



**Forum on the Standards of Quality  
Comments from the Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development**

**May 27, 2009**

**Dr. Emblidge, Mrs. Saslaw, and Members of the Committee on the Standards of Quality:**

I am Ann Etchison, Executive Director of Virginia ASCD, and I speak to you today on behalf of the VASCD Board of Directors who represent school divisions, schools of education, and educational consulting services throughout the eight geographic regions of Virginia and who offer the perspective of those in both instructional and support services roles.

We appreciate this opportunity to comment and begin by respectfully agreeing with our colleagues in many other organizations that the Board of Education's duty is to determine and prescribe the SOQ based upon current needs and practices and to establish "an educational program of high quality" as set forth in Article VIII of the Virginia Constitution.

With respect to staffing standards, Virginia ASCD believes the current SOQ ratios for instructional personnel provide bare minimum services with high quality teaching and learning occurring because all school divisions exceed those ratios. We fully support the previously recommended standards that include a principal for every elementary school, and those that would fund more assistant principals, math and reading specialists, testing coordinators, and speech-language pathologists.

We urge you to continue to support these additionally funded positions, the need for which grows each year as schools and school divisions approach the NCLB mandate of a 100% pass rate in English and mathematics by 2014. Federally defined subgroups continue to grow in many school divisions, and our most at-risk students have greater deficits and will require exponentially more intervention to reach the 2014 targets. Moreover, the current economic situation, not on the radar screen when existing staffing ratios were established, places more students in the economically disadvantaged subgroup requiring additional interventions by teachers, school counselors, social workers, and others assisting them in a collective effort to reach state and federal benchmarks.

The VASCD Board maintains that the important work of those who qualify as "support staff" is an integral part of raising student achievement across the Commonwealth. We join our colleagues in asserting that an arbitrary ratio that happens to save the exact amount of money projected in the shortfall is simply a budget cut with no reasonable relationship to concepts like prevailing practice and establishing an educational program of high quality.

In fact, when one considers simply the work that has to be done and the disparate sizes of school divisions across Virginia, the categorization of staff into “instructional” or “support” seems somewhat arbitrary. For example, in order to plan for, instruct, and assess the Standards of Learning, a body of work occurs that includes curriculum development, curriculum alignment, design and redesign of pacing guides, creation of benchmark assessments, instructional improvement, and overall school improvement. If that work doesn’t occur in central office or by others currently considered “support staff”, then it occurs among teachers or instructional coaches on teaching contracts. Not doing that work is not an option.

Similarly, small school divisions with fewer students have fewer support staff positions but are still morally and legally obligated to have the same programs and offer the same range of services as larger school divisions. To establish and maintain an educational program of high quality requires that this work be accomplished by a combination of both instructional staff and support staff, and creating pressure on one group of personnel by eliminating support for jobs in the other group doesn’t change the body of work that must be completed to create the high quality system we all seek. Virginia ASCD’s mission is to advance excellence in teaching, learning, and leadership, and we believe that effort requires the collective dedication of all existing school personnel.

As one VASCD Board member, a high school principal in Region II, points out, “With the accountability issues facing us, it just takes more people to lead a school and school division while we run the testing program, the Special Education program, the ESL program and still serve as the instructional leaders, building managers, safe school coordinators, and disciplinarians.” Another board member, a director of instruction in a small school division in Region VII, remarks that they are nowhere close to the support staff they need NOW with one person serving as director of testing, personnel, Title I, and other federal programs. They have 4 assistant principals in 9 schools with no reading or math specialists and no data manager. Like many divisions, they are also facing a huge turnover rate as experienced teachers and administrators retire, creating a greater need for district level support and programs to assist new and novice instructional staff members.

To conclude, Virginia ASCD supports full funding of the existing SOQ with continued effort to fund those additional positions recommended but not adopted in 2004 and 2007. We do not support an arbitrarily set ratio of instructional staff to support staff funding and would prefer to see a formula that recognizes the work that must be accomplished to achieve a high quality education for Virginia’s public school system with staffing that supports the collective effort of all school personnel to enhance quality teaching, learning, and leadership. We join our colleagues in being proud of all that Virginia students and educators have accomplished and appreciate the State Board’s efforts to recognize what it takes to truly deliver a high quality system.

Thank you.