

Virginia Board of Education Public Hearings *Meeting #2: Wytheville, July 13, 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 second hearing in Wytheville on July 13, 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 41 participants attended the Wytheville public hearing. There were 15 participants providing comments, 36 in person and nine who provided written comments, including administrators, representatives of educator organizations, teachers, parents, and community leaders. Represented organizations included Virginia School Boards Association, Virginia Coalition for Fine Arts Education, The Arc of Virginia, Inclusive Education, Virginia Music Educators Association, Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Virginia Association for Career and Technical Education, Parents Across Roanoke Valley, and Wytheville Community College.

Summary of Public Feedback

Standards of Accreditation

Several administrators expressed gratitude for the Board for their work on the *Standards of Accreditation* and for the opportunity to provide feedback.

Multiple Indicators

A representative from the Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) expressed support for the Board's efforts to develop the accreditation matrix, and urged the Board to allow for flexibility in student growth and allow for multiple indicators beyond state assessments.

VSBA also urged the Board to consider further reductions in the number of assessments students are required to take and, instead, promote the use of a variety of more effective assessments that encourage student acquisition and application of required knowledge and skills. VSBA would like to see an educational environment that promotes flexibility for students to make choices for them to be successful in college and/or career choices and in life itself.

Several administrators and community members expressed interest in seeing Virginia minimize emphasis on test-taking and maximize emphasis on life skills that are transferrable to college and career. They also encouraged the Board to continue to explore new indicators of effectiveness that are inclusive of these life skills and other indicators that address the whole child.

- Representatives from the Virginia Music Educators Association (VMEA), Virginia Coalition for Fine Arts Education, and multiple teachers stressed the importance of the inclusion of fine arts in graduation requirements. All expressed the desire for fine arts to be assigned one full credit versus one that is shared with other disciplines.
- The President of VMEA was thankful for the board's commitment to Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM), but offered the suggestion to expand it to STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts & Math).

Student Growth

The Superintendent of Wythe County Public Schools praised the Board for incorporating performance-based assessments into the accreditation process, and said this can be a more authentic and realistic method for evaluating student growth.

Administrators, teachers, and community leaders expressed a preference for evaluation that included student growth. Many expressed the opinion that the standardized tests did not allow teachers to celebrate the growth students had throughout the school year, nor did they allow for multiple points of data that could be aggregated to provide a more holistic picture of student performance. It was stressed that including student growth factors in evaluation allows teachers to focus on the individual needs of students.

Assessments

The Superintendent of Salem City Schools emphasized that some of the assessment components in Virginia could use updating. In the interim, he asked the Board to consider allowing school divisions with better assessment measures to use alternatives. He said this raises an equity concern given not all divisions would have access to the improved measures being implemented by other divisions. He said this can be addressed by permitting these assessments and providing resources to all divisions to support their implementation. He said this will promote innovation instead of suppressing it.

Capacity for Implementation

Several administrators referenced the unique challenges that each school and community faces, and suggested the Board consider providing additional guidance and capacity-building support for implementation. The Superintendent of Wythe County Public Schools added that many of these new initiatives and revised standards will require extensive staff development, modifications to scheduling, and reallocation of staff, and stressed that time and resources will be needed to make these changes viable.

Teacher Evaluation

Several participants communicated a concern about teacher evaluation being tied to student performance on assessments. A teacher in Henry County Public Schools cautioned that this could create an unfair environment in which teachers' performance varies depending on the students they teach. While all said student progress is important, they expressed a shared apprehension about teacher and student self-esteem being diminished.

Profile of a Virginia Graduate

Many commenters expressed gratitude for the work the Board has done to develop *Profile of a Virginia Graduate*.

VSBA expressed support for the proposed reduction in verified credits required for graduation outlined in the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate*, saying that this provides local school boards with opportunities to provide students with opportunities for civic engagement, career exposure, and more opportunities for participation in Career and Technical Education (CTE).

A music professor from Wytheville Community College referenced research he said shows that business leaders and tech industry leaders are learning that the skills and knowledge their employees have are not enough. He said these leaders are encouraging their employees to spend some time in arts programs to enhance their analytical, interpersonal, and team-building skills. He added that employers were particularly interested in their students learning how to interact with people, interpret the world around them, and develop creative solutions to problems.

School Counseling

As *Profile of a Virginia Graduate* is refined, a coordinator for school counseling from Montgomery County Public Schools asked that the Board keep in mind that counselors across the state are being tasked with non-counseling duties. She said counselors would like to spend time with students preparing them to be college, career, and life ready, but could use a guidance document that outlines for principals the appropriate duties for school counselors as it relates to *Profile of a Virginia Graduate* and their other responsibilities. She pointed out that, across the Commonwealth, counselors are serving an average of 500 students, leaving little time for individual student planning. It was requested that the Board reconsider the 500:1 level of funding, as the changes proposed would require increased individualized counseling time.

Career and Technical Education (CTE)

The Executive Director for the Virginia Association for Career and Technical Education (VACTE) highlighted that CTE is an integral component of a student's career, regardless of the student's career plans. She explained that CTE coursework provides the necessary preparation, knowledge, experience, and skills for students' chosen career path. She went on to say

- VACTE supports the continued expansion of workforce readiness through participation in internships, externships, other work-based learning opportunities and to obtain industry credentials.
- In 2015-16, over 630,000 students took one or more CTE courses, earning over 137,000 industry credentials.
- VACTE supports the value placed on the importance of technical skills, and would like to see increased emphasis on industry credentials and multiple pathways for students to prepare them for the new workforce.
- Career exploration in elementary school will support students in middle school to prepare their academic and career plans. VA students need to be career-ready after they leave high school, regardless of what their next step will be (2-year/4-year degree, technical school, etc.).

A representative from the Virginia Music Educator Association Representative for District 7 and a Music Educator in Wytheville would like to see Virginia's schools offering additional courses in fine arts. Life skills, such as teamwork, perseverance, creativity, goal-oriented thinking, critical thinking, citizenship, and communications were mentioned as some of the skills learned in fine arts courses. Music was referenced as supporting students in expressing feelings that they find hard to put into words. They argued that this creative self-expression aids students in releasing stress and expressing themselves in ways that are positive and beneficial to the community.

Conditions and Needs of Public Education

Inclusion

A representative from The Arc of Virginia (The Arc), advocated for inclusive schooling and appropriate services for students with disabilities (SWD), referencing a study the organization conducted that analyzed segregated placement for SWD in regional programs and private schools. This study found that

- The number of students in segregated placement is increasing each year, as well as the per pupil cost for maintaining students in these settings. There are over 6000 students with complex needs in these segregated settings (attending regional programs or other non-public options), over 4% of SWD in Virginia. The target for such placements on the federal indicator report is less than 1%.
- Where a child lived was a major factor in determining whether or not SWD received adequate services.

The Arc has the opinion that the two existing funding streams (The Virginia Department of Education funding for placement of students in regional programs and the Office of Children’s Services funding for private school placement) incentivize and further perpetuate this segregation. The Office of Children’s Services and the Department of Justice has begun to analyze these practices. The Arc encouraged the Board to do all it can to ensure that reform efforts continue.

Another community member, and advocate for inclusive education, stressed the importance of classroom inclusion for SWD, and shared some related research findings:

- Students with intellectual disabilities make greater progress in their literacy skills when they are included in general education classrooms as compared with students who are served in more restricted settings.
- Students with Autism in general education settings score significantly higher on academic achievement tests when compared with students with Autism in self-contained settings.
- Students without disabilities in inclusive settings made significantly greater progress in reading and math. Student without disabilities who provide peer support for students with disabilities in general education settings demonstrated positive academic outcomes such as increased academic achievement, assignment completion, and classroom participation.
- Inclusion is also good fiscal policy for the Commonwealth because it will help SWD be included and less likely to rely on paid supports.
- SWD educated in general education classrooms are more likely (than their peers in separate settings) to acquire reading and math skills, go on to post-secondary education, have better communication skills, obtain meaningful employment, have friends and relationships, and be welcome and contributing members of their community.
- Across Virginia, parents of SWD are asking for their children to be in inclusive settings. However, they are finding school divisions don’t have adequate resources for including SWD. A clear plan is suggested for training and providing technical support to build local school capacity in order to support quality inclusive education in students’ neighborhood schools and school divisions across the state.

ESSA State Plan

Well-Rounded Education

The President of the Virginia Music Educator Association indicated that one of the many challenges this board faces is implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). She said she believes one of the most significant statements in the law is that education in fine arts is included as part of a well-rounded education, and that it names music as one of the core subjects. She asked the Board for its plans related to the inclusion of music in the development of ESSA in the state? (Board member Romero mentioned the Board will follow up with an answer to this)

Chronic Absenteeism

A math teacher from Washington County Public Schools submitted a written plea for a policy for how schools implement the chronic absenteeism indicator in ESSA. She shared that in her division, students miss 30+ days before action is taken by the court system. She said students who are chronically absent miss out on key information and do not tend to pass SOL tests.

Miscellaneous

Protecting Student Data

A representative from Parents Across America Roanoke Valley, a chapter of the National Child and Public School Advocacy Organization, expressed a belief that stronger protections need to be in place for student data. She said research has shown that the number of student data breaches have doubled so far this year. For example,

- U.S. schools have, reportedly, experienced 137 separate cyber-security related incidents in the last 18 months.
- Breaches of personal information by Federal agencies have increased by 164% over five years.

She pointed out that students do not have negative credit histories, so their data is valuable to hackers who want to steal their identities. Other points made by her included

- School data used to be kept within the school system, but now there is greater concern that students' personal data is shared with outside entities, sometimes without the consent of parents.
- Parents should be concerned that their student's academic, behavioral, immigration status, and other personal information about their home life could be shared with outside entities.
- Parents should be made aware of exactly how their children's data are being used and how they are being protected.

She said that Parents Across America believes that technology in education is valuable, but parents have increasing concern that every mouse click made by their children will be tracked and mined for profit. She said that parents are also concerned about increasing focus on social-emotional wellness, and assessing this. "Address it, don't assess it." Emotional quotient data should not be shared with corporate entities.

She said that Parents Across America Roanoke Valley would like for the Board to hold school systems accountable and protect student information from hackers and marketers. The organization has developed a Parent Toolkit for Student Privacy – the handout was distributed and is also available on their [website](#).

School Discipline

A representative of VSBA reported that it would like to see a reduction in the use of suspensions and expulsions, and has started a taskforce on discipline to support this. VSBA is interested in the Board continuing to create opportunities to address this matter statewide.