

Virginia Board of Education Public Hearings *Meeting #5: Mecklenburg County, August 23, 2017*

Overview

Between June and August 2017, the Virginia Board of Education (the Board) conducted a series of public hearings to obtain feedback from families, educators and community members on expectations for graduating students, how schools are accredited, and the conditions and needs of the Commonwealth's public schools. The hearings were held in five sites across the state: **Fairfax** (June 27), **Wytheville** (July 13), **Harrisonburg** (July 18), **Virginia Beach** (August 9), and **Mecklenburg County** (August 23).

The Board solicited feedback on the following topics:

- The proposed **Standards of Accreditation** including changes to high school graduation requirements aligned with the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate* and changes to how schools are accredited
- The **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)** state plan
- **Conditions and needs of public education** in the Commonwealth

This document provides information about participants at the fifth hearing in Mecklenburg County on August 23, 2017, followed by a detailed summary of the feedback received. Similar summary documents were provided to the Board for the other four hearings along with a synthesis report highlighting common feedback and issues raised across the five hearings.

Participants

Approximately 125 participants attended the Mecklenburg County public hearing. There were 15 participants providing comments, including administrators, representatives of educator organizations, teachers, parents, and community leaders. Represented organizations included the Mecklenburg County Public Schools, Buckingham County Public Schools, American Association of School Librarians, Virginia Council on Economic Education, Mecklenburg Education Association, Virginia Poverty Law Center, Virginia Alliance for School Counseling, and the Appomattox Regional Governors School.

Summary of Public Feedback

Standards of Accreditation

Graduation Requirements

Virginia Council on Economic Education (VCEE) expressed appreciation for the Board's continuing graduation requirement to earn an economics and personal finance credit. A concern was shared regarding certification for teachers who teach in this area not being required.

A science teacher recommended the incorporation of environmental literacy into the Standards of Accreditation. The benefits outlined include: involving students in authentic problem-solving, providing teachers with a structure for team approaches and communication, and supporting the development of problem-based assessments.

A teacher supported requiring social studies as part of accreditation.

Another teacher argued that internships are needed for SWDs to help them learn basic job skills.

Assessments

A representative of the VCEE agreed with Board's emphasis on the 5 C's. He also supported the move to greater use of performance assessments as an effective way for students to gain the knowledge and skills they need. It was noted that there is little evidence that most schools have created quality authentic performance-based assessments in history and social studies. It is suggested that substantial professional development be provided to change methods of teaching aligned with these assessments.

VCEE believes that systems should be designed at the state level to ensure students are building the knowledge and skills envisioned in the K-12 Social Science Standards of Learning, especially at the middle and high school level. This system would assist local teachers and divisions in selecting high-quality curriculum-embedded performance tasks scored locally or regionally with some state oversight and assistance. The system would include professional development for teachers from experts in performance assessments.

A teacher recommended reinstating writing assessment in 5th grade to prepare students for those assessments in middle and high school. She also pointed out that science assessments are text heavy. Therefore, SWDs need an opportunity to demonstrate science knowledge in different ways.

Accreditation Levels

A parent representing the Virginia School Board Association supported the reduction in standardized testing and in the number of required verified credits. However, she encouraged flexibility in the use of student growth measures and other indicators of school quality. For example, she is concerned that schools in Level II will focus only on their weak performance indicators at the expense of other Board requirements.

A local superintendent supported the new accreditation levels and hopes they will better reflect the hard work being done by schools to maintain their accreditation.

Profile of a Virginia Graduate

A local superintendent argued that economic development is a priority for rural areas in order to fully implement the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate*. This development is needed to support Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) career exploration through partnerships with businesses. School divisions would also like support for certifying school counselors as career development facilitators.

A school counselor representing the Virginia Alliance for School Counseling called for an increase in the ratio of school counselors to students in order to support the acquisition of technical skills that prepare students for careers, to increase work-based learning experiences, and to support the learning of soft skills (conflict resolution, social skills, study skills, and problem solving) through such practices as mentoring programs, lunch buddy programs, and crisis intervention.

A teacher expressed appreciation for the Board's emphasis on workforce readiness.

ESSA State Plan

Librarians

A representative of the National Association of School Librarians requested explicit references to school librarians and library programs in ESSA state plan. She asked the Board to consider adding a priority under Title IV, Part A for school library programs that provide quality resources, personalized learning environments, equitable access to books, media, tools, and technologies, and collaborative learning, ensuring a well-rounded education and opportunities for every student.

A middle school librarian presented examples of what school librarians contribute to student learning: access to print and digital resources supporting curriculum as well as recreational reading; access to and evaluation of internet content; use of critical thinking skills; and collaboration with teachers in scaffolding student learning.

Other

A teacher supported the revised accountability system focus on growth, as described in the state's ESSA plan. However, she recommended that the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) provide resources to school divisions to train teachers in implementing proposed changes and to educate their communities about these changes.

A teacher recommended that VDOE provide adequate funds and resources to assist in the improvement of schools not making adequate progress on ESSA indicators of school quality.

Conditions and Needs of Public Education

Nutrition

A representative of Virginia Hunger Solutions at the Virginia Poverty Law Center advocated for increased student access and participation in nutrition programs to ensure that they are ready to learn, are less likely to be absent, and will exhibit fewer behavioral problems.

A teacher expressed concern about there being support for students receiving insufficient nutrition and emotional support at home.

Teacher recruitment

A teacher recommended that Virginia should invest in recruiting and mentoring new teachers, maintaining positive working conditions (e.g., school climate, teaching and student learning conditions), and retaining high quality teachers through competitive salaries and opportunities for professional growth.

A parent expressed concern about teacher shortages, the lack of administrative support for teachers, and the resulting lack of educational opportunities in Virginia schools.

Other

A local superintendent argued that due to increased automation and globalization, there is a need for a greater trust in and autonomy for teachers in order to encourage innovative practices in education.

A parent recommended that the VDOE study the possibility of employing a statewide student grading scale for K-12 schools.

Miscellaneous

Based on extensive stakeholder input, a parent requested that VDOE undertake a full-site evaluation of the Appomattox Regional Governor's School.