



September 13, 2021

The Honorable Janet D. Howell
Chair, Senate Finance and
Appropriations Committee
Virginia General Assembly
P.O. Box 2608
Reston, VA 20195-0608

The Honorable L. Louise Lucas
Chair, Senate Education and Health
Committee
Virginia General Assembly
P.O. Box 700
Portsmouth, VA 23705-0700

The Honorable Luke E. Torian
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
Virginia General Assembly
4222 Fortuna Plaza, Suite 659
Dumfries, VA 22025

The Honorable Roslyn C. Tyler
Chair, House Education Committee
Virginia General Assembly
25359 Blue Star Highway
Jarratt, VA 23867

Dear Madams and Sir:

In October 2020, the General Assembly's Joint Legislative Audit Review Commission (JLARC) released its report, Operations and Performance of the Virginia Department of Education. The report found that the Office of School Quality (OSQ) has responsibility for more schools in need of improvement than comparable offices in North Carolina and Kentucky. The JLARC report generated three recommendations related to OSQ, one of which asked the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to develop and implement a plan to guide its transition to a new school improvement model and estimate the additional staffing required to effectively implement the new model. I am pleased to share the attached report which provides a narrative overview of a presentation by the OSQ to the Virginia Board of Education (Board). The report outlines VDOE's plan to enhance its support for school divisions as these divisions implement a research-based school improvement model. It also includes the specific staffing requirements and budgetary impact to bring this model to fruition.

Changes to OSQ's approach to school improvement were underway prior to the report's release and have continued to date. These changes include balancing the demands of compliance to the Standards of Quality and assisting schools and divisions build local capacity to meet the standards, aligning OSQ personnel with VDOE Superintendent's Regions, coordinating support to school divisions with other VDOE offices, and providing technical assistance via webinars and virtual

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conferences. Division and school leaders have articulated their support for this new, collaborative approach. However, given the OSQ's limited resources, it is unable to affect the systemic change needed to improve all schools across the Commonwealth.

To align with the Board's Comprehensive Plan (Priority #3), the OSQ also needs to increase its capacity to fully support a system of continuous improvement for all schools. After researching effective state educational agency approaches to school improvement and scanning neighboring SEA organizational models, the OSQ determined that the VDOE should establish an interagency School Quality Committee that meets regularly to coordinate support to schools and divisions, and reorganize and staff the OSQ to provide high quality differentiated support to the field.

Employing a case management approach, the OSQ would collaborate with divisions, schools, educators, families and regional partners through a continuous improvement process to ensure each child in Virginia has access to a high-quality education. The OSQ would do this through regional support teams (RSTs) aligned with the existing Superintendent's Regions. RSTs would provide professional learning opportunities and need-based coaching focused on building leadership capacity, team development, and inclusive instruction practices to assist schools in improving educational outcomes. Each team would be task organized with capabilities to address the following functional areas: Continuous Improvement; Curriculum and Instruction; Data Analytics; School Readiness; Human Resources; Special Education; Operations; Literacy; Principal and Leadership Development; Family Engagement; and Career and Technical Education.

To realize this model, VDOE will require additional staffing to be phased in over two fiscal years. In FY23, VDOE would bring on an additional 5 Regional Support Team Leads and 20 School Quality RST Specialists for a cost of \$3.33M. VDOE would hire an additional 25 School Quality RST Specialists for \$3.23M in FY24 bringing the total proposal cost to \$6.55M.

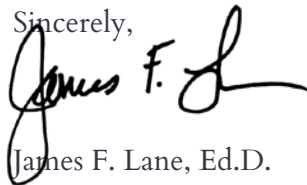
The desired outcomes from this regional support model include an increased ability for the VDOE to provide support as follows: Build capacity (superintendents, division leadership and principals); Strengthen instructional leadership; Utilize data to support division decision making; Provide technical support for aligned quality curriculum and instruction; Integrate continuous

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improvement strategies; and Align division level systems and processes, governance, resources and priorities.

If you require additional information, please contact Holly Coy, Assistant Superintendent, Department of Policy and Communications at (804) 225-2092 or Holly.Coy@doe.virginia.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James F. Lane". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "L".

James F. Lane, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Public Instruction

JFL/LMS

Enclosure

c: The Honorable Atif Qarni

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT ♥ F EDUCATION

**A New Virginia School Improvement
Model**

Presented to:

**Chairs of the House Education and Appropriations
committees and Senate Education and Health and Finance
and Appropriations**

October 1, 2021

*Virginia Department of Education
P. O. Box 2120
Richmond, Virginia 23218-2120*



Introduction

In October 2020, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) concluded an audit of several Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) departments, including the Office of School Quality (OSQ). In its report, *Operations and Performance of the Virginia Department of Education*, JLARC confirmed the need for the OSQ to change its approach to school improvement and recommended additional staffing to implement a differentiated support model. In response to the JLARC recommendations, the General Assembly directed VDOE:

...develop a plan to implement an effective and appropriately-resourced school improvement program. The plan should specify the activities necessary for its Office of School Quality to provide effective support to school divisions in the school improvement program, and the number of state staff and funding required to effectively implement the planned activities. The plan should also define performance measures that will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the services its Office of School Quality provides to school divisions and how it will evaluate performance compared to those measures and make changes as needed to ensure ongoing effectiveness. The department shall submit the plan for the state's more effective and appropriately-resourced school improvement program to the Board of Education and the Chairs of the House Education and Appropriations committees and Senate Education and Health and Finance and Appropriations committees no later than November 1, 2021. ([Item 140.C](#) of the 2021 Appropriation Act)

Currently, the OSQ is part of the Division of School Quality, Instruction and Performance, with the OSQ Director reporting to the Deputy Superintendent and Chief of Staff. Recognizing that school quality is the responsibility of all VDOE departments while assigned to daily management by OSQ, in September 2020, the State Superintendent elevated the OSQ Director to a cabinet-level position. The OSQ's current personnel structure is 12 employees, including the director, associate director, secretary, and a mix of federal and state school improvement coordinators and specialists. The current ratio of one OSQ personnel to twenty-two schools requiring assistance has severely restricted the VDOE's ability to move beyond a compliance-focused approach to a school improvement model.

The OSQ has more schools per staff in need of improvement than comparable offices in neighboring states. For example, North Carolina has one staff per eight schools, and Kentucky employs a one-to-one ratio. The JLARC report also articulated the impact of this model on employee satisfaction within the OSQ. VDOE's challenge was to transform the OSQ into an office that partners with schools in a way that is responsive to their differentiated needs, builds school divisions' overall capacity, and effects school improvement at scale. Many changes in the model of support and approach have occurred over the year; however, additional capacity remains a need.

VDOE presented its plan to the Virginia Board of Education (Board) during its April 2021 business meeting. To ensure alignment to federal and state law the plan was informed by the Board's *Regulations Establishing Standards for the Accreditation of Public Schools in Virginia*,

section 8VAC20-131-400 titled *Application of the School Quality Indicator Performance Levels to Actions* that defines the requirements for schools based on their School Quality Indicators and the U. S. Education Department's *Every Student Succeeds Act*. Specifically,

- All schools receive level I, level II, or level III designations based on Academic Achievement, Achievement Gaps and Student Engagement and Outcomes data.
- A school rating of level III on any indicator, or level II for Academic Achievement indicators in (English, mathematics or science), triggers the need for VDOE's involvement in implementing school improvement requirements for identified schools.
- *Every Students Succeeds Act* is based on state accreditation data that federally identifies schools for School Improvement Grant funding.

The proposed plan is also aligned with Priority #3 of the Board's Comprehensive Plan, "Ensure successful implementation of the Profile of a Virginia Graduate and the accountability system for school quality as embodied in the revisions to the Standards of Accreditation" and the VDOE's Goal #1 of its Strategic Plan, "Ensure student success and school quality."

Rationale

State Education Agencies (SEAs), uniquely positioned at the intersection of federal, local, and external stakeholders, can serve as a coordinator of capacity building efforts through the statewide system of supports. In his *Handbook on Statewide Systems of Support*, Sam Redding states that systemic capacity for change is achieved by the state creating and disseminating knowledge, enhancing the supply of personnel equipped for school improvement, and providing the necessary data systems to support school improvement . But to do so, according to Ashley Jochim at the Center on Reinventing Public Education, SEAs must be able to move beyond rules-based technical assistance and "reach far more deeply into the operations of local schools, as well as to draw upon talent and expertise outside of the SEA's traditional compliance roles." (Jochim and CRPE, 2016). However, "reaching deeply" into the inner workings of Virginia's 132 different school divisions without understanding the contextual factors impacting their performance may lead to imposing solutions absent a clear understanding of the problem, or layering on solutions that fail to address root causes. Schools and divisions are complex, adaptive systems — where parts of the system change as they interact with one another — therefore any interventions must take a systems approach to problem identification or risk treating the symptom, not the root cause of the problem.

Moreover, SEAs attempting to improve school performance through Technical Assistance (TA) should do so in ways that not only address these complexities through tailored support, but also capture the lessons learned from each intervention to increase the SEA's organizational capacity and adaptability. A scan of other SEA improvement models finds several states - Ohio, Georgia and North Carolina - introducing regional case management systems. The OSQ have continued to monitor and have dialogue with these states to capitalize on their lessons learned and help inform the OSQ's transformation.

Recommendations

If adequate funding is appropriated by the General Assembly, the plan would employ two complementary approaches to achieve differentiated support, one that addresses the organization alignment within the VDOE and the other that builds the VDOE's capacity to affect change at scale throughout the state.

Recommendation #1 establishes a School Quality Committee within the VDOE to coordinate department support across agency units. This committee will build on the VDOE's goal to collaborate across departments and offices to develop a data-based, continuous school and child care improvement planning process encompassing the school and child care quality indicators to build local leadership capacity.

Recommendation #2 builds the OSQ's capacity to differentiate support by need and leverage the power of deep collaboration to identify and address root causes inhibiting high-quality education. The OSQ maintains compliance and statewide coordination responsibility while Regional Support Teams (RST), aligned with the existing Superintendent's Regions, collaborate with divisions, schools, educators, families and regional partners through a continuous improvement process to ensure each child in Virginia has access to a high-quality education. RSTs provide professional learning opportunities and need-based coaching focused on building leadership capacity, team development, and inclusive instruction practices to assist schools in improving educational outcomes. Each team would be task-organized with capabilities to address the following functional areas:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continuous Improvement• Curriculum and Instruction• Data Analytics• School Readiness• Human Resources• Special Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Operations• Literacy• Principal and Leadership Development• Family Engagement• Career and Technical Education
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The VDOE envisions the preponderance of the team's efforts going to the schools and divisions that need it the most - those with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), and those with Level III and/or Level II indicators. Additionally, the OSQ will provide high quality universal support to all schools and divisions throughout the Commonwealth by leveraging VDOE's position within the education sector to convene stakeholders together in community. The RST Lead will help identify opportunities for growth and take a systemic approach to build the capacity of division and school leadership to address these issues. Key to the success of this model is the increased use of data to drive decision making. The goal is to not only use reflective data to engage schools and divisions that are in an identified status, but to identify those that are at risk of moving toward identified status.

Scaling the OSQ from its current 12-person office to the RST model will be done in stages, adding interim capacity in the near term to set conditions for future success. The OSQ recently

added four school quality specialists which expands its capacity to provide additional support to MOU, Level III and Level II schools; increased monitoring meetings from two to three times per year and broadened TA offerings. At full capability, the OSQ will employ five RSTs (Regions 3, 6, 7 and 8 will be combined due to the current number of identified schools) to increase divisions' and schools' human, organizational, structural and material capacities.

OSQ Staffing (FY21)	Current OSQ Staffing (FY 22)	Interim OSQ Staffing (FY 23)	Full OSQ Staffing (FY 24)
12 Full Time Personnel	Add (4) School Quality Specialist (ARP) Add (1) Data Analyst (ARP) Total OSQ Personnel: (17) Full Time Employees	Add (5) Regional Support Team Leads Add (20) School Quality RST Specialists Total OSQ Personnel: (42) Full Time Employees	Add (25) School Quality RST Specialists Total OSQ Personnel: (67) Full Time Employees
Additional Funding Requested each FY:		\$3,325,860	\$3,226,425
Total Funding Requested for FY23 & FY24 - \$6,552,285			

The expected outcomes from this regional support model include an increased ability for the VDOE to provide support to:

- Build Capacity (superintendents, division leadership and principals)
- Strengthen instructional leadership
- Utilize data to support division decision making
- Provide technical assistance for aligned quality curriculum and instruction
- Integrate continuous improvement strategies
- Align division and school level systems and processes, governance, resources and priorities

With the support of the General Assembly to provide the additional staff to create the RSTs and the deployment of the revised school improvement model, the VDOE via the OSQ will provide the necessary support for each Virginia school division and school to provide high-quality instruction to all Virginia students.