

## Virginia schools boards pass anti-SOL resolutions

By Valerie Strauss, Updated: October 27 at 9:08 am

About 30 school boards in Virginia have passed resolutions that call on education officials to revamp the Standards of Learning testing system, saying that there is “little research” that shows that students “will be better prepared to succeed in their careers and college” by taking the 34 standardized tests the state gives to each child between grades 3-11.

The resolutions in Virginia — where there are about 130 school districts — are part of a growing backlash around the country by academics, educators, parents and others against the use of standardized tests as the chief “accountability” metric to evaluate students, teachers, principals and schools for high-stakes purposes.

In 2012, Texas became the first state in which school boards began to pass anti-testing resolutions and other states followed suit. A [national resolution protesting high-stakes standardized testing](#) was then released by a coalition of national education, civil rights and parents groups, as well as educators who are trying to build a broad-based movement against the Obama administration’s test-centric school reform program. More school boards in Virginia are expected to pass an anti-SOL resolution.

A year earlier, in 2011, a group of Virginia school superintendents [indirectly bashed the Standards of Learning](#) by trying (unsuccessfully) to get the state to allow students to take their SOL exams anytime during the school year rather than at the end of the year. In 2012 and this year, the state [introduced tougher SOL exams](#) in reading and math, leading to a drop in schools in both subjects.

The resolutions all say that the Standards of Learning are not good measures of how well students, teachers and schools are actually doing and that there is little evidence that the practice of using student test scores to evaluate teachers and principals has any validity. They ask the Virginia General Assembly to:

...create a new accountability system that “encompasses balanced assessments, reflects greater validity, uses more cost efficient sampling techniques and other external evaluation arrangements, allows for expedited test retakes, and more accurately reflects what students know.

The resolutions being passed are all nearly identical to a model on the [Web site of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents](#), which is leading the effort. (See text below

of a resolution passed in York County.) The Smith Mountain Eagle quoted Steve Staples, the former superintendent of York County Schools and the current executive director of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents, [as saying](#):

The momentum is growing in the state to revamp the system as many more school boards are considering adopting resolutions, major education organizations in the state are organizing to promote these changes together, local chambers of commerce are considering their own resolutions, and members of the General Assembly are beginning to listen.

Here's the text of the resolution passed by York County's school board, mirroring that approved by other Virginia boards:

#### RESOLUTION CONCERNING HIGH STAKES, STANDARDIZED TESTING OF VIRGINIA PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS

WHEREAS, the state and federal accountability system's over reliance on high stakes testing as the only meaningful measurement of school quality continues to strangle public schools and undermines educators' ability to transform a traditional system of schooling into a broad range of learning experiences that better prepares our students to live successfully and be globally competitive; and

WHEREAS, scant research exists to support Virginia's assumption that students will be better prepared to succeed in college or in their careers by taking and passing thirty-four criterion referenced tests in grades three through 11; and

WHEREAS, we believe the Commonwealth's prosperity is dependent upon a meaningful and relevant education system of high quality, and without such a system Virginia's economic competitiveness and ability to attract new business will falter; and

WHEREAS, there is insufficient evidence and limited research supporting the conversion of criterion referenced measures into student growth measures as authentic indicators of student achievement; and

WHEREAS, there is insufficient evidence and limited research supporting the use of student growth measures as an indicator of teacher, principal and superintendent effectiveness; and

WHEREAS, Virginia's system of measuring teacher, principal, superintendent and school accountability at both the state and federal level is based on a flawed methodology that penalizes otherwise high performing schools and lacks any rational research foundation; and

WHEREAS, the work of creating more engaging student learning experiences requires changes in the culture and structure of the systems in which teachers and students work; and

WHEREAS, student centered learning should be the focus in the classroom and result in deep and meaningful understanding, as opposed to a broad yet shallow overemphasis on

that which may be easily measured by standardized assessments; and

WHEREAS, we believe that a balanced system of assessments providing a more comprehensive measure of student learning and growth is far better in describing student achievement than annual criterion referenced tests; and

WHEREAS, our vision for students is to be engaged in meaningful and relevant learning that cultivates individual talents, afford options to meet the unique needs of students, and to recognize that students can be both consumers and creators of knowledge; and

WHEREAS, only by developing new capacities and conditions in Virginia's divisions and schools, and within the communities they serve, will we ensure that learning is a product of innovation, creativity, collaboration, communication and critical thinking; and

WHEREAS, these are the very skills and attitudes essential to the survival of our democracy, and that business leaders desire; and

WHEREAS, we expect to be held accountable for the performance of our public schools and proudly promote the outstanding education we provide our students, but we believe the current system of accountability through seemingly endless performance testing dominates instructional time, limits precious resources available to our schools and impedes our ability to prepare our students to compete against others on a world-wide basis.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the School Board of York County, Virginia, calls on the Virginia General Assembly to reexamine Virginia public school assessments and the system of accountability for which they form the basis and to improve the current accountability system so that it encompasses balanced assessments, reflects greater validity, uses more cost efficient sampling techniques and other external evaluation arrangements, allows for expedited test retakes, and more accurately reflects what students know, appreciate and can do in terms of the rigorous standards essential to their success, enhances the role of teachers as designers, guides to instruction and leaders, and nurtures the sense of inquiry and love of learning in all students.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT THE School Board of York County, Virginia calls on its Superintendent, principals, teachers and others staff members to help students master the content and skills of the curriculum by continuing to promote the joy of teaching and learning with a focus on deep, meaningful, transformative learning, rather than an over-emphasis on just covering content that can be easily assessed by standardized tests

The list of school boards that have passed this or a similar resolution in Virginia include, according to the [Smith Mountain Eagle](#):

Albemarle County  
Appomattox County  
Bristol City  
Charlottesville City  
Clarke County

Colonial Heights  
Covington City  
Cumberland County  
Fauquier County  
Frederick County  
Gloucester County  
Greensville/Emporia  
Halifax City  
King William County  
Middlesex County  
New Kent County  
Prince Edward County  
Prince William County  
Rappahannock County  
Richmond County  
Salem City  
Scott County  
Smyth County  
Staunton City  
Tazewell County  
Westmoreland County  
Williamsburg/James City  
York County

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