

First District Education Advisory Council meeting
College of William and Mary
Thursday, April 16, 2009
9:00 am

Rep. Wittman opened the meeting with a request for feedback from those attendees to discuss upcoming legislative initiatives concerning the challenges of education in Virginia's First District. He addressed the agenda items for the meeting including:

No Child Left Behind Act: NLCB comes up for reauthorization this year. He asked the attendees for input on what role the government should have when the debate starts in Congress. He offered to take the participants' comments and make it a part of the process. He asked the attendees to consider options such as keeping the framework for this legislation, what should be done and what parts of the bill should we dispense with. The present nature of the No Child Left Behind Act is very prescriptive. Many teachers and administrators at the meeting indicated that they could be fired for noncompliance if they do not or cannot meet the requirements of the bill.

There was concern that the one dimensional element for measuring success doesn't work. The tests needed to measure other criteria such as written and verbal communications skills, critical and analytical thinking. Emphasis is currently on testing; not on learning. Educators have lost instructional time daily due to the overemphasis on testing.

Attendees stated that we are now leaving some children behind; some special needs children, some exceptional children and then there are the children that fall in the middle. The special needs and exceptional children are not taken into consideration in the administration of the SOL tests. Those students are barely getting by—and they are not being taught as they should be. Critical thinking, problem solving, and other qualities are missing from many students' educational backgrounds because of the NCLB. One participant observed that there is a 60% developmental delay in students from high school to community college. They cannot pass the placement tests to enter a community college for the first year programs.

There cannot be one test for all students as each of them are individuals. Several participants said that we are taking away the electives with children to emphasize the core subjects only to meet the standards for SOLs. The "one size fits all" concept creates all kinds of problems from a student and teacher's perspective.

Others observed that there is a need to focus on the career and technical education side that just emphasized college attendance as a path to success. There is also a need to focus on those that do not test well. Many felt that we need to determine what the best path to success is for students. Other input from the attendees included the suggestion that partners for teachers are needed. Teacher's aides and others should be able to help focus

on various issues that teachers face in the classroom. There should be a focus on librarians, public library reading programs, art and music programs as well.

Several attendees stated that we need to find ways to take the stigma away from summer school and its programs. There were several suggestions to use our public schools as community center; we make the school buildings off limits and we're wasting public resources.

We need to address the issue of adequate progress over a long period of time. There is a shortage of teachers and lack of preparation for teachers prior to entering the educational system. If we examine student's performance over a period of time we might be better able to evaluate the success of NCLB.

Another opinion not shared by all of the attendees was the observation that the Virginia State Board of Education made the SOLs' goals realistic—they sent teams and grant monies to school systems to get specific areas' schools to where they want to be. Virginia has risen to the challenge.

Several attendees asked Rep. Wittman what other colleagues in the House are considering concerning NCLB. He indicated that opinions as to how to address the issues in the legislation vary; many think that the present legislation is too narrowly focused and local school systems cannot adhere to the standards dictated by the bill; these are not realistic expectations. All colleagues that he has spoken with agree that we do need fair and equitable standards of accountability and for standards of success. We need to reflect the needs of our communities.

SOLs: Rep. Wittman stated that he will take all comments from the attendees and email these comments to participants for their feedback. He intends to put together a framework of proposals for the legislative issues to be considered for NCLB and the SOLs. Although SOLs are state programs, they relate to NCLB. At this point, we have to adhere to the criteria of administering SOLs. If we do not meet the criteria, we will lose dollars and then we cannot fund the programs that are linked to SOLs.

Stimulus Package discussion: Rep. Wittman outlined the details of the Stimulus package and how these issues impact the NCLB. He asked if there might be flexibility and can those dollars be redirected from the federal level? There was a discussion on how the dollars fit the needs of the school system.

Several attendees pointed out that the special needs community is growing and they will need money for mandated programs.

Rep. Wittman indicated that at the federal level there are questions on how to allocate money for these programs outlined in the legislation. There are programs within the Department of Education that are already in place and are working well. Rep. Wittman has asked for more funding for TRIO outreach programs.

Affordability/Access to Institutes of higher education: Rep. Wittman pointed out that his office has hosted a seminar on financial avenues for college bound students. There was a heavy turnout at the Sallie Mae seminar held at Rappahannock Community College and the next college workshop will be held at Christopher Newport University on Saturday, May 2. Rep. Wittman said that there are millions of dollars that presently go unrewarded and we need to inform constituents that there is money that they can tap into for their children's education.

K-12 Funding issues: States and localities have been the primary source of K-12 funding. Rep. Wittman urged attendees to forward input to him on this issue for future discussions.

Edmins2.doc
4/21/09