

MINUTES
Virginia Board of Education
School and Division Accountability Committee
March 21, 2012
3:00 p.m.
Jefferson Conference Room, James Monroe Building

Welcome and Opening Comments

Dr. Virginia McLaughlin, Chair, convened the meeting with the following Board members present: Mrs. Sears, Mr. Foster, Mr. Krupicka, Mrs. Beamer, and Mr. Braunlich. Dr. Wright, Superintendent of Public Instruction, was also present.

Discussion of a Request from Carroll County Public Schools for Approval of Waivers from the *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*

The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the Virginia Virtual Academy (VAVA), operated by Carroll County Public Schools (CCPS), under contract with K12 Inc., and the division's request for waivers related to the [Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia](#) (SOA) and its request to create a separate school for students enrolled in VAVA. This issue was first brought before the Board for review at its November meeting. Since that time, the Virginia General Assembly has approved and the Governor has signed [House Bill 1215](#) which requires the Board of Education to promulgate regulations establishing standards for accreditation of virtual schools that enroll students full-time.

The following speakers from CCPS and VAVA provided information regarding the request. A corresponding [PowerPoint presentation](#) was provided.

Topic	Presenter
Overview	Dr. Greg Smith, Superintendent, CCPS and Suzanne Sloane, Head of Schools, VAVA
Student End-of-Course Testing and Academic Accountability	Beverly Parker, Director of School Improvement, Accountability and Testing, CCPS
Special Education in a Virtual World/Partnerships with the District	Erin Rubinstein, Special Education Instructor, VAVA and Dr. Laura Goad, Director of Special Education, CCPS
VAVA Administrator and Teacher Overview	Nancy Brosnahan, Academic Administrator, VAVA and Lindsay Woods, ELL Certified - Instructor, VAVA

Dr. Smith began the meeting by reviewing the status of the waiver request that was presented to the Board in November of 2011. CCPS requested waivers to the SOA in the following areas:

- Standard School Day ([8 VAC 20-131-150](#))

- Health and Physical Education in the Elementary and Middle Grades ([8 VAC 20-131-80](#) and [8 VAC 20-131-90](#)) - CCPS will not be moving forward with this request.
- Instruction in Career and Technical Exploration in the Middle Grades ([8 VAC 20-131-90](#)) - CCPS will not be moving forward with this request.
- Requirement 140 hours of Instruction in English, Mathematics, Science, and History/Social Science in the Middle Grades ([8 VAC 20-131-90](#))
- Library Media, Materials, and Equipment ([8 VAC 20-131-190](#))
- Extracurricular and Other School Activities ([8 VAC 20-131-200](#))
- Staffing Requirements ([8 VAC 20-131-240](#))
- School Facilities and Safety ([8 VAC 20-131-260](#))

Dr. Smith asked that the person who will hold the principal's responsibilities for the school be designated as "Head of School." Dr. Smith stated that a revised proposal would be brought to the Board to reflect the withdrawal of the sections of the waiver request related to career and technical education exploration and health and physical education.

Overview

Dr. Smith provided information regarding the timeline for the creation of VAVA, which began in 2008-09 with Carroll County's implementation of a district-only online program option and culminated in school year 2010-11 with the expansion to statewide enrollment, resulting in 400 students in grades kindergarten through eight. Dr. Smith then discussed the reasons that students enroll in virtual schooling, the K12 Inc. curriculum that is used by VAVA and how middle school students are taking high school courses for credit. Dr. Smith was asked how mastery is evaluated in kindergarten. Dr. Smith responded that the topic of mastery would be covered later in the presentation.

Dr. Smith noted that some students choose virtual schools because of student dissatisfaction with the current traditional public school due to overcrowding, bullying, or lack of rigor. He was asked what was meant by "lack of rigor" in public school programs. Dr. Smith responded that the program is a self-starting program and, therefore, students must be self-motivated. Parents and learning coaches also have to participate. Ms. Sloane responded that the pace is more rigorous because students can move on more quickly when they understand the material being covered.

Questions were also asked as to whether families had to provide their own computer and how the program decides what materials are appropriate. Dr. Smith responded that parents do have to provide their own computer, but may be able to receive a "loaner" computer from K12 Inc. He indicated that some parents ask for Internet connections, but the school division does not provide this access. Adequate broadband service has been a challenge, but it has improved in Carroll County.

Ms. Sloane discussed traditional schools, the support team that works with the students, students' prior school settings, student enrollment figures, and the students' school divisions of residence. She also stated that VAVA students participate in Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments in grades three through eight.

Dr. Smith was asked if VAVA offers high school courses. Dr. Smith responded that there are no students enrolled in grades nine through twelve because of certain SOA and Virginia High School League (VHSL) standards that do not work well with virtual programs. Dr. Smith indicated that the VAVA program could offer courses at the high school level.

Ms. Sloane was asked about statistics presented concerning prior school setting, which indicated that four percent of the students were not in school prior to entering VAVA. It was explained that this statistic referred to students who were not yet of school age.

Dr. Smith was asked about access to International Baccalaureate and Governor's School courses and he responded that students would have to apply from within their local school division to take these courses.

There was a question regarding where students go to school when they complete the eighth grade in VAVA. Ms. Sloane responded that most students go back to their home school. However, approximately 15 percent of the students pay to enroll in the private K12 Inc., Inc. High School.

There was a question regarding how VAVA provides hands-on experiences, such as in science laboratories, to students and ensures that students have the opportunity to collaborate with other students regarding presentations. Ms. Sloane responded that VAVA provides virtual laboratories for science.

SOL Testing and Accountability – Ms. Parker presented information regarding testing and accountability, testing protocol, how the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests and assessments are used, and the application of federal, state and local accountability standards.

Ms. Parker was asked how VAVA handles content assessments for students who are working beyond their grade level. Ms. Parker responded that acceleration takes place more frequently in mathematics and English, and Dr. Smith noted that acceleration also takes place more frequently at the middle school level. All students from grades three through eight take SOL tests. Test results go back to the brick and mortar school where the student would have attended and the scores are included in that school's report card.

There was a question regarding how foreign language courses are provided, how acceleration is addressed, and whether there are limitations for these course offerings. Ms. Parker and Ms. Sloane responded that world languages (such as Spanish, French, Mandarin Chinese, and Latin) are offered as an independent study beginning in third grade and that credit is offered for such courses beginning in middle school.

There was a follow-up question regarding how VAVA determines mastery of content. Ms. Sloane responded that students in VAVA must log in for 990 hours just like students in brick and mortar schools. Mastery of every lesson is tied to objectives of at least 80 percent. For every lesson taken, there is an assessment that the student must pass with the 80 percent mastery level or higher. If this level of mastery is not achieved, then the lesson is repeated and the student must take the assessment again until the 80 percent objective is reached. This is the standard for

all grades in VAVA. There is a lesson, then a unit test, and finally a semester test. Ms. Sloane indicated that, if the 80 percent benchmark is not achieved for the grade level at the end of the school year, then retention is addressed.

There was a question about whether VAVA has done a correlation with the Standards of Learning. Ms. Sloane indicated that VAVA has looked at its assessments against SOL assessments and determined that the 80 percent mastery of objectives in the VAVA program is important to success on SOL assessments. There was also a comment that there are data being collected that could provide additional insights and there was a question regarding how much change the VAVA program makes year-to-year based on the data. In response to this comment, Dr. Smith indicated that CCPS requires VAVA to meet the same testing benchmark schedules/studies as brick and mortar schools.

There was a question regarding how the program handles truancy issues. It was explained that VAVA examined the CCPS policies on truancy and that CCPS approved of the policy adopted by VAVA. Each student has to log in daily unless VAVA has been notified of an excused absence and Ms. Sloane indicated that there are a number of tasks undertaken to reach out to families when truancy occurs. As is the case with the brick and mortar schools of CCPS, withdrawal from the VAVA program is addressed after ten days of absence.

Another question was asked about the principal of the school and how the requirements for teachers compare with those of teachers in brick and mortar public schools. It was explained that the requirements for teachers in virtual programs are aligned with state and federal standards, which require that all teachers be licensed with endorsements in the subject areas where they teach.

It was noted that the SOL test results for VAVA were lower in every category and there was a request for more information on how the scores compare with students in brick and mortar schools. Ms. Sloane indicated that more students will be tested this year so more data will be available. The data are expected to show better scores that are more consistent with students at brick and mortar schools.

There was a question related to textbook selection. Proprietary K12 Inc. textbooks are used in the program. In the case of history, Virginia-specific textbooks are used.

Virtual Special Education – Ms. Goad explained the makeup of students, teachers, and contractors in VAVA’s special education program, how individualized education programs (IEPs) are handled, child study and referral procedures, and evaluation and eligibility.

Ms. Goad was asked whether each child has an IEP. She explained that IEPs are developed for students in need of special education services and every child does have a learning plan. VAVA uses the same processes for special education services as those followed for the school division. Most contact with families is done by conference call when needed.

Special Education and Related Services – Ms. Rubenstein described the current population of students receiving special education services at VAVA, the support team that works with the

students, the services provided, parent satisfaction, and students' access related to services and therapies.

Virginia Education Teacher – Ms. Woods described what it is like to be a VAVA teacher, including the required responsibilities, teaching resources, communication, evaluation, and reporting.

Ms. Woods was asked how much flexibility teachers have to create their own lesson plans and how time is different during the day for a virtual student versus a brick and mortar student. Ms. Woods responded that students are directed by their learning coaches as well as the teachers. There are monthly parent-student-teacher conferences and monthly grade-level teacher conferences.

Administration – Ms. Brosnahan explained access to all classrooms, real-time student data, teacher and student communication, and opportunities for socialization.

A question was asked about per pupil funding for VAVA versus the students in brick and mortar schools and whether parents are charged a fee for their children to enroll in VAVA. Dr. Smith responded that parents do not pay any fees to K12 Inc. for the program. Out-of-county students pay a \$500 fee to CCPS. Dr. Smith was also asked about the comparison of per pupil amounts for brick and mortar versus virtual students. Dr. Smith indicated that he would provide additional information, but that the cost for a virtual program is generally less than for a brick and mortar program.

Dr. Smith was asked whether there were any areas raised in the November meeting that the presenters would like to address. He indicated that he did not have any additional information to provide at this time but would resubmit the CCPS waiver request.

There was a question about capacity, which is a school division decision. Dr. Smith was asked that, when he comes back to the Board, he provide more information on the socialization opportunities for the students. There was a follow-up comment regarding how students can work together on projects and solve problems and present their information/project when working in the virtual program.

Participants were invited to work with the Board and help identify what in the SOA is not feasible for virtual programs.

During this meeting, a classroom demonstration was provided for a kindergarten class.

Public Comment

Cherie Nielsen, a parent with children enrolled in VAVA, commented on her children's experience in the program.

Adjournment

The committee meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.