

Educational Partnerships at All Levels

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Fairfax County Public Schools' new Superintendent Jack Dale posed an interesting idea to a joint meeting of the Superintendent's Business-Industry Advisory Council and the Fairfax County General Assembly delegation last week. The Superintendent wondered aloud as to whether it might be more meaningful to measure each student's individual progress each year rather than the school-wide assessments of Standards of Learning or No Child Left Behind. Many persons have heard me speak about and have read in this column my belief that every student should have an individual education plan and that testing should be related to the student's progress on that plan set jointly by the parents, student, and school. Rather than the industrial model of the state SOL's and the federal No Child Left Behind Act that assumes that all students are to perform at the same level at the same time, the customization model would encourage students to soar to the maximum of their abilities and not be limited to averaging or static standards. Hopefully the Superintendent will push his ideas on accountability.

Governor Mark R. Warner continues to show leadership in educational reform. Recently he signed an historic agreement between the Commonwealth and 63 public and private, two- and four-year colleges and universities to provide any student in Virginia the opportunity to obtain college credit for courses while still in high school. The senior year in high school that many including the Governor feel is too often wasted will now include an option for students to complete a group of agreed-upon subjects through Advanced Placement or dual-enrollment programs for college credit.

An additional 61,000 additional students are expected to seek admission to Virginia colleges and universities by 2010. The initiative by Governor Warner will help relieve the space crunch, and for parents and students it can represent an average savings of \$5,000 in tuition.

For many years Northern Virginia Community College and George Mason University have had a "2+2" agreement whereby students completing their academic work at NVCC could transfer to GMU for their final two years of study. In line with the Governor's initiative, conversations are already underway among NVCC President Bob Templin, GMU President Alan Merten, and Superintendent Jack Dale to create new programs that will smooth the way for dual enrollments in high school, NVCC, and GMU. Articulated agreements among the three institutions would ensure that students could transfer credits and complete their programs in less time than currently possible.

The leaders of the public schools and public colleges in the region are to be congratulated along with the Governor for their willingness to examine old paradigms and to change them when necessary. Higher education has traditionally resisted such changes. Necessity now requires change. The students of the region are the winners with the changes.