



Continuous Improvement and Meaningful Results: VASCD's Education Policy Priorities for 2016-2017

Virginia students deserve schools where they learn important content while developing skills needed for success in postsecondary education, the workplace and the community. We believe our students need classrooms where subject matter is interesting and relevant, the 5 C's (Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Citizenship) are emphasized, and social-emotional learning is intentional. These classrooms should be supported by state systems that are balanced and restrained in their approach to measurement, provide flexibility where it leverages improvement, and value the skills and perspectives of those who work directly with students every day.

Specifically, VASCD supports:

- 1. Revision of the Standards of Learning (SOL) to more directly support the Profile of a Graduate and reflect the knowledge and skills most relevant in the current century.**
- 2. A balanced assessment system that informs instruction while providing sufficient data for accountability purposes.**
- 3. A multi-metric accountability and reporting system that is understandable to all stakeholders, transparent, and relies more on real data than labels.**
- 4. School improvement processes and protocols that are contextualized, timely, meaningful and effective.**
- 5. Recognition that successful innovation and redesign efforts rely on support for high-quality professional development for Virginia educators.**

1. Standards of Learning Revision/ Profile of a Graduate:

VASCD applauds efforts by the Board of Education and its stakeholder groups to articulate the Profile of a Virginia Graduate. We support high school programs that better prepare students for the demands and opportunities they will encounter beyond school, including Virginia's workforce needs. The "academic or vocational" dichotomy is a thing of the past. Today, personalized preparatory experiences give students a variety of pathways into and within the workforce. "College or job" has become "postsecondary learning and careers". By 2020, the percentage of jobs in the U.S. requiring some type of postsecondary education is estimated to be 65% (Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl, 2013).

However, the high school experience must be more than job training. Tacking "the 5 C's" onto the existing Standards of Learning is not sufficient. Virginia's standards should provide a framework that integrates academic content and skills with reasoning, decision-making, and responsible citizenship. They should recognize not only citizenship, but also the roles of the arts and wellness as integral to the education of well-rounded individuals. We recommend a comprehensive revision of the Standards of Learning that integrates the 5 C's as well as the goals of social-emotional learning (see VASCD statement on social-emotional learning, page 4) with content knowledge.

2. Balanced Assessment System: VASCD supports further reductions in the number and length of high-stakes multiple-choice tests, as well as the expanded use of performance assessments. State assessments will undoubtedly drive instructional decisions. Therefore, we need assessments that are matched to meaningful goals, embedded in rather than disruptive to teaching and learning, and that yield valuable information. We recommend an assessment system that provides reasonable degrees of flexibility for school divisions and students, and that includes:

- growth measures in reading and mathematics at the elementary grades (see note);
- grade-span assessments in science and social studies that incorporate higher-level reasoning skills along with research and writing where natural connections exist and allow for more personalized learning approach for students; and
- flexibility at the high school level to provide evidence of students' college and career readiness through alternative assessments, selected college placement tests, and/or credentialing.

3. Multimetric Accountability: VASCD commends the Board of Education on the design of the School Quality Profile, and urges attention to the Profile's ongoing development in the years ahead. The work done to date should be a springboard for further thinking about aligning what we measure with what we value. Careful consideration must be given to identification and measurement of the "non-academic indicator" required by ESSA (see VASCD statement on school climate, page 4). We urge the Board to follow the evolving research on measures of school climate, and to consider selecting a valid and reliable measure as an indicator reported through the School Quality Profile.

Just as high school students should be able to pursue multiple pathways to a diploma, Virginia should recognize multiple routes to school accreditation. Our public schools lie in a variety of communities, serve diverse student populations, and face unique challenges. VASCD agrees with the SOL Innovation Committee that Virginia should adopt one rating, "accredited school", and that this rating should be attainable in multiple ways by aggregating and balancing accreditation measures. (see VASCD statement on school accreditation ratings and indicators, page 4). We also suggest that consideration be given to including a locally-defined indicator that measures a goal of importance to the school in the School Quality Profile. Though it may not be practical or wise to include such an indicator as a component of accreditation, it could be a valuable part of the overall data describing the school.

4. Supports for School Improvement: Virginia's approach to school improvement should be flexible and contextualized. We support the dissemination of research-based practices as an appropriate role for the Virginia Department of Education. However, the needs of schools differ. Therefore, improvement efforts should be differentiated and should be designed and driven to the greatest extent possible by those working in the school. When assistance from outside the school division is necessary, school staff should be engaged as collaborators and design partners with an emphasis on professional development and capacity building rather than intervention and compliance. We recommend that the Department of Education align school improvement resources with proven professional development models aimed at long-lasting improvements in teaching and learning.

5. Professional Development: Professional development for teachers, leaders, and support staff is urgent and essential if schools are to redesign teaching and learning for students. The most effective professional learning occurs in context, with colleagues, and over a sustained period of time. Associations like VASCD do not have the capacity to be present in each school to directly facilitate professional learning, but we can point educators to resources, connect them to networks, and provide jumping-off experiences that can be carried back to school and built upon there. VASCD and other professional organizations in Virginia are ready to partner with the Department of Education and with school divisions to support the change we want for students. We recommend preserving and increasing funding and other resources that enable educators to participate in ongoing professional learning.

We recognize that this is a pivotal moment for public education in Virginia. Encouraging innovation, understanding the needs of modern learners, and accepting the risk of failure in order to move forward all create favorable conditions for positive change. VASCD is pleased to be a partner in the process, messy though it is, and we will strive to remain positive, energetic, and focused in our support for policy changes that are in the best interests of Virginia's students.

Carnevale, A., Smith, N., & Strohl, J. (June 2013). *Recovery, job growth and education requirements through 2020*. Executive Summary. Georgetown University Public Policy Institute, Center for Education and the Workforce.

Note on growth measures: We refer to growth as the change in student achievement for an individual student between two or more points in time. We define progress as year-to-year changes in indicators of achievement of student groups, schools, or school divisions.

VASCD Statement on Social -Emotional Learning:

The Center for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning defines social-emotional learning as the "process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions." VASCD believes that these skills are essential underpinnings of citizenship, and that they should be integrated into classroom instruction in planned, purposeful ways. When students are communicating with adults and each other, when they are engaged in active learning and projects, and when they are invited to explore and struggle with real-world problems, many opportunities arise for social-emotional learning. All students need these skills. We urge more attention to the evidence showing the relationship between social-emotional learning and student success.

VASCD Statement on School Climate as a Non-Academic Measure in ESSA:

Indicators that "count" towards accreditation should be few in number but differentiated in their focus. We urge you to study and consider choosing a measure of school climate, the degree to which the learning environment is supportive and caring for all students. We recognize that discipline, suspension, and expulsion data are important to monitor, but these are not appropriate proxies for school climate. If a measure of school climate is selected, we further recommend that change in this measure over time be the focus. The National School Climate Center has developed proposed standards, benchmarks, and indicators for school climate that are endorsed by ASCD, NSBA, PTA, and a number of other organizations. The American Institutes for Research maintains a compendium of instruments that yield school climate data.

VASCD Statement on Accreditation Indicators and Ratings:

We understand concerns expressed recently about the implementation of "partially accredited" ratings. VASCD supported these additional ratings as stopgap measures to recognize schools making progress and approaching benchmarks. Now, the longer-term goal should be a system that reduces rather than increases the number of labels applied to schools. We do not see a longer list of labels as a way to more accurately describe schools. More types of "partial accreditation" and multiple levels of "accreditation denied" would create grading scales even more confusing and distracting than A-F and be equally useless in providing descriptive information.

Instead, we suggest leveraging the ability of the School Quality Profile to clearly present data on a number of indicators that describe important qualities of the school, a few of which should "count" towards accreditation. Infographics, color coding, and other visual tools can be used to present data on multiple indicators in ways that are easily understood. ESSA requires that the selected measures be aggregated in some way to yield a single rating. We suggest a compensatory approach; that is, a method for combining multiple measures in which higher performance on some measures can compensate for lower performance on others. Compensatory methods should not be applied to reporting groups, as this could mask achievement gaps among groups. However, there are sensible ways to apply compensatory methods. For example, a school where achievement is improving but not yet at benchmarks (currently this would be a "partially accredited" school) could be accredited if school climate data for that school also showed significant improvement. We assert that a single accreditation rating supported by meaningful data and high expectations is at least as rigorous as the current system, especially given the public's ability to access information by indicator and by reporting groups in the SQP.