

# VIRGINIA COMMISSION ON YOUTH

## Comparison of Academic Achievement in Virginia with Leading Industrialized Countries

Speaker's Conference Room  
General Assembly Building  
May 9, 2012  
1:00 p.m.

### MINUTES

#### **Advisory Group Members:**

Delegate Christopher Peace, Paula Fisher, Meredith Gunter, Sarah Gross, Meg Gruber, Mark Herzog, Sarah Herzog, Andrew Kanu, Nancy Hoover, Catherine Finnegan, Barry Glenn, John Morgan, Patricia Popp, Wendell Roberts, James Ryan, Kirk Schroeder, Patrick Tolan, Lola Tornabene, Linda Wallinger, Emily Webb for Javaid Siddiqi, Anne Wescott, Michelle Vucci

#### **Guests:**

Ellen Davenport, Tommy McNeil, Augustine Kang

#### **Monitoring:**

Susan Patrick

#### **Absent:**

Karin Addison, James Baldwin, Jean Braxton, Pam Brott, Barry Duval, David Foster, Susan Hogge, Stephen Horton, Ashby Kindler, Bet Neale, Suzanne Sloane, Thomas Smith, James Stronge, Patty Pitts, D. Patrick Lacy

#### **Staff Attending:**

Leah Hamaker, Joyce Garner, Meg Bures

#### **Welcome and Introductions**

*The Honorable Christopher K. Peace, Chair*

Delegate Peace welcomed the Advisory Group and asked the members and guests to introduce themselves. He noted that it was appropriate that everyone was gathered during this time because it was both Foster Care Awareness Month and Teacher Appreciation Week. Delegate Peace asked Leah Hamaker to give the Advisory Group members the background about the study.

#### **Study Overview**

*Leah Hamaker, Senior Legislative Policy Analyst*

Ms. Hamaker gave an overview of the study and presented on how Virginia students rank on the international and national assessments which measure student achievement. She noted that, in year one of the study, the Commission conducted research and identified attributes from the educational systems of leading industrialized countries, as evidenced by the performance of students from these countries on specific international assessments. She noted the overarching goal of this study was to compile these best practices and present findings to the Commission prior to the 2013 General Assembly Session. Delegate Peace asked staff to provide information to the Advisory Group that identified Virginia's recent educational accomplishments including legislative actions such as the top jobs bills and reading goals. Several of these initiatives were previously reported to the Governor's Commission on Higher Education. Ms. Hamaker said that staff could provide the Advisory Group with a synopsis of these activities prior to the June 26 Advisory Group meeting.

## **Comparison of Academic Achievement in Virginia with Leading Industrialized Countries**

*Patricia A. Popp, Ph.D., State Coordinator, Project HOPE-VA*

*Clinical Associate Professor, School of Education, College of William & Mary*

Dr. Popp followed with a presentation on the preliminary findings from the literature review. Dr. Popp first outlined the methodology used in selecting the comparison countries. She then shared preliminary findings, including the comparative and contrasting data from these countries. Of the top performing countries on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) assessments, factors such as region, population, population density, and gross domestic product (GDP) were used to narrow the list of countries used in the comparison.

Dr. Popp noted that the review attempted to identify attributes that explain/support the positive educational outcomes in the selected countries. The next step would be identifying the policies and practices that could be adopted for use in Virginia.

The Advisory Group members asked which high-performing countries were excluded from the review and Dr. Popp stated that Japan, Australia and New Zealand were not included. Another member inquired whether the demographic makeup of a country was considered. Dr. Popp stated the review was limited to countries that were consistently high performing on the international assessments and that demographic makeup was not a factor. The Advisory Group discussed whether the subgroups in the United States were actually outperforming the total population of students in these countries. Dr. Popp noted that high performing subgroups in U.S. are still being outperformed. She stated that there were discrepancies between those students being tracked and those students whose scores were actually reported.

A member inquired whether there was any study or literature from these countries that gauged the impact of role of the family, involvement of community, and other similar factors, such as the cultural impact of parental expectations. A follow up question was raised about the amount of after-school instruction offered to students the selected countries.

The Advisory Group discussed findings from the data. Further questions and items that the Commission may wish to consider are outlined below.

- The rate that the comparison countries retain teachers, as well as the types of teacher preparation/training programs; Dr. Popp noted that teachers remain in their field because their role is more respected in the comparison countries. There is no research on content of teacher training programs but there is information about the level of education teachers are required to possess.
- Further investigation into whether teachers in the target countries have advanced degrees in education or in the topic that they teach.
- The comparison countries' commitment to early education. Dr. Popp stated that the U.S. might have lower numbers of children that participate in early education programs but definitely do not have the lowest numbers. Canada has the highest percentage of students that participate in early education programs.
- Research on the demographics of schools in the comparison countries, for example, how do middle-income schools in the U.S. compare to schools in other countries and what is included in educational spending for these countries compared to the U.S.
- The role that school plays in the comparison countries' communities; in the U.S., schools provide more than an education. It was noted that schools in several of the comparison countries did not provide extracurricular activities or sports.
- The impact the unionization of teachers has had upon the teaching.
- Acknowledging whether the comparison countries' data includes private educational systems. In the U.S., only public education data will be used.
- In different countries, some school systems classify by age and not grade level. This factor should be considered.

- The data does not tell the entire story. In the U.S., the “input” consists of the entire country of children. This philosophy may not be the same in comparison countries. For example, children with developmental disabilities are treated differently in some countries.
- The belief that every student must attend college needs to be re-evaluated.
- The focus of this study must be narrow and the Advisory Group should agree on basic concepts to establish a baseline for this study.

The Advisory Group discussed the objective of the study. Members questioned whether the objective was ensuring that students in Virginia were prepared for the workplace, preparing students for college or replenishing STEM-H careers. Ms. Hamaker noted that the Commission was examining what other countries with high-performing educational systems have implemented and whether these practices would be appropriate and/or useful for Virginia. Questions were also raised about whether staff would evaluate other states’ practices to see if these would be helpful or useful. Ms. Hamaker noted that Commission staff would provide information about other states’ initiatives to the Advisory Group.

Delegate Peace encouraged the Advisory Group to ask the following question, “What would you do if you knew you couldn’t fail?” He stated that the Advisory Group should keep this question in mind, particularly when evaluating a practice that was not perceived to be feasible but may be the right thing to do. Delegate Peace noted that the Advisory Group needed to remain objective but also willing to confront difficult issues. Additionally, Virginia’s educational system is controlled by multiple hands and very dependent on political parties. Politically sensitive issues would also need to be acknowledged.

One Advisory Group member asserted that Thomas Jefferson believed that Constitution needed to be reviewed every 30 years. However, our educational system/structure has not been evaluated or revised in 40 years. One of the comparison countries, Finland, accomplished change with a comprehensive approach rather than a piecemeal approach. While the Virginia Department of Education has a strategic plan, it is not universally followed.

Another Advisory Group member stated that the burden for providing an education has shifted to the localities. In addition, classroom teachers have been subjected to the mandates imposed by fragmented, piecemeal, and *ad hoc* strategies. There is a need to look at this issue holistically; legislation comes with good intentions but may not always consider the “big picture.”

## **Study Subcommittees**

### *Advisory Group Discussion*

The Advisory Group was introduced to the subcommittees of the study, which were created to focus discussion and recommendations on the common findings from the literature review. The four subcommittees are:

- The International Achievement Gap – Ms. Hamaker noted that this subcommittee would focus on the research findings and help determine which practices would be appropriate or useful for further consideration.
- Structure and Support of the Educational System – This subcommittee will evaluate Virginia’s educational structure and develop recommendations that may improve educational achievement.
- Teacher Preparedness/Effectiveness – A great amount of research points to teacher effectiveness as a primary factor that influences student achievement. This subcommittee will review findings from comparison countries to determine whether they can be employed in Virginia.
- Future Considerations – This subcommittee would discuss issues that were broader than this study and offer recommendations. These issues include STEM-H, students at-risk, high ability students, and virtual learning.

A question was raised whether the “Future Considerations” subcommittee ought to be renamed “Other Considerations.” Ms. Hamaker stated that the Advisory Group could certainly rename it because the issues that this subcommittee would be addressing were potentially large enough in scope to constitute separate study.

Ms. Hamaker asked the members to complete the blue sheet in their packets to rank their choice of subcommittee. She noted that it was likely that the subcommittees would be meeting simultaneously and that staff would try to accommodate the members’ preferences. The subcommittees will convene during the June 26 Advisory Group meeting.

Delegate Peace discussed several books that the Advisory Group may wish to consider for summer reading. He recently read the following books:

*The Republic* by Plato

*Hot, Flat and Crowded* by Thomas Freedman

*The Global Achievement Gap* by Tony Wagner

*Drive* by Dan Pink

*The Coming Jobs War* by Jim Clifton (suggested by Patrick Tolan)

Delegate Peace also referenced a recent Richmond Forum which he attended. The topic was “Revolutionizing Education.” Sir Ken Robinson and Rafe Esquith were the speakers. Delegate Peace asked staff to investigate whether this forum was available online so that it could be shared with the Advisory Group. Ms. Hamaker stated that she would investigate this for the June 26 Advisory Group meeting.

#### **Next Steps and Adjournment**

Ms. Hamaker advised the Advisory Group that information about future Advisory Group and subcommittee meetings would be sent via email. The meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

The Advisory Group meets next for a Roundtable Discussion on June 26, 2012 at 10:00 a.m. in House Room 3, the Capitol.