

April 18, 2012

David M. Foster, President
Virginia Board of Education
P.O. Box 2120
Richmond, VA 23218-2120

Dear President Foster and Members of the Virginia Board of Education:

We, The Alliance for Virginia's Students coalition, are writing today to share our views on important issues related to the Standards of Quality (SOQ) revisions. The Alliance for Virginia's Students is a broad-based coalition of educational and municipal organizations and over 6,000 individual members across the state committed to encouraging all Virginians to demand high quality educational opportunity for every child in the Commonwealth.

Under the Constitution of Virginia, the role of this Board is to prescribe the Standards of Quality, subject to revision only by the General Assembly. As this Board has formally resolved, "the Standards of Quality (SOQ) define the minimum foundation the Commonwealth must provide to meet its constitutional obligation to maintain an 'educational program of high quality' for the children of Virginia.¹ According to Attorney General's opinions from 1972 and 1983, "These standards must not be prescribed in a vacuum, but must be realistic in relation to the Commonwealth's current educational needs and practices." The constitutional duty to prescribe the standards can best be fulfilled by using a methodology that is "known, reliable, and independent of factors that are unrelated to the actual expense of education, such as the short-term availability of State funds."²

Virginia's economic health depends on a well-educated workforce. The need for action is clear: the state is significantly underfunding public education, and many students are at risk of not learning what is required to succeed academically as well as economically in the demanding globalized economy.

Accordingly, we submit the attached resolution urging the Board to reaffirm its commitment to the Standards of Quality. We also urge the Board to encourage wider public engagement to allow all stakeholders the opportunity to share their perspectives, such as organizing regional public hearings or welcoming comments through Virginia's Regulatory Town Hall.

Sincerely,
Angela A. Cioffi
On behalf of the Alliance for Virginia's Students

¹ Virginia Board of Education, Resolution Expressing the Sense of the Board of Education on the Standards of Quality: For Consideration by the Governor and the 2009 Session of the General Assembly (Nov. 20, 2008).

² JLARC, "Review of Elementary and Secondary School Funding," p.34 (Feb. 2002).

Resolution Urging the Virginia Board of Education to Reaffirm Its Commitment to the Standards of Quality

WHEREAS the child poverty rate in Virginia has increased every year since 2006 and is now at its highest since 1998.

WHEREAS an additional 33,000 Virginia children have slipped into poverty, bringing the total number to nearly 265,000, or 14 percent of Virginia's children.

WHEREAS the General Assembly has found that "poor children are more at risk of educational failure than children from more affluent homes and that reduced pupil/teacher ratios and class sizes result in improved academic performance among young children." (Va. Code § 22.1-199.1)

WHEREAS over 9,100 students in grades 7-12 dropped out in 2010-2011;

WHEREAS students at-risk of educational failure need academic, behavioral, and emotional support both inside and outside of the classroom;

WHEREAS the economic downturn has taken a serious toll on our public schools, and Virginia's level of investment has fallen to \$4,609 per student in FY 2012, 8% less than what Virginia spent in 2007;

WHEREAS, as a result of budget cuts, local school divisions have been forced to increase class sizes and remove student services and supports; and

WHEREAS Virginia ranks 41st in the nation in teacher-pupil ratio and 35th in per pupil revenue from state sources.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the undersigned members of the Alliance for Virginia's Students urge the Virginia Board of Education to consider the following principles when revising the Standards of Quality (SOQ). The Board should:

- Reaffirm its support for those provisions of the SOQ that have been recommended by the Board in recent years and that are yet to be adopted and funded;
- Acknowledge the adverse impact of individual and concentrated poverty on educational achievement by moving incentive and categorical programs serving vulnerable populations of students into the SOQ;

- Recognize the instructional value of support services and programs provided inside and outside the classroom to students whose academic, behavioral, and emotional challenges prevent them from accessing the curriculum successfully;
- Incorporate into the SOQ the recommendations made by JLARC to promote reading by grade three, including PALS (Phonological Awareness Literacy Screenings), literacy coaches, and reading specialists;
- Encourage the Governor and General Assembly to generate SOQ cost estimates using a methodology that is known, reliable, and independent of factors that are unrelated to the actual expense of education, such as the short-term availability of State funds; and
- Recommend that the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) conduct ongoing and regular reviews to ensure that SOQ funding is realistic in relation to the Commonwealth's current educational needs and practices.

Be it resolved,

Alliance for Virginia's Students
The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis
The Legal Aid Justice Center's JustChildren Program
Virginia Association of Counties
Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals
Virginia Education Association
Virginia First Cities Coalition
Virginia Municipal League
Virginia PTA
Voices for Virginia's Children