



# BOARD OF VISITORS

**THE VIRGINIA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND THE BLIND**

**P.O. BOX 2069**

**STAUNTON, VA 24402-2069**

**Senator Emmett W. Hanger, Jr.**  
**Board Chairman**

Board of Visitors Meeting  
September 24, 2014

Members present: Senator Emmett Hanger, Senator Barbara Favola, Delegate Dickie Bell, Delegate Tony Wilt, John Pleasants, Virgil Cook, Mike Asip, Judy Sorrell, Paula Johnson

Members absent: Alice Frick and Ann Latham-Anderson

Advisors to the BOV: Wanda Council, VDOE; Wendell Roberts, AAG; Pat Trice, Interim Superintendent

Senator Hanger called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m.

## **Roll Call of Members:**

Roll call of members was conducted by introductions in which new board members were welcomed. Senator Hanger observed that a quorum was present.

## **Reading and approval of June 11, 2014 meeting minutes:**

Virgil Cook clarified one editing correction that “parapro” should be changed to “Paraprofessional” throughout the minutes instead of “parapro”. Correction was noted. John Pleasants moved to Accept the minutes. Delegate Wilt seconded the motion. The motion passed.

## **Reports**

### **Budget and Grants**

Janice Rankin, Director of Operations, presented budget information. Currently, VSDB is 1% over budget. Budget cuts include losing \$150,000 from DOE, and flow-through money from a grant. Budget amendments have been sent to DOE. In addition, a 5% budget cut was required for fiscal 2015 with an additional 2% for 2016. Strategies used for managing budget cuts include keeping job vacancies open, deleting wage positions, and finding an alternative way to fund sports programs. The Strategic Plan has been sent to the Secretary of Education and will be published at end of the month.

VSDB is required to use the new Cardinal accounting system starting October 1<sup>st</sup>. Staff have been participating in training. VSDB is in the first phase of the new system and will run dual systems until 2016.

Decision packages will be submitted to the Department of Planning & Budget.

The following items are also included: IT impact Analysis (\$30,000 to \$50,000) to be in compliance, Art Flash evaluation, (to ensure that workers understand hazards that they may encounter when working on electrical equipment), and OSHA requirements (\$30,000), and a request that teacher salaries be upgraded to be competitive with area LEAs.

One new leased vehicle in addition to one new bus was acquired last year. We are still using 15- and 20-year- old lawnmowers as well as a 30-year-old truck.

Delegate Bell questioned IT security audited by the Auditor of Public Accounts, since IT security did not meet VITA standards. Doug Wright explained IT security scan. *We need an expert to look at our situation.*

Mike Asip questioned the impact of the IDEA grant cut. Janice explained that we are using other grants to supplement cuts. Judy Sorrell commented that use of equipment from regional programs may be possible.

### Human Resources

Nate McLamb, Director of Human Resources, presented information regarding 20 employee vacancies that are being held open for 2014 with nine positions being left open for 2015. One teacher assistant position will be filled. Currently, VSDB has 185.5 total positions, 155 which are currently filled. When one Teacher Assistant and one Housekeeping position are filled then 85% of the positions will be filled.

Compared to the average salary scales for the three surrounding regions of Staunton, Augusta County and Waynesboro, our salaries are the lowest in the area. The proposed teacher salary increase will bring VSDB in alignment with other area school divisions. A decision package will be submitted with the proposed teacher salary increase for the 2015-2016 school year with an additional \$2,500 for teachers with a Master's Degree.

John Pleasants moved that we support the proposal for teacher salary increases. Judy Sorrell seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Delegate Bell asked if we know the number of teaching staff lost because of salary. Four teachers resigned this past school year, two because of poor performance and two because of salary. We expect significant losses of teachers for the upcoming year.

### School Report

Keith VanFossen, Interim Principal, reported that VSDB had a very good start to the school year, with 100 students. We have 12 new students and six more who are being evaluated. The summer-school program went well with the largest enrollment of 35 blind students and 28 deaf

students. Teacher curriculum development of functional academic instruction, which was funded by the Foundation Board, was completed over the summer and is being implemented in two MD classrooms. Benchmark testing is being completed which helps monitor student achievement. Five VI students and three staff are currently at Space Camp in Huntsville, Alabama. Deaf Awareness Week is being celebrated this week with special programs, skits, and history of VSDB. Deaf Alumni weekend—October 2-4--will coincide with the 175th anniversary of VSDB. Deaf middle school students recently attended the naturalization ceremony held at the Museum of Frontier Culture.

Shannon Mueller is the new director of the CROPS Agricultural Program, in which greenhouse activities are incorporated into both deaf and blind classroom activities. Vegetables are being harvested from the school garden and incorporated into cafeteria meals.

Fall sports are in full swing. Four interns from Radford University will be on campus during the second semester.

The VSDB time capsule will be opened on November 14, 2014.

Virgil Cook asked for elaboration on Space Camp designed for VI students. Activities and experiences are created for VI students with adaptation to their needs including tactile and Braille.

#### Admissions Report

Cyndy Ward, Director of Clinical Services, reported that last school year VSDB was unable to accept four prospective students because we did not have the available staff support that these students needed to be successful. This lack of support was due to budget constraints for staff funding for a prospective student who needed 1:1 assistance (physical/feeding). If the responsible LEA will not fund a 1:1 staff position, then VSDB cannot accept the student. Applications continue to come in throughout the school year.

Judy Sorrell suggested that students with medical challenges are able to access Medicaid nurses.

#### Interim Superintendent's Report

Pat Trice, Interim Superintendent, reported that administrative staff members have been working on budget, the Strategic Plan, and Cardinal training. The budget proposal has been completed.

Pat and John Eisenberg, DOE representative, recently met with Secretary of Education, Anne Holton. Secretary Holton is supportive of VSDB, but she recognizes that we have budget challenges and expressed her belief of the need for some different strategic planning to help move VSDB forward. She is willing to advocate to recruit support reducing our budget cuts. John Eisenberg suggested an internal review for a small group to plan a foundation for developing a plan to move forward for the next three years. Pat has scheduled a meeting for October 20 to examine our program to see how best to go forward. Pat invited Secretary Holton

to visit VSDB to see for herself how complex our program has to be and why it is different from public schools.

Upcoming campus events include homecoming activities as part of the 175th anniversary celebration. Nancy Armstrong has stepped forward to help with these events. The time capsule will be opened on November 14<sup>th</sup>, and the Annual Staunton Christmas Tour will include Main Hall with a kick-off of the weekend in the chapel.

In response to a question from John Pleasants, Pat indicated that the stakeholders meetings have been very valuable, helping us determine what the needs are.

Senator Hanger complimented Pat on doing an excellent job. Both Senator Hanger and Senator Favola complimented Secretary Holton for wanting to help the K-12 program.

### IT Report

Doug Wright, IT Director, reported that things are going well with the IT department. The last step to create a separate IT entity was completed over the summer, and no more big changes are planned. We will maintain what we have and marginal improvements are in place. Wills Kitchen has been hired as a specialist to keep Power School functioning. The IT security plan policy and procedures have been taken care of.

Mike Asip asked if IT security issues are affecting teachers. IT security has become complex and is slowing down instead of speeding up because we have to be careful how we handle information that is personally identifiable. Doug is working on bringing systems on line to handle that situation. Right now we are sending out information by surface mail where electronic communication should be sufficient. Senator Favola stated that VSDB needs to keep moving forward, even at slower pace, to show improvement. Doug reminded the Board that the Foundation Board bought computers that took the educational arm of VSDB out from under VITA. Judy Sorrell asked if VSDB had access to DOE funding. VSDB does get \$26,000 in bond funding from the State.

### Outreach Report

Debbie Pfeiffer, Outreach Coordinator, explained our Mission Statement and the Small step program for children from birth to three years. DOE gave VSDB a grant to expand outreach. Debbie reminded the Board that VSDB cannot recruit students, but we can help other local school divisions both meet the needs of their VI and HI students and also collaborate with other agencies to avoid program duplication. Debbie plans to expand our outreach Web site. The outreach program also provides professional development, evaluation and consultations, and support to teachers in smaller divisions. The VSDB Web site can be a valuable source for resources and information on collaboration with other state agencies. Our challenge is to collaborate with all LEAs without duplicating services from DBVI and DDHH and to identify gaps and bring those services together. Debbie will be visiting Regional meetings throughout the state and linking with other state schools. She would like to see the development of a virtual

course such as ASL or other courses accessible to everyone. She also wants to identify gaps for LEAs and families to provide services for students, educators and families.

Pat expressed pleasure at having Debbie here at VSDB in this position to make outreach our focus.

Senator Favola suggested that VSDB partner with other organizations for summer programs.

Mike Asip had questions regarding our summer-enrichment program. The program could not accept Deaf/Blind students. The Foundation Board funded \$65,000 for the summer program. Pat Trice noted that VSDB does not have funding to provide the full-time interveners that deaf-blind students would require. The VSDB Foundation will not provide services that the state should fund. They provide funds for enhancing a service. The summer program is seen as an enhancement.

Wanda Council commented that Debbie is the right person for the position and that DOE is supportive in her pulling everything together to be able to move forward.

#### Residential Report

Becky Church, Residential Director, was introduced to the Board. Becky is a graduate of RIT, has worked in North Carolina School for the Deaf, South Carolina School for the Deaf, Indiana School for the Deaf and Gallaudet. She has experience working with deaf, blind and deaf/blind students. Currently, there are 64 students staying in residential halls. We have sports programs and many other activities for the students. Pat Trice observed that Becky has come in with great ideas for managing the residential programs. She is spending time both day and night working on the program.

#### Public Safety Report

Blake Porter, Director of Public Safety, informed the group that he came on board because of the structural review, mandated by the General Assembly. The purpose of the mandate was to be proactive for school safety. Consequently, outside entities are involved with the process of evaluating security. The Virginia Department for School Safety, a division of the Department of Criminal Justice, and DOE are charged with carrying out the mandate. Outside entities must be involved in the process. Blake distributed a confidential report of the findings. The Board has a 90-day window to process information and then indicate how we will address the issues. VSDB received a one-time general-fund grant of \$53,000 and a continuing grant to cover the yearly cost of \$17,000. Eight buildings have had updated security. Fifteen recommendations were made and some recommendations have been addressed, but some buildings still have systems dating from the 1960s and 70s.

Senator Hanger asked if the 90-day window would allow us to address the document at the December Meeting. Blake indicated that he believed it would be and that he would work with the entire Board or any subcommittee formed to address the recommendations in the report. Senator Hanger will meet with Blake to discuss to work with a sub-committee or entire body.

Representative Wilt can be on the subcommittee. Judy Sorrell asked if there might be an option of looking at how to combine and partner with other State agencies. Pat responded that other agencies were also strapped by budget cuts. VSDB has all of these new and renovated buildings with state-of-the-arts technology that uses more electricity. Senator Favola asked if the Foundation Board could raise some capital money and take this on. Pat responded that the extra utility bills and other costs would not be considered enhancements, meaning that they would not help. Delegate Wilt can be the liaison for any committee charged with working on these issues. John Pleasants complimented security for its help during blind alumni weekend on their quick response to a tree-falling accident. Delegate Bell questioned VSDB's relationship with the Staunton police department and Staunton fire department. Blake responded that VSDB has a good relationship with these agencies.

We have already conducted fire drills. We conduct fire drills for both the school buildings and the dorms. We also conduct a lockdown drill and a tornado drill. Every employee on campus is certified in first aid and CPR.

### Land Use Report

Marvin Mahler, Director of Maintenance, reported on the Land Use Report, which must be submitted yearly to the Department of General Services to identify any surplus property to sell. It is basically the same plan as last year's. Our vacant buildings can be rented out. The basement of Battle has been rented out to the RAW Learning Center. This relationship has worked out well. The Board of Visitors recommended that none of VSDB's campus be declared surplus and that the buffer of wooded area be retained.

John Pleasants moved to endorse the land-use proposal and Senator Favola seconded. The motion passed. Delegate Bell stated that he would like to keep the campus intact to maintain its integrity. The entire board agreed. VSDB will coordinate with the Department of General Services about use of any vacant buildings.

### Grant Proposals Report

Amy Thornton, Grant Writer, was introduced to the Board. The VSDB Foundation funds her part-time position. Amy has spent the summer researching and looking for grant opportunities. Most grant deadlines fall between September and April. She is looking at programs for special equipment and for a program grant that includes 12% operating costs and salaries. She anticipates \$425,000 with at least 12 proposals between now and end of the year. She will bring in STEM grants for the VSDB "farm" with a plan of 70% to be funded from grants, and she will try to find an additional 30% grant for the program.

Senator Favola suggested getting collaborators to submit letters of endorsements.

### Continuing Business

Wendell Roberts reported that the Board recently passed a new FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) policy which places VSDB on the same level with most LEAs and

colleges. VSDB staff did a great job implementing the policy that went out with registration packets for parents. Follow-up FERPA training with staff on client information sharing has been scheduled.

VSDB Staff will be looking at all policies to be regularly reviewed and updated. Wendell and Pat are looking at follow-up training. First efforts are geared toward policies being accessible on our Web site for staff, students and parents.

We are looking at all policies to see that we are current. Each policy can then be updated on rotation.

### New Business

Senator Favola reported on the committee to look at the possibility of accepting out-of-state students. The committee discussed a possible model for attributing the cost--Medicaid, local school dollars, etc.--and logistics of residential students from connecting states where parents could access our bus stops. The program must cost the state nothing. Questions came up about whether out-of-state students would have to meet their home-state SOL standards or Virginia's SOL standards, which are still being investigated. The option for out-of-state students can be put in the strategic planning to go forward. The revenue can be neutral to the State and provide good educational experience for both our students and out-of-state students. John Eisenberg will look into the SOL issue.

Senator Favola sponsored legislation asking for authority to accept out-of-state students, but the legislation did not pass because the General Assembly did not feel comfortable with the language even though the bill contained the clause that the program must cost the state nothing. State programs have rate packages in place, and these rate packages could offer a menu of services at VSDB. The Board affirmed the policy that we continue investigating the possibility of admitting out-of-state students.

John Pleasants requested information on the Superintendent search.

Senator Hanger responded. The process has been left open. To date, six qualified people have applied. The Executive Committee will review candidates' applications and establish a timeline. The Executive Committee will need to coordinate with Nate McLamb to use appropriate protocol and move forward before the December meeting. Nate reminded the Board that a parent representative needs to be replaced on Executive Committee. Senator Hanger Proposed that the chair and vice chair (Senator Hanger and Delegate Bell) appoint a Board member to the Executive Committee. Senator Favola moved that Senator Hanger and Delegate Bell make the appointment and John Pleasants seconded. The motion passed.

There was no other new business.

There were no public comments.

Date for the next Board meeting will be scheduled for December 10<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m. John Pleasants moved for a holiday musical program to be scheduled near the meeting with abbreviated reports to be presented. Senator Favola made the motion and Delegate Bell seconded. Senator Hanger would like the Foundation Board and the press to be invited.

Senator Hanger closed out the meeting by welcoming the new board members and moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed.

Virgil A. Cook, Board Secretary