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Superintendent and School Board Members Participate in Panel Discussion

Administrators Meet With State and National Representatives to express growing concerns

LURAY, Va. — On Wednesday, November 13, 2019, school superintendents from Page, Shenandoah, Rockingham, and Harrisonburg, gathered together with representatives of state and national lawmakers along with school board members to discuss multiple issues of importance to schools.

Dr. Wendy Gonzalez, along with other area superintendents, were able to meet with representatives that included: Del. Tony Wilt, R-Harrisonburg, Del. Steve Landes, R-Weyers Cave; Kelly Johnston, representing U.S. Sen. Mark Warner, D-Virginia; Jennifer Aulgur, representing Virginia Sen. Mark Obenshain, R-Harrisonburg; Jeff Walters, representing Del. Todd Gilbert, R-Woodstock; and Emilee Loope, representing U.S. Rep. Ben Cline, R-Virginia, 6th District.

Of the many issues discussed, one was the changes in the State's Standards of Quality. Superintendents expressed concern over the cap on support positions that was put in place as a result of the Great Recession of 2007-2009. They asked their legislators to support a revision to the standards that would include the removal of the cap with the restoration of the funds and more funds for key student support positions, like psychologists, social workers, nurses, behavioral analysts, and school counselors with the flexibility to hire the position most needed for their circumstance.

The superintendents also expressed concerns with the ongoing mandates that are not fully funded even those described as no cost, yet it encumbers resources at the local level, like trainings. Concern was also shared regarding the decrease in the availability of therapeutic day

treatment services due to the changes within the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS). This will directly impact Page County in December when Crossroads will no longer be an option for our students.

Also discussed was the changes that will occur in funding regional special education programs and how it will affect local divisions. The concern that was most prevalent was that larger divisions may be able to support themselves, while smaller districts, such as Page County, will be the ones to struggle.

Lastly, the teacher shortage was also addressed. It was stressed that teachers have a lot on them today with serving in multiple roles in addition to being a teacher to multi-students at any given time. The comparison to other professions was presented wherein they usually work with one client at a time without having to take work home, like grading papers and doing lesson plans, and they are compensated well for their time. Without proper compensation as a starting point for educators, recruiting and retaining young people in this profession is going to continue to be a challenge.

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If you would like more information about this topic, please call Tricia Runyan at (540) 743-3750 (option 3), or email at trunyan@pagecounty.k12.va.us.

** Please see attached picture.