| **Virginia Board of Education Agenda Item** | **Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia** |
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# Agenda Item: E

## Date: September 17, 2020

### Title: Report from the Governor’s African American History Education Commission

#### Presenter: Dr. Rosa Atkins, Commission Chair & Superintendent Charlottesville City Schools

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## Purpose of Presentation:

For information only. No action required.

Executive Summary:  
On August 24th, 2019 at Old Point Comfort, the site where the first enslaved Africans arrived on Virginia shores 400 years earlier, Governor Ralph Northam signed [Executive Order Thirty Nine](https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/executive-actions/EO-39-Establishment-of-the-Commission-on-African-American-History-Education-in-the-Commonwealth.pdf) and announced the establishment of the [*Virginia African American History Education Commission*](https://www.education.virginia.gov/initiatives/aahec/). The Governor charged the Commission with thoroughly examining the Commonwealth’s K-12 curricula, professional development practices, and instructional supports to make recommendations for improving the way African American history is taught in Virginia schools.

The Commission was chaired by Dr. Derrick Alridge, Professor of Education and Director of the Center for Race and Public Education in the South, Curry School of Education and Human Development, University of Virginia; Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Professor of History, Norfolk State University; and Dr. Rosa Atkins, Superintendent, Charlottesville City Schools. Dr. Alridge chaired the Professional Development Subcommittee; Dr. Newby-Alexander chaired the Standards Subcommittee and Dr. Atkins served as co-chair and Commission facilitator. The Commission was comprised of educators, historians, museum curators, school board members, faith leaders, school administrators, teachers, and citizens across the Commonwealth. Other key leadership included Virginia’s Secretary of Education Atif Qarni and Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. James Lane. A complete list of Commissioners is available here: <https://www.education.virginia.gov/initiatives/aahec/>.

The Commission began meeting in the fall of 2019, and met seven times over the course of the following year in different parts of the Commonwealth. Additionally, the subcommittees met in small groups to discuss, develop and draft their recommendations. All meetings were open to the public, and time was allocated for public comment at each meeting. Verbal and written public comment was received from students, educators, families, advocacy groups, and citizens.

To view the written public comments submitted to the Commission, see the [Commission’s Dropbox file](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/vplosfiwk1y3vyy/AABm2Iib8uU9OIOm2dyYnTvxa?dl=0).

The Commission also sought community input during a series of public listening sessions during the spring of 2020 as it examined how to best strengthen the Virginia history standards, and improve African American history education in classrooms across the Commonwealth. Approximately 300 people attended the first three listening sessions in Roanoke, Richmond, and Norfolk with panelists and members of the public alike providing robust public comment to Commission members at these events. Sessions in Danville and Woodbridge were cancelled due to COVID-19, and a survey was developed to obtain comment from those unable to attend an in person listening session.

On August 31, 2020 the Commission presented their [final report](https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/secretary-of-education/pdf/AAHEC-Report-Final_version2.pdf) to the Governor for improving the way African American history is taught in Virginia schools, including but not limited to:

* Making recommendations and technical edits for enriched standards related to African American history;
* Identifying how the standards can be organized and improved to ensure that African American history is a cohesive part of the teaching of all history;
* Revising of the full history and social studies standards review process to be more inclusive of diverse perspectives; and
* Recommending the addition of professional development and instructional supports to equip all educators to create and sustain culturally responsive pedagogy and gain appropriate foundational knowledge in African American history.

Summary of Recommendations

**Standards Recommendations:**

While revised regularly by historians and experts, Virginia’s History and Social Studies Standards of Learning continue to be incomplete with regards to incorporating African American history into the larger narrative. Therefore, the Commission was tasked with making recommendations to ensure that the standards are more inclusive of African American history and provide opportunities for students to engage the content deeply, drawing connections to its relevance in our contemporary communities. These recommendations are as follows:

* The State Superintendent for Public Instruction should approve technical edits to the Curriculum Framework for the following courses: Virginia Studies, United States History I and II, and Virginia and United States History. Any edits that fall outside the purview of technical adjustments should be considered during the regular standards review process by the Board of Education. All recommended edits can be found in Appendix D.
* The Board of Education ought to revise its standards review process and practice to be more inclusive of diverse perspectives. An updated review process chart can be found in Appendix E.
* The Board of Education should consider including 10 key concepts in its history and social studies standards to ensure that African American history is not taught separately, but is truly a cohesive part of the teaching of all history.
* The Board of Education ought to approve the teaching of history as a requirement at all levels in K-12 to ensure that all of Virginia’s citizens are educated about the history of Virginia and the nation.

**Professional Development Recommendations:**

Additionally, the Commission recognized that change in the delivery of content will only be successful if teachers and school leaders are appropriately supported and equipped to do so. The professional development subcommittee developed six key recommendations to ensure Virginia educators achieve proficiency in culturally relevant teaching and gain appropriate foundational knowledge in African American history. These recommendations are to:

* Revise Virginia’s Teacher Evaluation Regulations and Virginia’s Uniform Performance standards for School Leaders to include cultural proficiency efficacy.
* Require every Virginia educator to certify that they have enrolled in Cultural Competency Professional Development by 2022.
* Allocate funding and personnel resources to develop and implement comprehensive professional development in the areas of cultural competency and African American History content for Virginia educators.
* Mandate certification (Continuing Education Units) in African American History for all holders of education licenses issued by the Virginia Department of Education (this includes initial licensure and renewals).
* Amend requirements for licensure endorsements in History/Social Science to require evidence of course study in African American History.
* Require a credit in African American History as a new requirement for graduation in Virginia. *The new elective course in African American History developed by VDOE and WHRO could be used to fulfill this requirement*.

The timing of the report reinforces the urgent and critical need we have as a society to better understand African American history and the ways in which our racial history continues to influence policies and systems today. The Commission wrote this final report in the midst of a global pandemic that disproportionately impacts communities of color. They worked against the backdrop of protests and outrage at the murder of George Floyd and too many other Black Americans in the name of law and order.

Understanding history imbues citizens with a deep and complex knowledge about their community and their nation. An effort to change the way citizens of Virginia are educated about history, with a special emphasis on incorporating African American history into the larger narrative, has never been more important. The Commission shares a strong sense of urgency for policymakers to act and implement the recommendations necessary to achieve a vision for a more just and inclusive Virginia.

## Action Requested:

No action requested.

## Superintendent’s Recommendation:

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education receive the report and recommendations from the African American History Education Commission.

## Previous Review or Action:

No previous review or action.

Background Information and Statutory Authority:   
On August 24th, 2019 at Old Point Comfort, the site where the first enslaved Africans arrived on Virginia shores 400 years earlier, Governor Ralph Northam signed [Executive Order Thirty Nine](https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/executive-actions/EO-39-Establishment-of-the-Commission-on-African-American-History-Education-in-the-Commonwealth.pdf) and announced the establishment of the *Virginia African American History Education Commission*. The Governor charged the Commission with thoroughly examining the Commonwealth’s K-12 curricula, professional development practices, and instructional supports to make recommendations for improving the way African American history is taught in Virginia schools. Governor Northam appointed a diverse, talented, and vibrant group of individuals to serve on this Commission including educators, historians, museum curators, school board members, faith leaders, school administrators, and citizens across the Commonwealth.

Executive Order Thirty Nine tasked the Commission with issuing a report no later than September 1, 2020, with recommendations including but not limited to:

1. Technical edits to and recommendations for enriched standards related to African American history;
2. Broader considerations for the full history and social studies standards review process; and
3. Necessary professional development and instructional supports for teachers to ensure culturally competent instruction

Timetable for Further Review/Action:  
No further action required.

## Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources:

N/A