

Virginia Joint Commission on Technology & Science
c/o Hon. Kathy Byron, Chairman
901 Capitol Street
General Assembly Building, 2nd Floor
Richmond, VA 23219

7 October 2013

Dear Madame Chairman,

Re: Recommendations for the JCOTS Broadband and Education Advisory Committee

We are writing this letter to provide our input and recommendations to the Broadband and Education Advisory Committee.

As parents, technologists, entrepreneurs, PTA representatives, Fairfax County Public School employees, community activists, and elected officials we are very grateful to have had the opportunity to participate on the Committee. We feel there is a need to provide input beyond direct responses to the three contemplated Bills.

The digital conversion of our society makes Internet access and digital literacy critical to the success of our children and our economy. To ensure that our students are prepared to excel in an increasingly technology-dependent world the Commonwealth must set a clear direction.

Specifically, we believe in the following principles:

- *Digital Citizenship should be included in education standards:* All students must be able to effectively use digital devices, the Internet, and digital content. These are critical skills that have a life-long impact on a student's employability and ability to communicate, learn, create content, and use the Internet safely.
- *The nature of content is changing:* Digital technologies allow content to be richer, more engaging, more current, and more universally available than non-digital content. Additionally, open source standards have been established that enable creation of viable, up-to-date materials while providing cost benefits to users.
- *Measurement of access to technology is important:* Since computers and the Internet are the modern version of the paper and pencil, access to these essential tools is indispensable. Access and performance gaps are better addressed if the Commonwealth knows the extent and nature of these gaps – both inside and outside school.
- *Equal access to required educational resources is critical:* Use of computers and the Internet is already pervasive throughout the Commonwealth's K-12 education system. But, without universal access to computers and the Internet both inside and outside school, education is not equal. Moreover, without universal access teacher effectiveness in using technology tools is adversely impacted.
- *Research and Development should be encouraged:* In order to gain experience with different solutions, and maximize the success of broad deployments, the Commonwealth should encourage and fund research and development in K-12 education for Digital Citizenship and Educational Technology. A natural byproduct of R&D is failure – failure from which much can be learned.
- *Digital technology and content enhance existing educational methodologies:* Digital technology and content do not replace teachers, face-to-face communications, or all printed books.

Accordingly, we recommend the following:

- **Requiring the State Board of Education to develop standards of quality for Digital Citizenship as part of a complete public school education.**
- **Approval of legislation to test Open Education Resources.** This will allow institutions of higher learning to take advantage of new technology resources while potentially generating considerable cost savings to students. We hope that lessons learned can be leveraged by public K-12 institutions in the future.
- **Approval of legislation to measure student access, both inside and outside of school, to the Internet and any required digital educational resources.** The State Department of Education should develop the specific measurement guidelines.
- **Schools that use digital educational resources should strive to ensure that all students have adequate access to all required educational content and materials, both inside and outside of school.** A variety of technologies and funding solutions exist for schools to bridge gaps in access to technology. Any school receiving state funds for K-12 education should be required to comply with the above measurement, equality, and digital citizenship guidelines.

Achievement of the above is a process that will take (1) careful elaboration of the concepts above, (2) thoughtful legislation, (3) policies developed with input by all stakeholders, and (4) time. We request that you share this letter with the legislative JCOTS committee and encourage adoption of our recommendations.

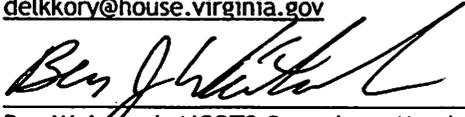
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Cc:
Tom Stevens

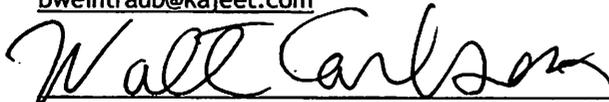
Very Respectfully,



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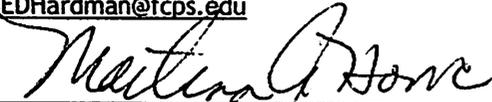
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