three finalists to replace the outgoing division superintendent prior to making an offer to a candidate. The MOU also requires the division superintendent and her successor to consult with the state superintendent before making recommendations to the city school board on instructional programs and instructional personnel. And it requires the Franklin School Board to provide justification in writing for instructional or personnel decisions made counter to the recommendations of the state superintendent.

"The memorandum of understanding represents a commitment on the part of the state board and local school board to work together to correct systemic problems within the division and ensure that Franklin's children receive the quality education to which every Virginia public school student is entitled," Board President Christian N. Braunlich said.

All three of Franklin's schools are rated as Accredited with Warning for a second consecutive year. The schools also are under federal sanctions for not meeting incremental improvement goals under Virginia's No Child Left Behind waiver. Eighty-one percent of the division's 1,266 students are economically disadvantaged.

"Despite the challenges, I believe Franklin can do better, much better," Wright said. "It won't be easy, and it won't happen overnight, but with the right leadership on the school board and in the central office and well-supported and highly qualified teachers, I am confident that students will achieve at higher levels and Franklin's schools will earn full accreditation."

In October, the Board of Education authorized a division-level academic review after considering evidence that the accreditation status of the schools was due, in part, to Franklin's failure to implement the Standards of Quality, which define the foundational program all 132 Virginia school divisions — by state law — must provide.

(more)

The review was conducted by the Virginia Department of Education's Office of School Improvement and AdvancED, an international accreditation, research and professional services organization. The findings included the following deficiencies related to instruction, leadership and governance:

- Written, taught and assessed curricula not adequately aligned with the Standards of Learning (SOL)
- Administrators and teachers not properly endorsed for their areas of responsibility or subject matter
- Lack of adherence to state laws, regulations, standards, policies and best practices related to governance, accountability and community engagement

State superintendent Wright directed the Office of School Improvement to draft a memorandum of understanding as a means of securing a commitment from the Franklin school board to address the findings of the division-level academic review.

Franklin School Board Chairman Edna King told the state board today that she and her colleagues on the local board are committed to correcting the issues identified.

"Our board is moving forward expeditiously to address all of the essential actions that need to be taken," King said.

The MOU requires the school board to develop a corrective action plan spelling out the steps it will take to improve instruction and raise student achievement in Franklin to state standards. Once the corrective action plan has been accepted by the Board of Education, Franklin's school board and division superintendent will be required to appear before the state board when requested to provide progress reports and answer questions about implementation.

Franklin is the fifth division in the state to undergo a division-level review and enter into an MOU with the state Board of Education. Sussex County Public Schools and Petersburg Public Schools have been operating under MOUs since 2004 and 2006, respectively, because of chronic low achievement. Lee County Public Schools entered into an MOU with the state board in 2004 and was released in 2007 after meeting the plan's objectives. Richmond City Public Schools operated under an MOU from 2005 until 2007, when it was released by the state board.

###