March 25, 2020

Dear Principals and Assistant Principals:

I trust that each of you is working diligently with your building and division level teams to process this past week’s events while also developing a plan to ensure the continuation of learning. On March 23, 2020, and March 24, 2020, I had the opportunity to participate in video-conferences with our State Superintendent, Dr. James Lane. During the March 23, 2020 conference, Dr. Lane shared that all public and private schools across the Commonwealth will be closed for the remainder of the academic year. He went on to share that the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) will issue guidance on the following topics:

- Graduation
- Standard and verified credits
- Continuity of learning
- Special education services
- Grading practices

Dr. Lane also advised that school divisions should continue to provide meal programs for students and plan for childcare of personnel deemed as essential. Essential personnel may encompass health care providers, first responders, utility personnel, bank employees, and grocery store personnel. Dr. Lane encouraged school divisions to partner with their local YMCA and/or Girls & Boys Clubs for this plan. Later that evening, the VDOE posted the following Superintendent Memos:

- MEMO 077-20 Guidance on Graduation Requirements, Awarding of Credits, and Continuity of Learning
- MEMO 077-20 Attachment A: Graduation Requirements, Awarding of Credits, and Continuity of Learning

During the March 24, 2020 conference call, Dr. Lane reviewed the guidance from the VDOE in particular § MEMO 077-20. He highlighted a number of flexible options for awarding high school credits to students currently enrolled in grades 8-12. Perhaps the most important message from him is that all
students who were on track to graduate and/or to be promoted as of March 13, 2020, should graduate and/or be promoted. However, schools should continue to provide a continuity of learning services to all students in PreK-12. Schools should not use the situation to graduate students who were not on target to graduate as of March 13, 2020. As an example, a senior who may have been enrolled in four courses during the spring semester and needed five additional courses to graduate should not be considered as on target to graduate. Seniors who were failing a course as of March 13, 2020, but enrolled in all necessary and final coursework toward graduation should be considered as on target to graduate; learning opportunities should be extended to these students to improve their knowledge and understanding of the content. Local school divisions should take a cautious and common sense approach in defining "on track to graduate."

Dr. Lane also reviewed a host of flexible learning options for the continuity of learning for returning students in grades 8-11. It is imperative that principals work with their school divisions to document evidence that students in grades 8-11 have mastered coursework necessary for earning credit toward graduation. Examples included virtual/correspondence courses, summer school opportunities for students who are unable to access content, extending the 2020-21 school year, and/or other means of documenting evidence that students have mastered course content. Dr. Lane advised that schools capitalize on opportunities to launch innovative and equitable practices that focus on the 5C’s of Learning, Project-Based Learning (PBL), and Performance Based-Assessments (PBA). The State Superintendent also advised school divisions to consult with their local School Board attorneys on issues related to providing equitable learning programs. He reiterated the importance of schools continuing meal programs and providing daycare options for essential personnel.

Just today, VDOE notified VASSP that it is creating a task force of educational practitioners to provide guidance on best practices in providing continuity of learning opportunities for Virginia students. As your president, I will represent VASSP on this task force.

Next Monday, the State Superintendent, as a member of the VASSP Board of Directors, will be joining the Board during our virtual meeting. We will be sure to report as much as we can as events continue to unfold.

VASSP thanks the State Superintendent for his leadership and guidance during this difficult time. As you know, the COVID-19 pandemic is continuing to evolve. VASSP will continue to keep you informed as we all work together to bring normalcy back to our communities. Please know that as your professional organization we will remain vigilant supporting the work you do each day in schools across the Commonwealth. We appreciate the leadership and hard work of our principals, teachers, and support staff. Please do not hesitate to reach out to VASSP if we can help you in any way.

Sincerely,
Travis Burns, Ed.D.
Principal