

When the Standards of Learning and their associated tests were implemented in the 1990's, they may have been the right tools for the time. But this is 2014. The children in our kindergarten classrooms will enter higher education or the workforce in 2026. Hard to imagine? Maybe. But imagine it is what we must do, because those children are here now and they are ours. They need us to give them the right tools for their time.

Policy makers have an important role in public education. Federal regulations, the laws of the Commonwealth, Virginia Board of Education policies are needed in order to ensure that all students have access to quality schools and teachers. But the policy arena is not where innovation occurs. The spirit of pioneering and the modernization that are needed in Virginia schools today must come from practitioners who work in schools and with students every day. For better or worse, these expert practitioners- classroom teachers, building administrators, central office leaders, superintendents, teacher educators and others- must not only take responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning. They must also educate policy makers, so that their work does not hinder the creativity and innovation in teaching and learning that our students need.

The current session of the Virginia General Assembly will almost certainly impact the lives of teachers and students. Bills have been introduced to:

- change SOL testing procedures (see House Bills 172, 175, and 178 and Senate Bills 305 and 389).
- reduce the number of SOL tests (HB 447, 498, 640, and 930; SB 270 and 306). Some of these proposals also provide for the development of alternative and authentic assessments.
- change, delay, or eliminate the current "A-F" grading system that purports to measure school quality.

At the end of the last century, the SOL curriculum and assessment system gave Virginia schools a consistent curriculum and a transparent way of looking at student achievement. These were the needs of that time. Now, if Virginia's public education system is to remain a pioneer and retain its high quality, we must not rest on our earlier work.

Now is the time to engage with your own legislators and school boards, educating them about the need to equip students for success in a complex, rapidly changing world. I hope you will follow the 2014 General Assembly's action on education at the **advocacy links** on VaASCD's website. Contact your own representatives, either to advocate for VASCD's positions (also on our website) or to share your own. Educators know how to create standards that give students the skills they need for the future; we know how to build a reasonable, balanced system of assessments; and we know how to assess school quality. We need our elected representatives to be pioneers, and to open the doors for us to make these changes in a planned, evidence-based, professional way.

