

REL AP 3.25.5 - Virginia Board of Education Hearings: Expectations for Students and Schools Meeting 1: Manassas, July 14, 2016

In July and August 2016, the Virginia Board of Education is hosting a series of meetings to gather information on expectations for students, how schools are accredited, and school resources. Each event consists of two feedback sessions: a stakeholder roundtable and a public hearing. The stakeholder roundtables include 15–20 invited attendees who represent school and district leadership, teachers, parents, students, higher education institutions, and employers. The public hearings, which follow the roundtables, give all interested community members the opportunity to provide feedback. Participants in the public forum may include school and district leaders, teachers and other educators, representatives of educator organizations, parents, students, and other concerned citizens. The roundtables and public hearings are intended to solicit feedback on the following topics:

- **Conditions and needs of public education.** Views on current education conditions and needs in Virginia public schools.
- **Profile of a Virginia Graduate.** Reactions to the proposed redesign of the high school experience guided by a draft Profile of a Virginia Graduate and proposed revisions to high school graduation expectations and requirements.
- **Accountability system changes.** Suggestions for the development of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) state plan, as well as responses to proposed changes in school accreditation, state support for schools needing improvement, and public reporting of school information.
- **Standards of Quality revisions.** Recommendations for revisions to school quality standards that align with the Profile and accountability system.

This memo summarizes feedback from the first event in Manassas, on July 14, 2016, as well as written comments submitted to the Board. Similar memos will be developed for the remaining events: Williamsburg (July 19), Abingdon (August 24), and Lynchburg (August 25). A synthesis of feedback from all four events will be provided after the Lynchburg event.

In this memo, summaries are provided for each feedback session, organized by the four topics outlined above. These summaries are followed by a synthesis of feedback across the two sessions.

Stakeholder Roundtable

Dr. Billy Cannaday, President of the Virginia Board of Education, facilitated the roundtable. Participants are listed in table 1.

Table 1. Stakeholder roundtable participants, Manassas

Name	Title	Jurisdiction
Dr. Billy Cannaday	President	Virginia Board of Education
Jim Dillard	Member	Virginia Board of Education
Sal Romero	Member	Virginia Board of Education
Dr. Catherine Magouyrk	Superintendent	Manassas City Public Schools
Tim Demeria	Chairman	Manassas City School Board
Michael Wright	Principal, Potomac Senior High School	Prince William County Public Schools
Laura Rotella	Director of Student Services	Fairfax County Public Schools
Ron Carmichael	Director of Administration & Operations	George Mason University Science and Technology Campus
Dr. Molly Lynch	Acting Provost	Manassas Campus, Northern Virginia Community College
Amy Hall	Parent	Frederick County Public Schools
Kym Nguyen	Parent	Manassas City Public Schools
Glendy Hernandez	2016 Graduate	Osborn High School
Kimberly Kasik	Senior	Manassas Park High School
Patrick King	Owner	Imagine Design
Shavonne Gooden	Assistant Branch Manager	Apple Federal Credit Union

Conditions and needs of public education

Much of the conversation on the needs and conditions of public schools in Virginia centered on three key topics: (1) financial resources, a concern shared primarily by division representatives; (2) counseling support to students, a concern expressed by district administrators; and (3) teacher recruitment, retention, and effectiveness, concerns expressed by school administrators, parents, and students.

Financial resources

Concerns about financial resources were shared primarily by district administrators and centered on both adequacy and equity.

- **Adequacy.** A superintendent and a school board member from the same school division spoke of the need to ensure adequate state funding levels. They reported that state funding to divisions has declined since 2008, in essence depriving the division of an additional \$7 million if funding had been maintained at 2008 levels. Local funding has enabled the division to hire additional staff to serve high-needs groups, including students who receive free and reduced-price lunch, special education services, and English language services. Additional funding from the state, however, would enable the division to serve these students more effectively, and to implement innovations for all students.
- **Equity.** A principal spoke to the importance of ensuring that students have equal access to resources. For example, many of his students do not have access to technology at home, so it is important to provide it at school.

Counseling support

A district administrator recommended hiring additional counselors to reduce large caseloads of many school counselors. She further suggested eliminating non-counseling duties such as test administration—a current responsibility of counselors in her division. She also noted the need for additional mental health support for students.

Teacher recruitment, retention, and effectiveness

The topic of recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers was raised by a parent, a principal, and a student. A parent expressed concern about the turnover among math and science teachers in her district, and suggested offering incentives and professional development to keep these teachers in their districts. A principal and a recent high school graduate also expressed concerns about teacher effectiveness. The principal spoke about the importance of

professional development for English language and special education teachers to ensure that they can serve these populations effectively. A recent high school graduate spoke of the need for qualified teachers who care about and respect students.

Profile of a Virginia Graduate

In general, roundtable participants were supportive of the Profile of the Virginia Graduate and the related proposed policy changes. Participants were positive about reductions in required verified credits, career exploration opportunities, and the 5 Cs emphasized in the Profile (critical thinking, creating thinking, collaboration, communication, and citizenship). Concerns were expressed, however, about high school career tracks, implementation timelines and supports, and ensuring implementation of the Profile across all grade levels K–12.

Support for reducing verified credits and expanding locally developed assessments

Several participants supported reductions in the number of required verified credits and the implementation of locally developed assessments. A principal predicted that reducing the number of Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments would allow teachers to be more innovative in their instruction and provide additional time to incorporate Profile skills into their instruction, including the 5 Cs and other 21st-century skills. Finally, he said that the reduction in standardized testing would allow more time for students to practice and demonstrate mastery of these skills.

Mixed reactions to career components

A community college administrator expressed enthusiasm for the career exploration component of the Profile, noting that many students arrive at community college without direction, then leave without a credential after exhausting financial aid. A parent, however, raised concerns that choosing a technical track in high school may limit students who choose to attend college later on. The parent believes that high school classes should prepare all students for postsecondary education. She expressed particular concern that the two-year sequence of semester-long science courses would be insufficient to prepare students for postsecondary education.

Support for 5 Cs

Several roundtable participants voiced support for the Profile's emphasis on the 5 Cs, particularly community engagement and civic responsibility. Business representatives stressed the importance of communication, leadership, creativity, and financial literacy skills. A business

representative said that he looks first for employees who are able to innovate and challenge existing models. A higher education administrator spoke about the importance of ensuring sufficient funding for extracurricular activities, which contribute to the development of interpersonal skills that are critical to civic engagement.

Timeline and implementation support

Both parents in attendance expressed concerns about the relatively short timeline for the Profile's implementation, noting that the proposed changes will require a huge investment of time and energy for educators to make the cultural shift required to address the Profile. For instance, teachers will need to alter their approach to instruction and manage instructional time differently. They will need to unpack the standards to understand the skills students need to demonstrate. Additionally, districts and schools will need support to develop alternative assessments and find internship opportunities for students. The parents emphasized that district and school administrators, teachers, and students must have support during the implementation process.

Implementation from K through 12

A superintendent stressed that the knowledge, skills, and capacities included in the Profile must be taught throughout the K–12 curriculum and not delayed until high school. She noted that incoming high school students need a solid foundation in each domain, including experience with career and technical education and service learning. She cautioned about attrition among effective high school teachers if the skills in the Profile are considered solely their responsibility. She also stressed the importance of promoting leadership among students and families, and that students need the opportunity to try out new skills and make mistakes.

Accountability system changes

The discussion of changes to the accountability system centered around how achievement is measured and reported, meeting diverse student needs, student supports to transition to college, and parent education.

Measuring and reporting achievement

Given the shift away from SOL assessments, participants said that the Virginia Department of Education should reconsider how information about school effectiveness is communicated to the public. A parent noted that reports need to make clear whether a school is educating the whole child. She also recommended that accountability reporting emphasize the annual growth

of each student rather than comparing the success rate of sequential cohorts of students who may not be equivalent in background or skill. Dr. Cannaday stressed that revisions to the accountability system will incorporate multiple measures of student growth and success.

Meeting diverse student needs

Several participants discussed the importance of acknowledging that students enter school with different skill levels and experiences. Participants were asked about the supports that are needed to help children who come from challenging circumstances and do not start kindergarten at grade level, as well as those students who experience challenges throughout their school careers. The responses focused on supporting students during their transitions to postsecondary education and parental education.

College transition supports

A high school graduate said she would have liked information about challenges she might encounter as a college student and how other students have overcome them. She praised the AVID college access program at her school, including the college enrollment guidance and internship opportunities it provided. She noted that her parents would not have been able to provide her these kinds of support.

Parent education

A parent suggested providing additional resources and information for parents, especially parents of young children. For example, parents need to understand the advantages of early exposure to language, as well as the importance of reading to their children.

Standards of Quality revisions

The stakeholder roundtable concluded with participants' suggestions for changes to the Standards of Quality (SOQs). Participants were asked whether they would like to see more flexibility in certain areas or reexamination of the SOLs in certain subjects. Responses centered around the need for flexibility in student electives and graduation requirements.

Student electives

A district administrator stressed the importance of flexibility for students in choosing electives. She explained that in recent years, the state has moved toward emphasizing sequential electives. However, students who enroll in the first course of a sequence and then decide they do not want to continue to study the subject should be able to choose a different elective.

Graduation requirements

A district administrator called for flexibility in the graduation requirements generally. For example, schools that lack the capacity to provide internships or work-based learning experiences for all students may engage students in project-based learning across disciplines. She cited the Da Vinci Project at Virginia Commonwealth University as effective project-based learning that brings together art, engineering, and business majors to collaboratively solve a problem. She concluded that students should have multiple paths available, and schools should have flexibility to meet student needs with available resources.

Public Hearing

There were more than 90 attendees and 35 speakers at the Manassas hearings. Speakers included district leaders and administrators, teachers, librarians, nurses, other school staff members, business representatives, parents, students, and other community members. Represented organizations included the Virginia Association of Science Teachers, the Virginia Association of School Nurses, the Virginia Association of School Librarians, the Virginia Mathematics and Science Coalition, the Virginia Council on Economic Education, the Prince William County Education Association, the Virginia Alliance for School Counseling, and the Virginia Coalition for Fine Arts Education.

Conditions and needs of public education

Three key needs emerged in the public hearing: (1) funding, (2) professional development, and (3) career and technical education (CTE) facilities.

Funding

The superintendent who attended the roundtable reiterated the importance of funding schools at a level equivalent to 2008, noting the increased support additional funding would provide for students who face challenges.

Professional development

Several educators stressed the importance of professional development for teachers, administrators, and other staff, such as school librarians. A Virginia Association of Science Teachers representative urged the Board to ensure that professional development is research-based, includes adequate resource support, and builds on the strengths of the current system. A physical education teacher noted the need to invest in professional development to improve the effectiveness of physical education teachers. A school administrator submitted comments

urging the Board to expand the implementation of the National Institute for School Leadership’s executive development program and executive coaching for current principals and assistant principals.

Career and technical education

A district administrator urged policymakers to invest in updating CTE facilities, many of which are outdated and do not reflect the skills needed in the 21st century. He added that schools are challenged to compete with industry for qualified CTE educators. The state senator who represents Manassas spoke about the importance of strong partnerships between K–12 and community college CTE programs.

Profile of a Virginia Graduate

As with the stakeholder roundtable, participants in the public hearing generally supported the Profile and associated policy proposals, including reductions in the number of verified credits and testing, emphasis on the 5 Cs (particularly community engagement and civic participation), and the use of internships. Concerns were expressed, however, about professional development and support needed to implement the Profile on a fast timeline, including supports to develop internships. Suggestions were also made for incorporating various subjects into graduation requirements, but ensuring flexibility for students.

Support for reducing verified credits and expanding locally developed assessments

Several participants, including educators and parents, expressed support for reducing the number of verified credits and expanding the use of locally developed assessments. Many of these speakers said that students are currently overtested.

Timelines and implementation support

Educators at the hearing noted the need to ensure appropriate implementation support, given the short timeline. A school administrator suggested incorporating professional development and support for principals into the timeline. He noted, for instance, that school leaders will need training and support to coordinate student internships and experiential learning. Another participant agreed that requiring internships or experiential learning for all students may be logistically challenging for school districts, especially large ones.

A science educator noted that teachers will also need a robust system of support that includes resources for revising the standards and professional development that engages teachers with Profile ideas.

Graduation requirements

Support was expressed for several proposed requirements:

- **Economics and personal finance.** Supported by several teachers and business owners.
- **Health and physical education.** Also supported by teachers and business owners.
- **Health and wellness.** A health teacher praised the Board for including personal health and wellness in the profile.
- **Mathematics.** A school administrator and the representative of the Virginia Math and Science Coalition supported proposals to establish one Virginia Diploma and to require four years of mathematics at the high school level.

Educators urged the Board to consider additional requirements in these areas:

- **Fine arts.** Suggested by a music educator who noted that the fine arts are essential to development of the 5Cs.
- **Financial literacy and personal finance.** Suggested by several participants for inclusion in the Profile.

Several science educators cautioned against the implementation of a two-year science course sequence incorporating 70 hours of instruction (one semester) in earth science, biology, chemistry, and physics. They cautioned that the course would not include the breadth or depth of content necessary for postsecondary success, and that it will be difficult to determine which content to cut. One participant said the course might also make it challenging for students to pass SOL assessments because they will lack the necessary content and skills.

A parent of a special needs child spoke to the importance of ensuring that the requirements of the Profile be flexible depending upon the needs of individual children, particularly special education students.

Miscellaneous comments

Additional comments were made on these topics:

- **Business partnerships.** One speaker urged the Board to secure a strong partnership between schools and the business community to ensure that students have opportunities to participate in internships.

- **Librarians.** School librarians noted that school library programs can support the skills outlined in the Profile, particularly around project-based learning and performance-based assessments.

Accountability system changes

Participant comments on proposed changes to the accountability system included suggestions for measures to include in the accountability system and potential priorities for ESSA funding. Others offered suggestions for revising the state teacher evaluation system and the Virginia Alternative Assessment Program.

Multiple accountability measures

Several participants expressed support for an accountability system that incorporates multiple measures of school quality, relies less on standardized testing, and emphasizes critical thinking skills. Educators said that the assessments used for accountability should be rigorous and varied. A superintendent urged the Board to align the state and federal accountability systems.

Participants suggested the following measures be incorporated into a revised accountability system:

- Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Cambridge Programme exams as accountability measures.
- The SAT and ACT exams as accountability measures.
- Flexibility for schools to count SOL assessments as final exams.
- A school-level accountability measure focused on increasing levels of racial and socioeconomic integration.
- Flexibility for school systems to develop local, internal accountability systems.

Proposed priorities for ESSA funding

Participants from the Virginia Math and Science Coalition and the Virginia Association of School Librarians recommended the following as priorities for ESSA funding:

- Development of a STEM master teacher corps, which would build on the Virginia Initiative for Science Teaching and Achievement (VISTA).
- Support for STEM programs, including development of teacher expertise, student academic enrichment and support, and technology.
- Revenue for school libraries and professional development for school librarians.

An educator suggested the development of an ESSA Opportunity Dashboard indicating the levels of support available to schools.

Teacher evaluation in Virginia

A participant who was both a parent and a teacher would like teacher evaluation ratings to be based on factors other than student test scores. She supports using SOL assessment scores for school-level accountability only.

Virginia Alternative Assessment Program

A special education teacher proposed that the Board consider revisions to the Virginia Alternative Assessment Program, which (he believes) does not measure the life skills that special education students need, including citizenship and interactions with developmentally typical peers. He said that his students benefit more from work skills development programs than from the assessment program.

Standards of Quality revisions

Participants expressed support for revising the SOQs to: (1) provide additional educators and support staff in key areas, (2) strengthen school library programs, and (3) ensure equity and support for at-risk students.

Additional staff

Participants noted the need for additional staff in the following areas:

- **School counselors and social workers.** Several participants recommended lowering the ratio of school counselors and social workers to students.
- **Assistant principals.** Two participants would like to have additional assistant principals available to schools.
- **School nurses.** A representative of the Virginia Association of School Nurses recommended requiring at least one school nurse at every school.
- **Reading/support specialists.** Other participants voiced support for additional reading specialists and other support specialists.

School library programs

Several school librarians spoke in favor of maintaining or strengthening the SOQs for school librarians. One speaker recommended increased school staffing levels for librarians, particularly

at the elementary school level, as well as dedicated funding to maintain library resources and facilities. Another participant advocated for additional language to establish the curricular importance of library programs, with the establishment of a clear role for librarians.

Equity and support for at-risk students

A superintendent urged the Board to focus the SOQs on ensuring equity and support for at-risk and disadvantaged students. He proposed a formula for staff allocation similar to the class size reduction funding formula. He noted the need to focus on social and emotional needs as well as academic ones.

Key Themes

Several key themes emerged from both the stakeholder roundtable and the public hearings:

- **Support for Profile.** Both groups were generally supportive of the Profile of a Virginia Graduate and related Board policy proposals.
- **Need for professional development and support.** Multiple participants in both sessions identified high-quality, research-based professional development as a priority area for schools. Participants expressed reservations about the short timeline for implementation and would like to ensure that administrators and teachers receive adequate support and professional development to support implementation.
- **Need for flexibility.** Participants proposed flexibility in some proposed Profile components. For example, they noted the need to offer additional options, such as project-based learning, for schools with limited capacity to offer internships to all students.
- **Reducing assessments.** Participants expressed support for reducing the number of assessments and implementing additional locally developed assessments.
- **Multiple measures accountability.** Both groups support an accountability system based on multiple measures. Public hearing participants offered suggestions for additional measures to include in the accountability system.
- **Increased staff in key areas.** Both groups recommended reduction of the ratio of school counselors to students. Public hearing participants proposed revisions to the Standards of Quality to increase staffing levels for librarians, nurses, and other support staff members.