



The New Blueprint for the Future of Public Education

VASS

Leadership in the 21st Century

Executive Summary

Nothing demonstrated the interconnectedness of the world or the change in the knowledge and skill demand for employment more than the recent global recession. The incongruence of today's economic realities and the knowledge, skills, and measures currently required by public schools to prepare students for their futures has precipitated new efforts to reform public education nationally as well as in Virginia. 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 are being analyzed as educators continue to prepare students for the shifting demands of business and higher education in an ever-changing global environment. In addition, the recent national backlash resulting from the overuse of high-stakes standardized tests for accountability purposes, has caused educators and policymakers to rethink current accountability systems and consider alternative measures of student progress and educator performance.

The *New Blueprint* represents the response of the members of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS) to these changing circumstances. It was produced after months of evaluation, discussion and consensus-building by all of Virginia's school division leaders concerning what makes the most sense in educating and preparing the Commonwealth's students for their futures.

The resulting document provides an outline of goals, objectives and strategies in six main interdependent areas, which create a map for the improvement of public education in Virginia. The prescriptions in these six focus areas work together to ensure that Virginia's public schools function more effectively and efficiently to provide the high quality of education necessary to meet the demands of our changing world. The goals and objectives in the six focus areas can be summarized in a series of belief statements:

Curriculum/Readiness

The members of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents believe that the Commonwealth's public school students must be successfully prepared for citizenship, enrollment in post-secondary education and training, employment, and/or enlistment when they graduate from high school. We further believe that in order for them to be prepared:

1. State curriculum standards should be developed that define in-depth understanding, cognitive strategies, and learning skills to apply what is learned.
2. Revisions in the state curriculum should be aligned with research-based instruction and performance assessments that both develop in-depth understanding and cognitive skills, and show how students apply knowledge and skills.
3. Incentives for local school divisions should be provided to: a) identify alternative ways for students to accrue standard credits outside of the traditional seat-time requirements and b) to identify additional opportunities to earn verified credits beyond passing end-of-course Standards of Learning (SOL) tests or State Board of Education-approved substitute tests.
4. Variability in learning time, assessments, and modes of instruction should be provided to take into account students' learning differences so that they can become proficient in the acquisition and demonstration of the knowledge and skills identified by the curriculum standards.
5. Initiatives should be planned, developed, and assessed to address essential literacy and numeracy skills.
6. Pre-K learning experiences should be expanded for all children.

Assessment

The members of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents believe that school divisions should use a variety of assessments to document and enhance student growth and achievement and to ensure that students are given sufficient opportunities to demonstrate their acquisition of required knowledge and skills. 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 created 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

The members of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents believe that a balanced, comprehensive and fair system of accountability needs to be developed to improve postsecondary and career readiness. To do this:

1. Accountability system must be based upon multiple, varied measures of representative student performance.
2. Individual student growth and status measures must be used to evaluate schools and teachers.
3. A variety of meaningful, easy-to-understand measures must be used to hold educators accountable in addition to test scores.
4. Additional opportunities must be provided for students to meet both the standard credits and verified credits required for graduation.

Instructional Delivery

The members of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents believe that Virginia's students will benefit from instructional delivery models that are supported by evidence-based research, that are personalized to accommodate diverse learners, and sufficiently broad to maximize students' learning styles. To this end, we believe that:

1. 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.
2. 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 assist teachers in differentiating instruction and implementing tiered interventions for students throughout the school year based on the students' different paths of learning.
3. Virtual and blended learning opportunities should be provided for all students to enhance personalized learning.
4. High-quality professional development for teachers and school leaders should be provided in order to expand their knowledge and practice of classroom instructional strategies that have been tested and have demonstrated success.
5. Adequate state funding and support for research-based mentoring models should be provided for all teachers during their probationary terms.
6. Pre-K learning experiences should be expanded for all children.

Human Capital

The members of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents believe that Virginia's human capital must be improved for the provision of high-quality globally-competitive public education. In order for this to occur the following must be improved:

1. Pre-service and in-service training and the recruitment and retention of Virginia's teachers, administrators, and classified staff.
2. Pre-service and in-service training and the recruitment and quality of teachers and administrators in schools in challenging environments.
3. Teacher, administrator, and classified staff performance.
4. Local and state capacity to provide professional development support for all employees.
5. The provision of incentives for innovative programs that support personalized learning.

Funding Public Education

The members of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents believe that funding for public education must be increased 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 fulfill its obligation, the state government must:

1. Pay its full share for the quality of public education as required in the Standards of Quality (SOQ).
2. Improve its funding 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.
3. Protect Virginia Retirement System (VRS) to make it a healthy defined benefit program and restore it to its fully funded status.
4. Provide multiple funding sources for school construction.
5. Require local revenue sharing agreements to carry over money in excess of required local effort.
6. Conduct a Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) Study to investigate the impact, performance, and effectiveness of fiscally independent school boards.
7. Require incentive programs to become part of the SOQ (e.g., At-Risk programs, Pre-K programs, etc.)
8. Curtail the use of Lottery funds as a replacement for the SOQ or basic aid funds.
9. Support funding for high-speed Internet connectivity to all schools and communities in Virginia.
10. Provide funding for local school divisions to support teachers in their development of local alternative assessments.

It is important to understand how each of the six focus areas are connected to each other and should be considered in total when building on our present foundation for public education. Our hope is that with this *New Blueprint* and a concerted effort on the part of all stakeholders in public education, we can provide our children with successful futures.