

Board of Education Agenda Item

Item: J.

Date: April 24, 2008

Topic: First Review of Virginia's Definition of School Readiness

Presenter: Dr. Linda M. Wallinger, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction

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Origin:

Topic presented for information only (no board action required)

Board review required by

State or federal law or regulation

Board of Education regulation

Other: Governor Kaine has asked the Board of Education to adopt the proposed definition of school readiness as part of his preschool initiative.

Action requested at this meeting Action requested at future meeting: _____ (date)

Previous Review/Action:

No previous board review/action

Previous review/action

date _____

action _____

Background Information: On January 16, 2006, in one of his first official acts, Governor Kaine created the Start Strong Council to develop expanded access to quality pre-kindergarten for Virginia's four-year-olds. The Governor's charge to the Council was to develop recommendations for cultivating public-private partnership to provide for preschool service delivery in both public schools and private community settings; and to recommend strategies for governance to be shared across state and local lines through local councils made up of key child-serving agencies and organizations in each region or locality. In July 2007, the Council completed its study of preschool opportunities for Virginia and presented six key recommendations to Governor Kaine.

The first recommendation from the Start Strong Council was:

Virginia should adopt a common definition of school readiness that is accepted and supported by all early childhood programs in both the public and private sector in order to facilitate the development of a common approach to evaluate PreK program performance as well as the school readiness of Virginia's children.

An additional component of the recommendation was the establishment of a School Readiness Task Force.

In fall 2007, the Secretary of Education convened a School Readiness Task Force consisting of individuals with a vested interest in preschool education. Included in the task force were representatives from the Virginia Board of Education, the Virginia Department of Education, the Virginia Department of Social

Services, Virginia School Division, the Start Strong Council, private providers of early childhood programs, and higher education. During the next several months, the task force members worked as a group, in subgroups, and electronically to review the research literature on school readiness and to examine definitions of school readiness that have been adopted in other states. Ultimately, the task force developed the definition found in Attachment A. This definition was also endorsed by the Governor's Working Group on Early Childhood Initiatives at its meeting on March 13, 2008. On March 31, 2008, Governor Kaine requested that the Virginia Board of Education take action to formally adopt the attached definition of school readiness (Attachment B). Agreement on a common definition of school readiness is a step that few other states have been able to achieve.

Summary of Major Elements:

Virginia's definition of school readiness describes the concept of children's readiness for school at kindergarten entry in the context of ready families, schools, and communities. It describes the capabilities of children, their families, schools, and communities that will best promote student success in kindergarten and beyond. Each component – children, families, schools and communities – plays an essential role in the development of school readiness. No one component can stand on its own. In addition to the four components of the definition, research-based benchmarks are provided to assist with defining, assessing, and tracking school readiness.

Superintendent's Recommendation:

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education waive first review and adopt the proposed definition of school readiness.

Impact on Resources:

The Department of Education is able to absorb the impact of this activity at this time.

Timetable for Further Review/Action:

Upon approval by the Board of Education, the Governor's Working Group on Early Childhood Initiatives will continue to seek the endorsement of the definition from other stakeholder groups.

Virginia's Definition of School Readiness

"School readiness" describes the capabilities of **children, their families, schools, and communities** that will best promote student success in kindergarten and beyond. Each component – children, families, schools and communities – plays an essential role in the development of school readiness. No one component can stand on its own.

- **Ready Children.** A ready child is prepared socially, personally, physically, and intellectually within the developmental domains addressed in Virginia's six *Foundation Blocks for Early Learning*: literacy, mathematics, science, history and social science, physical and motor development, and personal and social development. Children develop holistically; growth and development in one area depends upon development in other areas.
- **Ready Families.** A ready family has adults who understand they are the most important people in the child's life and take responsibility for the child's school readiness through direct, frequent, and positive involvement and interest in the child. Adults recognize their role as the child's first and most important teacher, providing steady and supportive relationships, ensuring safe and consistent environments, promoting good health, and fostering curiosity, excitement about learning, determination, and self-control.
- **Ready Schools.** A ready school accepts all children and provides a seamless transition to a high-quality learning environment by engaging the whole community. A ready school welcomes all children with opportunities to enhance and build confidence in their skills, knowledge, and abilities. Children in ready schools are led by skilled teachers, who recognize, reinforce, and extend children's strengths and who are sensitive to cultural values and individual differences.
- **Ready Communities.** A ready community plays a crucial part in supporting families in their role as primary stewards of children's readiness. Ready communities, including businesses, faith-based organizations, early childhood service providers, community groups and local governments, work together to support children's school and long term success by providing families affordable access to information, services, high-quality child care, and early learning opportunities.

Indicators of School Readiness

In order to define, assess, and track school readiness, we must set objectives, research-based benchmarks for each component of school readiness and develop clear strategies for measuring progress towards these benchmarks.

- **Ready children...**
 - communicate effectively with adults and children by:
 - labeling objects and feelings;
 - providing simple descriptions for events;
 - effectively conveying information, desires, and needs; and
 - using simple language and grammar to solve problems and to negotiate social interactions with adults and peers.
 - display emerging literacy skills by:
 - showing interest in and interacting with books as they are read by adults;
 - answering questions;
 - learning to use new words and tell stories;
 - recognizing and producing speech sounds, such as rhymes, beginning sounds, and letter sounds;
 - identifying the letters of the alphabet;
 - learning about print concepts from books, signs, and household objects; and
 - engaging in drawing and pretend writing and writing their name, letters, and other printed symbols.

- show an interest and skill in mathematics by:
 - counting and using numbers to describe and compare;
 - recognizing and sorting simple shapes and describing their position;
 - identifying simple patterns;
 - making comparisons based on length, weight, time, temperature, and size; and
 - using objects in play, experimenting with materials, building blocks and puzzles.
- build early science skills by:
 - exploring and showing curiosity;
 - asking and answering questions about nature, why things happen and how things work;
 - identifying patterns and changes in daily life; and
 - making observations based on the five senses.
- learn about **history and social studies** by:
 - interacting with their family, peers, religious, and social communities;
 - recognizing ways in which people are alike and different; and
 - recognizing the relationships between people, places and time.
- enhance **physical and motor development** by:
 - learning to control their bodies;
 - strengthening their muscles;
 - practicing different movements;
 - participating in regular physical activity; and
 - practicing healthy living and appropriate daily care routines.
- exhibit **personal and social skills** and a sense of self-worth by:
 - feeling secure and valued in their relationships;
 - expressing their emotions and taking pride in their accomplishments;
 - recognizing the consequences of their actions;
 - showing self-control; and
 - cooperating with others, using nonphysical ways to resolve conflicts.
- **Ready families...**
 - interact with their children, helping them to develop listening and communication skills and to express their feelings, needs, and wants. Adults:
 - read to and speak with children regularly and respectfully;
 - appreciate the child's view of the world;
 - encourage exploration of the world in which they live;
 - are trustworthy and dependable; and
 - engage with children with joy, warmth, and comfort.
 - encourage and act as the bridge to positive social relationships. Adults:
 - help children learn to cooperate with others;
 - help children follow simple directions and complete basic tasks;
 - foster friendships with other children;
 - teach children routines and how to respond to rules and structure;
 - help children learn how to handle disappointments; and
 - expose children to and help them describe different people, places, and things.
 - ensure their children are healthy by:
 - completing all appropriate eye, ear, dental and other medical screenings as well as immunizations.

- **Ready schools...**

- smooth the transition between home and school by:
 - communicating kindergarten standards and other school information to families through activities such as home visits, telephone calls, questionnaires, and kindergarten visitation days; and
 - forming effective relationships with parents and early childhood programs to share children's pre-kindergarten experiences and to assess their development.
- support instruction and staff development by:
 - employing highly qualified teachers;
 - maintaining appropriate class sizes;
 - encouraging professional development; and
 - using best practices in the classroom.
- support teachers as they assess the individual needs of children, design instruction based on these needs, and regularly monitor students' progress.
- partner with communities by participating in activities such as:
 - recreational and enrichment programs;
 - family literacy activities;
 - before and afterschool care;
 - open houses; and
 - communication with other early childhood education programs in the community.
- provide resources and services to address the diverse and individual needs of students including:
 - educational services;
 - health and mental health services; and
 - social services.
- emphasize the importance of early childhood education by:
 - regularly reviewing the quality, appropriateness, and alignment of the curriculum across all grades and phases of development; and
 - regularly focusing on and supporting the quality of teachers' interactions with children at all grade levels.

- **Ready communities...**

- promote collaboration to reach the most vulnerable children and families through diverse channels of communication by:
 - supporting effective, innovative strategies; and
 - building a sustainable, comprehensive system that maximizes resources.
- ensure all children have access to high-quality early care and education programs.
- provide accessible and affordable family services related to physical health, mental health, and lifelong learning. These services include:
 - literacy, English language learning, parenting skills, and adult education;
 - home visiting programs;
 - basic health care and nutrition services, including prenatal care;
 - mental health counseling;
 - early identification and treatment for children with disabilities and other special needs;
 - drug and alcohol counseling;
 - family court services; and
 - child abuse prevention.

- promote public assets such as parks, libraries, recreational facilities, civic and cultural venues and other opportunities to provide a better quality of life for families, encourage early learning opportunities, and foster community participation.
- regularly assess the status of children, families, schools, and community resources with regard to their role in school readiness and use these assessments in program planning and resource allocation.



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

March 31, 2008

Timothy M. Kaine
Governor

Dr. Mark Emblidge, President
State Board of Education
413 Stuart Circle
Suite 303
Richmond, VA 23220

Dear Dr. Emblidge:


Recently, my Working Group on Early Childhood Initiatives endorsed a definition of school readiness for the Commonwealth. As you know, this definition was researched, written, and recommended to the Governor's Working Group by a diverse task force committed to describing the concept of readiness for school at kindergarten entry. The definition outlines our hopes for each child within the context of ready families, schools, and communities.

Agreement upon this formal definition is a significant step, one that few states have been able to achieve. With common understanding of the concept of readiness, we move closer toward our goal of providing a strong foundation to help more children arrive at kindergarten healthy and ready for success.

I recommend that the Board of Education take action in formally adopting this definition of school readiness.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Timothy M. Kaine

TMK:lm1

c: The Honorable Thomas R. Morris, Secretary of Education