



Virginia Association of School Superintendents

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Superintendent Jillian Balow
Virginia Department of Education
P.O. Box 2120
Richmond, Virginia 23218

On behalf of 133 public school division superintendents, I am writing to thank you and Secretary Aimee Guidera for meeting with the VASS Board of Directors and its officers on Tuesday, March 8, to discuss your 30-day report to Governor Youngkin pertaining to his Executive Order #1.

As a follow-up to our conversation, I wanted to reiterate in writing key points that were shared by division superintendents and provide you a written request of aspirations going forward as to how your office and others can work with division superintendents to establish the collaboration and build the relationships that you and the Secretary both indicated were desired.

Virginia superintendents are the educational leaders who are responsible for legislative compliance, policy implementation, and the assurance of quality educational services delivered to children daily throughout the Commonwealth. School division superintendents, along with their communities, know best their curriculum, personnel, and student services, and they believe that gross assumptions have been made, without evidentiary support, in the development of the 30-day report.

Key Points to the 30-day Report

- Division superintendents and other stakeholder groups should have been consulted prior to the development of the 30-day report.
- Division superintendents disagree with your having rescinded much of the Ed Equity work by the Department of Education. This work had been completed by many quality educators over a number of years to provide support for the success of children in underserved communities and in select population groups.
- Division superintendents disagree with your assumption that discriminatory and divisive concepts have become widespread in Virginia school divisions without your having involved educators in formulating that position or without having provided evidence to support that position.
- Division superintendents disagree with your using “equitable outcomes” as the basis for determining what divisive concepts are and unilaterally suggesting that this approach is discriminatory.
- Virginia’s public education system has consistently ranked as one of the best throughout the country in expectations and in student outcomes.
- Your use of “equitable opportunities” in lieu of “equitable outcomes,” without considering those factors that impact student achievement in underserved communities, can set public education in Virginia back many years. Quality education in Virginia has to be more than providing opportunities and hoping for the best. Virginia’s accountability system relies heavily on student outcomes, not opportunities.
- Division superintendents disagree with the administration’s goal of “restoring excellence” in Virginia’s public schools, since that implies an inaccurate assessment of Virginia’s public

education system currently and historically. Again, by most measures, Virginia ranks near the top and surpasses most states throughout the country.

Regarding the 90-day Report

- Establish a working group soon, which includes superintendent representatives from throughout Virginia and superintendents of color, to discuss the process, objectives, and data that will be incorporated in the 90-day report. As the Executive Director of VASS, I will be happy to assist in the facilitation with division superintendents.
- The agenda for this working group must include clarity on the administration's understanding of equity, opportunity, and access as they relate to serving all children, regardless of where they live.

Moving Forward

- Relevant and ongoing communications with division superintendents is needed. This includes the state leadership participating in VASS Conferences, dedicating at least 2 hours monthly for the State Superintendents Leadership Committee (SSLC), attending regional superintendents' meetings, and facilitating statewide virtual meetings to share and collect input on current and relevant issues. Sharing a plan in writing at the next SSLC meeting would be helpful.
- Sharing draft VDOE positions/documents with division superintendents, when possible, prior to making those documents public will build trust.
- Mutual respect and understanding of each other's role in providing quality educational services should serve as the basis for constructive dialogue.
- Parents and educators must collaborate in a positive manner to achieve better outcomes for children. The administration can be a catalyst for positive stakeholder relationships through messages and actions. A tip line for parents to report divisive content to the Governor impedes positive relationships; therefore, the tip line needs to be terminated.

According to previous surveys, Virginia's parents generally support their local schools. Local education leaders, teachers, and all support personnel work daily with their communities in serving children. Public school division superintendents hope that state leaders will partner with local educators and understand that we are all working for the same customers, students.

Sincerely,



Howard B. Kiser
Executive Director, VASS

pc: Secretary Aimee Guidera
Virginia Board of Education