

**Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS)
Guiding Principles for Instruction, Assessment and Accountability
August, 2014**

Introduction

The Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS) acknowledges and applauds the current focus on instruction, assessment and accountability in order to strengthen public education in the Commonwealth of Virginia. School superintendents also recognize and appreciate the opportunities for public school leaders across Virginia to contribute their insight and expertise in shaping the future of students and their contributions to our democratic society.

VASS proposes a discussion around the “big ideas” in the areas of instruction, assessment and accountability. VASS’ “big ideas” are those that effectively and reasonably demonstrate students reaching standards of achievement, as well as those that demonstrate continuous progress and growth.

From the “big ideas,” initial recommendations are offered for consideration in improving Virginia’s assessment and accountability system.

Big Ideas

In creating and developing a framework, planning with “the end in mind” is necessary. Connecting existing planning documents and creating new definitions for success of public education students must be linked and redefined. In reviewing the goals of the Virginia State Board of Education, Virginia Department of Education, Virginia Association School Superintendents’ Blueprint, federal accountability, and current research, each contributes a varied perspective to instruction, the assessment of teaching and learning, and the accountability of schools. The varied perspectives present a host of challenges for local education affiliates.

The following key points along a child’s educational continuum are offered as “essential pillars” to linking and redefining the varied perspectives into a new brand of assessment and accountability for Virginia:

- Essential Pillar I: Ready to learn
 - Pre-K learning experiences for all students are imperative to establish a strong educational foundation;
- Essential Pillar II: Literacy and numeracy skills
 - Essential literacy and numeracy skills are foundational to the success of students beyond grade 2;
- Essential Pillar III: Academic enrichment and acceleration opportunities for grades four through eight
 - Challenging and accelerated curriculum pathways in mathematics, science, and world languages are needed to prepare students for high school and post-secondary education; and
- Essential Pillar IV: College and career readiness
 - Strategic pathways for students are needed to explore and pursue interests in order to transition from middle school to post-secondary and career opportunities.

Strategies

The Virginia Association of School Superintendents believes that the implementation of the essential pillars will require alignment, consistent practices, and support systems by policymakers and practitioners. VASS proposes the following strategies to reach a continuum of short-range, mid-range, and long-range thresholds that will move Virginia to much improved instruction, assessment and accountability:

- Plan, develop, and continuously support initiatives and actions that include comprehensive professional learning for teachers and administrators. Professional development must be integral to all aspects of instruction, assessment and accountability.
- Plan, develop, and continuously support an expansion of Pre-K experiences for students.
- Plan, develop, and continuously support initiatives that include curriculum, assessment, resources, and practices that address essential literacy and numeracy skills by the end of grade 2.
- Plan, develop, and continuously support viable curriculum, effective instruction, and alternative assessments (including performance assessments) that support academic enrichment and acceleration, especially in the middle years.
- Provide a statewide data warehouse that includes a common formative assessment tool for monitoring students' acquisition of curriculum content and skills. Formative assessments are intended to measure student progress over time and not used for comparing groups of students. Use of a common formative assessment tool can be pivotal in affecting systemic change and greater academic content consistency across Virginia.
- Implement a progress monitoring system for collecting, analyzing, and monitoring student data that is prescriptive in proactively addressing and supporting students', teachers', and schools' academic needs.

A Metaphor for Change

Suppose a person purchases a new boat in the fall with a plan to use it during the following summer. That person needs to store the boat in the garage over the winter to avoid damage. This individual realizes there is no way the boat will fit in the garage considering the current state of the garage. It is necessary to reorganize the garage and make some decisions about what to eliminate if the boat is going to fit in the garage.

To make room for a new assessment and accountability model, and more effectively address the needs of students, their future, and ways of assessing learning, Virginia will need to implement practices that look differently from what is being done today. Virginia is faced with the challenge of removing and amending many of the current practices in order to establish new and more effective ones; for the welfare of children and their futures.