

>> classifieds	>> personals	>> advertise	>> contacts	>> faq	>> archives
--------------------------------------	------------------------------------	------------------------------------	-----------------------------------	------------------------------	-----------------------------------


Monday
June 13, 2005

Letters to the Editor
[Rules](#) / [Send one now!](#)

Google Web Search

Hook site search by Google







[>> Back to The Hook front page](#)

NEWS- Missing kids: SOL bragging rights challenged

Published July 1, 2004, in issue 0326 of The Hook

BY LISA PROVENCE LISA@READTHEHOOK.COM

This is the first year passing the Standards of Learning exams was required for graduation. The Albemarle County School Board was so pleased that no seniors were denied diplomas that-- along with a raise-- it issued a resolution lauding Superintendent Kevin Castner.

Meanwhile, Charlottesville reported that just two students didn't get diplomas because of SOLs, and officials are still hopeful passing test scores will come back and those two will receive their sheepskins.

As impressive as those numbers seem, several groups across the state are crying foul, including JustChildren, an arm of the Legal Aid Justice Center in Charlottesville.

"Where are the kids who are not in school-- potentially because of SOLs or other factors-- who were there as freshmen?" asks JustChildren's Andy Block. "What happened?"

Block charges that 19 percent of Charlottesville's Class of 2004 disappeared between their freshman and senior years, and that Albemarle's attrition rate is an even higher 21 percent.

Statewide, a press release from the JustChildren-backed Virginians for Educational Fairness claims 25,000 youths were missing on graduation day.

Kevin Hughes, "the numbers guy" for Albemarle, says he's never heard the term "attrition rate" used in educational circles.

The county's 986 freshmen in 1999 had dwindled to 849 by last fall. "The difference between those two numbers would not be the drop-out rate," says Hughes.

"I'm wondering where they're getting those numbers," says CHS Dean of Students Therese Titus.

Block has a ready answer: "From the department of education."

Over at the Virginia Department of Education, spokesperson Charles Pyle says the so-called attrition rate is similar to that of the Class of 2003 and earlier years. "To do that simple arithmetic and say that's because of SOLs is a bit rash," he says.

As to what happened to the 25,000 missing students statewide, Pyle says, "We don't have the ability to look at the size of a graduating class and say with certainty what happened. Some dropped out. Some left the state-- we have a transient population. Some exited public school and entered private or parochial schools."

Mickey VanDerwerker, spokesperson for Parents Across Virginia United to Reform SOLs, sees nothing wrong with using "simple arithmetic" to come up with numbers of missing kids.

And she doesn't buy state department of ed explanations-- or its math. "No longer can we say of the 22 percent missing, they probably moved or went to private school. Those numbers don't gel."

VanDerwerker is particularly concerned that one third of the missing graduates are African Americans. "The department of education claims SOLs are working when these are the kids we put this program in place for," she complains.

Her reform group wants to see a study done on the effects of SOLs, both positive and negative. "And we think it should be done by someone with no ties to SOLs," she adds.

Pyle says a study is already taking place at Virginia Commonwealth University by a "supremely qualified" group.

VanDerwerker doubts that the VCU study is independent enough because one of the group, Bill Boshier, "is one of the original architects of SOLs," she says. "It's like asking a father if his daughter is pretty."

This year, Albemarle County high schools graduated 797 seniors. "Even as close as a few days before graduation, we had a few students still working on credits, so it came down to the wire," says Hughes. "No student was denied a diploma because of SOL credits."

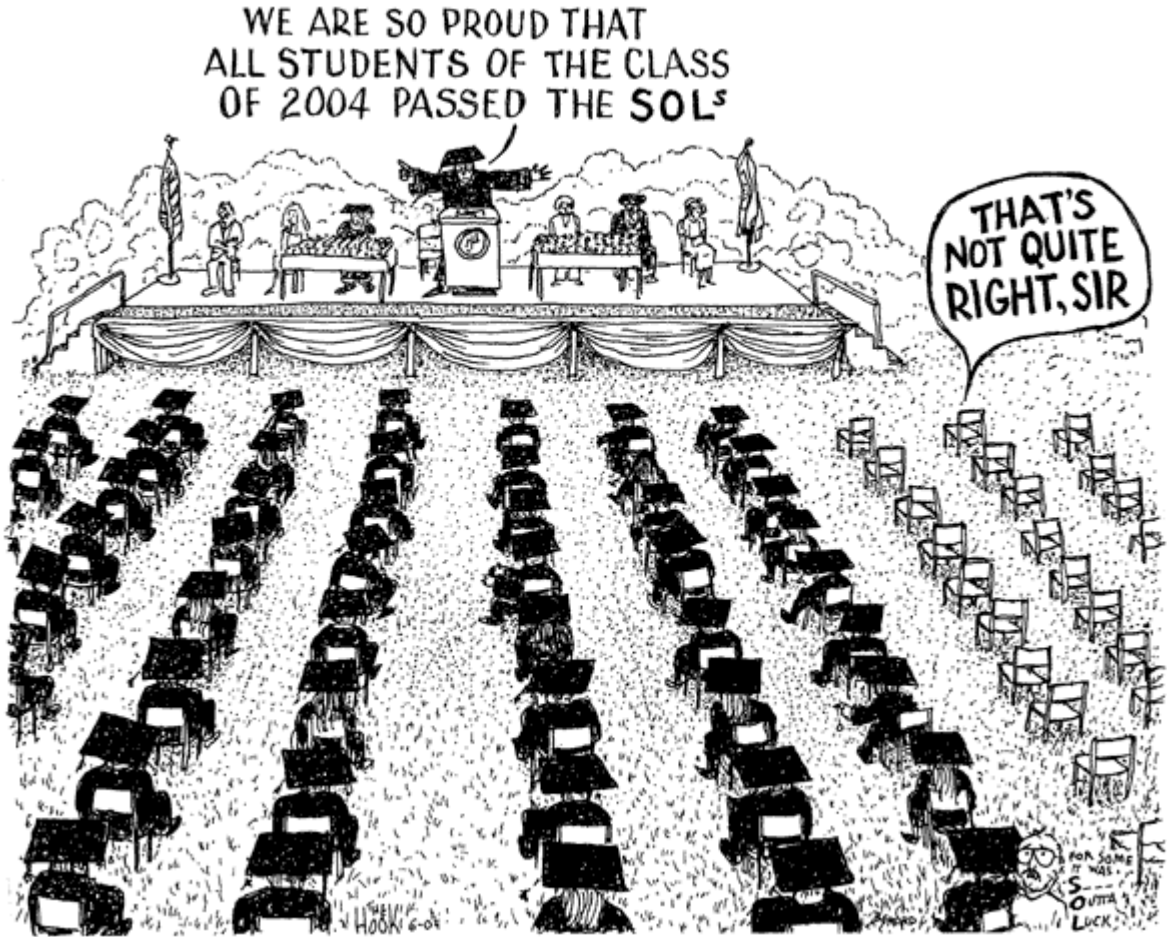
"Albemarle County has an excellent reputation for serving its students, both before and after SOLs," VanDerwerker concedes.

"We're not opposed to strategies to help kids get diplomas," she says. "We don't like these manipulations and then saying SOLs are working."



Hughes

PHOTO BY JEN FARIELLO



#

>> [Back to The Hook front page](#)

100 2nd st nw . charlottesville va 22902 . 434.295.8700 . fax 434.295.8097

>> [buy Hook schwag](#)

Contents © Copyright in the year of its publication.