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NEWS

September 19, 2013 – New Assessments Impact State Accreditation

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NEW ASSESSMENTS IMPACT STATE ACCREDITATION

State accreditation is determined by calculating the percentage of students receiving passing scores on reading, writing, mathematics, science, and history Standards of Learning (SOL) Assessments. This year, schools across the state needed to meet an increased benchmark of 75% in English (reading and writing) for all grades and 70% in all other subject areas.

There has been a significant increase in the number of schools "accredited with warning" across the state. According to the Virginia Department of Education, the number of schools falling into the category of "Accredited with Warning" has risen to over 400 this school year, which represents more than 20% of all Virginia schools. These 400 schools are spread across 97 of 132 school divisions, meaning over 70% of divisions have schools that are *not meeting* accreditation standards this year. This is a complete reverse trend from only two years ago; in 2011-2012, schools within 97 of 132 divisions were *meeting* all accreditation benchmarks. Repeatedly, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia Wright has stated: "Lower pass rates at the beginning of this process are a sign that the state has raised the bar, not that students are learning less."

Staunton City Schools has historically met state accreditation rates on Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments. All of our schools saw a decline last year in our mathematics results, with the introduction of the new, more challenging assessments. This year, all of our schools saw a decline in reading, writing, and science results with the introduction of new assessments. This has impacted our accreditation ratings for the 2013-2014 school year. Bessie Weller will be "accredited with warning" for the second year in mathematics and for the first year in reading and science. All other schools will remain "fully accredited," despite drops in student pass rates.

"Bessie Weller Elementary School's staff is dedicated to providing all students with an excellent education. We are working as a team to set high standards for student achievement and to continue implementing plans and strategies to address the needs of all of our students. We are using the support provided by our school division and the state focusing on research-based instructional practices to maximize learning gains," comments Linda Mahler, Principal of Bessie Weller Elementary School.

Despite the impacts of these new assessments, all schools in Staunton have made positive gains in student pass rates in particular areas, including:

- Bessie Weller Elementary School:
 - School mathematics (grades 3-5) increased by 24%
 - Grade 3 history above state average at 88%
- McSwain Elementary School:
 - Writing above state average at 73%
 - Grade 4 Mathematics at 86%, with pass advanced rate of 42%
- Ware Elementary School:
 - Reading above state average at 78%
 - School mathematics at 82%, with pass advanced rate of 27%
- Shelburne Middle School:
 - Mathematics for black subgroup increased by 14%
 - Science above state average at 84%
- Lee High School:
 - All science assessments above state average (ranging from 86 - 98%)
 - Virginia & US History increased 12% over past 3 years (from 71% to 83%)

Schools have been analyzing data from the SOL assessments and will be using information to further refine the curriculum with the high level of thinking required of these new assessments. They will also be using new resources in reading, writing, and science instruction that align closely with the Standards of Learning. Schools will monitor student progress throughout the year to quickly identify student needs and provide additional supports or enrichment.

"In Staunton, we believe it is our role to prepare students for college, career, and life," comments Director of Assessment and School Improvement, Stephanie Haskins. "We are stretching our students to high levels of thinking and problem-solving that will allow them to tackle the rigorous new SOL assessments, and more importantly, prepare them for real-life experiences they will encounter beyond school."

School and division report cards with updated state accreditation information may be accessed on the homepage of the Staunton City Schools website: <http://www.staunton.k12.va.us>. They may also be accessed by going directly to the Virginia Department of Education website.