



VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION
AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

513 Half Mile Branch Road
Crozet, VA 22932

July 15, 2011

To Dr. Pat Wright and Members of the Board of Education:

The Virginia ASCD Board of Directors supports the waiver request by five Virginia school superintendents to pilot early Standards of Learning testing at the middle school level. After thoughtful discussion and careful consideration regarding the intent of the request, the VASCD Board agrees that this more flexible approach is an important step toward meaningful assessments that support a high quality curriculum characterized by rich and rigorous work and differentiated instruction for all students.

VASCD is unique among statewide educational organizations in that its members comprise a wide spectrum of school-related roles: teachers, building administrators, central office administrators, and higher education faculty. With these various perspectives represented, the Board crafted and adopted a position statement in September 2010, [Teaching, Learning, and Leading for a Changing World](#), in which we stated:

VASCD recognizes that although acquisition and application of core knowledge serve as building blocks to new learning, students must graduate with skills that go well beyond facts and content. Students should apply knowledge and skills to novel situations and authentic problems, demonstrating creativity, innovation, self-reflection, and flexibility in thinking.

In order to assess student learning in today's world, testing and accountability systems must go beyond selected response tests to include the assessment of student-generated products. This shift requires that school leaders engage students and teachers in experiences that connect them with a wider learning community.

We believe in a high quality, relevant curriculum for all students and are encouraged that this middle school pilot program would allow teachers to differentiate by asking both students who pass the tests early and those who need additional support to apply knowledge and skills to authentic learning tasks. Brain research has shown that remedial classrooms are poor learning environments for students, especially during adolescence (Sousa and Tomlinson, 2010). Opportunities for a more inquiry-driven approach will

increase student engagement, deepen understandings, and ultimately assist all students in demonstrating mastery of the minimum competencies while fostering analysis, evaluation, and creation of new information.

The Virginia ASCD Board applauds the thoughtful and collaborative effort of the five superintendents and their middle school teachers and administrators for taking the first step toward broadening learning experiences for Virginia's middle school students. By putting this pilot program in the capable hands of groups of educators, the Board of Education and State Superintendent have an opportunity to shift the unintended consequences of SOL assessments on narrowed instruction to the Commonwealth's vision for rigorous and engaged student learning.

Respectfully Submitted,



Betsy Poulsen, Virginia ASCD President



Ann Etchison, Virginia ASCD Executive Director

Mission: Advancing Excellence in Teaching, Learning, and Leadership