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**[THE TOP STORY: The life and times of a genuine American hero](#)**



**By Chris Graham/AFP** "I feel a person has to give their whole heart to whatever they do," United States Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Jason Redifer once said. "If it's not worth putting your heart into, then don't do it. There are enough things in life to do with your heart; you don't need to waste time on other stuff." Redifer, 19, who was killed in

# Graduation rates don't tell the whole story

**Guest View**

**Stonewall Odom**

**Special to *The Augusta Free Press***

Let's not get fooled by the good-news feel that Gov. Mark Warner put on the recent statistics for graduation rates.

We can't forget that almost 27 percent of the students who entered the class of 2004 four years ago did not walk across the stage and get a diploma. Plus, a significant percentage - more than 5 percent - of the graduating seniors of 2004 received modified standard, special or IEP, not regular (standard or advanced studies) diplomas.

The feel-good number is grossly misleading when you realize that of those who entered the class of 2004 four years earlier, more than 26,000 students are not in a position to be accepted into college or get a job that requires a real high-school diploma.

According to Parents Across Virginia United to Reform SOLs (on-line at [www.solreform.com](http://www.solreform.com)), "Gov. Warner's recent announcement of a graduation rate of 94.3 percent for the class of 2004 plays fast and loose with the figures in an effort to divert attention from yet another negative consequence of high-stakes testing." Data indicates that 30 percent of the students from the original class of 2004 didn't graduate with a standard or advanced-studies diploma.

We should be working for the day that each and every Virginia student qualifies for an on-time diploma to help ensure a solid future for them and for the Commonwealth.

How can we do this?

First, we need to focus on the serious disparity of funding in the state. It is obvious that where we have high concentrations of poverty, there are fewer graduates. In my community, Petersburg, we had 508 ninth-graders in 2000-01. Only 282 completed their senior year four years later. Of the 508 freshman who were enrolled in 2000, only 214 got a standard or advanced diploma. That's a regular grad rate of 42 percent. More freshmen *didn't* get a regular diploma than those who did.

Second, teachers and administrators invested Herculean efforts to get as many seniors as possible to pass the SOLs - and to graduate. How can we sustain that effort?

Third, Gov. Warner has said numerous times that quality teachers matter. If every school system is to recruit and retain the best teachers possible, what is the plan to do this? What can the state do to assist disadvantaged districts to secure high-quality teachers?

We hope that Gov. Warner will use his last legislative session in 2005 to plant the seeds for continued education reform so that we can stop the trend of tens

action in Iraq on Monday, nine days before he was due to return home ...

of thousands of young people not graduating each year. Surely, we can do better than losing one of four young people.

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### **INSIDE ... Kilgore steps down as AG**

**By Chris Graham/AFP** It's official - Jerry Kilgore is a private citizen again. "Today at noon, my resignation as Virginia's attorney general is effective so that I may pursue a goal that will take a tremendous amount of time and energy, running full time to become Virginia's next governor," Kilgore wrote in an e-mail that went out to supporters Tuesday afternoon.

*Stonewall Odom is a parent and member of Petersburg Advocates for Children.*

*The views expressed by op-ed writers do not necessarily reflect those of management of The Augusta Free Press.*

*What do you think? Share your thoughts on this story at [letters@augustafreepress.com](mailto:letters@augustafreepress.com).*

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### **IN FOCUS: The four corners**

**By Chris Graham/AFP** The bill has been sitting on the verge of being passed for going on a week now. But its sponsor, well, he isn't too sure that he wants to see it get that final nod of approval. "I want to keep this issue on the table in Virginia, but at the same time I'm not sure that it's worth butting heads over with the House when there are all these issues that need to be resolved at the national level" ...

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### **NOTES FROM THE PRESS: I-81 news and notes**

**By Chris Graham/AFP** House Republican Caucus chairman Steve Landes is on board with a proposal authored by Sen. Emmett Hanger, R-Mount Solon, that would halt ongoing negotiations between the Virginia Department of Transportation and a private consortium that has offered its services in accord with the Virginia Public-Private Transportation Act ...

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### **EYE ON THE VALLEY: School board to consider WMS opening date**

**By Chris Graham/AFP** Augusta County school officials are still mulling over what to do about the tentatively scheduled late-summer opening of the Wilson Middle School. "We're still not sure of what the next step