

Joint Committee to Study the Future of Public Elementary and Secondary Education in the Commonwealth

Subcommittee #2: School Leadership and Student Outcomes

Meeting summary: September 14, 2017

Summary:

The School Leadership and Student Outcomes subcommittee held its second meeting of the 2017 interim on Thursday September 14, 2017 at 10:00am in House Room 1 in the Capitol. A quorum was present and consisted of Senator Favola (chairwoman), Mr. Baldwin, Mr. Bond, Mr. Matney (on behalf of Mr. Barrack, VASSP), and Mr. Smith. The Committee heard presentations in three subject areas:

1. Improving student outcomes:

Mr. Hamish Brewer, Principal, Fred Lynn Middle School in Prince William County:

Principal Brewer, recipient Virginia's nationally distinguished principal award, addressed the subcommittee about his efforts to improve student outcomes at Occoquan Elementary School and his plans to implement similar interventions at Fred Lynn Middle School in Prince William County, where he recently assumed the role as principal. His far-reaching efforts at Occoquan lead to drastic student improvements on assessments (pass rates went from the 50-60% range to the 90-100% range over the course of his tenure), earned the school the rare distinction as a nationally distinguished Title I school in category 3 based on excellence in serving special populations of students, were centered on building a school community and culture, and included, among other things:

- Implementing a tribal system where students belong to small, close-knit communities.
- Unlimited field trips.
- Double recess.
- Standards-based instructional practices.
- Engaging students and parents using the right media (e.g. social media).
- Setting high expectations.
- Holding students and parents accountable.
- Not letting poverty be used as an excuse.
- Understanding cultures within the school building.
- Engaging community stakeholders (churches, mosques, etc.)
- Giving teachers a sense of ownership and leadership in instructional practices.
- Allowing teachers to take risks, experiment, and take advantage of teachable moments.

2. Addressing Teacher Shortages:

A. Delegate Les Adams and Dr. Mark Jones, Division Superintendent, Pittsylvania County Public Schools:

Delegate Adams and Dr. Jones participated in the meeting telephonically and presented information to the subcommittee about the struggle to adequately compensate and retain teachers in the Southside region of Virginia and the Pittsylvania School Division in particular.

Under the LCI formula, Pittsylvania County is not able to fund the total amount required to reach the prevailing funded salary for teachers. As a result, teacher salaries in the school division are below the state average. Last year, the school division had 100 teacher vacancies and the results of exit surveys indicated that the most common reason for leaving a teaching position was inadequate salary. Compounding the retention challenge is a recruitment challenge: though Pittsylvania innovates and has implemented a "grow your own" teacher program, Mr. Jones observed that fewer and fewer college students are enrolling in teacher preparation programs at institutions of higher education.

Delegate Adams' HB 2052 (2017) attempts to establish a policy that would provide some state financial support in school divisions like Pittsylvania that are not able to adequately fund teacher salaries. The subcommittee will consider some refined bill language and reexamine the issue at its next meeting.

B. Dr. Steven R. Staples, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Department of Education:

Dr. Staples updated the subcommittee on the worsening problem of teacher shortages from a statewide perspective. Enrollment in teacher preparation programs has declined on a national level, and that issue is compounded by increases in student enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools on a national level. Virginia tracks both national trends. Data on teacher preparation program completers tends to be somewhat skewed by the fact that it includes completers of Liberty University's online program. While certain regions such as Region 3 are adversely affected by low numbers of teacher preparation program completers due to the lack of programs within or in close proximity to the region, teacher shortages are a statewide problem. Each region and school division is affected, although the data does show that challenged school divisions are more likely to face shortages.

Potential solutions include (i) expanding eligibility and/or increasing funding for the Virginia Teaching Scholarship Loan Program and reviewing and making changes to the existing regulations governing teacher licensure to remove unnecessary barriers to entry into the teaching profession. Dr. Staples also noted that the Governor has convened a Teacher Shortage Workgroup that has met and is due to release a report and additional recommendations on October 1. The subcommittee will track the progress of this workgroup.

C. Kathy Burcher, Director, Office of Government Relations and Research, Virginia Education Association:

Ms. Burcher, on behalf of the Virginia Education Association (VEA) echoed some of the points made by the previous presenters about the teacher shortage problem: teacher demand continues to far outpace supply, enrollment in teacher preparation programs is down, and teachers are leaving the profession due to dissatisfaction. She also focused on the need to diversify Virginia's teacher workforce and pointed to compelling data that suggests that minority students taught by minority teachers tend to have higher rates of academic achievement. The VEA hosted a summit in February to explore in-depth the issue of a diversified teacher workforce.

The VEA provided the subcommittee with recommendations in four areas:

- Teacher licensure testing requirements: embed test preparation and student skills in teacher education curricula, support teacher candidate test preparation through partnerships, and explore alternatives testing tools based on potential cultural biases in the current testing tools.
- Teacher pipeline: Grow your own programs and improved recruitment in higher education (teacher fellow and residency programs and pathways for para-educators to be licensed to teach).
- Compensation and working conditions: higher salaries (currently ranked 32 out of 50 states and \$8,000 below the national average), statewide school climate survey, mentorship during the school day, and fewer new teachers in hard-to-staff schools.
- Student loan debt: Expand the Virginia Teaching Scholarship Loan program and establish student loan forgiveness and other incentive programs for individuals who choose to teach.

Ms. Burcher concluded by explaining that while reform is important to solving the teacher shortage problem, there are certain reforms that should not be pursued: permitting unlicensed and/or otherwise underprepared individuals to teach (e.g. those who've not achieved the requisite instruction in pedagogy) or establishing pay-for-performance programs, which only tend to drive teachers away from the challenged schools in which they're needed the most.

D. Dr. Scott Bray, Assistant Professor of Education and Chair of Graduate Education - Teacher Licensure Preparation, University of Richmond:

Dr. Bray spoke to the subcommittee from the perspective of a professor and administrator of a teacher preparation program at an institution of higher education. Dr. Bray first noted that the teacher shortage in the Commonwealth is an economic issue: the "New Virginia Economy" is directly linked to the quality of the Commonwealth's public K-12 education system. He also emphasized the paramount importance of teacher quality in improving student outcomes, agreeing with scholars who've maintained that no other factor is as important in determining student achievement. While the current state and perception of the teaching salary is negative from several different angles (prestige, working conditions, pay, career alternatives, student loan debt), there are practical, evidence-based innovations such as teaching fellow programs (modeled

on now unfunded NC program that saw great results), residency and new teacher induction programs, improved career advancement opportunities, and encouraging instructional aides to pursue teacher licensure that can help reverse the troubling shortage trend.

3. High quality professional development for school leaders:

Dr. Michael F. DiPaola, Chancellor Professor, and Dr. Amy Colley, Executive Director, School Leadership Institute at the School of Education of The College of William and Mary in Virginia:

Drs. DiPaola and Colley presented to the subcommittee an overview of the School-University Research Network (SURN) Principal Academy. The Principal Academy is a two-year program for principals in SURN member school divisions that consists of a two-day summer academy, four daylong sessions during the academic-year, onsite visits, mentors, and supporting professional literature. The Principal Academy is an ongoing, job-embedded model for principal professional development. The framework and concept behind the Principal Academy is that principals should (i) have knowledge of classroom instruction and skills in collecting data about instructional practice and (ii) prioritize instruction and provide quality feedback to teachers about their instructional practices. This engagement leads to changes in teachers' classroom practices and student engagement and increases their effectiveness. The key is frequent observation of and supportive feedback to teachers. The principal's role thus becomes that of leader of the formative process for teachers. Drs. DiPaola and Colley recommended to the subcommittee that the SURN Principal Academy serve as a statewide model for principal professional development and school leadership that is focused on knowledge, skills, dispositions, and vision.