



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

HOUSE OF DELEGATES
RICHMOND

SCHUYLER T. VANVALKENBURG

900 EAST MAIN STREET
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23219

SEVENTY-SECOND DISTRICT

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
PRIVILEGES AND ELECTIONS
EDUCATION
GENERAL LAWS

December 22, 2022

Virginia Board of Education
101 North 14th Street
Richmond, VA 23219

TRANSMITTED VIA EMAIL

Dear Board President Gecker and Members of the Board,

The Commission on Civic Education has a statutory obligation to provide feedback and make recommendations to the Board of Education on any revisions to the Standards of Learning (SOL) for civics and government, an obligation outlined in [§ 30-351](#). Over the last two and a half years, Dr. Alice Reilly has acted as the Commission's representative as the standards made their way through the revision process outlined in [§ 22.1-253.13:1](#). This process involved thousands of stakeholders, multiple workgroups, and numerous opportunities for public comment and input. As part of its mandate, the Commission on Civic Education monitored this long and careful process so that it could provide feedback and make recommendations.

At the August 17, 2022, Board of Education meeting, Superintendent of Public Instruction Jillian Balow asked the Board to postpone the first review of the standards created during this two-year process. Three months later, on Thursday, November 17, 2022, the Board chose to discard the standards at the Superintendent's request. This circumvented a first review in which the standards could have still been debated and revised publicly and transparently. At this meeting, the Superintendent introduced alternative standards significantly different from those crafted in the two-year revision process. Superintendent Balow asked the Board to start the review process immediately, despite the fact that the newly presented standards had been privately drafted and had only been public for days. These alternative standards were created privately, with no public input, in less than four months. When asked who helped create the new alternative standards, Superintendent Balow provided a list of nine mostly out-of-state and ideologically right-wing groups or individuals. Virginia citizens, scholars, teachers, historical and civic groups, parents, and students - who had a voice and participated extensively in crafting the standards proposed in August 2022 - were left out of the creation of the new alternative proposal.

As a Commission, we would like to officially voice our disapproval of what has transpired over the last six months. The Superintendent has ignored the SOL revision process outlined in Virginia statute and discarded the work of thousands of Virginians to try and impose a partisan curriculum on the state's school systems at the last second and in secret. Virginia's students, parents, and educators will have little reason to have confidence in the standards the Superintendent and

Department of Education produced because of this continued delay, lack of transparency, and seemingly political motivations behind the changes.

The Board, aware of the weaknesses of the draft proposed by the Governor's Administration and the Superintendent, instead of moving it forward, directed the Virginia Department of Education to merge both the original August 17, 2022, document and the alternative November 17, 2022, document for the Board to consider for first review early in 2023. At the time of the submission of this letter, the Virginia Department of Education has not publicly released draft standards resulting from this merge, and no January Board meeting to present the merged draft standards has been called.

At its December 21, 2022, meeting, the Commission on Civic Education voted to send a letter to the Board of Education urging the Board to accept the revisions [proposed by the Virginia Social Studies Leaders Consortium, Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and American Historical Association](#). This proposed draft represents a compromise between the strengths of the August 17, 2022, and November 17, 2022, drafts and further addresses the public comments and concerns raised at the November 17, 2022, Board of Education meeting. We believe this draft, created by professionals and building on the work of the thousands of people who participated in the public process to create the originally proposed standards, will allow the standards process to get back on track, build public confidence in the final product, and enable us to focus on what really matters: teaching students history.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Schuyler Van Valkenburg". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "S".

Delegate Schuyler VanValkenburg
Chairman, Virginia Commission on Civic Education

cc:

The Honorable Aimee Rogstad Guidera, Secretary of Education
Superintendent of Public Instruction, Jillian Balow