

MINUTES
Virginia Board of Education
Committee on School and Division Accountability
July 23, 2014 - 2:30 P.M.
Jefferson Conference Room, James Monroe Building

Welcome and Opening Comments

The following Board of Education (Board) members were present for the July 23, 2014 Committee on School and Division Accountability meeting: Diane Atkinson; Christian Braunlich; Dr. Oktay Baysal, Dr. Billy Cannaday, Jr.; James Dillard; Darla Edwards; Andrew Ko; Winsome Sears, and Joan Wodiska. Dr. Steven Staples, the superintendent of public instruction, was also present.

Mrs. Atkinson, chairman of the committee, convened the meeting and welcomed the Board members and guests.

Approval of Minutes from the June 25, 2014 Meeting

A motion was made to approve the minutes for the June 25, 2014 committee meeting, the motion was seconded, and the minutes were approved by the committee members.

Introductory Remarks

Mrs. Atkinson said today's meeting would again focus on the local assessment guidelines to be developed in response to legislation adopted during the 2014 General Assembly Session. Over the past two months, the Board has heard from representatives from various organizations, including the Virginia Consortium of Social Studies Specialists and College Educators, the Virginia Association of Science Teachers, the Virginia Association of Teachers of English, the Virginia Council for the Social Studies, and the Assessment and Accountability Roundtable. In addition, two Board members and Dr. Staples met with a group of stakeholders on July 9 to receive input related to implementation issues. Ms. Atkinson thanked all of the participants for their input and said she believed this process has been very helpful. Today she said the committee will hear from the Virginia Mathematics and Science Coalition and a first draft of the guidelines will be presented. Tomorrow the guidelines will be on the agenda for first review at the Board's business meeting and then they will come back to the Board for final review probably in September.

Public Comment

At this point Mrs. Atkinson opened the floor for public comment. Since no one asked to provide public comment, she went on to the next item on the agenda.

Presentation to the Committee from the Virginia Mathematics and Science Coalition

On behalf of the Virginia Mathematics and Science Coalition, Dr. Julia Cothron, chairman, and Fred Hoffman, president, presented a report which included a list of recommendations regarding the development of guidelines for local assessments. Mr. Huffman said the coalition has been looking at these issues for over a year formally and said he would focus on elementary science today because the third grade science Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment has been eliminated. He mentioned the following points:

- From the standpoint of the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) process in getting students ready for college and career readiness, science lends itself very well to the whole idea of inquiry which is an integral part of many jobs.
- The coalition believes many teachers enjoy that process rather than just focusing on facts and out-of-the-book kinds of processes.
- We have a twenty-year history of what has been done with the SOL.
- The SOL and science start with the concepts of inquiry, reasoning, and logic. While these elements remain, there is now an opportunity to do more to emphasize investigation and understanding, to make it more real-world, and to deal with solid connections between many different organizations, including the Virginia Department of Education, the school divisions, and professional organizations.
- The new legislation is providing an opportunity to get away from traditional assessment as we deal with authentic assessment and cross-disciplinary opportunities.
- Professional development is an integral part of this legislation.

He also noted the following concerns:

- The new assessments do not give us any state-wide data until the fifth grade. Thus, more pressure is put on that grade-level.
- There is a concern about the narrowing of the curriculum where the focus is now on math and reading and we lose science and social studies, subjects which are still critical for students in preparation for their future.
- Reading the science textbook is not science.
- Ideally, the assessments will still be based on the SOL, try to involve higher level thinking, and include more concepts across strands. Although some teachers have been doing this, professional development will be necessary to ensure that all teachers are able to do this well.
- There is also concern that there will be a bigger focus on *No Child Left Behind* subjects which will lead to a narrowing of the curriculum.

At this point Dr. Cothron began her part of the presentation. She said she wanted to talk to the committee about changing the dynamics for elementary school science and taking some small steps forward. She then went on to discuss a program, the Virginia

Initiative for Science Teaching and Achievement (VISTA). This organization started at George Mason University and has a \$25 million grant award as well as additional funding from private sources. The coalition has been part of VISTA since its inception. There are multiple components to VISTA but the one component most important for this discussion is the one related to elementary science. VISTA's vision is to improve elementary science by focusing on inquiry and problem-based learning. One of VISTA's goals is to improve student achievement for the overall student population as well as the subpopulations. This is the third year of implementation for VISTA.

Teachers who are part of the VISTA project come in teams of two to six teachers for two weeks in the summer. They have an opportunity to practice inquiry and problem-based learning in a setting that is non-threatening. She then showed the Board an article in the *Richmond-Times Dispatch* about the VISTA program at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Dr. Cothron went on to describe a unit the participating teachers had to teach and the lesson's objectives. She noted that every one of the objectives implied active learning and a product or a performance task that gets at higher level cognitive skills. She then asked the Board to look at the cumulative activity referenced in her presentation and said she thinks this is the kind of activity we want to see in the schools.

She said VISTA includes an external evaluator team from the University of Virginia and Oregon State University. These teams are evaluating the impact on teachers - not just what they do on a test, but also what they do in a classroom.

Discussion with Board members followed. Issues raised included the following:

- How many teachers have been through the VISTA program?
- How are these teachers chosen?
- Is there a plan for the teachers who have been through VISTA to train other teachers?
- What should an assessment process look like?
- What model should be used?
- Is enough time spent on content and relevance?
- Is the content rigorous enough?
- Does the content include essential information?
- Should the richness of the curriculum be reviewed?
- How can we help teachers to differentiate students at all levels so that we know that students understand before moving on?
- Would cross-peer review be helpful?
- There is a need for high quality professional development.
- Math also needs to be assessed.

The Board members thanked Dr. Cothron and Mr. Hoffman for the presentation.

Presentation of Proposed Local Assessment Guidelines Developed in Response to 2014 Acts of Assembly

Shelley Loving-Ryder, assistant superintendent for the Division of Student Assessment and School Improvement, presented a first draft of the proposed local assessment guidelines developed in response to General Assembly action taken during the last session.

She began her presentation by reminding the Board that the 2014 General Assembly legislation eliminates five SOL tests, including those for Grade 3 Science, Grade 3 History, Grade 5 Writing, United States History to 1865, and United States History from 1865 to the Present. In addition, the legislation requires that each school division certify that it has taught the content for each of the eliminated areas and administered alternative assessments, consistent with Board guidelines. According to the legislation, the Board is to develop guidelines that “(1) incorporate options for age-appropriate, authentic performance assessments and portfolios with rubrics and other methodologies designed to ensure that students are making adequate academic progress in the subject area and that the Standards of Learning content is being taught; (2) permit and encourage integrated assessments that include multiple subject areas; and (3) emphasize collaboration between teachers to administer and substantiate the assessments and the professional development of teachers to enable them to make the best use of alternative assessments.”

The impetus for this legislation was concern about the amount of testing that goes on in the school divisions and the time spent in test preparation activities. As noted by Mrs. Atkinson earlier in the meeting, the committee has heard from a number of organizations and school division personnel have also provided input. The task is to develop guidelines that school divisions will use to implement this legislation in the current school year. The proposed guidelines allow the school divisions considerable flexibility and will be reviewed again for possible revision by the Board after the 2014-2015 school year.

For the 2014-2015 school year, school divisions will be asked to administer assessments that address each strand within the SOL for that content area and grade level. However, the assessments will not be expected to cover all of the SOL contained in that strand. In subsequent years, the requirements for coverage of the SOL may increase as experience in implementing the local assessments statewide is gained.

The legislation also requires that school divisions certify that the content has been taught and the assessments administered. Current guidelines do not require school divisions to report scores to the department. Instead local school boards and division superintendents will certify through the annual Standards of Quality compliance process that local alternative assessments measuring the SOL and adhering to the Board guidelines have been administered. During the 2014-2015 school year, the plan is that department staff will conduct site visits or in some cases telephone interviews with local school division personnel to determine how the requirements are being met.

Local school divisions may choose to administer the same assessments for particular grade levels and content areas to all students in the division. The use of division-wide assessments ensures consistency across the division. If school divisions choose to allow flexibility at the school level in selecting the assessments, the school division will need to prepare a written plan explaining the evidence from each school that will be reviewed by the local school board and the superintendent to certify that the requirements of the legislation have been met.

The legislation encourages integrated assessments where more than one content area is addressed. If such assessments are used, the results should include information about the extent to which the students have demonstrated proficiency in each content area covered.

Ms. Loving-Ryder reported that the results of the local authentic assessments will not be used to designate state accreditation or federal accreditation. She also stated that questions have been raised as to how this information will be provided to the field so staff can gather as much input as possible. A Superintendent's email will be sent out Friday after the Board receives the guidelines for first review. In addition, it will be copied to certain school division staff and posted on Teacher Direct, and will be sent out as a Principal Memo and to certain education organizations, including the PTA.

Discussion with Board members followed. Issues raised included the following:

- How will the department discover problems with the assessments since scores will not be reported to the department?
- What happens if any problems are discovered?
- Is it expected that different classrooms in the same school will be allowed to use different assessments?
- Will each teacher be allowed to develop his/her own assessment?
- Will the school divisions be required to retain their scoring mechanisms?
- Has any thought been given to creating a bank of assessments?
- What kind of test security will be required at the local level?
- Will there be a requirement for more department staff? If so, how many will be needed and what will this cost?
- If a school division is having problems, where will the funding come from to assist that division?
- How can the department help teachers use the resources they currently have?
- As we go forward, the Board may be able to provide useful information to the General Assembly.
- There is value in being able to collect data in ways that can help inform the Board and others.
- School divisions needing technical assistance should be identified.
- There is a need for more guidance so that the expectations are clear.
- The department's role in this process should be clear.
- Phone interviews should be limited and priority should be given to site visits.
- Some thought also needs to be given as how this type of testing should be integrated into the teacher preparation programs as well as teacher licensure.

Board members thanked Ms. Loving-Ryder for her presentation.

The meeting adjourned at 5:05 p.m.