



**VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION
AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

**513 Half Mile Branch Road
Crozet, VA 22932**

November 18, 2011

Dr. Patricia Wright, Superintendent of Public Instruction
Virginia Department of Education
101 N. 14th Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Dr. Wright:

On behalf of the Virginia ASCD Board of Directors, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to the Department of Education regarding Virginia's ESEA Flexibility application. VASCD is encouraged that USED responds to the public's questions about ESEA with the following statement:

Under ESEA flexibility, States will begin to move beyond the bubble tests and standards that are based on arbitrary standards of proficiency. By measuring student growth and critical thinking, new assessments will inspire better teaching and greater student engagement across a well-rounded curriculum. By setting standards based on college- and career-readiness, States will challenge students to make progress toward a goal that will prepare them for success in the 21st century knowledge economy. (USED, Sept 2011)

As an organization of teachers, administrators, and higher education faculty, we support efforts to enhance the quality of teaching, learning, and leading across the Commonwealth, and we understand that preK-12 education is in a transformational state. VASCD joins other public education stakeholders grappling with how to define 21st century learning, how to build new assessment systems, how to measure student growth, and how to design meaningful ways to evaluate educators. The offer of flexibility and the promotion of pilot programs and innovative practices in classrooms and school divisions provide an excellent opportunity for VDOE to collaborate with Virginia educators and to shape the future of public education in Virginia.

College- and Career-Ready Standards and Assessments

VASCD applauds Virginia's efforts to revise and align the Standards of Learning with the Common Core State Standards. Our members indicate a high level of interest in information about the Common Core and its relationship to the SOL. On December 14, VASCD will offer a [symposium](#) focused on building on the SOL foundation plus

maintaining alignment with the Common Core. VASCD's guiding position statement, [Teaching, Learning, and Leading in a Changing World](#), speaks to the rapidly changing nature of learning and working environments and notes, "Testing and accountability systems must go beyond selected response tests to include the assessment of student-generated products." (VASCD, 2010) In the *Blueprint for the Future of Public Education*, Virginia's division superintendents opine students must graduate with skills that go well beyond facts and content and encourage Virginia stakeholders to, "Define and develop an integrated model of rigorous content and core performance competencies that combines Virginia's excellent content standards and international/21st century performance standards." (VASS, 2011) A system of instruction and assessment that prepares students for college and the workforce is essential, but the definition of "college- and career-ready" is complicated, is changing, and should not be defined by a single test score. We view the flexibility application as an opportunity to pilot problem-based instruction and new assessment systems that highlight the application of knowledge in multiple ways.

Differentiated Accountability Systems

VASCD recognizes the importance of student growth as one piece of a differentiated accountability system; however, we question multiple choice test performance as a valid and reliable way to measure student growth. In particular, we are concerned about student growth measures based on SOL scores of some students taught in some subjects by some teachers. We are concerned about transient populations, students scoring above 570 on SOL tests, and measures based on SOL scores alone.

We recognize and appreciate that AYP measures and the related accountability system have caused schools to pay greater attention to the needs and progress of all students, particularly those who may have been underserved in some schools in the past. However, we believe that the keys to unlocking the vision of learning for all students are found in supports for evidence-based practices, not in sanctions or punitive measures.

We hope that Virginia will use the flexibility offered by USED to establish a rigorous but reasonable set of targets for student achievement and growth in our public schools. We believe it is imperative that teachers and administrators continue to challenge their students and themselves each and every day in order to ensure that all students achieve at the highest possible levels. When schools struggle, we hope that the response from the state level will be a research-driven and flexible set of strategies that focus on support for quality implementation. We agree with the recommendation made by USED that, for schools that are low-performing or have the largest achievement gaps, interventions be tailored to the unique needs of these schools, their districts, and their students.

Teacher and Principal Evaluation

Virginia ASCD values and supports an evaluation system that informs and improves instruction and has a positive impact on student learning. If an evaluation system has high stakes for educators, the tools and information used must be correlated to student learning and must include multiple measures of teacher effectiveness. Given the lack of agreement among educators on how to approach this challenge, we believe research on

five measures of teacher effectiveness (MET Project from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation) is worth considering:

1. Student achievement gains on state standardized assessments and supplemental assessments designed to measure higher-order conceptual thinking;
2. Classroom observations and teacher reflections;
3. Teachers' pedagogical content knowledge;
4. Students' perceptions of the classroom instructional environment; and,
5. Teachers' perceptions of working conditions and instructional support at their schools

While the research associated with this project is ongoing, the goal is to identify reliable and credible measures of teacher effectiveness that predict the biggest student achievement gains. Preliminary findings suggest that student perceptions of the classroom instructional environment have high correlation to student achievement data. The project's soon-to-be-released conclusions reinforce the importance of an evaluation system that includes a variety of proven measures of teacher effectiveness. VASCD supports efforts to define teacher effectiveness through research-based multiple measures as well as to design evaluation systems aligned with the research findings.

The documents produced by USED regarding ESEA flexibility emphasize the need to move beyond assessments of students, teachers, and schools based on a single standardized test on a single day. The terms *well-rounded curriculum* and *multiple measures* indicate an interest in moving away from test prep classrooms toward rich and rigorous learning environments that provide the flexibility needed to ensure the success of each student. Virginia ASCD is ready to assist in shaping the preK-12 programs and systems that will increase the quality of instruction and assessment, provide meaningful feedback to educators, and ultimately prepare Virginia's students for a variety of post-secondary paths.

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide input on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Ann Etchison, Virginia ASCD Executive Director

Mission: Advancing Excellence in Teaching, Learning, and Leadership