

The Big Untruth in Public Education in Virginia
-Scott Brabrand, Lynchburg City Schools Superintendent

Recent headlines in papers and TV all across Virginia are misleading and confusing you into thinking that the majority of the state's public schools are failing. It is time to read beyond the headlines and go straight to the source: *your* local educators. Stop listening only to the misleading reports from Richmond and Washington that treat your children as a test score, and start listening to the truth from the teachers in Lynchburg and across Virginia, who treat your children as their own.

HERE ARE THE 3 TRUTHS AROUND WHAT IS REALLY HAPPENING.

Truth #1 - The intersection of new, more rigorous tests with federal accountability standards and state accreditation has created manufactured failure for our public schools.

That is right – politicians in Richmond and Washington are making up new ways to have our schools fail with tests that are far harder than anything anyone has taken before.

Examples of test questions can be found here:

http://www.pen.k12.va.us/testing/sol/practice_items/index.shtml

How do we know this as truth? More than 59% of Virginia's public schools didn't make the federal standard based on the new test scores. Yet our state is continuously ranked among the top in the state in K-12 education. See Education Week ranking here:

http://www.edweek.org/ew/qc/2013/state_report_cards.html.

Well, maybe new, harder tests are not so bad. But here is the rest of the truth.

Truth #2 - New, more rigorous tests come to Virginia's public schools just as the Virginia General Assembly passes new legislation to assign schools a letter grade of A-F based on these new tests. They create an Opportunity Educational Institution (or OEI) in Richmond to take over the "failing schools" and turn them over to private interests with no track record of SOL performance or stake in the local community.

Make no mistake -- There is a concerted effort to take the public out of public education. Why? Just listen to James McMillan of the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute: "Some view the standards movement as a way to demonstrate that public education is failing, which will provide political power to incorporate vouchers and other forms of support for private education.

At this point it is unclear what will happen to schools that do not meet performance standards. If the ultimate sanction is state takeover, it is argued that the state, by its nature, is ill equipped to run public schools. "

Truth #3 – Finally, the most important truth: Public school teachers are working harder than ever. If you don't believe me, just ask– I am sure one of your friends or family members knows a public school teacher. They have increased student expectations, increased workload and increased testing. And these teachers are producing results. In Lynchburg City Schools more students are taking harder classes, getting higher grades and graduating at higher rates.

Will Rogers once said of a man, "It's not what he doesn't know that bothers me, it's what he knows for sure that just ain't so." Don't rely on reports from politicians in Richmond and Washington to hear the truth. Listen to the truth from teachers and educators in Lynchburg and Central Virginia!