



**VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS
PRESS CONFERENCE**

**10:00 AM – January 15, 2015
Library of Virginia**

**Opening Remarks about the *New Blueprint for the Future of
Public Education* and Assessment and Accountability**

Alan Seibert, VASS President and
Superintendent of Salem City Public Schools

Remarks about Curriculum/Readiness and Instructional Delivery

Rosa Atkins, VASS President-elect and
Superintendent of Charlottesville City Public Schools

**Remarks about the Human Capital and Funding Public
Education**

Jennifer Parish, VASS Secretary/Treasurer and
Superintendent of Poquoson City Public Schools

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**Remarks by Alan Seibert
VASS President and Superintendent of Salem City Public Schools**

Good morning. My name is Alan Seibert and I serve as Division Superintendent in Salem City Schools and currently as President of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents - VASS.

It is personally and professionally gratifying to present to you for the first time, a document thoughtfully researched, assembled, and published by my colleagues in our association that will serve as the guide for the future of public education in Virginia for many years to come. This document, the *New Blueprint for the Future of Public Education*, represents many months of research, discussion and consensus-building among all of Virginia's school division leaders concerning what makes the most sense in educating and preparing the Commonwealth's students for their futures.

For the past two decades, Virginia has used a model for public education and accountability that has moved us forward but is no longer sufficient for the improvement of classroom instruction and student performance. That model, which based student achievement, school accreditation and the evaluation of educators on snapshots of student knowledge on a total of 34 high stakes tests, helped to standardize what was taught, what was tested, and how it was tested in the classroom.

Last year, the General Assembly acted in a bipartisan manner to reduce the number of these tests from 34 to 27, a reduction that focused on the elementary and middle grades, replacing them with locally developed alternatives. This was a step in the right direction, and in the short time since this change was enacted, Virginia's teachers have responded by rapidly developing superior, meaningful, rigorous, and relevant assessments. These assessments are far superior because they administered when a child is ready to demonstrate their learning in applied and relevant ways that require creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and communication.

To be clear, we are strong supporters of clear, rigorous, and relevant standards. We are committed to ensuring a consistent, high quality system across the Commonwealth, but the era of 40-50 question multiple choice tests taken a prescribed moment in time being the primary tool, often a hammer in the lives of children, has passed.

We are also supporters of assessment. We are not opposed to testing, we are simply pointing out that the art and science of teaching and learning has advanced in the last 20 years and it is time for Virginia's assessment program to leverage these advances. We must be consistent in ensuring that all students have access to high quality learning opportunities, but must resist standardization. We are in the business of unfolding the unique human potential of every student, not seeking to make all children the same, like widgets on an assembly line.

To accomplish this, student learning must be the measure, not seat time. Students are learning best in systems that blend online course work and teacher-facilitated instruction, not "all or none" approaches. Flexibility must be provided to schools, students, and

parents so that students may demonstrate what they know and are able to do in different ways and at different times. The practice of batching children by date of birth and placing them on an assembly line is giving way to personalized pathways for learning, where college and career readiness are two-sides of the same coin and not mutually exclusive preparations. We envision a time when Virginia's Graduates don't just have a diploma listing the number of hours they sat in prescribed courses, but a diploma and a digital resume that reveal both their competence in skills and their uniqueness in value to employers and to the world.

Systems of assessment and accountability built almost exclusively on standardized tests not only cannot accomplish this end, in fact, they are an impediment to innovation. Assumptions of what students should know and be able to do, how their acquisition of knowledge and skills should be measured, and how educators should be held accountable for student learning must be re-examined as educators continue to prepare students for the shifting demands of business and higher education in an ever-changing global environment.

VASS' *New Blueprint* represents a proactive response by the members of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents to these changing circumstances. By providing an outline of goals, objectives and strategies in six main interdependent areas of curriculum, assessment, accountability, instructional delivery, human capital and funding public education, the *New Blueprint* creates a map for the improvement of public education in Virginia. The recommendations in these six focus areas are interconnected to ensure that Virginia's public schools function more effectively and efficiently to provide the high quality of education necessary to help our children meet the demands of their changing world.

I will specifically address two of these areas – Assessment and Accountability.

Assessment

I am not opposed to testing students. On the contrary, In Salem City Schools, we added tests because our parents and teachers were more interested in the progress of every individual student than aggregated pass rate percentages. This required better assessments at local expense. In divisions where the capacity to pay for these readily available and superior tests exists, students, teachers and parents have better data to inform student learning, but with an added testing burden. In divisions without the necessary local funds, only the 1990's approach to assessment imposed by the state is available.

To that end, the members of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents believe that the recommendations of the SOL Innovation Committee to further reduce the number of required achievement-only SOL tests and reallocate those resources to better assessments be enacted swiftly, that a new approach to assessment be developed, and that in the meantime, all students should have the opportunity to re-test.

To accomplish this:

1. School divisions must be given the flexibility to measure student progress and achievement throughout the year using a variety of assessments to both document and improve student learning.

2. Flexibility in the scheduling of assessments must be afforded to accommodate the different learning rates of students so that they not only become proficient in acquiring required knowledge and skills, but also accelerate their learning to acquire additional knowledge, more in-depth knowledge and enhanced skills.

Accountability

With regard to accountability, we agree that student outcomes should be among the primary indicators of school and educator effectiveness. Decades of experience in Virginia and across the nation reveal the need for a more balanced system of accountability that uses multiple measures over multiple years and includes opportunities for reporting individual student progress and readiness for career and postsecondary opportunities.

To accomplish this, the members of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents propose that:

1. Virginia base its accountability system upon multiple, varied measures of student performance;
2. The state use individual student growth and progress measures as part of the evaluation of schools and educators;
3. Virginia use a variety of meaningful, easy-to-understand measures to hold educators accountable in addition to test scores; and finally
4. We create additional opportunities for students to meet both the standard credits and verified credits required for graduation.

Lastly, in accordance with the recommendations of the SOL Innovation Committee, we urge the General Assembly and the State Board of Education to accredit schools on a 3-5 year cycle for most schools with an annual accreditation opportunity for schools in need of improvement. This approach will permit the state and localities to focus efforts where needed while reducing burdens elsewhere.

In closing, VASS is pleased with the bipartisan attention that K-12 education is receiving here in the Commonwealth. There is interest in reforming how students are tested, to how schools are accredited, and how success, progress and improvement are reported. Virginia's Superintendents have identified these issues, but also school funding, and instructional delivery in our *Blueprint for the Future of Public Education* and we look forward to collaborating with the General Assembly and the Administration in how to best achieve these goals.

At this time I would like to recognize my colleague and friend, VASS' President-elect, Rosa Atkins, who will address our goals and objectives in the areas of curriculum and college/career readiness and instructional delivery.

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Remarks by Rosa Atkins

VASS President-elect and Superintendent of Charlottesville City Public Schools

Good morning. I am Rosa Atkins, Superintendent of Charlottesville City Public Schools. I am also serving as President-Elect of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents. It is my pleasure to speak to you regarding two critical components of our New Blueprint; (1) Curriculum/Readiness and (2) Instructional Delivery.

First, Curriculum/Readiness:

As educators, our focus is always on students, their performance, and their growth over time. Our goal is to have all Virginia students successfully prepared for citizenship, enrollment in post-secondary education and training, employment, or service in the military when they graduate from high school.

Members of VASS believe that in order to accomplish this goal, the following must be supported and established:

- State curriculum standards have been well refined over the years to focus on content; now, we believe that we should revisit the standards to support the real-life **application** of knowledge and skills.
- We believe these revisions and assessments should be supported by research.
- We support incentives for local school divisions that identify alternative ways for students to accrue standard credits. These new solutions might be outside of traditional seat-time requirements, and they would be an alternative to end-of-course Standards of Learning (SOL) tests or State Board of Education-approved substitute tests.
- We would like to offer variability in learning time, assessments, and modes of instruction to take into account students' learning differences, allowing a greater percentage of students to demonstrate mastery of the curriculum.
- Initiatives should be planned, developed, and assessed to address essential literacy and numeracy skills.
- Pre-K learning experiences should be expanded for all children.

Studies have demonstrated that performance on standardized tests alone is not a strong indicator of college and career readiness. Students need a broader array of skills in order to successfully function in and adapt to an ever-changing environment.

Revisions to Virginia's Standards of Learning should align state curriculum standards with the knowledge and skills required for college and career readiness. Connecting the classroom to the career will provide opportunities for learning outside of the traditional school environment, but this new framework will also require time, creativity, and partnerships within the community. But this work is worth it: Offering new modes of instruction will allow students of all backgrounds and learning styles to succeed in a globally-focused job market or postsecondary institution.

This work starts early – even at the preschool and elementary levels, it is critical to provide a strong foundation of high-quality education. Studies have shown that

exceptional instruction at these levels has a profound impact on middle and high school learning and beyond. Our big plans depend on age-old goals: strong literacy and numeracy.

Second, Instructional Delivery:

Our goal is that all students will benefit from instructional delivery models supported by evidenced-based research. These strategies should be specific enough to accommodate diverse learners and broad enough to maximize students' learning styles.

Members of VASS believe that in order to accomplish this goal, the following must be supported and established:

- Effective and flexible learning schedules should be designed to enhance student and teacher performance as well as to improve the use of time throughout the year.
- Multiple paths of learning in classroom instruction for all students should be supported to acquire reading and math skills based on students' readiness, interest, learning styles, and other characteristics.
- Formative assessments should be used to help teachers differentiate instruction and implement tiered interventions for students throughout the school year.
- Virtual and blended learning opportunities should be provided for all students to enhance personalized learning.
- High-quality professional development for teachers and school leaders will expand their knowledge and practice of classroom instructional strategies that have been tested and successful. Places of learning for students must also be places of learning for teachers.
- Adequate state funding and support for research-based mentoring models should be provided for all teachers during their probationary terms of service.

The ultimate goal of effective instruction is to enhance student performance. This goal is reached when teachers have the knowledge, skills, resources, and information about students that will enable them to provide instruction that addresses the needs of each student and maximize learning for all.

This teaching model focuses on how instruction can be matched to individual students. Many people use the term "personalized learning" has been used to describe this approach.

There are many instructional styles that can be used for personalized learning, but it is critical to have adequate resources, support structures, and professional development for schools and teachers to be able to move toward greater implementation of this model of instruction.

This includes allowing flexibility in the use of school time and schedules, new ways of grouping students, seamless integration of instruction with assessment, mentoring models for professional development, and effective use of technology. Ultimately, the goal is to transition our model of instruction from "one-size-fits-all," a longstanding approach in which all or most students are provided with the same instruction, to flexible, evolving, and adaptive instructional experiences that are able to engage students meaningfully and accelerate students' learning by encouraging each student to learn at his or her own pace.

Digital-based learning experiences are essential to implement this goal. This includes established online and blended instructional approaches, as well as more recent technology-enhanced learning strategies that include the use of mobile devices, social networking, and BYOD (Bring Your Own Device).

VASS is committed to enhancing what we call teachers' pedagogical data literacy. Teachers show pedagogical data literacy when they identify, gather, interpret, and use data to plan and evaluate instruction. Using data diagnostically to discern student needs, preferences, strengths, and weaknesses is critical to personalizing instruction. Together with more structural, organizational changes, pedagogical data literacy is essential to more effective instruction.

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**Remarks by Jennifer Parish
VASS Secretary/Treasurer and Superintendent of Poquoson City Public Schools**

Good morning. I am Jennifer Parish, Superintendent of Poquoson City Public Schools and currently Secretary/Treasurer of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents. It is my pleasure to speak to you regarding two critical components of our new Blueprint, those being human capital and funding.

First, I will address human capital. It is commonly accepted that quality teachers and school leaders are absolutely necessary to have if schools are to be effective. The goal of our membership is to improve Virginia's human capital to ensure we provide the children of Virginia a high-quality, globally-competitive public education.

Members of VASS believe that in order to accomplish this goal there must be improvement in three areas. We must improve in the recruitment and retention of Virginia's teachers, administrators, and classified staff. We must also improve the recruitment and quality of teachers and administrators in schools in challenging environments. We must continue to improve teacher, administrator, and classified staff performance. Additionally, VASS members believe we need to build local and state capacity to provide professional development support for all employees. The final objective we have in the area of human capital is to provide incentives for innovative programs that support personalized learning.

To quote our blueprint, the recruitment, cultivation and retention of high quality teachers, administrators, and classified staff are integral to the success of Virginia's public education system. The core of education is teaching and learning, and the teaching-learning connection works best when school divisions have highly effective teachers working with every student every day. Simply put, excellence in an education system cannot exceed the excellence of its teachers and other personnel.

Teachers have the challenging task of meeting the educational needs of a diverse student population. We must provide appropriate compensation, assistance, professional development, and effective evaluation systems to sustain and improve their efforts.

Additionally, we work hard each year to hire quality teachers, especially in high needs areas such as math, science, special education, and career/technical education so it is important that we enhance the pool of highly qualified candidates for teaching as well as leadership positions. In order to do so we must improve salaries and incentives, better articulate with college and university teacher preparation programs, and provide support for new approaches for identifying and training future educators and leaders.

We believe our Blueprint through its goal, objectives, and strategies will improve recruitment, retention, performance, and professional development so that current and future Virginia educators and support staff can prepare students for success after school.

Finally, I want to talk about funding for public education. Our goal is to increase funding for public education to ensure that the state meets its responsibility to provide public education as a core function of state government and to promote economic development in Virginia.

In order to accomplish this goal, superintendents propose that the state be required to:

- Pay its full share for the quality of public education as required in the Standards of Quality (SOQ).
- Improve funding in order to reduce the disparity between wealthy and poor school divisions and to fund what is identified in the latest educational research as the best practices in public education.
- Protect the Virginia Retirement System (VRS), make it a healthy defined benefit program and restore it to its fully funded status.
- Provide multiple funding sources for school construction.
- Require local revenue sharing agreements that enable school divisions to carry over money in excess of required local effort.
- Conduct a Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) Study to investigate the impact, performance, and effectiveness of fiscally independent school boards.
- Require incentive programs to become part of the SOQ (e.g., At-Risk programs, Pre-K programs, etc.)
- Curtail the use of Lottery funds as a replacement for the SOQ or basic aid funds.
- Support funding for high-speed Internet connectivity to all schools and communities in Virginia.
- Provide funding for local school divisions to support teachers in their development of local alternative assessments.

There is a fundamental mismatch in Virginia between the high expectations and goals for Virginia's K-12 public schools and the amount of state funding provided to meet those expectations. State funding has been significantly reduced since the last recession and has yet to be restored. On average, the state share of per pupil funding has dropped by almost \$800 per student. The percentage of the K-12 share of the state general fund has dropped from 35% to below 30% since FY2009. The loss of funding for support positions alone has decreased by \$754 million since 2009.

Local governments have been hard pressed to make up the funding reductions from the state. Localities already provide more than double what is required to match state K-12 appropriations and in some cases have done so through local tax increases. All while in many localities, revenues remain stressed from the slow recovery of the real estate market in Virginia.

Our school divisions are becoming more diverse. The recession also contributed to a rise in the number of at-risk students. The number of students who are economically disadvantaged has risen by over eight percent since 2008 to what is now 41 percent of all K-12 students in Virginia. At the same time, Standards of Learning, accreditation and graduation requirements have become more challenging.

Virginia's economy has become dependent on federal spending. Reductions in federal spending, particularly in defense, have dramatically lowered the growth in our economy. Everyone recognizes that Virginia needs an economic transformation. Public policymakers and elected officials in Virginia need to understand that

transforming our economy requires a more qualified workforce and that requires more funding and resources for public K-12 education.

Our legislators must reinvest in public K-12 education. Over the past six weeks, school boards across the state have adopted funding resolutions that will be given to the General Assembly members. To date more than 90 school boards out of 132 in Virginia have acted and by doing so have clearly acknowledged the need for the state to pay its full share of the cost of K-12 education. It is the only way schools can continue to assist in developing the Virginia workforce for a more diversified economy.