

# **Virginia Commission on Youth Study of Truancy and School Dropout Prevention Advisory Group Meeting**

General Assembly Building  
Speaker's Conference Room – 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
September 23, 2008  
1:00 p.m.

## **Attending:**

Delegates William Fralin and Robert Brink, The Honorable Joseph Bounds (Electronically), Rita Bishop, Asia Jones, Suzanne Devlin, Cynthia Cave, Katherine Farmer, Sarah Geddes, Tracey Jenkins, Katherine Farmer, Melissa Nehrbass, Bet Neale, Tom Shortt, Jean Bankos, Kendall Tyree, Suzanne Whitehead, Michele Dowdy, Otis Dowdy, Ingrid Grant, Marie Sobers, Anthony Roper, Jan McKee, Rob Jones, Pat Lacy.

## **Absent:**

Delegate Frank Hall, Robert Ransome, Kitty Boitnott, Alfred Butler, Heidi Davis, Mark Embridge, Patrick Lacy, Keith Lisenbee, William Boshier

## **Staff Attending:**

Amy M. Atkinson, Leah Hamaker and Cordell Hairston

### **I. Welcome and Introductions**

*The Honorable William H. Fralin, Jr., Chair*  
*Amy M. Atkinson, Executive Director*

Delegate Fralin welcomed the members of the Advisory Group. He gave an overview of the Truancy and School Dropout Prevention study and later reviewed agenda items.

### **II. Study Overview**

*Ms. Atkinson*

Ms. Atkinson gave an overview of the Truancy and School Dropout Prevention study. She informed the Advisory Group that it was anticipated this would be a two year study. Staff had conducted several site visits over the summer but still have additional study activities to carry out. The study plan was then reviewed by the Advisory Group.

### **III. Judicial Perspective of Truancy and School Dropout Prevention**

*The Honorable Joseph P. Bounds (Presentation via Teleconference)*  
*City of Roanoke Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court*

Judge Bounds spoke about the judicial perspective pertaining to truancy and dropout. He stated that the Virginia Council of Juvenile Court Judges established an Education Committee to address these issues. Judge Elizabeth Kellas from Winchester chairs this Committee. Commission on Youth staff attended the last Committee meeting, which was held in August. One topic discussed by the Committee was that there was no model in Virginia regarding truancy.

Judge Bounds shared with the Advisory Group that Roanoke has had a truancy docket for the past 13 years. This has worked well for Roanoke. Some jurisdictions'

school boards' involve the judicial branch and some do not. Regulations addressing how the courts and the schools are to handle truancy would be helpful.

#### **IV. Graduation Rates**

*Rita Bishop, Ed. D.*

*Superintendent, Roanoke City Public Schools*

Dr. Bishop discussed the on-time graduation rate. She stated that dropout impacted the social capital of Roanoke and the Commonwealth. If there were 17 year olds in 7<sup>th</sup> grade or 14 year olds in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, the result was the same; kids dropping out and ending up on the streets. Dr. Bishop then discussed the Lancaster model for addressing overage students. This program increased the graduation rate in Lancaster by 5 percent in the first year. She then gave an overview of Roanoke's Overage Academy, Forest Park Academy, which opened its doors a couple of weeks ago.

Dr. Bishop stated that Forest Park Academy would serve 250 students. There was a intense need for an alternative for these students. The school would serve middle and high school students who are older than their grade level or who have dropped out of school. Dropout prevention and retrieval would be available. Dual enrollment with the community college was also an option. A future planning center would also be part of the academy. Parent permission was required.

Dr. Bishop stated that it was her belief that it was possible to retrieve students who dropped out but that the on-time graduation rate could have an impact.

#### **V. Virginia On-Time Graduation Rate**

*Charles B. Pyle, Director of Communications*

*Virginia Department of Education*

Mr. Pyle gave a presentation on the Virginia Department of Education's (VDOE) 2008 On-Time Graduation Rate. Mr. Pyle informed the group that published graduation rates traditionally have been estimates, with flaws that impact reliability. In 2005, the National Governors' Association recommended that all states enact an on-time graduation rate formula. In 2006, Delegate Fralin introduced House Bill 19 to request the Department of Education to adopt a formula. The Virginia Board of Education then set the definition for the cohort graduation rate based on 2005 NGA recommendation. The Board also reported to the Governor and the General Assembly that cohort graduation rates be reported for first time in the fall of 2008.

A Virginia on-time graduate is a student who graduates in four years or less after earning one of the following diplomas:

- Standard Diploma
- Advanced Studies Diploma
- Modified Standard Diploma
- General Achievement Diploma
- Special Diploma

Virginia would also amend the plan for graduation rates submitted pursuant to No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Mr. Pyle informed the Advisory Group that on-time dropout rates would be calculated and reported in early 2009.

Mr. Pyle then answered questions from the Advisory Group. Questions included how incarcerated students and those who acquired a GED would be counted.

## **VI. Preliminary Study Findings**

*Ms. Atkinson*

Ms. Atkinson gave an overview of the general topics from the study and also reviewed the preliminary findings from the site visits conducted to date. The Advisory Group discussed disincentives that may prevent a student from graduation. If the Standards of Accreditation (SOA) required that the student be present for a specific number of “seat hours” when a student needed only one or two classes to graduate, that may be an issue for staff to include in their review. The Department of Education stated that there was staff that provided technical assistance to school divisions whenever these type of issues arose.

## **VII. Advisory Group Discussion**

*Advisory Group*

The Advisory Group discussed issues and questions they had pertaining to the study. It was mentioned that 13 to 15 percent of dropouts were actually gifted students. Credit recovery programs could address this. While students who dropped out could obtain a GED, the state should not be in the GED business.

It was also discussed that truancy statutes were not always consistently applied. The statute called confusion. Parents were not always cooperative and may even keep their children home for company. In Pennsylvania, a \$300 fine was imposed upon parents if a student did not attend after so many absences. Schools do not have control of the students. Parental involvement was crucial.

The Advisory Group discussed the lack of alternative education options. Also, the increase in GED and home schooling could not be ignored. It was also noted that some jurisdictions did not utilize CHINSup petitions for truancy.

Commission staff was asked to schedule meetings with parents and students to look at what was needed to help families keep their children in school. Students must have meaningful experiences in school so they do not dropout.

The truancy statute addressed middle and high school students but not elementary school students. If all students with issues were brought to the school counselor, there would be a need to increase in the number of counselors.

A member of the Advisory Group noted that Roanoke County has a 1 percent dropout rate. This is due to the fact that there are good pieces to the puzzle in Roanoke County and there are good prevention programs.

The Advisory Group agreed that subcommittees on truancy and dropout prevention be established. Staff would compile a listing of members, based on the interest expressed by the members. Subcommittee meetings would be scheduled in the next couple of weeks. A full Advisory Group meeting would be scheduled after the subcommittees met.

## **VIII. Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 3:46 p.m.