

July 21, 2017

The Honorable Dr. Dietra Trent, Secretary of Education
Holly Coy, Deputy Secretary of Education
Virginia Department of Education
101 North 14th Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Re: Final Review of the Consolidated State Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015

Dear Dr. Trent and Ms. Coy:

Re: Final Review of the Consolidated State Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015

We write to urge the Virginia Board of Education (Board) to postpone its final approval of the consolidated state plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) until August. ESSA represents a significant shift in authority from the federal government to the states in strategies for school accountability and lifting up struggling schools. Virginia's consolidated plan presents an opportunity to inform parents about how Virginia will continue to carry out the letter and spirit of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, including the goal of full educational opportunity for every child.

Despite the importance of this plan, the Virginia Department of Education (Department) did not release the plan for public review until shortly before the Board's meeting in late June, and there have been few meaningful opportunities for public input since the draft's release. The Board must maximize public and stakeholder engagement before finalizing the plan to ensure that the plan adequately addresses the needs of all children across the Commonwealth. We believe that a final vote at the July 27 Board meeting will be premature given the short timeframe for public review of the plan.

To provide the public a meaningful opportunity to review the plan and offer input, we ask the Board and Department to:

- postpone the Board's final review of the consolidated state plan and convene a separate meeting in late August, after the conclusion of the Board's summer series of public hearings, for final review and approval;
- immediately engage stakeholders to review and offer input on the draft plan through an online survey;
- hold a public hearing in central Virginia to discuss the draft plan prior to an August final approval vote;
- make ESSA the focal point of all remaining public hearings this summer; and
- provide education to the public on the details of the plan, including a public webinar.

We applaud the efforts of the Board and Department in gathering public input at the initial stages of developing the proposed plan. Yet it is even more important to allow time for a public response to the draft itself. Other states, like New Mexico, have conducted a survey of stakeholders to gather feedback on key decisions made in the plan. Virginia should now seek input on key parts of the plan, such as the measure of school quality indicator and how it will be implemented. We note that the Board's summer series of public hearings on the Standards of Accreditation, Profile of a Virginia Graduate, and ESSA do not include a hearing in central Virginia, an area with a large population of vulnerable students.

The Commonwealth must perform its due diligence and produce a plan that is appropriately specific and ambitious when it is submitted to the U.S. Secretary of Education and U.S. Department of Education. Massachusetts, Maine, Connecticut, Nevada have already been cited by the Department for a lack of specificity in long-term goals for student achievement and English Language Proficiency (ELP). Among other shortcomings, Virginia's plan does not yet include long-term goals for ELP or meaningful measures of school climate. Postponing the Board vote and creating additional opportunities for public input on the draft plan will help to ensure that Virginia's consolidated state plan adequately reflects the Commonwealth's commitment to a high-quality education for every child.

We greatly appreciate your dedication to public education in the Commonwealth.

The Advocacy Institute
American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia
ART 180
The Commonwealth Institute
Delta Kappa Gamma
The Down Syndrome Association of Greater Richmond
Legal Aid Justice Center
National Alliance on Mental Illness of Virginia
Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center
Prevention Not Punishment
Virginia Education Association
Virginia Excels
Virginia Organizing
Virginia Retired Teachers Association
Virginia TASH
Voices for Virginia's Children