



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Anne B. Holton
Secretary of Education

July 14, 2015

The Honorable S. Chris Jones
Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
P.O. Box 5059
Suffolk, Virginia 23435

The Honorable Walter A. Stosch
Co-Chairman, Senate Finance Committee
Innsbrook Centre
4551 Cox Road, Suite 110
Glen Allen, Virginia 23060-6740

The Honorable Charles J. Colgan
Co-Chairman, Senate Finance Committee
10660 Aviation Lane
Manassas, Virginia 20110-2701

Dear Delegate Jones, Senator Stosch, and Senator Colgan:

Pursuant to Item 127, Paragraph F of the 2015 Appropriation Act, I am pleased to transmit a report on the potential benefits and costs of Virginia participating in the 2018 administration of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) as an independent educational system.

The 2015 Appropriation Act directed the Secretary of Education to consult with the Board of Education in investigating the benefits and costs of Virginia participating in the 2018 administration of PISA as an independent educational system or "country" so that state-level results could be obtained. As background, PISA, the largest international education study in the world, is a set of tests administered to students 15 years of age in 70 countries. PISA measures student performance in mathematics, reading, and science. Conducted every three years, each PISA data cycle assesses one of the three core subject areas in depth (considered the major domain), although all three core subjects are assessed in each cycle. The other two subjects are considered minor subject areas for that assessment year.

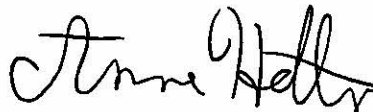
States can choose to pay to participate in PISA as independent educational systems. If Virginia participates as an independent system, results for Virginia students will be reported relative to other states and to the United States overall as well as to other participating countries. Participation in PISA allows Virginia to pair with other high performing states and provinces around the world with similar demographics. Other states have chosen to participate as independent educational systems in previous PISA administrations. Massachusetts, Florida, and Connecticut participated as independent systems in 2012 and North Carolina and Massachusetts in 2015.

A report providing an overview of PISA and detailing the advantages and disadvantages of Virginia participating as an independent system is attached. If Virginia is to participate in the 2018 administration of PISA as an independent entity, a commitment to participate must be made by March 2016. Specific costs for 2018 have not yet been determined but the costs for the 2015 administration were more than \$600,000. Since existing funds are not sufficient to cover these costs, a new appropriation may be required. Alternatively, because of the strong interest in an international achievement measure for Virginia's students, the business community and educational foundations could be approached as potential funding sources.

Should Virginia not participate as an independent educational system in 2018 PISA, Virginia students will be included in the sample for the United States, but state-level results specific to the performance of Virginia students will not be available.

Thank you for your continued support of the students of the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,



Anne Holton

Attachment:

Report on Virginia's Potential Participation in the Program for International Student Assessment as an Independent Educational System in 2018



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

REPORT

**Report on Virginia's Potential
Participation in the Program for
International Student Assessment as
an Independent Educational System
in 2018**

JULY 13, 2015

**The Honorable Anne Holton
Secretary of Education**

Background

In the past several years there has been considerable interest in obtaining information about how the achievement of Virginia students compares to that of their peers in other countries. One way to obtain such information is for Virginia to participate as an independent educational agency in the 2018 Administration of the Program of International Student Assessments (PISA) so that Virginia-specific results may be obtained. PISA is the largest international education study in the world and is comprised of a set of tests administered to students 15 years of age.

The 2015 Appropriation Act directed the Board of Education and the Secretary of Education to investigate the benefits and costs of Virginia participating in the 2018 administration of the Program of International Student Assessments (PISA) as a “country” so that Virginia-specific results could be obtained.

Item 127, Paragraph F. of the 2015 Appropriation Act contains the following requirement:

“The Secretary of Education, in consultation with the Board of Education, shall review, assess the value and cost of obtaining state-level results from the Program for International Student Assessment. The Secretary shall report the findings to the Chairmen of House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees no later than July 15, 2015.”

Additional information about PISA and the potential advantages and disadvantages of Virginia’s participation as an independent educational system in the 2018 administration of PISA is provided in the remainder of this report. Should Virginia not participate as an independent educational system in the 2018 PISA, Virginia students will be included in the sample for the United States but results specific to the performance of Virginia students will not be available.

Overview of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)

PISA, the largest international education study in the world, is a set of tests administered to students 15 years of age. PISA measures student performance in mathematics, reading, and science literacy. Conducted every three years, each PISA data cycle assesses one of the three core subject areas in depth (considered the major domain), although all three core subjects are assessed in each cycle. The other two subjects are considered minor subject areas for that assessment year. Assessing all three subjects every three years allows countries to have a consistent source of achievement data in each of the three subjects while rotating one area as the primary focus over the years. In 2018, the next year of administration for PISA, reading will be the subject area of focus. It is expected that PISA will be administered in October-November 2018, and results will be reported at the state level in December 2019. Results are not reported at the division, school or student level.

States can participate in PISA as independent educational systems. If Virginia chooses to participate as an educational system, results for Virginia students will be reported relative to other states and to the United States overall as well as to other participating countries. Participation in 2018 PISA administration requires a commitment by March 2016. Participants must have the technical expertise necessary to administer an international online assessment and must be able to meet the full costs of participation.

Advantages of Virginia's Participation in PISA as an Independent Educational System

- Results would provide a comparison of Virginia students' learning in reading, mathematics, and science to that of students in other countries, as well as a comparison to the performance of students in other states that choose to participate and to the United States overall. Subgroup performance comparisons will be reported if the sample is large enough to be statistically significant for gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.
- Members of the business community and policymakers have expressed considerable interest in how Virginia students compare to those in other countries.

- Participation is age-based rather than grade level or course so the results would provide a measure of the cumulative learning outcomes of Virginia students rather than attainment of a specific curriculum.
- PISA focuses on literacy or the use of mathematics in real-world situations. All problems are context-based and would provide information about Virginia students' application of skills in contexts that are likely to be new for students.
- PISA is the only international assessment that offers an international comparison of students in the United States at the high school level. If Virginia participates as an independent educational system, state results relative to international results will be reported.

Disadvantages of Virginia's Participation in PISA as an Independent Educational System

- Participation in PISA as an independent educational system requires a minimum sample of 50 schools and 1500 students. However, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the organization responsible for PISA, recommends larger sample sizes of approximately 4,500 students in order to get finer-grained breakouts.
- Funds must be appropriated for participation. The cost for participating in PISA 2015 was about \$630,000. A final cost estimate will be available once the national contractual agreement is in place and the final design for 2018 has been established. This information should be available toward the end of 2015 or in early 2016.
- PISA requires approximately 3 hours to administer and does not replace other required tests. As described above, at least 1500 students in a minimum of 50 schools must be tested so the impact on schools and divisions would be considerable.
- Results are not reported until a full year after the assessment is administered and are not reported at the division, school, or student level.
- Students are informed of their selection to participate on assessment day, and their participation is voluntary. Since student participation is voluntary, Virginia's participation could be nullified (not reported) if less than 80% of those sampled participate.
- A percentage of the sample of tested students from each school will be required to respond to a 20 to 30 minute questionnaire providing

information about themselves, their attitudes to learning, and their homes. Questions might include parent occupation, the highest level of parent education, and an index of home possessions related to family wealth and home educational resources. Some parents may object to the content of these questions.

Next Steps

Participation in the 2018 administration of PISA would require a commitment by March 2016. While existing funds are not available to cover the costs of Virginia's participation in PISA, because of the considerable interest in an international achievement measure for Virginia's students, the business community and educational foundations could be approached as potential funding sources. If this strategy were not successful, a budget initiative might be needed.