

MINUTES
Virginia Board of Education
Committee on School and Division Accountability
November 20, 2013
1:30 P.M.
Jefferson Conference Room, James Monroe Building

Welcome and Opening Comments

The following Board of Education (Board) members were present for the November 20, 2013 meeting: Diane Atkinson, Betsy Beamer, Christian Braunlich, Dr. Billy Cannaday, Jr., David Foster, Darlene Edwards, Winsome Sears, and Joan Wodiska. Kent Dickey, deputy superintendent for the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), was also present as Dr. Patricia Wright could not attend.

Mrs. Diane Atkinson, chairman of the Committee on School and Division Accountability, convened the meeting and welcomed the Board members and guests.

Agenda Items

Ms. Atkinson outlined today's agenda items:

- A report on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the Norfolk City School Board for Lafayette-Winona Middle School and William H. Ruffner Academy Middle School.
- A report on the MOU for the Alexandria City School Board for Jefferson-Houston Elementary School.
- An undated corrective action plan and MOU with the Sussex County School Board and the Board. (This item will be on first review at the Board meeting tomorrow.)
- The proposed A-F school grading formula developed in response to the 2013 Acts of Assembly. (This item will be on final review at the Board meeting tomorrow.)
- Changes in the process for Virginia's renewal application for waivers from certain requirements of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*. (Because the submission timeline has been changed, this item will not be discussed at tomorrow's Board meeting, but will be moved to the January meeting.)

Public Comment

Mrs. Atkinson then went into public comment.

The first speaker was Dr. Emma Violand-Sanchez, a school board member for Arlington Public Schools (ACPS). She stated that the ACPS board appreciates the hard work and careful thought that the Board and Dr. Wright and VDOE staff have invested in developing the A-F School Ranking proposal in response to the action of the General Assembly and the Governor. However, the ACPS board is opposed to the concept

because it does not provide parents or citizens with any additional useful information. Recognizing the Board's responsibility to develop a plan to implement the A-F legislation, she said the ACPS board requests that the Board adopt the proposal presented in October with the additions proposed by Dr. Wright:

- Use Option B for elementary and middle schools and Hybrid Option A/B for high schools for converting the number of points accumulated by a school using the criteria outlined to an A-F grading scale.
- Include the Bonus Points outlined in the October 24 proposal in the final grade calculations.
- Apply the Decision Rules as revised by the VDOE.

Dr. Violand-Sanchez said she does not support the concept of the A-F school rating, but if the Governor and the General Assembly believe we should have it, than she believes Dr. Wright's proposal as revised more accurately reflects the progress and achievement of English Language Learners than any other such proposal.

Tom Smith then spoke on behalf of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS). Before he made his comments, Mr. Smith acknowledged the passing of Dr. Wright's mother and Charles Finley, a former VDOE assistant superintendent. He said Mr. Finley was a person who taught him a lot as an administrator and someone whom administrators in the field could always call upon to gain help and get straight answers. He said that Mr. Finley will be missed. In terms of his comments, he said VASS would still like the Board to postpone action on the A-F proposal. If there are issues, VASS asks that those issues be looked at first. He said we know that the Board has received comments from the membership regarding these concerns. VASS is asking that action be postponed tomorrow on this proposal.

As there were no other speakers for public comment, Mrs. Atkinson moved on to the agenda items.

Report on the Memorandum of Understanding for the Norfolk City School Board for Lafayette-Winona Middle School and William H. Ruffner Academy Middle School

Dr. Kathleen Smith, director of the VDOE Office of School Improvement, introduced this agenda item and presented the Norfolk school board representatives: Dr. Samuel King, school division superintendent, and Dr. Kirk Houston, school board chairman. She stated that the *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* (SOA) at 8 VAC 20-131-315 requires certain actions for schools that are denied accreditation, including the provision of a status report. The report today is an update regarding the MOU on the two schools (Lafayette-Winona Middle School and William H. Ruffner Academy Middle School) currently denied accreditation in Norfolk. Last year William H. Ruffner was identified as a priority school, but it has exited priority status this year as it has met the exit requirements in the USED flexibility waiver. Lafayette-Winona will remain as a priority school through the end of the 2015-2016 school year. This is the fourth year of denied status for Lafayette-Winona Middle School year and the second year for William H. Ruffner Middle School. Both schools demonstrated some

difficulty with the assessment for the new standards for English, mathematics, and science as did other schools in Norfolk and throughout the state. For this reason, a comprehensive division and school curriculum audit will be provided in Norfolk from December 5th to January 15th to accommodate all of the schools that are accredited with warning in that division. At the end of that review both of these schools will be expected to adjust their corrective action plans to reflect the essential actions that come out of the review. In the packet of information submitted Norfolk has provided a report regarding teacher quality and the number of teacher teaching-years of experience for each school. One Board member asked if the change in status at William H. Ruffner Middle School would require a change in the status in the MOU. (Dr. Smith checked on this and reported back to the Board at the end of the discussion for this item. She said she looked at the MOU and it states that the MOU will remain in effect until these schools are no longer in denied status and no longer focus or priority schools.)

Dr. King then presented information about the schools and responded to questions. He gave the Board an outline as it relates to philosophy and instructional leadership and achievement in the school division. He reported that last year they spent time doing the necessary review of records, conferencing, observations, and audits to determine the strengths and weaknesses in order to transform the system itself. They also spent the last school year bringing together members of the community to determine what is important for public education in Norfolk. In addition, they spent months with the planning team consisting of members of the community and with action teams (subcommittees consisting of members of the community and school specialists) to develop a five-year strategic plan to address the items that surfaced that reflected strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. They believe they have made significant steps to begin to bring a systemic focus to the system itself as well as for each individual school. The current approach is to analyze the individual needs for each student and to teach in an aligned fashion. In one major development they find that there were gaps in the taught curriculum and the testing items. The school division is now doing on-going walk-throughs. The focus on doing a walk-through is to look for major items of interest, including whether instruction is aligned with the standards expected. They also look to see that safety nets are provided for those students who need them. The Board members had several questions for Dr. King and there was much discussion.

Dr. Houston said the issues raised are discussed regularly at the board meetings. One of the things that the school board has added to its monthly agenda is a discussion about academic issues and student achievement. In addition, they are looking at how to retain highly qualified teachers, school climate, how to support the students, and the Board's role in support and accountability.

See [Report on the Memorandum of Understanding for Norfolk City School Board for Lafayette-Winona Middle School and William H. Ruffner Academy Middle School](#) for the material supporting this agenda item.

Report on the Memorandum of Understanding for the Alexandria City School Board for Jefferson-Houston Elementary School

Dr. Kathleen Smith, director of the VDOE Office of School Improvement, also introduced this agenda item. She said Jefferson-Houston Elementary School is in denied status for the second year and is deemed a priority school. The American Institutes of Research (AIR), the lead turnaround partner in this school, provided support last year in mathematics and the school saw gains. The school division has contracted with AIR to include support for reading in grades K-8 this school year. This school and division will conduct a comprehensive review of its curriculum December 2nd through 5th and once the essential actions are provided as a part of the MOU, the school will be expected to revise its current corrective action plan. She then introduced Dr. Alvin Crawley, interim superintendent for the school division. He began this position on October 14, 2013, and said clearly there is work to be done in ensuring that Jefferson-Houston is a high-performing school. He said they are looking at findings in four key areas: the drop in the student performance on the PALS after kindergarten, the decline in the performance on the reading SOL across the various sub-groups, the overall effectiveness of the delivery of reading and mathematics across the grade levels, and behavioral approaches to address suspension and attendance concerns. He said there are five steps he and his team are taking to increase achievement:

- Walk-throughs - He has visited all but two of the schools since starting and he is looking at the teaching and learning process.
- A system of continuous monitoring and accountability.
- Instructional leadership - making sure that teacher and support staff have the skills to do the work that must be done to dramatically increase achievement.
- An examination of the structure and organization of Jefferson-Houston to ensure that they have sufficient capacity to support the needs of the school.
- Parent engagement and working with community partners.

He said they have pulled together a teacher review committee that is looking at the work environment for teachers and the issues that impact stability. He then introduced Rosalyn Rice-Harris, the principal at the school. Ms. Rice-Harris provided a summary of the changes that have taken place since the last appearance before the board. She said one thing they found successful was the extended day program which began in November of last year and roughly added a little over 100 hours of instruction for all students in grades K-8. This year they were able to start this program on the first day of school. She believes that with this additional time and with other factors they were able to see growth in several areas. In addition, they were able to add almost two hundred hours of additional instruction this year. They also have a 21st Century Learning Center which has been able to support students in grades 5-8 so that tutoring was able to start on the first day of school and have been able to implement their intervention blocks. Ms. Rice-Harris also discussed other changes in the school. She said they are celebrating the progress made, but recognize that there is a way to go. She then introduced Dr. Gwen Holmes, who is the chief academic officer for the school division. Dr. Holmes talked about the data findings and how this information is being used.

Board members discussed issues and asked questions during the presentation. A Board member asked about the new construction. Mark Eisenhower (principal on

assignment – “principal of construction”) responded to this question. They are due to be in the building in mid-August and they expect the grade levels in the new school to remain the same. The school is divided into grade level groups and will have four small cafeterias which will also be used as extended learning areas. There are a lot of elements like that that will facilitate instruction. Dr. Crawley brought the presentation to closure by thanking the Board for its support and his team for the work they have been doing.

See [Report on the Memorandum of Understanding for Alexandria City School Board for Jefferson-Houston Elementary School](#) for the supporting material for this agenda item.

Updated Corrective Action Plan and Memorandum of Understanding with Sussex County School Board and the Virginia Board of Education

Dr. Kathleen Smith, director of the VDOE Office of School Improvement, introduced this agenda item. She said this item is also on the Board agenda tomorrow for first review of an updated corrective action plan. Sussex now has all of its schools on one campus as it has consolidated its elementary and middle schools and closed three schools. As a result, a new corrective action plan was needed this year. Two of the priority schools closed. However, they did meet the exit criteria required by the waiver before they closed. This has created a problem in that Sussex will no longer receive the Title I funding to support the same grades and students. Therefore, Sussex has had to make some decisions about certain programs used as a part of the reform effort and some programs have been restricted. Sussex County Public Schools will undergo an academic review in December as well as make changes to the division’s corrective plan if essential actions are found. The corrective action plan the Board currently has will be amended after that review and the Board may want Sussex to return in February rather than January to give Sussex time to make those adjustments to the corrective action plan. Dr. Smith introduced Dr. Arthur Jarrett, superintendent of the Sussex school division, and said he would introduce his Board member.

Dr. Jarrett introduced himself as the newly appointed superintendent for Sussex Public Schools. He introduced his board chair, Eddie Morris. Dr. Jarrett came to Sussex in 2005 and got the high school accredited the first year. He brought to the table with teachers, parents, and students a plan as to where they needed to go and how they could get there. When he came to Sussex, there were teachers who really did not know how to teach. He had to teach veteran teachers how to teach and talk to them about expectations. They also talked about data and looking at data and making decisions based on what the data says. He brought in people who had not been at the table before (teachers, parents, people supportive of the plan and some who were not supportive to get buy-in from them) and that is how they got that school accredited. That is how they are working to get all of the schools accredited. He met with the school board and they determined that the focus needed to be on four things:

- Student achievement.
- Teacher support.
- Principal support.

- Community partnerships.

They also realized that the curriculum really needed to be aligned to ensure that the students meet the benchmarks. They have tried to capture the good things that come out of being in school improvement and make those things systemic. They now have a standardized benchmark assessment, weekly data sessions led by the principals, and monthly data sessions where they meet with him. They now have a standard lesson plan template developed with the lead turnaround partner and the Virginia Department of Education. They have also had to look at the budget and some of the initiatives have had to be combined or delayed due to loss of funding. The school board has allowed him to hire a human resources specialist to ensure they are hiring good teachers. He also hired a director of pupil personnel to support students. In addition, the school division now has a parent portal so parents can see what a student's grades are at any time.

The Board asked questions and discussed issues during this presentation. In response to a question from a Board member, Dr. Jarrett indicated that he has been in the superintendent's position for 131 days. Dr. Jarrett reported that there is now a school division foundation to support some initiatives. A member responded that they should use caution in depending on foundation funds for core services. A Board member also raised concern about the number of students identified as needing special education in the middle school. A Board member also asked about retention of teachers. Dr. Jarrett said teachers are not leaving due to salary, but teachers are looking at how they are treated and supported. A Board member asked about the consolidation of the schools and how this empowers him to make future decisions. Dr. Jarrett said the students have been in dilapidated buildings for so long and now have a new state of the art building where the heat can be regulated, where the lighting is sufficient and reliable, and where the technology is now up to date. All of the school facilities are now on the same campus, including central office. They save on fuel and in a lot of different ways. He can walk right out of his office, and he is in one of the schools after a short walk. One Board member said she would like to see more data available. A Board member also asked about professional development and how the items in the corrective action plan are being implemented. A Board member asked Dr. Jarrett to bring back information on the two focus areas referenced in the corrective action plan: shared leadership between the central office and the schools to raise student achievement and teacher quality. He also asked him to describe what shared leadership looks like in the division. A Board member asked Mr. Morris how long he has been on the school board and asked other questions. She also asked about the school board membership and how he felt about the schools' direction. Mr. Morris said he believes the initial re-configuration hurt the division. However, he has confidence in Dr. Jarrett. Mr. Morris said he taught for 30 1/2 years and retired from the system. A lot of the children in the county don't have access to the Internet. 83% of the children are on free lunch. Dr. Jarrett believes he has a good team of principals, and, given time, they will move the division to where it needs to be. He thanked the Board for its suggestions.

See [Updated Corrective Action Plan and Memorandum of Understanding with Sussex County School Board and the Virginia Board of Education](#) for the material supporting this agenda item.

Approval of Minutes from the October 23, 2013 Meeting

Copies of the minutes from the October 23, 2013 committee meeting were distributed to all committee members prior to today's meeting. A motion was made to approve the minutes, the motion was seconded, and the minutes were approved by the committee members.

Report on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Waiver Renewal Process and Options for Amendments to Virginia's Renewal Application

Veronica Tate, director of the office of program administration and accountability, presented this agenda item. She provided a one-page report about the changes in the ESEA flexible renewal process. Last Thursday USED issued a letter to all states indicating the process has been revised. States must submit a letter requesting a one-year extension and may submit a redline version of an application requesting any optional amendments that they are interested in. At the bottom of the report she submitted to the Board is a summary of what is proposed at this point; that is, that the item be pulled from the agenda tomorrow and come back to the board for first review in January with the final review in February. The deadline for submission is by the end of February or 60 days from the time the report is received. The Board chair indicated that, unless there was objection from the Board members, the item would be removed from tomorrow's agenda and carried over to the January meeting. The public will be notified of this change through the email lists.

See [Report on Virginia's Renewal Application for Waivers from Certain Requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 \(ESEA\)](#)

Proposed A-F School Grading Formula Developed in Response to the 2013 Acts of Assembly

Mrs. Shelley Loving-Ryder, assistant superintendent for the division of student assessment and school improvement, presented this agenda item. She reported that she was bringing information about three things the Board asked for at the October meeting:

- To include the development of a communication plan.
- To include something in the grading formula that would provide for the Board to periodically review the grading formula.
- To recalculate the pass rates that are used for the proficiency component of the grading formula, using the accreditation adjustments rather than the accountability pass rates seen previously.

These issues have all been addressed in the Superintendent's Recommendations in the boilerplate for tomorrow's meeting and can be found in the first document referenced in the paragraph below. The Board members asked questions and discussed these issues.

See the [Proposed A-F School Grading Formula Developed in Response to the 2013 Acts of Assembly](#). See related [presentation on proposed A-F School Grading Formula](#) for additional information about this agenda item.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 5 p.m.