

**MINUTES**  
**Virginia Board of Education**  
**Committee on School and Division Accountability**  
**Wednesday, March 16, 2016**  
**1:00 p.m.**  
**Jefferson Conference Room; James Monroe Building**

**Welcome and Opening Comments**

The following Board of Education (Board) members were present for the March 16, 2016 Committee on School and Division Accountability meeting: Diane Atkinson; Dr. Billy Cannaday, Jr.; James Dillard; Daniel A. Gecker; and Sal Romero, Jr. Dr. Steven Staples, the superintendent of public instruction, was also present.

Ms. Atkinson, chairman of this committee, convened the meeting and welcomed the Board members and guests. As part of her introductory remarks, she said today's meeting would focus primarily on graduation requirements and on the profile of a graduate. She indicated that the meeting would start with an overview of how the Board became involved in discussions of these issues and related policy matters. Presentations, including information about school improvement, followed her introduction.

**Approval of Minutes from the February 24, 2016 Meeting**

Mrs. Atkinson said the draft minutes from the February 24, 2016 meeting were posted on-line and provided to Board members. The minutes were then approved by the Board members as drafted.

**Public Comment**

Ms. Atkinson indicated that no one had signed up to provide public comment, but she asked if there was anyone present who wished to do so. However, when no one in the audience responded, Ms. Atkinson then continued to the next agenda item.

**Profile of a Graduate: Policy Context**

Dr. Cynthia A. Cave, assistant superintendent for policy and communications, led the discussion regarding this agenda item. She began with a discussion of the *Standards of Accreditation* (SOA) revision timeline which incorporated legislation passed by the General Assembly, ESSA reauthorization, and actions taken by the SOL Innovation Committee and the Board in 2014, 2015, and 2016. (The *Standards of Accreditation* are also known as the *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* or the SOA.) Ms. Atkinson noted that some of the work done by the Board in 2013 had also influenced the work that was started in 2014. She then provided an overview of legislation passed by the General Assembly regarding the A-F grading system and the School Report Card and actions taken by the Board in response to that legislation. She said the Board worked very hard in determining implementation requirements, but Board members and stakeholders had much concern about the A-F

grading system. During that timeframe, the Board identified two areas where they thought they could influence policy. Those areas were the School Report Card and the SOA. Previously, they had started talking about related issues at the April 2013 Retreat, and the Board continued with similar discussions at the 2014 Retreat. She closed her comments here by saying the Board decided to look deeper into these issues after they were confronted with complex matters as they worked on the A-F grading system.

As Dr. Cave proceeded with the presentation, she highlighted the following:

- Purpose of the October 22, 2014 Board Retreat and issues discussed
  - Review of Virginia's accountability system and proposed revision
  - Discussion regarding elimination of the 140-clock-hour requirement
- November 20, 2014 - withdrawal of pending revisions in the SOA in order to consider a more comprehensive review
- April 22, 2105 - Board Retreat where there was a section by section review and discussion of the SOA, as well as potential revisions
- Board Committee on School and Division Accountability meetings held in 2015 and issues considered
  - Identification of short-term and long-term systemic changes to graduation and accountability system
  - Focus for committee work
    - Redesigning of Report Card
    - Review of revisions for Fast Track SOA
    - Development of new accreditation ratings to recognize progress
- July 2015 - Board Meeting, adoption of Fast Track SOA
  - Effective October 2015
  - Waiver of 140-clock-hour requirement under certain circumstances pursuant to Board guidelines
  - Implementation of legislative requirements for graduation
  - Accreditation ratings reflecting improvement and near attainment of benchmarks for academics and graduation rates
- September 2015 meeting – began to look at what other states were doing around graduation and accountability
- October 2015 meeting – introduction of definition and framework for expected knowledge, skills, and competencies of a Virginia graduate
- January 2016 meeting – discussion of graduation concepts, profile of a graduate, graduation requirements, verifying credits, and “strawman” Virginia diploma
- February 2016 meeting – looked at other states in developing a profile of a graduate. Additional discussion regarding possible elements of the Virginia Diploma

Dr. Cave said a number of things influenced the Board in its work. She then provided an explanation of the history of the Standards of Learning Innovation Committee (Committee) and its recommendations. This Committee was created by HB 930 during

the 2014 General Assembly Session. Its purpose is to provide the Board of Education and General Assembly with suggestions regarding changes to the Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments, student growth measures, and ideas on innovative teaching in the classroom. The Committee issued an interim report on November 6, 2014 and issued a second round of recommendations on October 29, 2015, which included suggestions regarding the revision of the SOA accreditation ratings, provision of incentives, expansion of availability of locally awarded verified credits, and revision of the SOL. Dr. Cave provided information about the recommendations suggested by this Committee.

Dr. Cave then provided an overview of related 2014, 2015, and 2016 legislation which impacted SOL assessments, computer science, waiver of the 140-clock-hour requirement, redesign of the School Performance Report Card, expedited re-takes, graduation, profile of a graduate, high school re-design, revision of types of diplomas, the Standards of Learning Innovation Committee, and accreditation. She also provided information about related 2016 bills carried over to 2017: SB 203, SB 428, and SB 427. These bills all impact SOL assessments.

The following issues were raised by the Board:

- How quickly revised regulations can move through the regulatory process
- The skill set proposed for a profile of a high school graduate is not something new – students in a college preparatory program were exposed to this years ago
- How we can ensure that we focus the re-design work on students' success in school and beyond high school in preparation for life
- How rising elementary school students can be prepared for the new 21<sup>st</sup> graduation requirements

Dr. Staples noted that the Board members have an opportunity to shape these issues as they wish, but there are also other groups interested in these issues.

During this discussion, Ms. Atkinson introduced Holly Coy, deputy secretary of education, who was present for this meeting.

### **Aligning the High School Experience with Workplace Readiness**

Ms. Atkinson stated that the presenters for this agenda item would help with understanding how schools can prepare their students for college and career. There were two groups of representatives that provided information about their respective programs: one from the Governor's STEM Academies and the other from CTE centers.

The panel of representatives from the Governor's STEM Academies included Jason Suhr from the Governor's STEM Academy at the Burton Center for Arts and Technology (Roanoke County); Jeff McFarland from the Governor's STEM Academy at George C. Marshall High School (Fairfax County); and Dr. Brian Matney from the Governor's STEM Academy for Engineering, Marketing, and Information Technology Studies at Landstown High School (Virginia Beach). Each provided an overview of his respective program.

Several issues were raised in response to this part of the presentation:

- There needs to be some emphasis on civics education in these programs so that citizens can actively participate in the democratic process.
- What opportunities and flexibility are available to create alternative assessments to serve as an alternative to a written assessment? What might the Board do to make this a viable option?
- How are the academies looking to include more students from under represented populations?
- Has there been feedback from the employers as to how well the students have been prepared for the jobs that they are taking?

The panelists from the CTE Centers included Joseph Johnson from the Greater Peninsula Governor's Stem Academy (facilitated by the New Horizons Regional Education Centers) and Mr. Kris Martini and Margaret Chung from the Governor's Career Technical Academy at the Arlington Career Center. These representatives provided information about their respective programs and activities.

The following comments were made in response to this part of the presentation:

- A Board member noted that the presentations were excellent. He said he hoped these opportunities could be made available to others outside of their region. This would benefit their students and those persons living in other communities.
- The panelists may get a call from Board members who are looking for a better understanding of what the possibilities are.

### **Discussion with Dr. Patrick K. Murphy, Superintendent of Arlington County Public Schools**

Ms. Atkinson said the Board would now hear from Dr. Patrick K. Murphy, Superintendent of Arlington County Public Schools. She said Dr. Staples had previously shared with the Board a paper written by Dr. Murphy – *Authentic Redesign: Bridging High School and Workforce Development*. Arlington County has a senior project requirement. Ms. Atkinson said Dr. Murphy brought with him two seniors from Wakefield High School, Abey Alemayehu and Kacy Tucker, as well as the senior project coordinator, Lisa Labella, to discuss this requirement.

Dr. Murphy began with introductory remarks. He then said he had brought the students with him so the Board could hear first-hand how the students are engaged in their community, how they are becoming service oriented, and how they are thinking about their future. Ms. Labella then provided background information for this requirement, which is mandated for all seniors at Wakefield High School.

Both students talked about their senior projects and what they have learned. Kacy Tucker spoke about her project on learning about civil engineering. Abey Alemayehu looked at how to motivate students to learn mathematics and be successful. Both said they learned quite a bit from the experiences they had had through their projects.

Following this presentation, the following questions/issues were raised:

- Did Abey learn anything that would better engage students who do not like mathematics? He said students should have a strong base in mathematics and, therefore, should not be encouraged to skip years of mathematics in school. If a student skips a year of math, then that student will struggle in a latter math class. He also said that there is too much testing.
- Kacy was asked if she would pursue engineering as a career. She said she is still undecided because Wakefield only offers one class in engineering.
- Does any other school in the division have this requirement? No, the other schools do not use this particular model.
- What checkpoints do they have during the school year? The students develop their own timelines, but they are monitored every two weeks through a journal check.
- Could any school division in the state do this? They do have a lot of community support, but the students also develop their own resources. The school population is quickly expanding so they may have to revise this model in the near future.
- Have they thought about allowing more than one student to work on a project? Yes, in some cases this is being done now.
- Are they keeping track of where the high school graduates go? This is limited. However, there must be choices and opportunities available along a continuum to prepare all students for the future.

### **Report on Local Alternative Assessments**

In introducing this agenda item, Ms. Atkinson said she thought it would be helpful to understand what has been done and what needs to be done as related to local alternative assessments. Dr. Billy Haun, chief academic officer and assistant superintendent for instruction; Shelley Loving-Ryder, assistant superintendent for student assessment and school improvement; and Dr. Kim Dockery, a consultant, former assistant superintendent for Fairfax County Public Schools, and a member of the Standards of Learning Innovation Committee led the discussion for this agenda item.

Shelley Loving-Ryder provided an overview of the local alternative assessment process. She said legislation in the 2014 General Assembly amended the *Code of Virginia* to eliminate five Standards of Learning tests, including Grade 3 History and Science, Grade 5 Writing, United States History to 1865, and United States History: 1865 to the Present. She said the legislation required each local school board to:

- Certify annually that it has provided instruction in the content assessed by the eliminated tests, and
- Administer an alternative assessment consistent with Board guidelines to students in grades three through eight in each SOL subject area where the SOL assessment was eliminated (Those guidelines were approved in September 2014.)

School divisions were asked to submit implementation plans to show how this process would be implemented and desk reviews of selected school divisions were conducted during the summer of 2015. Several examples of performance assessments were provided to the Board.

Dr. Haun introduced Dr. Dockery to the Board. Dr. Dockery said almost all eight regions used similar language when they looked at how to develop strong alternative assessments and developed the goals they wanted to accomplish. The grants allowed the regions to collaborate within the divisions and allowed the sharing of resources. She pointed out the university and professional organization partnerships (University of Virginia, College of William and Mary, James Madison University, Old Dominion University, Virginia Commonwealth University, George Washington University, VASCD, VASS, and VSUP). Through this process, the regions were able to access experts in the area. She and Dr. Haun will be contacting non-participants to offer assistance.

### **Report on Visits to Schools with Notable Gains in Student Achievement**

Mr. Jason Ellis (Office of Test Administration, Scoring, and Reporting at VDOE) provided a report on visits to schools with notable gains in student achievement. He stated that the schools visited were selected due to their exceptional increase in student achievement during the 2014-2015 school year, as indicated by student performance on the Standards of Learning assessments. Six schools were visited and 60 interviews were conducted with school staff. Common themes were seen in these schools:

- High expectations by school leadership
- Principal or administrative team had been there one or two years
- Central office support which allowed them to run the building
- Professional Learning Communities
- Willingness to make difficult decisions
- Focused effort to connect with the parents and the community
- Targeted professional development
- Purposeful use of data – teachers are constantly monitoring student performance
- Master schedule development
  - Specific schedule to target the needs of the overall student body
  - Departmentalization at the elementary school level

There was also flexibility in curriculum and instruction with additional instructional supports and implementation of specific technology that provided meaningful data.

The following questions/comments were raised:

- What is central office doing to make these gains possible?
- Are there recommendations that will be helpful regarding changes in the regulations regarding school improvement?
- Have these schools been able to sustain these gains? For most of these schools, these are new, but significant, gains.

- This is the beginning of a template which correlates with gains. How might this be done in other regions?
- Have any of these schools experienced a change in demographics? No.
- What is the leadership doing to incentivize the staff to be able to continue to keep the momentum going? In one school, Mr. Ellis said the principal allowed the teachers to bring their children to the school. Some of the teachers had worked at the schools for a very long time, but there had also been some turnover, particularly in the first year.
- Were there commonalities found in the new leadership so that we could develop a *profile of the principal*?
- We need to be mindful of how much we are asking teachers to do. We do not want them to reach the breaking point.
- Has thought been given to an outside consultant collecting this data? We may want to continue with department staff at this time. We are also looking at how we can link this to the research office in VDOE.

Mr. Ellis said these schools had an unwavering commitment to the students. Ms. Loving-Ryder said we want to look at whether these schools can sustain these improvements. She did remind the Board that only a small number of schools were involved in this review.

### **Concluding Remarks and Adjournment**

Ms. Atkinson said the presentations were informative.

The meeting adjourned at 4:20 p.m.