

Low Performing Schools in Urban High Poverty Communities

Education Subcommittee,
Senate Finance Committee

January 13, 2015

Study Mandate

JLARC to study options for restructuring the lowest performing schools or districts

- primary reasons for low school performance
- successful approaches for urban high poverty schools in Virginia
- options used in other states and cities
- appropriate criteria for state intervention

For full text see Item 31 of the 2013 Appropriation Act

Student Achievement Influenced by Community, Family, and Schools



Community

- Local economy
- Employment
- Education
- Crime and violence



Family

- Household income
- Physical, social, & emotional support
- Stability of family & living situation
- Cognitive stimulation in the home



Public Schools

- School Board & division
- Funding
- Teachers & principals
- Curriculum & instruction
- School climate
- Remedial & enrichment opportunities



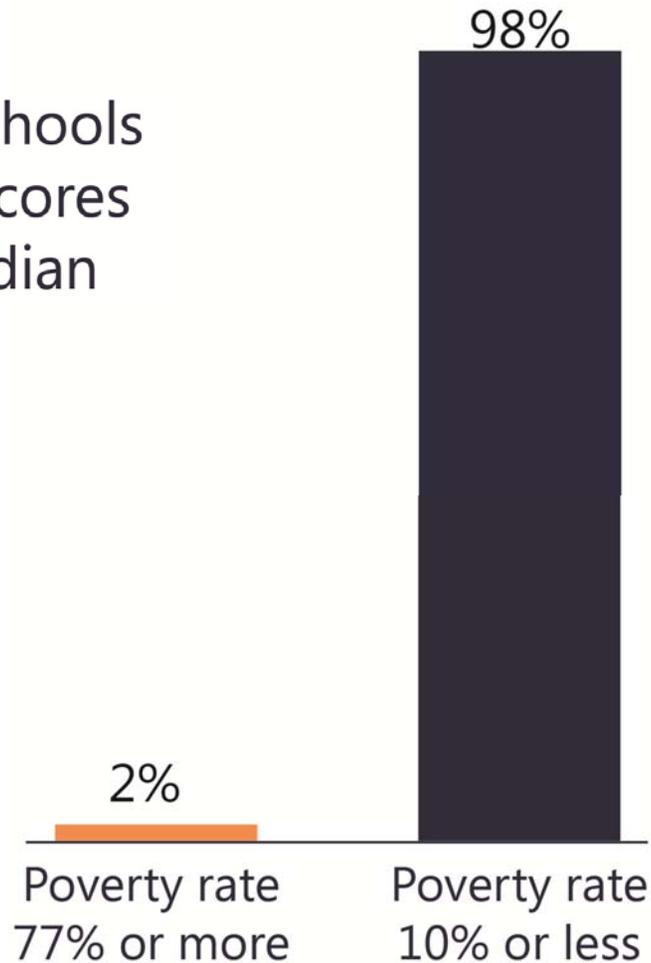
Student Achievement

Poverty Poses Significant Challenges for Virginia's Urban Students

- Students in high poverty schools more likely to
 - miss school days
 - change schools during the school year
- Poverty cited as significant challenge by teachers and principals
 - Students regularly come to school unprepared for learning because of difficulties at home

Low School Performance in Virginia Is Strongly Associated With High Poverty

% of elementary schools with English SOL scores **ABOVE** state median



Low Performing Schools Often Lack a Sufficient Number of Effective Teachers

- 7 of 11 low performing schools reported lacking enough effective teachers
- Two challenges with removing ineffective teachers
 - Time and documentation required for termination
 - Difficulty recruiting quality teachers

Staff at Higher Performing Schools Use Recommended Instructional Practices

- Effective teachers
 - Regular use of student performance data
 - Team approach to teaching
 - Ongoing professional development for teachers
- Principal serves as instructional leader
- Limited turnover among teachers and principals

Higher Performing Schools Provide Support Services to Students

- Achievable Dream schools
 - Partner with local businesses and City of Newport News
- Broad range of support services
 - Character education
 - Mentoring and monitoring
 - Medical and personal care services

School Improvement Efforts in Virginia Have Had Moderately Positive Impact

- Low performing schools subject to state assistance and requirements
 - MOU with Board of Education, school restructuring, federal School Improvement Grant
- About 40% of schools improved relative to the state average
 - Nearly half of schools still substantially below the state average score

State Takeover Unlikely to Lead to Greater Improvement than Past Virginia Efforts

- Insufficient evidence in most states whether takeover has been successful
 - Insufficient evidence from older takeover initiatives
 - Other state takeovers too recent to assess
- Moderate improvement in Louisiana, but similar to results in Virginia
 - In both states, moderate improvement in some schools
 - At most schools subject to improvement efforts, performance remains low

Accountability for Improving School Performance is Essential

- State has constitutional obligation to ensure high quality K-12 education
- Ability to exercise greater control over low performing schools is critical

Virginia Has Used MOUs to Support Prior Improvement Efforts

- Local school divisions have had final authority
- State played more of an advisory role
 - Consultation on instructional programs and personnel
 - Provide documentation on planning and actual expenditures

Stronger MOUs Would Compel Better Decisions, But State Role Needs to Be Established

- Use VDOE expertise and insight when necessary to require—rather than merely suggest—changes
- Binding state authority to override local division on key budgetary, personnel, and instructional decisions
- Would require changes to Code and Constitution of Virginia

Recommendations

State Board of Education should enter into mandatory MOUs with school divisions that meet criteria for low performance.

The General Assembly may wish to consider

- amending the Code to give the Board legal authority for such MOUs
- amending the Constitution to provide such authority, subject to voter approval

Teachers Can Be Trained Specifically for Urban High Poverty Schools

- Teach for America provides short-term solution
 - Costs local school division up to \$5,000 per teacher placed
- Urban teacher residency programs provide longer-term solution
 - Approximately \$480K in planning costs and \$40K per teacher placed

Recommendations

The General Assembly may wish to consider providing grants to local school divisions that place Teach for America teachers in low performing schools.

The General Assembly may wish to consider providing grants to higher education institutions and local school divisions to develop teacher residency programs.

Non-Traditional Models Can Improve Instruction and Student Support

- Year-round schools
- Support services for students in poverty
 - Achievable Dream model: smaller student body, per-student expenditures \approx 20% higher
- High quality charter schools
 - Can improve high poverty schools, according to research literature
 - Requires rigorous evaluation of charter vendors

Key Findings

- Lower school performance is strongly associated with high poverty, but high poverty schools can perform relatively better with effective staff, instructional practices, and support services.
- Accountability is essential for improving performance; binding MOUs could help.
- The state can provide additional resources and flexibility to assist low performing schools.

Final Report

- Final report posted on JLARC website
 - <http://jlarc.virginia.gov/>