Summary of Recommendations for Revisions to the Standards of Accreditation for Virginia Public Schools

Virginia Council of Administrators of Special Education
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SLIDE 2: Process of SOA Revision

The Virginia Council of Administrators of Special Education (VCASE) supports the recommendation presented by the Virginia Association of School Superintendents (VASS) that, in the absence of substantive reform, there are revisions that will support positive changes within the SOA. VASS' suggestions will be cited.

SLIDE 3: Closing the Achievement Gap and Strengthening Accountability

- The following recommendations relate directly to the questions being asked by the State Board of Education pertaining to *Closing the Achievement Gap* and *Strengthening Accountability*, as they relate specifically to Students with Disabilities (SWD).
- VCASE gathered input from special education administrators from each of the eight regions in Virginia provide input to the State Board.

SLIDE 4: What changes are needed to close the achievement gap?

- Enhance focus on early intervention targeting reading skills so the goal of all students are able to read by Grade 3 is reachable and so that students are better prepared to read to learn. This goal is typically more difficult to achieve for SWD due to the disability related barriers that require specialized instruction and services.
  - Incorporate specific requirements under 8 VAC 20-131-80, 8 VAC 20-131-90 and 8 VAC 20-131-100 regarding "students who are unable to read with comprehension the materials used for instruction (to) receive additional instructional time in reading"
    - Recommend time for targeted supplemental instructional interventions in reading
    - Provide flexibility to divisions to create time to provide the intervention
- Digress from one time, multiple choice testing format. We are preparing students for college and career readiness. Students are typically assessed on a semester basis at the college level
  - Provide flexibility in testing schedule to support more frequent assessments of student understanding
    - Provide opportunities to test on a semester basis. SWD often have a difficult task of navigating the testing process (format/interface) due to substantial processing deficits related to a variety of disability related impact factors.
    - Provide frequent opportunities to assess the knowledge of some SWD to limit the overwhelming nature of the testing process that in itself requires significant focus and cognitive processing skills
- Reinstate the Virginia Modified Achievement Standards Test (VMAST) as an acceptable alternative assessment beyond the currently adopted use as a consideration for credit accommodation
  - Many students with disabilities learn differently and at a difference pace compared to their typical peers
  - Special educators provide instruction that focuses significantly on learning strategies and supports that promote student learning
  - Students are not assessed in the manner in which they best learn and demonstrate their understanding
  - The VMAST (or similar assessment options if developed) will provide some SWD a more realistic way to demonstrate their understanding.

SLIDE 7: How can student growth measures be incorporated?

VCASE supports the VASS belief that indicators that focus solely on SOL growth are too narrow to comprehensively assess student performance, particularly for SWD.

- Use of Student Growth Measures may be a valuable component in determining the effectiveness of schools and supporting accreditation decisions.

- o Virginia is in the early stages of assessing growth through the current format, making it difficult to determine the impact of the growth model on assessing instructional outcomes.
- o Once we are able to see the results of the current formula over time, it may be easier to determine the value of the current model as a measure of instructional success.
- Recommend use of multiple growth indicators (other than solely SOL scores) for SWD which may ultimately be factored into accreditation decisions
- Consider an emphasis on student essential skill growth in Reading and Mathematics through other assessment measures that identify grade level proficiency gains
- Identify a list of "approved" literacy and numeracy instruments that assess pre and post grade level skill measures for use in determining student growth outcomes in addition to SOL score results, possibly alleviating the barrier that the testing format creates for many SWD

SLIDE 9: Are other changes needed in the accreditation requirements?

VCASE supports the VASS stance that the option for expedited retakes should be made available to all students, rather than the currently identified group.

- SWD benefit from small group targeted remediation of essential skills in preparation for retake.
- Growth measures may increase as student outcomes rise due to retakes following targeted remediation, supporting the notion of learning content

VCASE supports the VASS stance that "the SOQ should be revised to reflect state support for all mandated programs. Currently, the two sets of standards do not align."

- As a result, class sizes are very large in areas outside of core subject areas. SWD who are educated in collaborative and integrated settings benefit from smaller average class sizes for a wide variety of reasons such as availability of individualized support and increased capacity to attend to instruction.
- Revise requirements for instructional programs in elementary school (VAC 20-131-110 A-D) to recognize and incorporate a percentage of time to be directed toward targeted intervention/remediation in essential skill development (reading and mathematics) to promote and support tiered intervention

SLIDE 11: Which provisions of the SOA are outdated or no longer relevant?

VCASE strongly supports the VASS stance that "The Standards of Quality staffing ratios be adjusted to reflect the SOA goal that 'Each school shall provide a program of instruction that promotes individual student academic achievement in essential academic disciplines and shall provide additional instructional opportunities that meet the abilities, interests, and educational needs of students." Current staffing standards support whole/large group instruction rather than a focus on individualized instruction.

- Increase qualified instructional personnel ratios to impact student learning
- Fully fund the resources that are most meaningful and impactful in education

SLIDE 12: What new provisions are needed to address changes in technology?

VCASE strongly believes that the testing format and testing process is often overwhelming itself, which results in outcomes that may not accurately reflect what students truly know because they have a difficult time demonstrating their knowledge and skills through limited testing formats.

- Provide more frequent windows for testing SWD (or all students) to allow them to appropriately demonstrate their acquired knowledge and skills without being overwhelmed by the assessment itself
- Provide funding support for expanded hardware for student testing that will provide a more current and familiar processes for student interaction with technology during testing, i.e. iPads, iPods. (increase comfort and familiarity)

SLIDE 13: What technical or editorial changes are needed?

VCASE supports a continued and increased emphasis on including active educational professionals in policy discussions in order to get input from experts in the field.