

STAYING THE COURSE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIRGINIA'S STANDARDS  
OF LEARNING AND THE DECISION NOT TO ADOPT THE  
COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

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ABSTRACT

The research study investigated the history of the curriculum standards movement in the Commonwealth of Virginia in the context of the national standards movement in order to explain how and why the Commonwealth of Virginia arrived at the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards based on descriptive evidence. The study utilized a qualitative methodology with a two-phase data collection process. First, documents from the Virginia Board of Education and the Virginia Department of Education were collected and analyzed using the constant comparative method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Second, data were collected from major figures in the history of Virginia public education over the last 20 years, including former Superintendents of Public Instruction, through in-person interviews. Data from the interviews were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). An interview protocol was developed, tested for content validity, and piloted prior to conducting the interviews.

Categories that emerged from the data analysis for both research questions were identified and descriptive evidence was presented related to both research questions. Three major conclusions from the study were identified and discussed that appeared to influence Virginia's decision not to participate in the Common Core State Standards: the Virginia Standards of Learning are an institutionalized system; the Virginia Standards of Learning had bipartisan political support; and confidence in the Standards of Learning outweighed confidence in the Common Core State Standards.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Description of the Problem and Context for the Study**

The movement toward national curriculum standards has been long, circuitous, and not without debate and controversy. The national movement has culminated in what is today known as the Common Core State Standards. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are a set of curriculum standards in reading and mathematics that provide detailed descriptions of what students should know and be able to do in each grade level (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014).

The Commonwealth of Virginia has had versions of curriculum standards, known as the Standards of Learning (SOL), in place for over three decades (Virginia Board of Education, 2013). Like the Common Core State Standards, the Virginia Standards of Learning describe what students should know and be able to do at each grade level in order to earn a high school diploma (Virginia Department of Education, 2014a). The Commonwealth of Virginia has decided not to join the group of 43 states, the District of Columbia, four United States territories, and Department of Defense schools in approving the Common Core State Standards. Only Alaska, Indiana, Minnesota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, and Virginia and the United States territory of Puerto Rico have not adopted the Common Core State Standards in reading and mathematics (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014). This study explores how the Commonwealth of Virginia arrived at the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards, and based on the descriptive evidence, why Virginia has not adopted the Common Core State Standards.

#### **Definitions of Key Terms**

Several key terms are used throughout the paper and are defined here to facilitate common understanding.

*Common Core State Standards.* This term refers to a set of K-12 reading and mathematics curriculum standards that detail what students should know and be able to do at each grade level to ensure workplace and college readiness. The decision to adopt or not adopt the Common Core State Standards is left up to individual states (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

*Curriculum standards.* This term refers to what a student should know and be able to do in a given subject in school at each grade level (Ravitch, 1993). Curriculum standards are written documents adopted by professional associations, states, or localities.

*School reform movement.* The term school reform movement refers to large-scale efforts to improve schools on a regional or national scale (Teddlie & Stringfield, 2006). School reform movements can be driven by the development of new findings in educational research (Lezotte, 1989) or by various types of governmental intervention (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; Ravitch, 2010b). The term school reform movement is used interchangeably with the term school reform initiative in the literature review below.

*Standards of Learning.* The Commonwealth of Virginia refers to curriculum standards as Standards of Learning. The Virginia Standards of Learning are written documents that explain what is expected of students in grades K-12 public schools in Virginia (Virginia Department of Education, 2014a).

### **Purpose for Conducting the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the history of the curriculum standards movement in the Commonwealth of Virginia in the context of the national standards movement in order to explain how and why the Commonwealth of Virginia arrived at the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards. Based on the descriptive evidence, this study explores why the Commonwealth of Virginia has not adopted the Common Core State Standards. This study does not seek to delineate how the wording of curriculum standards have changed over time, or how certain curricular topics have gained or lost emphasis with succeeding revisions of the standards. One assumption behind the purpose of the study is the notion that the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards was not arbitrary or made without consideration of the investments made in the Virginia Standards of Learning accountability system since 1995. An understanding of the development of the Standards of Learning over time may help explain how and why Virginia came to the decision regarding the Common Core State Standards.

In sum, this study seeks to answer two questions. When considering the history of the curriculum standards movement in the Commonwealth of Virginia in the context of the national standards movement, how has the Commonwealth of Virginia arrived at the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards? Based on the descriptive evidence, why has the

Commonwealth of Virginia not adopted the Common Core State Standards? The following sub-questions provide insight into the two research questions for this study.

- What were the major events, influences, and processes in Virginia’s curricular reform known as the Standards of Learning, 1995-2014?
- Is there evidence that professional organizations, the Virginia Board of Education, or the Virginia Department of Education compared the Standards of Learning to national standards, 1995-2014? If so, what evidence was used to make the comparison?
- What impact, if any, have professional organizations had on the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards?
- How have Virginia’s curriculum standards compared to the development of curricular standards in other states and nationally?

### **Theoretical Model**

The review of literature is framed in terms a theory of policy development as stated by Baumgartner and Jones (1993), known as “punctuated equilibrium” theory. Punctuated equilibrium theory states that policies develop within subsystems over time but may be punctuated by dramatic events. The theory states that policies develop through long periods of gridlock or acceptance of the status quo, because the gridlock is juxtaposed with the introduction of important events or new ideas (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; True, 2000). According to Jones, Baumgartner and True (1998), punctuated equilibrium may help explain why governmental policies can unfold in surprising ways:

Complex interactive political systems do not react slowly and automatically to changing perceptions or conditions; rather, it takes increasing pressure and sometimes a crisis atmosphere to dislodge established ways of thinking about policies. The result is periods of stability interspersed with occasional, unpredictable, and dramatic change (p. 2).

Punctuated equilibrium theory can be juxtaposed with another theory of policy development, often applied to governmental policy studies, known as “incrementalism.” The theory of incrementalism states that policies develop slowly, over a period of years, in small linear steps. Change happens very gradually and in small adjustments to current policy, according to incremental theory. Incrementalism is often applied to studies of governmental agencies and governmental policies (True, 2000).

True (2000) notes that punctuated equilibrium theory differs from incrementalism by taking into account the possibility of rapid change due to important or dramatic events. The theory of incrementalism holds that policies gradually develop and change in a linear fashion over time. Punctuated equilibrium theory, on the other hand, does not presume that policies develop gradually or in a linear fashion. New ideas or new definitions of a situation can serve as dramatic events in the process of policy development, leading to punctuations of change (True, 2000). The review of literature for this study, regarding Virginia Standards of Learning and the Common Core State Standards, is viewed through the lens of punctuated equilibrium theory.

### **Practical Significance**

Information gleaned from this study may be useful to Virginia school personnel, legislators, and policy makers in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Standards of Learning receive revisions in each curricular area every seven years. It may be useful to school personnel to know how the Virginia standards developed over time in relation to the national standards movement, in order to have a better understanding of the current configuration of the K-12 school accountability program in Virginia. For example, a delineation of the spheres of influence in the development of curriculum standards in the Commonwealth of Virginia would be useful to school personnel who serve on review committees for state standards. Information in this study could be useful to policy makers as they consider future changes in the Standards of Learning. Information from this study could be useful to legislators as they consider changes in the Virginia public school accountability system in the future.

Further, professional organizations that advocate for students and schools encourage educators to understand and attempt to influence the profession in a positive direction. For example, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, produced by the Council of Chief State School Officers, provide guidance for educational leadership preparation programs. ISLLC Standard Six states that “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). Similarly, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) has a list of standards for professional educators and lists under the first standard the need to “Stay informed of the continually changing context for teaching and learning” (National

Association of Elementary School Principals, 2008). This study aligns with the ISLLC standards and the NAESP standards in encouraging an understanding of the historical context of the national standards movement, in order to influence future iterations of curriculum standards with knowledge of what has come before.

Another area of practical significance is the impact that information from this study could have on students in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The type of curriculum offered to students is a vital factor in the educational experience that students receive (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2003). This study provides information on the reasons for Virginia's non-participation in the Common Core State Standards that could positively impact schoolchildren in Virginia.

### **Scholarly Significance**

Results of this study have significance to researchers in the area of curriculum standards. Much has been written about why the Common Core State Standards may or may not be advantageous for America's public school students. However, there has been little research completed on why seven states have chosen to remain on their own path with curriculum standards. In particular, the questions of how and why the Commonwealth of Virginia has arrived at the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards have yet to be addressed in the research literature. Because this study addresses the research questions from an historical perspective, this study may help shed light on how the current situation has come about and may "help to establish a sound basis for further progress or change" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 159).

### **Context of the Problem**

The context of this problem is examined two-fold. First, the context is viewed briefly through the lens of the national standards movement. Second, the context is discussed specifically with the development of standards in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative is the latest in a series of developments over the last several decades related to curriculum standards in the United States. The Common Core State Standards are curriculum standards in reading and mathematics that detail what a student should know and be able to do at each grade level in order to eventually

earn a high school diploma. The standards are written for each grade level from kindergarten to grade 12. The goal of the Common Core State Standards is to ensure workplace or college readiness for America's high school graduates (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

The Common Core State Standards were developed as a joint project of the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. States had the choice of adopting the CCSS beginning in 2010 (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014). Unlike other major school reform movements over the last 30 years, the Common Core State Standards were a state-led effort. The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers make it clear that the federal government was not the driving force behind the standards. Reading and mathematics are the two most commonly assessed content areas nationally and are building-block subjects for other content areas, so national standards are only developed in these two content areas (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014).

The Commonwealth of Virginia implemented the initial version of the Standards of Learning (SOL) in the early 1980s. The Standards of Learning were field tested in 1981 in several divisions and implemented throughout the Commonwealth in 1982. A major revision occurred in the mid-1990s and the revisions were approved by the Virginia Board of Education in June of 1995. Because the 1995 standards were accompanied by a new set of high stakes assessments two years later, the 1995 standards signify an important point of demarcation in the development of standards in the Commonwealth of Virginia (Duke & Reck, 2003). This study delimits data collection by focusing on the years 1995-2014.

The Virginia Standards of Learning provide specific expectations in each content area for student learning in grades K-12. Virginia has developed standards in English (reading and writing), mathematics, science, history and social science, family life, economics and personal finance, fine arts, foreign language, computer technology, health, physical education, and driver education. Comprehensive assessments on the Standards of Learning are required at the end of the year or the end of course for specific grade levels and high school courses (Virginia Department of Education, 2014a).

## **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations of a study acknowledge the incomplete nature or weaknesses of any research project (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The study has several potential limitations. The passage of time is a limitation of the study. The viewpoints of the interview participants provide depth and historical perspective to the research questions. However, the data collected during interviews is subject to the recollections of participants and the passage of time can alter the perspectives of interview participants (Hatch, 2002). The passage of time can limit the availability of documents, the availability of possible interview participants, and the memories of interview participants. The researcher acknowledges the possibility of “elite bias” when interviewing high-status participants (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 294). In addition, the honesty and candor of interview participants can be a limitation.

The data collection process suggests several limitations. Using a purposive sampling process (Palys, 2008), a limited number of interviews were conducted. The data collected through the interviews were not generalizable to any larger population of Virginia educators and only reflect the views and recollections of the interview participants. The sample of interview participants was limited by the willingness of participants to participate and disclose. Additionally, the types of documents analyzed in the study were selected by the researcher and did not represent an exhaustive list of possible documents during the time frame of the study.

Researcher bias is another potential limitation in qualitative studies (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The researcher acknowledges that his experience as a teacher and administrator in two states, Virginia and Kansas, has shaped his outlook regarding accountability systems and state standards and may have influenced the research design. As an elementary school principal in Virginia versed in the Standards of Learning and the accountability process for schools, the researcher acknowledges that he is in favor of the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards. Acknowledging researcher bias allows others to judge the merits of a research project (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

## **Delimitations of the Study**

Delimitations of a study help frame the study conceptually and “imply what a study is not” (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The study is delimited primarily by time. The study focuses on the years 1995-2014. The year 1995 was selected as the starting point because a major revision

of the Standards of Learning in mathematics, science, and language arts at all grade levels was adopted by the Virginia Board of Education in June of 1995, with the other subjects receiving adopted revisions shortly thereafter. The first set of Standards of Learning assessments were also introduced in 1995 (Duke & Reck, 2003).

### **Summary of Chapter 1**

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the research study. The chapter included a description of the research problem and associated research questions. Also included in the chapter were a brief historical context of the study and a description of the practical and scholarly significance of the study.

### **Outline of Succeeding Chapters**

Chapter 2 presents a description of the literature on the national standards movement and the standards movement in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in the study. The research design, research procedures, sources of data, interview protocol development, procedures for data management, and procedures for data analysis are presented in detail. Chapter 4 contains the results of the study. Chapter 5 features the conclusions, implications for practitioners, and recommendations for additional research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of the Literature**

This chapter contains an overview of the research literature regarding the history of curriculum standards in the United States and the Commonwealth of Virginia. The purpose of the literature review is to identify the major events and influences of the national standards movement, thereby establishing a timeline and context for the development of curriculum standards in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The sources were identified through online searches using the search tools Summon and Google Scholar, as well as databases that included Education Research Complete, Project Muse, and ERIC. Search terms included: curriculum standards, national standards movement, NCTM standards, Common Core State Standards, Goals 2000, America 2000, Charlottesville Education Summit, history, and Virginia Standards of Learning.

Several thousand results were obtained using the aforementioned terms in a search using the online Virginia Tech Summon tool in November, 2013. In order to delimit the thousands of search results, search refinements were used. The resultant literature review includes works representative of the empirical, theoretical, and commentary literature.

An example of a search during the literature review process shows the typical steps taken to pinpoint useful literature. A Virginia Tech Summon online search conducted in November, 2013, for the term “Common Core State Standards” resulted in 7,733 results. By refining the search to only include articles from scholarly publications, including peer-reviewed publications, 1,168 results were returned. By refining the search to only include articles from peer-reviewed publications, 925 results were returned. Further, by limiting the subject terms to only articles related to education, the results were narrowed to a total of 207. A similar process was used for all search terms previously noted.

As a result of the literature searches, two research threads emerged: the history of the national standards movement and the history of the Virginia Standards of Learning. The literature on curriculum standards included commentary literature, empirical studies, and publications designed to assist practitioners implement standards in the classrooms. The following review of the literature on the standards movement is mainly structured chronologically. Each succeeding event or initiative helped pave the way for what eventually became the Common Core State Standards initiative.

## National Standards Movement

Curriculum standards developed in American public schools gradually over several decades. However, several important events interrupted, or perhaps accelerated, the gradual movement toward the Common Core State Standards. In the following review of the literature on the national standards movement, punctuated equilibrium theory (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993) is used to frame the movement toward national standards.

### *A Nation at Risk*

This review of the literature related to curriculum standards begins with the 1983 report called *A Nation at Risk*, a report commissioned by President Reagan's Secretary of Education, Terrell H. Bell. The report has proven to be a watershed moment in school reform in the United States. *A Nation at Risk* presented an argument against the "rising tide of mediocrity" in K-12 public schools and universities and in particular highlighted inadequacies in four major areas of public education: content, expectations, time, and teaching (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p.4).

*A Nation at Risk* featured numerous recommendations for United States schools, including: improving curriculum content, raising standards and expectations of students, increasing time devoted to education, significantly raising teacher quality, providing more effective educational leadership, and finally increasing the financial support of education (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Good (2010) contended that one of the most important aspects of the report was the fact that the Commission "was focused on increasing excellence – that is, how to make American schools as high performing as any in the world" (Good, 2010, p. 385).

Though *A Nation at Risk* was criticized for its methods, misuse of data, and incendiary language (Berliner, 1993; Bracey, 2003; Gardner, 1984; Ravitch, 2010b; Walberg, 1986), the report did generate a great deal of press and public attention on the K-12 education system in the United States. The publication of *A Nation at Risk* focused national attention and scrutiny on public schools. Several states increased funding for public education in the years immediately following the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (Verstegen & McGuire, 1991). As noted above, one of the recommendations from the report was to raise standards and expectations of students, making *A Nation at Risk* one of the first key forces in the national standards movement.

## National Education Goals

A second key event in the national standards movement was the development of national education goals, which eventually helped lead to the era of curriculum standards. National education goals were a result of the influence of the federal government and the nation's governors (Ravitch, 1993). The nation's governors met in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1989 at the invitation of President George H.W. Bush to discuss education issues. The meeting came to be known as the Charlottesville Education Summit. The governors discussed the adoption of national K-12 performance goals to be met by the year 2000, and this effort became the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Vinovskis, 1999).

Vinovskis (1999) stated that the Charlottesville Education Summit was one of the most important events in the history of modern school reform. The nation's governors were brought to Charlottesville with education reform as the lone item on the agenda. To put the unusual nature of such a gathering in perspective, the Charlottesville Education Summit was only the third time a sitting president had convened all of the nation's governors for a summit meeting of any kind. There were several prominent governors in attendance that would, in one way or another, influence education policy in the coming years, most notably Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas (Vinovskis, 1999).

As a result of the Charlottesville Education Summit, six national education goals were developed and introduced in President Bush's State of the Union address in January of 1990. These six goals were the "centerpieces of educational reform in the 1990s" and became the bulk of the Goals 2000 legislation passed in 1994 (Vinovskis, 1999, p. 1). The Goals 2000 act, bolstered by federal funding, encouraged states to adopt state standards in content areas. The national education goals, which were initially identified as Goals 2000, later became known as America 2000 after the passage of the Goals 2000 legislation (Vinovskis, 1999). The six goals were:

1. All children in America will start school ready to learn.
2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
3. American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students

- learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.
4. U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.
  5. Every adult American will be literate and possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
  6. Every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a safe, disciplined environment conducive to learning (Superfine, 2005, p. 36).

The Charlottesville Education Summit specifically excluded participation from Congress. Indeed, the fact that Congress was excluded may have angered some legislators and contributed to later confrontations about the nation's education policy, particularly in the area of federal financing for the education goals. Regardless, the Charlottesville Education Summit set the stage for the reform initiative of America 2000 (Vinovskis, 1999).

According to Ravitch (1993), who was invited to work in the U.S. Department of Education at the time, America 2000 had three objectives: to encourage every community to adopt the national goals using its own local strategy, to encourage the formation of "break-the-mold-schools" across the country, and to develop voluntary "world class" standards and American achievement tests (Ravitch, 1993, p. 768). At the time, Ravitch viewed standards and assessments as vitally important to reform efforts:

Standards and assessments were critical because they would allow teachers, students, parents, and communities to determine whether they were aiming high enough and whether they were making progress. Without standards and assessments, the "new American schools" and the community-based reformers would not know whether their innovative efforts were making a difference. (Ravitch, 1993, p. 768)

Rudiger and Krinsky (1992) viewed the first goal of America 2000, related to having all children starting school ready to learn by the year 2000, as particularly daunting. Without reaching this goal, all of the other goals would have "relatively little possibility of attainment" (Rudiger & Krinsky, 1992, p. 287). Securing additional federal funding for the first goal was a major hurdle to be overcome, since only 25% of the potential pool of Head Start candidates were served by Head Start in the early 1990s (Rudiger & Krinsky, 1992).

Edward Rozycki (1995) wrote a particularly scathing account of the America 2000 education goals, in which he took issue with the goals' stated requirement that new schools would be designed to cost no more than what was being spent on current schools. If schools are not making the grade as it is, Rozycki reasoned, how will they be expected to meet the goals of America 2000 with no additional funding? Further, Rozycki stated that the goals of America 2000 were basically just platitudes:

Most vexing to me as someone who has spent so many years in education is the thought that no one in health care, industry, or government – not one single human being capable of fogging a mirror or scratching an itch – would have taken six facile slogans about national health care, industrial, or governmental goals as worthy of anything more than polite disdain. (Rozycki, 1995, p. 166)

## **Goals 2000**

The 1994 federal legislation that arose from the Charlottesville Education Summit and President Bush's America 2000 education goals was known as Goals 2000: The Educate America Act. This law, a highlight of the Clinton administration's education platform, ushered in a new era of federal intervention in education by encouraging states to participate in national education reform in exchange for funding. The law focused on goals and standards and was oriented towards measurable improvement. However, the legislation was not a strict federal mandate. State participation was optional, and each state that chose to participate developed its own reform plans, deadlines, and accepted the responsibility of reform (King, 1994). According to King (1994), the main thrust of Goals 2000 was the development of standards and goals for public school students in every participating state. The goals stated in the legislation differed in number – two goals were added – and somewhat in content from the goals in America 2000. The goals stated that by the year 2000:

1. All children will start school ready to learn.
2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
3. All children will leave grades four, eight, and twelve competent in challenging subject matters, such as English, mathematics, arts, history, and geography.

4. The nation's teachers will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.
5. American students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.
6. Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
7. Every American school will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.
8. Schools will promote parental involvement and participation in the social, emotional, and academic growth of their children (Cookson, 1995, p. 417).

The goals were deliberately written as broad statements. The broad statements were intended to move the goal of education standards forward, while at the same time allowing states to design their own plans to achieve the goals (King, 1994).

Cookson (1995) viewed the signing of the Goals 2000 legislation as a "critical turning point in the history of American education. For the first time, the federal government unabashedly laid claim to the management of a national effort of educational reform" (Cookson, 1995, p. 406-7). Cookson viewed this legislation as a new federalism, based on the assumption that a comprehensive reform movement can meet the stated education goals (Cookson, 1995). Similarly, Danielson and Malouf (1994) viewed the Goals 2000 legislation as an opportunity for better outcomes for students with disabilities. Specifically, the legislation included provisions for accountability related to the academic standards, and accountability for positive academic outcomes for students with disabilities had been an ongoing problem in American public schools (Danielson & Malouf, 1994).

Schwartz and Robinson (2000) viewed Goals 2000 as an effort to define the relationship between federal and state control of education policy. Goals 2000 required that states would be held accountable for student achievement in exchange for resources that encouraged standards-based reform. However, by the year 2000 there was little evidence that standards-based reforms had impacted student achievement across the country (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000).

Hobbie (2001) analyzed the first goal of Goals 2000, which he noted was perhaps the least controversial goal in the entire legislation: By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn. Hobbie did not find evidence of any measurable improvement in the readiness of preschool-age students. Indeed, the goal itself is vague. Did “all students” really mean all students, regardless of English proficiency or disability status? Did “start” mean starting kindergarten at the same time? States have a wide variety of dates for the start of kindergarten, with a range of 12 months expected in an average class of kindergarten students. Did “ready” have an actual definition? Kindergarten readiness was defined by the National Education Goals Panel, but no single assessment was found to adequately measure “readiness” (Hobbie, 2001).

Manatt (1995) stated that the term voluntary curriculum standards was “the ultimate oxymoron” (Manatt, 1995, p. 98). Despite the fact that participation was voluntary as far as individual states were concerned, Goals 2000 formalized the creation of national standards and assessment systems, and prevented states from merely engaging in more of the same types of practices. Merely providing additional remediation services to failing students, for example, was no longer considered enough – states, districts and schools were required to create new comprehensive plans for improvement (Manatt, 1995).

Murphy and Adams (1998) viewed the era of Goals 2000 as a restructuring era in public schools. Restructuring refers to the notion that the bureaucratic infrastructure in education was itself a major part of the problem of declining student achievement. Site-based management, sometimes known as decentralization, was a major restructuring idea. In site-based management, decision making and the governing structure of schools was upended, at least in theory, to give parents, community members, teachers, and school staff more authority in making decisions on behalf of the school (Jenni, 1991). In addition, the restructuring era was highlighted by the encroachment of market influences such as vouchers, deregulations, and privatization (Murphy & Adams, 1998). Darling-Hammond (1991) viewed two aspects of Goals 2000, school choice and a national testing program, as inadequate responses to a systemic resource allocation problem in American schools. “It [Goals 2000] presumes that supplying concrete goals and carrots and sticks will remedy underperformance” (Darling-Hammond, 1991, p. 26).

Goals 2000 was passed in 1994 in conjunction with the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Title I of the ESEA reauthorization of 1994 required states to develop state curriculum standards, state assessments of those standards, and systems of

accountability for student achievement relating to those standards. Thus, Title I was a key federal mechanism to standards-based reform, particularly since education was not a provision in the United States Constitution and the governance of education systems was left up to the individual states under the provisions of the Tenth Amendment. States had the flexibility to enact their own system of standards, but billions in federal Title I dollars were at stake for the states. Superfine (2005) stated, “As Goals 2000 was to provide the federal direction for standards-based education reform, Title I was to provide the push” (Superfine, 2005, p. 11).

Bowyer and McCree (1997), in their linguistic examination of the legislation Goals 2000, found that the political context was an important factor in the wording used. The numerical order of the goals and the addition of two goals from the America 2000 report were two examples of how politics entered into the legislation. For example, the way the first goal was worded (All children will start school ready to learn.) was an instance of the use of a slogan in education. Educational slogans are defined as “rallying points of key ideas and attitudes” (Bowyer & McCree, 1997, p. 144), the type of saying with which most of the public would agree. The placement of such a non-controversial goal as the initial goal in the legislation was a calculated move (Bowyer & McCree, 1997).

The influence of the federal government in American public school reform could be seen throughout the 1980s. The Charlottesville Education Summit (which came about as a result of President Bush’s request for the summit), America 2000, and the Goals 2000 Act were all part of a larger movement towards national education standards. Again, one school reform initiative, America 2000, gave way to another reform initiative, national curriculum standards (Ravitch, 1993).

### **National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Standards**

A national professional education organization, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), also helped pave the way for the standards movement. NCTM published its first set of national standards in mathematics in 1989, and the standards “quickly became a dynamic force in changing staff development, instructional practices, teacher education, textbooks, technology, and assessment” (Ravitch, 1993, p. 767). The NCTM standards were important because there was finally consensus on what students should learn at each grade in mathematics (Hekimoglu & Sloan, 2005; Ravitch, 1993).

Prior to the NCTM standards, there was significant variability in K-12 mathematics content from state to state and school district to school district. However, much of the K-8 mathematics curriculum around the nation was focused on arithmetic and computation. The NCTM standards reshaped the elementary mathematics curriculum by infusing content in other important areas of mathematics besides computation at an early age, such as concepts of algebra and geometry (Burrill, 1997). The NCTM standards brought an unexpected amount of attention from educators and non-educators alike, along with criticism and praise for the original standards and subsequent revisions. At a minimum, the NCTM helped provoke debate and guide the nation's attention toward mathematical issues in particular and curriculum standards in general (Finn & Kanstoroom, 2001; Hekimoglu & Sloan, 2005).

Darling-Hammond and Wise (1985), in a qualitative study of teacher perceptions, examined the nascent movement of standards from the perspective of teachers. Their study provided evidence that teachers were concerned about the impact of standards, especially with the perceived narrowing of the curriculum necessitated by preparation for standardized tests based on standards. Even in 1985, teachers were concerned about the possibility of academic standards leading to routinized, scripted, or teaching that was standardized (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985).

### **No Child Left Behind**

By the close of the 1990s, every state had created its own system of accountability based on state curriculum standards and student assessment (Rothman, 2012b; Teddlie & Stringfield, 2006). The key legislative accomplishment of President George W. Bush's education platform was the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB), which was an 1100-page reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, featured four key principles: (a) annual state testing would be required of every child in grade 3-8 in reading and mathematics; (b) major school reform decisions would be made by the states; (c) schools marked by poor student achievement would receive assistance; (d) and parents of students in persistently dangerous or failing schools would be allowed to choose another school (Ravitch, 2010b). Under NCLB, schools and school divisions were required to meet yearly benchmarks of progress on state assessments in reading and mathematics, known as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), with the ultimate goal of 100% of all students achieving

proficiency by the year 2014. A key difference between NCLB and reform movements in the past was an emphasis on closing the achievement gap between subgroups, such as students with disabilities, students from minority groups, and students from low socioeconomic families (Tyack, 2003). Title I funding was used as the main incentive for states to implement these assessment systems (Williams, 2008).

Underlying the NCLB legislation was the notion that student assessment was a way to measure the quality of teaching and the quality of schools. That is, state assessments for NCLB not only measured student achievement but also measured the achievement of teachers as well. In some states, teachers had little input into the revision of state standards or state assessment test item selection, so state assessments purportedly provided an “independent measure of a school’s curriculum and learning environment” (Joyce, Calhoun & Hopkins, 1999, p. 76).

The assessment movement has moved into the public consciousness over the last two decades. High-stakes student assessment has become more commonplace and more vital to school accountability. Murphy and Adams, writing in 1998, noted: “The public's appetite for reform remains high. The nation has settled on better student performance as the desired means to attain a strong economy, vibrant democracy, and satisfied citizenry” (Murphy & Adams, 1998, p. 442).

The political aspects of NCLB have been important as time has passed. NCLB was passed with broad bipartisan support in 2001 (Ravitch, 2010b). However, the law has received much criticism and debate over the last decade. The consequences written into the law for when schools fail to meet Adequate Yearly Progress are viewed as punitive towards students, teachers and schools by some observers. For example, Williams (2008) stated that “the sanctions imposed on schools failing to meet standards have a similar effect because they punish schools and students in need of help rather than provide effective remedies or encourage states and districts to develop strategies aimed at concealing underachievement” (Williams, 2008, p. 583). Nichols and Berliner (2008) suggested the testing-centered curriculum brought about by No Child Left Behind has decreased the motivation for many students, leading to feelings of disconnection from school and increased reluctance when it comes to test-centered schoolwork. Further, the sanctions imposed on schools failing to make AYP are seen to stigmatize and shame the teachers in these schools, making it more difficult to retain and hire competent faculty (Ravitch, 2010a; Williams, 2008).

Inserra and Bossert (2008) studied the instructional practices of elementary school teachers in high-stakes state testing grades (grades 3-5) compared to teachers in primary grades without high-stakes testing. They found no significant differences in planning, classroom environment, instructional practices, or attitudes about high-stakes testing. However, they did find statistically significant differences in the amount of test preparation activities and enrichment activities offered by the two groups of teachers. Teachers in testing grades were busy with test preparation activities rather than enrichment (Inserra & Bossert, 2008).

As the 2014 deadline for 100% student pass rates has drawn closer, most states (including Virginia) have sought and received waivers to certain requirements of the law in exchange for other more flexible systems of accountability. Some states were more successful with their applications for the waiver than other states. Shelly (2012) found several factors that contributed to successful waiver applications. Successful waiver applications tended to be from “states with a more developed system of standardized testing prior to NCLB implementation and states that received a higher percentage of their total K-12 school funding from the federal government” (Shelly, 2012, p. 118).

### **Common Core State Standards**

From the inception of public schools, individual states have determined what their students need to know and need to be able to do. These state standards have varied widely from state to state. The No Child Left Behind Act made variability in state standards obvious (Ravitch, 2010b; Rothman, 2012b). For example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has helped provide evidence that the curriculum standards vary widely from state to state. The NAEP is administered biennially as part of the accountability provisions of No Child Left Behind. As an example of the variability of state standards, 87 percent of Tennessee fourth grade students were proficient on the Tennessee state mathematics assessment in 2005, compared to a 28 percent proficiency rate on the NAEP. Meanwhile, in Massachusetts in the same year, 40 percent of fourth grade students were proficient on the Massachusetts state assessment in mathematics, compared to a 41 percent proficiency rate on the NAEP (Rothman, 2012a).

A variety of issues with the patchwork system of standards in states across the country highlighted the need for common standards. For example, NCLB prompted each state to create

its own curricular standards as well as its own definition of proficiency, leading to state standards and state assessments that varied in depth, breadth, and quality (Rothman, 2012a). Another issue was an increase in the numbers of students arriving at college in need of remediation (McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013). Further, the recognition that today's students would be competing in a global economy made the tradition of state control of standards seem somewhat anachronistic. Thus, the No Child Left Behind act and national standards-based reform has led to, in the current decade, the movement toward Common Core State Standards. (Rothman, 2012a).

Forty-three states, four territories, the District of Columbia, and Department of Defense schools have signed on to the voluntary national standards known as the Common Core State Standards, as of this writing (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014). Table 1 contains a list of states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards and a list of states that have not adopted them (Ferguson, 2013; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014).

Table 1

*U.S. States and Territories and the Common Core State Standards*

States and territories that have adopted the Common Core State Standards as of November, 2014			States and territories that have not adopted the Common Core State Standards as of November, 2014
Alabama	Maryland	South Carolina	Alaska
Arizona	Massachusetts	South Dakota	Indiana*
Arkansas	Michigan	Tennessee	Minnesota+
California	Mississippi	Utah	Nebraska
Colorado	Missouri	Vermont	Oklahoma*
Connecticut	Montana	Washington	Texas
Delaware	Nevada	West Virginia	Virginia
Florida	New Hampshire	Wisconsin	Puerto Rico
Georgia	New Jersey	Wyoming	
Hawaii	New Mexico		
Idaho	New York	District of Columbia	
Illinois	North Carolina	American Samoa	*Indiana and Oklahoma originally adopted the CCSS but subsequently reversed their decision
Iowa	North Dakota	U.S. Virgin Islands	
Kansas	Ohio	Guam	
Kentucky	Oregon	N. Mariana Islands	
Louisiana	Pennsylvania	Dept. of Def. Schools	+ Minnesota has adopted CCSS in Language Arts
Maine	Rhode Island		

*Note:* National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014.

Proponents of the Common Core State Standards point to several benefits of the standards. The Common Core State Standards encourage: (a) shared expectations of student learning from state to state; (b) increased focus on fewer, important concepts at each grade level; (c) increased efficiency by allowing consortia of states to produce common assessments and curriculum guides; and (d) increased quality of assessments through the development of electronically adaptive assessments (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). A major difference between the Common Core State Standards and previous national standards initiatives is that Common Core State Standards have the goal of building toward enhanced college and career readiness. The Common Core State Standards are intended to remedy a perceived lack of preparedness for higher education and the workplace among high school graduates (Rothman, 2012b).

Not unlike other major education reforms of the last several decades, the Common Core State Standards have been accompanied by political disagreements and controversy. Some educators, such as Tienken (2011), view the research base presented by the developers of the Common Core State Standards as inadequate. Gamson, Lu, and Eckert (2013) found in a study of text complexity in third and sixth grade reading textbooks that, despite the claims to the contrary by proponents of the Common Core State Standards, the level of complexity of social studies textbooks has remained steady or increased over the last 50 years. In some states, such as California and Massachusetts, opposition groups have formed to try to revert to previous state standards (Peterson & Kaplan, 2013). Due to the contentiousness of the debate, the public profile of the Common Core State Standards is rising. As Ferguson (2013) notes:

The state-led movement to ensure that most of the nation's students are learning to the same rigorous, internationally benchmarked standards in math and reading is not exactly a new notion, but the Core has nonetheless created a firestorm, resulting in perhaps the most significant debate about American education since desegregation (Ferguson, 2013, p. 66).

As of November 2014, there remains considerable controversy regarding the Common Core State Standards. Rycik (2014) notes that the Common Core State Standards have been criticized by conservatives and liberals alike. The pullout of several states from the two major CCSS testing consortia, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), points to the controversy regarding assessment of the Common Core State Standards (Rycik, 2014; McShane, 2014).

The Common Core State Standards have been vocally supported by some and vocally denigrated by others. Far-right conservatives and teacher's union activists "have forged an unlikely alliance against the Common Core" (Hess, 2014). Business interests have weighed in on the Common Core State Standards controversy, some in favor of the CCSS. For example, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Washington-based Business Roundtable launched an advertising campaign in favor of the Common Core State Standards and the goal of career readiness. The Business Roundtable represents some of the largest corporations in the United States (Trotter, 2014; Hess, 2014).

Viewed through the lens of punctuated equilibrium theory (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993), the movement toward the Common Core State Standards over the last several decades has been

punctuated by several important events. The publication of *A Nation at Risk* was a catalyzing event that encouraged educators across the nation to consider more carefully what students were expected to learn and do. The Charlottesville Education Summit, the education goals of America 2000 and Goals 2000, the NCTM standards, and No Child Left Behind were dramatic events that punctuated the national conversation about curriculum standards.

### **Curriculum Standards in Virginia**

Just as curriculum standards developed in American public schools gradually over several decades, the Virginia Standards of Learning developed over many years. However, several important events interrupted, or perhaps accelerated, the move to adopt and to revise the Standards of Learning. In the following review of the literature on the Virginia standards movement, punctuated equilibrium theory (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993) is used to view the development of the Virginia Standards of Learning. Virginia schools systems are known as divisions, and the term school division is used synonymously with the term school district throughout this study.

### **Roots of Local Control**

The Commonwealth of Virginia has a long history of local control in public education. Heatwole (1916) notes that initial attempts at creating common schools for the general public were often derailed by prominent aristocratic citizens, who viewed common schools as only appropriate for the truly indigent. Thomas Jefferson was a prominent proponent of public education and local control: “Jefferson’s proposed plan of public education in 1779 was based upon his political philosophy of local self-government and provided for no higher authority for administration than the local district or county” (Heatwole, 1916, p. 101). However, public schools in the Commonwealth would not take hold until the creation of a sizable middle class in the mid 1800s, with the creation of the first system of public schools in Virginia in 1870 (Heatwole, 1916).

The original Virginia city school systems, including Alexandria, Lynchburg, Fredericksburg, Staunton, Winchester, Danville, Williamsburg, and Portsmouth found that local taxation would be necessary to maintain adequate schools (Heatwole, 1916). According to the *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of the Commonwealth of Virginia*

(Farr, 1885), there were over 1,400 superintendents and trustees appointed throughout the Commonwealth. Such a large number of superintendents and trustees spread throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia in the early days of public schools is evidence of the longstanding tradition of local control in Virginia. Thus, the concept of local taxation to support local schools combined with numerous school officials making their own decisions added to the tradition of local control in Virginia public schools.

### **Governance of Virginia Public Schools**

Public schools in Virginia are governed by a tiered system of authority. Authority over Virginia schools begins with Article VIII of the Virginia Constitution, which is the education article, and ends with local school division boards of education. The education article of the Virginia Constitution establishes several critical aspects of the Virginia public education system, including: (a) authorizing the Standards of Quality; (b) establishing the authority of the General Assembly to approve revisions of the Standards of Quality and to fund the Standards of Quality; (c) establishing the State Board of Education; (d) establishing the office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; and (e) giving authority over local school decisions to local school boards and division superintendents (Szakal, 1997).

The Virginia General Assembly is “the most powerful force in elementary and secondary education in Virginia” (Szakal, 1997, p. 5) The General Assembly has the constitutionally mandated task of funding public schools, as well determining the funding balance between state funds and local funds for school divisions. The General Assembly is also responsible for making sure the education system in Virginia is of high quality (Szakal, 1997).

The governor of Virginia has a great deal of influence over education policy in Virginia, and compared to other states, the governor of Virginia is particularly influential. “The constitutional and statutory powers of Virginia’s governor have been said to create one of the seven most powerful governors in the nation. The most important aspect of his [sic] powerful position vis-a-vis education is the budgetary process” (Szakal, 1997, p. 3). The governor can influence education priorities in the Commonwealth by creating new initiatives and limiting other initiatives through the budgetary process, with General Assembly approval of the budget (Szakal, 1997). The governor appoints the members of the State Board of Education with confirmation of appointees by the General Assembly. The governor appoints the Secretary of

Education as a member of the governor's cabinet. Due to the Constitutional responsibility allocated to the General Assembly and the Superintendent of Public Instruction, however, the Secretary of Education mainly "serves as the ambassador for the governor's philosophical and policy positions" (Szakal, 1997, p. 4). In addition, the governor appoints the Superintendent of Public Instruction, with confirmation by the General Assembly (Szakal, 1997).

The State Board of Education is given authority by the Virginia Constitution to manage the Commonwealth's school divisions. The Board of Education has authority over a wide array of public school management functions. Some of the management functions of the board include: monitoring the implementation of the Standards of Quality, developing the Standards of Learning, implementing the Standards of Accreditation, and creating licensure standards for Virginia educators (Szakal, 1997). The State Board of Education members serve staggered four year terms so that the board is made up of appointees from the current and previous governor (Hess, 2006).

As previously noted, the Superintendent of Public Instruction is an office created by the Virginia Constitution. The Superintendent of Public Instruction is appointed by the governor and confirmed by the General Assembly; the term length of the Superintendent of Public Instruction coincides with the term of the governor. Besides the governor, the Superintendent of Public Instruction arguably has the most influence over Virginia public schools because the Superintendent serves as the head of the Virginia Department of Education (Szakal, 1997). The Superintendent of Public Instruction is secretary to the Virginia Board of Education, but is not appointed by the board. The Superintendent of Public Instruction is appointed by the governor and works with the board, an important distinction in Virginia school governance (Hess, 2006).

### **Accountability in Virginia Schools**

In their timeline of events in the history of Virginia school accountability, Duke and Reck (2003) note that the Virginia Standards of Quality were proposed in 1971 in response to a mandate from an amendment to the Virginia Constitution requiring the development of Standards of Quality. The Standards of Quality were an attempt to provide all students in the Commonwealth with a comparable educational experience and were intended to create more uniformity among school divisions. Curriculum decisions were largely under the purview of localities until the early 1980s, when Virginia became one of the first states to create state

curricular guidelines (Duke & Reck, 2003). Known as the Standards of Learning, the curriculum guidelines were developed starting in 1979, field tested in 1981, and implemented in 1982. The Virginia Department of Education held meetings and workshops statewide to introduce the standards and help teachers implement the standards. Through the original 1982 Standards of Learning, combined with the codification of the Standards of Quality in 1984, the state of Virginia asserted its influence over public schools despite rising concerns about the loss of local control for school divisions (Duke & Reck, 2003).

In 1988, the Standards of Quality were revised by the Virginia Board of Education, with the addition of a requirement to measure student achievement on the standards. The Literacy Passport Test was developed to measure student achievement in reading, writing and mathematics and phased in over a seven-year period. According to Duke and Reck (2003), the Literacy Passport Test was one of the first high stakes assessments in Virginia. Students were administered the Literacy Passport Test in sixth grade, with remediation provided if students failed and opportunities to retake the test were offered in seventh and eighth grade. Students who did not pass all three portions of the Literacy Passport Test by eighth grade were not supposed to be promoted to high school. The guidelines for promotion were eventually altered so that students were allowed into ninth grade, but students were not able to earn credits for graduation until all three portions of the test had been passed (Duke & Reck, 2003). The Literacy Passport Test was eventually phased out, amid criticism that it assessed only lower level skills such as “how to tell time or count change” (Ravitch, 1997, p. 106), but the Literacy Passport Test was an important step in the development of the school accountability system in Virginia (Duke & Reck, 2003).

### **Common Core of Learning**

The administration of Virginia Governor Wilder in 1990 proposed education reforms called the World Class Education Program. The main thrust of the proposal was a set of education outcomes known as the Common Core of Learning. The Common Core of Learning was proposed to ensure that Virginia graduates would have not only outstanding academic skills but also increased integrity, self-management and self-esteem (Duke & Reck, 2003). Conservative critics of the Common Core of Learning took issue with the program for including affective domains of learning. The outcomes-based education of the Common Core of Learning,

as viewed by social conservatives, was a “backdoor attempt at social engineering” (Harris, 1993, p. B1). In addition, some superintendents viewed the Common Core of Learning as an intrusion upon local control (Duke & Reck, 2003). Amid fierce criticism, the World Class Education Program and the Common Core of Learning was discontinued by Wilder in 1993 (Harris, 1993).

Jez (1999) explored the organizational changes made in the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) between 1990 and 1994 as the agency sought to encourage the World Class Education Initiative. The World Class Education Initiative was related to core standards in each of the K-12 academic subjects. Though the World Class Education Initiative (and the Common Core of Learning) ultimately did not take hold in the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Virginia Department of Education took a greater leadership role in the promotion of state standards in Virginia as a result of the four-year VDOE restructuring period (Duke & Reck, 2003; Jez, 1999).

#### **Four-Prong Education Reform in Virginia**

The Virginia Standards of Learning became more formalized as part of the Commonwealth’s major education reform initiative in 1995, a reform that has largely shaped the accountability structure in Virginia today. The Virginia education reform initiative of 1995 included four prongs of accountability, including: (a) curricular standards known as the Virginia Standards of Learning; (b) criterion-referenced assessments based on the Virginia Standards of Learning; (c) Standards of Accreditation primarily based on pass rates on the Standards of Learning assessments; and (d) school performance report cards as a measure of public communication and accountability (Duke, Tucker, Higgins, Lanphear, Levy, & Salmonowicz, 2008). Since 1995, the Virginia Standards of Learning and the associated assessments have undergone major revisions, sometimes with heated debate (Hess, 2006).

Duke, Tucker, Higgins, Lanphear, Levy, and Salmonowicz (2008) found that all 21 school divisions in their study adopted policies in response to the Virginia Standards of Learning reform of 1995. In particular, school divisions adopted policies to provide additional academic intervention for struggling students. For example, the 21 school divisions created policies regarding in-school intervention programs and summer school intervention programs (Duke et al., 2008).

In December of 2003, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission of the Virginia General Assembly (JLARC) conducted a study to determine why some schools had

more success than others with the new Standards of Learning assessments. Specifically, JLARC sought to identify best practices in top performing public schools on the new assessments (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2003). JLARC is a commission, with its own full-time staff, comprised of legislators from the Virginia House of Delegates and the Virginia Senate. JLARC has the charge of evaluating the operation of Virginia programs and state agencies for efficiency (Salmon, 2010). Originally formed in 1973, JLARC has made more than 1000 recommendations that have resulted in significant changes to the Code of Virginia as well as savings to taxpayers through recommendations for efficiency and effectiveness (Gordon, 1994).

The 2003 JLARC study on SOL assessment performance found that a large portion of the variation in student performance could be attributed to demographic characteristics of students and their communities (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2003). Poverty, race, and parent educational attainment were key demographic variables explaining the variation in performance. However, several factors related to best practice were identified that contributed to success on the assessments. These practices included: (a) strong principal leadership; (b) positive learning environment; (c) effective teaching staff; (d) data-driven instruction; (e) curriculum alignment, pacing, and resources; (f) differentiated instruction; (g) academic remediation; (h) teamwork, collaboration, and vertical integration; and (i) intensity and structure of the school day (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2003). In addition, schools that implemented remediation programs early, prior to SOL failure, had more successful student outcomes on the Standards of Learning Assessments. The study found that implementing the aforementioned best practices quickly and aggressively was vital for schools facing challenges such as high rates of poverty, low graduation rates, and high retention rates (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, 2003). Thus, in the first years of the Virginia SOL assessments, schools that reacted slowly to the curriculum changes brought about by the Standards of Learning had less successful outcomes than schools that embraced the changes (Christie, 2004).

The first school performance report cards in the Commonwealth of Virginia were released to the public in January of 1999. The report cards showed that schools struggled with the new Standards of Learning assessments. For example, 39 of the 1800 public schools in the Commonwealth achieved the passing rate to meet state accreditation standards in 1999, (Cross, 1999). However, nearly 40 percent of schools met accreditation rates the following year (Duke &

Reck, 2003). School performance report cards are now published annually on the Virginia Department of Education website.

### **Virginia Accountability and Standards Research**

Accountability in public schools, in the form of revised curriculum standards and assessments, can have a political dimension. Fore (1995) examined the political aspects of the development of the Standards of Learning in Virginia in history and social sciences. Three influential groups helped to influence the development of the standards: members of the Governor's education staff, public school social studies educators as represented by the Virginia Consortium of Social Studies Specialists and College Educators, and members of the Virginia Board of Education. Fore identified the themes of power, rhetoric, and ideology as important themes in the debate over the standards. Reagan-era concerns about the crisis in American education, as well as the controversy in Virginia over the outcomes-based proposal of the Common Core of Learning were important contextual aspects of the debate over the history and social science Standards of Learning in Virginia (Fore, 1995).

The national standards and accountability movement has been documented in the research literature on Virginia public schools in a number of ways. For example, the implementation of national standards in mathematics in middle and high schools was the focus of a staff development project in central Virginia (Patty, 2001). The purpose of the five-year project was to promote whole-school mathematics reform using professional development for hands-on, standards-based lessons that moved away from traditional textbook lessons (Patty, 2001). Meyers (2000) surveyed 110 Virginia high school teachers regarding perceptions of the Virginia Standards of Learning assessments. Meyers found that teachers perceived an increase in pressure to raise student achievement. Teachers also reported a narrowing of the curriculum since the arrival of the Standards of Learning, particularly among core subject teachers, such as mathematics, science, reading, and writing, as compared to teachers of non-core subjects, such as music, drama, and vocational education (Meyers, 2000).

Epps (2001) studied the perceptions of middle school principals of accountability-based school reform as related to characteristics of middle schools in Virginia. Epps found no significant differences between principals' perceptions of school accountability and whether or not features of the middle school concept (such as flexible block scheduling and advisor/advisee

systems) were present. However, principals in schools with large minority populations tended to agree that the new accountability in Virginia schools focused on gaps in student achievement between minority and non-minority students (Epps, 2001).

The perceptions of Title I reading teachers regarding school accountability through the Virginia Standards of Learning assessments was the focus of a study by Beale (2003). Teachers reported change in instructional practices and scheduling, including increased time allotted for reading instruction, as a result of the increased accountability required by the Standards of Learning assessments. Teachers also reported that the Standards of Learning had required them to raise expectations for their students (Beale, 2003).

Bolt (2003) investigated teacher perceptions of how the Virginia Standards of Learning had affected teaching practices in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Bolt randomly selected 360 teachers in Virginia and administered a survey to gauge teacher perceptions of the SOL. Teachers in Bolt's study reported their instructional autonomy had been adversely affected by the standards movement and that teaching strategies were less diverse. Bolt also found that teachers reported the Standards of Learning were inadequate to meet diverse student needs (Bolt, 2003).

Student perceptions of the Virginia Standards of Learning and the academic engagement of high-school students was the focus of a study by Certo, Cauley, Moxley, and Chafin (2008). A total of 33 high school students from seven urban Virginia high schools were interviewed about their perceptions of the types of learning activities they were exposed to in class each day. The students interviewed indicated an increase of note-taking and worksheet activities during their high school years, as opposed to the type of learning activities that they found more engaging, such as debate, discussion, and hand-on learning activities. The authors found that students believed their teachers were rushing to cover the standards by the time Standards of Learning assessments were conducted, rather than planning learning activities that the students enjoyed (Certo et al., 2008).

## **Summary of Chapter 2**

Chapter 2 included a review of the literature regarding the national standards movement and the development of the Virginia Standards of Learning, as well as research studies related to the Virginia Standards of Learning. The national standards movement, culminating in the

Common Core State Standards, had its roots in events such as *A Nation at Risk*, the Charlottesville Education Summit, America 2000, Goals 2000, the NCTM standards, and the No Child Left Behind legislation. The Commonwealth of Virginia developed state curriculum standards in advance of much of the nation and alongside national standards initiatives such as the NCTM standards. Virginia had rudimentary standards in place as early as 1982, while the national mathematics standards produced by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics were adopted in 1989. The theory of punctuated equilibrium was introduced as a framework for the research literature on the standards movement across the nation and in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The research literature shows that there is a need for more information about the development of the Virginia Standards of Learning alongside national standards initiatives such as the Common Core State Standards. Empirical studies have largely been focused on responses to the Standards of Learning, such as the study of teacher perceptions by Bolt (2003) or the study of principal perceptions by Epps (2001). Though the standards movement has been several decades in the making, the Common Core State Standards coalition began in 2010 and the research literature on the Common Core State Standards is still developing. There is a gap in the research literature when considering the questions of how and why the Commonwealth of Virginia has arrived at the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Research Methods**

This chapter is a description of the research design and methods used in the study. Qualitative methods were used to answer the research questions. To answer the research questions, data were collected and analyzed. Sources of data utilized for this study were documents and interviews. A two-stage process of data collection and analysis was employed. First, the documents were collected and a document analysis was conducted. Second, using the results of the document analysis to inform the interview process, elite interviews were conducted and the interviews were analyzed.

The constant comparative method of data analysis was used in the study (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The constant comparative method is based on the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967), who developed what is known as grounded theory. Grounded theory is the result of a process where understanding of a phenomenon is the result of data derived from the field rather than from the research literature (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Leedy & Ormrod, 2007; Robrecht, 1995). That is, data obtained from a social setting are compared with data from other social settings, and eventually give rise to a theory (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Creswell, Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2007). Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) refer to grounded theory as a process of moving from the particular to the general: “You are trying to categorize a particular action, event, participant, state, and so on, into a more abstractly defined class” (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 285). Grounded theory allows researchers to simultaneously collect and analyze data, and through successive rounds of data analysis a theory can emerge (Charmaz, 2005). An important characteristic of grounded theory is that the theory is grounded in the views of the participants (Creswell, 2009).

Data for the first stage of this study were collected using documents from two sources over the 1995-2014 time period: Virginia Board of Education documents and Virginia Department of Education documents. A third category of documents, professional organizations’ advocacy documents, was an intended source of data, but contact with the professional organizations did not yield documents. From the Virginia Board of Education, documents collected for the study included meeting agendas, meeting minutes, and briefing information. From the Virginia Department of Education, documents collected for the study included Superintendent’s Memos.

Documents from the Virginia Board of Education were included because the Virginia Board of Education is the constitutionally-prescribed manager of public elementary and secondary education in the Commonwealth of Virginia (Szakal, 1997). The Virginia Board of Education meets monthly and publishes agendas and minutes for each meeting, along with providing briefing documents. Superintendent's Memos were selected for inclusion because the Superintendent's Memos are important methods of influence and communication to local education officials. Virginia's governance structure for its public schools includes the periodic issuance of Superintendent's Memos from the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The policy position of the Superintendent's Memos is usually weighted between regulations and guidelines (Szakal, 1997). Therefore, Superintendent's Memos are an important source of guidance in Virginia school divisions. Since 2009, the Superintendent's Memos have been sequentially numbered and uncategorized, but in prior years the memos were color-coded and divided into the categories of administrative, informational, and regulatory (Virginia Department of Education, 2014b). Together, the documents provided the researcher with context regarding the development of the Virginia Standards of Learning since 1995 and insight into the decision made in Virginia regarding the Common Core State Standards.

Interviews were conducted to obtain in-depth information from major figures in the Commonwealth's Department of Education since 1995. Specifically, this study utilized a process of elite interviewing. Elite interviewing involves conducting interviews with people who have held important positions within an organization or within society, with the balance of power or knowledge base in the interview situation typically in favor of the interviewee (Morris, 2009). Interviewing elites can result in three distinct benefits, including: (a) providing narratives about the participant's background and point of view, (b) providing commentary or interpretations of events based on their experiences, and (c) providing entrée to information that may not be accessible otherwise (Moyser, 2006). Interviews with major figures in Virginia public education over the last two decades, including current Board of Education members and current and former Superintendents of Public Instruction, provided significant information for the study, based on their commentary and their interpretation of events. Few people possess such a broad-based perspective of the Virginia public education system along with a perspective of national initiatives such as the national standards movement.

Interviewing elites is likely to yield different information than interviewing non-elites, because someone who is in an elite position may have had the opportunity to influence outcomes more than the average person. The sample population is likely to be small when seeking elite interviews (Richards, 1996). The population of former State Superintendents of Public Instruction in the Commonwealth of Virginia since 1995 totals seven, for example.

## **Sampling**

The interview sampling procedure began with the population of Virginia Superintendents of Public Instruction and Assistant Superintendents of Public Instruction since 1995, as well as Virginia Board of Education members who served during the Common Core State Standards decision, a purposive sample. A purposive sample is a group of people carefully selected to give depth and detail to a topic in order to more fully explain the topic (Seidman, 2013). A purposive sample is necessarily tied to the objectives of one's research (Palys, 2008). As noted above, when conducting elite interviews the sample population is likely to be small. A total of seven face-to-face interviews were conducted with major figures in the last two decades of education in Virginia, with an average interview length of one hour. Interviews were conducted in-person and the researcher traveled to meet the participants at a location that was convenient to the participants.

The specific type of purposive sampling conducted in this study was criterion sampling. Criterion sampling is defined as "searching for cases or individuals who meet a certain criterion, for example, that they have a certain disease or have had a particular life experience" (Palys, 2008, p. 698). The population sought for interviews consisted of Virginia Superintendents of Public Instruction and state-level Assistant Superintendents who have served since 1995, as well as members of the Virginia Board of Education who served during the Common Core State Standards decision. Each of the former Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, and board members had particular experiences and recollections that were useful in this study.

## **Development of Interview Protocol**

Following the document analysis stage of the study, the second stage of the study featured interviews. When conducting interviews for this study, the researcher followed an interview protocol which included index card manipulatives to which the participants were asked

to respond. As part of the document analysis process, the major events, processes, and influences discovered to be instrumental in the development of the SOL and the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards were compiled and written on 4 x 6 index cards. The index cards were used as interview prompts. Schamber (2000) notes that the use of index cards as conversation prompts in interviews can help put the participant at ease. Recall of the participants can be facilitated by the use of the index cards (Schamber, 2000). With the use of index cards as interview prompts, participants can utilize the index cards as visual aids, make connections, and allow for comparisons and contrasts (Schultze & Avital, 2011). Participants were asked to discuss the three most important cards as they related to the historical development of the Virginia Standards of Learning. Participants were then asked to explain which of the cards, from their perspective, would have had the most influence on the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards. Finally, blank index cards were made available for participants to add any important events, influences or processes related to the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards that may have been overlooked in the document analysis.

The interview protocol for the study was created using Seidman's (2013) concept of interviewing using an interview guide. An interview guide works to provide structure for the interview with a list of pre-determined questions and possible probes. At the same time, the interview guide provides flexibility to allow follow-up questions in an open-ended manner. An interview guide is useful to help participants reconstruct their experiences (Seidman, 2013).

Each interview for this study was conducted face-to-face. Irvine, Drew, and Sainsbury (2012) conducted a comparison study of telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews. Even though face-to-face interviews are typically deemed to be superior to telephone interviews due to the non-verbal cues and information provided in a face-to-face setting, the use of an interview guide is a vital component of either type of interview situation (Irvine, Drew, & Sainsbury, 2012).

Question probes, used as supplements to the index cards, were developed based upon the research questions and the findings of the literature review. The question probes were developed in anticipation of the need to elicit further information following discussion of the index cards. Table 2 shows the alignment of research sub-questions with the interview probes used as needed following discussion of the index cards with interview participants.

Table 2

*Alignment of Research Sub-Questions and Interview Probes*

<b>Research Sub-Question</b>	<b>Interview Probes</b>
1. What were the major events, influences, and processes in Virginia’s curricular reform known as the Standards of Learning, 1995-2014?	What would you consider to be some of the most important events in the development of the Standards of Learning during your term? Why?
2. Is there evidence that professional organizations, the Virginia Board of Education, or the Virginia Department of Education compared the Standards of Learning to national standards, 1995-2014? If so, what evidence was used to make the comparison?	Were the standards of other states or standards of professional associations reviewed? What did you learn from them?  In your view, how were Virginia Standards of Learning similar or different to the other standards?
3. What impact, if any, have professional organizations such as VASS, VSBA, VASCD, or VEA had on the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards?	There have been changes to the Standards of Learning over the last 20 years. When thinking about your term, how do you think professional organizations influenced the Standards of Learning?  Do you think any of these organizations had any influence on the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards?
4. How have Virginia’s curriculum standards compared to the development of curricular standards in other states and nationally?	As you look across the country at leadership in the standards movement, how does Virginia fare in terms of influence or impact?  What specific influences has Virginia had in the standards movement?  What are the pros and cons of Virginia being one of five states not joining the Common Core State Standards?
Additional probes	Is there anything else you would like to tell me about Virginia’s decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards?  Who else do you think I should speak with that would have insight into these questions?

**Content Validity of the Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol was checked for content validity by two experienced Virginia division superintendents. In order to improve the clarity and relevance of the interview protocol as related to the research questions, two current superintendents in Virginia public school

divisions with at least five years experience as division-level administrators were invited to participate in the content validity check. Participants were asked to rate each question in two areas: clarity of the question's wording and relevance to the research questions.

Participants in the content validity check were informed of the purpose of the content validity check and the fact that the responses were confidential and anonymous. Participants were advised of their ability to withdraw participation at any time. Any possible risks or benefits of participation were explained as well. Appendix A contains the cover letter that explained all facets of participation for the participants in the content validity check.

Participants in the content validity check were asked to rate each interview question on a three-point Likert-style scale. A rating of three on the scale indicated high clarity and a high relevance to the research questions. A rating of two on the scale indicated moderate clarity or relevance to the research questions and rewording may have been necessary. A rating of one on either scale indicated the question should be reworded or deleted. Participants were asked to provide suggestions for rewording and to suggest additional questions. Appendix B contains the content validity check Likert-style scale document that was emailed to the content validity check participants in order to conduct the content validity check.

Responses from the content validity check participants were compiled by the researcher into a single file. Responses from the scales were compiled, as well as suggestions made by the content validity check participants. No changes were made in the interview protocol based on feedback from the participants.

### **Field Testing of the Interview Protocol**

A superintendent from a Virginia school division was invited to field test the interview protocol. This individual did not participate in the content validity check. The researcher sought input on the interview protocol from a superintendent who had a thorough understanding of the Virginia Standards of Learning accountability system. Thus, criteria for invitation to the field test of the interview protocol included: the participant must have served as a school division superintendent, and the participant must have served as a school division superintendent in Virginia for at least three years between 1995 and 2014.

The participant of the field test of the interview protocol was informed of the purpose of the field test and the fact that the responses were confidential and anonymous. The participant

was advised of their ability to withdraw participation at any time. In addition, possible risks of participation were explained. The field test participant was asked for permission to audio record the interview, and the field test participant was informed that the audio would be professionally transcribed. Appendix C contains the cover letter and participation agreement explaining all facets of participation for the field test of the interview protocol. Appendix D contains the interview protocol script for the field test and subsequent interviews following the field test.

After the interview was professionally transcribed, the researcher emailed the transcript of the interview to the participant for a member check (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Data from the field test interview was transcribed and analyzed using the constant comparative method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). After these data were analyzed and questions revised, the researcher determined that a second field test interview was not necessary. Feedback from the field test participant indicated that the index cards were useful conversation starters and that the additional question probes were clear and relevant. The interview protocol for the field test was consequently used in the actual interviews.

### **Administration of the Interview Protocol and Securing Informed Consent**

Potential participants were invited to participate in the study via an introductory email from the researcher. Individuals who responded affirmatively were sent a follow-up email thanking them for their willingness to participate and to confirm the location, date, and time for the interview. Appendix E contains text of the interview appointment confirmation sent to participants through email, as well as information participants received about the study.

Each interview lasted about one hour. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at a location that was convenient for the interview participant. Before each interview commenced, each participant was informed of the required elements of informed consent and signed the IRB-approved informed consent form. Each interview participant was informed of:

- Purpose of the study
- Risks and benefits to the participants
- Attribution in the study
- Compensation
- Freedom to withdraw from participation in the study at any time
- Recording of the interview using two digital recording devices

- Data to be destroyed at the completion of the study

Appendix F contains the Virginia Tech IRB-approved informed consent form and information regarding the study that interview participants were provided prior to beginning the interview. The interview protocol script from Appendix D was followed for all interview participants, and Appendix D also contains all information about the study that was initially provided to the interview participants. Following completion of the interview, a note of appreciation was mailed to each interview participant. The text for the note of appreciation is found in Appendix G.

### **Data Management Procedures**

All interviews utilized the following procedures for data management. The interviews were recorded using two digital recording devices, with the second device used as a back-up. Following the interview, the recording was transcribed by a professional transcription service, Synergy Transcription Services. As soon as the transcription was complete, the researcher read through the transcription. In addition, any notes taken by the researcher during the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and kept in a separate file.

As soon as possible following the completion of each transcription, the researcher forwarded the Microsoft Word interview transcript file via email to each participant. The participant was asked to check the transcript for accuracy and to make corrections or additions as necessary, a process known as member checks (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). All digital transcription files were kept on a password-protected computer at the home of the researcher, and all physical copies of transcripts were stored in a locked filing cabinet at the home of the researcher. Following the defense of the dissertation, physical copies of transcriptions will be destroyed, electronic files of transcriptions will be deleted, and digital recording files of interviews will be deleted.

### **Coding of Data**

Each interview was coded using the following procedure, based on the steps described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). Page numbers were inserted at the top right hand corner of each page. Interview participants were identified by the letter P, followed by the participant number, a hyphen, and a number indicating the page number of origin from the interview transcript. For

example, a quotation taken from page seven of an interview transcript with participant number three was identified as (P3-7). Following the coding of each page, the transcript was photocopied for use in the data analysis process.

Each document analyzed by the researcher was coded with a similar process. Page numbers were inserted at the top right hand corner of each page. Documents from the Virginia Board of Education were identified by the letters BOE, followed by the type of document, a hyphen, and the date. The letter A indicated the document originated from a Virginia Board of Education meeting agenda and the letter M indicated the document originated from Virginia Board of Education meeting minutes. For example, a Virginia Board of Education meeting agenda from August 9, 2012, would be noted (BOEA-08/09/12). Superintendent's Memos were identified by the letters SM, followed by the memo number, followed by a hyphen, followed by two digits for the year. For example, Superintendent's Memo number 218 from 2004 would be coded (SM218-04). Following the coding of each document, the documents were photocopied for use in the data analysis process.

### **Data Validation: Member Checks, Triangulation, Audit Trail**

In order to increase the trustworthiness of the research, data were validated by the researcher in three ways (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). First, the researcher utilized member checks to ensure that transcripts were accurate. Participants were emailed the transcript of the interview and were asked to read over the transcript and make any necessary changes or additions. Member checks allowed participants the opportunity to make sure the researcher had accurately described their thoughts and experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Member checks added a measure of credibility to the study by allowing participants to confirm the transcript (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

As a second strategy of data validation, the researcher utilized triangulation. Triangulation in data validation is a process of identifying themes across multiple sources of data, multiple points in time, or a variety of methods (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Creswell and Miller (2000) note that the term triangulation originated from military sea navigation when sailors would determine the bearing of a ship by using several distant points. Similarly, the researcher searches data to find several points that will eventually converge into a theme or

category (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Rothbauer, 2008). Triangulation is a strategy that “adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5).

Triangulation in this study was accomplished by identifying themes across multiple points in time and identifying themes across multiple sources of data. For triangulation across multiple points in time, the researcher examined the categories created with each source of data to ensure that the categories reflected multiple points in time between 1995 and 2014. The category of Professional Development on the Standards of Learning, for example, was validated by multiple data points from 1995 to 2014. For triangulation across multiple sources of data, the researcher examined the Superintendent’s Memos, Virginia Board of Education meeting agendas and meeting minutes, and elite interviews. The multiple sources of data were examined for congruency of information. For example, multiple sources of data were used to determine the three major conclusions listed in Chapter 5. Thus, triangulation was utilized in this study to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

As a third strategy of data validation, the researcher developed an audit trail during the course of the project. An audit trail is a record of research activities that goes from the beginning of the research project to its conclusion, in order to be able to reconstruct the findings of the researcher (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The audit trail adds credibility to a study by providing clear documentation of the researcher’s activities (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher kept a journal detailing the work accomplished each day during the course of the project as part of the audit trail. For example, handwritten notes taken during interviews became part of the audit trail. Research notes, according to McDowell (2002), require the researcher to actively reflect upon the research at all stages of the project. The research journal includes information about interviews such as the location, time, date, duration, and with whom the interview took place, as well as thoughts and impressions from the researcher (Hatch, 2002). The unitized data and large sheets of paper, as described in the next section, were also part of the audit trail.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Documents were analyzed using the constant comparative method, as described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). Constant comparative refers to a method of inquiry that documents patterns in the data to identify themes (Richards, 2014). The first step in the constant comparative method was identifying units of meaning in the document, also known as unitizing

the data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). A line was drawn across the page to separate units of meaning on each page of the document, creating a unit of meaning. Each unit of meaning was then labeled with the page code, in order to retrace where each unit of meaning came from in each document. The units were then cut from the page and taped to a 4 x 6 index card. The units were then organized and taped to a large sheet of paper, lined up under categories of meaning, as themes emerge from the unitized data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

After all interviews had been transcribed and coded, the researcher analyzed the interview data using the constant comparative method, as described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). After each page of each interview transcript was coded, the transcripts were analyzed in order to find units of meaning. When a unit of meaning was found in the transcript, a line was drawn across the page, the page code was added to the unit, and the unit was cut and taped to a 4 x 6 index card. The unitized data were then added to the categories on large sheets of paper. The constant comparative method guided the researcher to continually consider the new units of meaning in context with all the other units of meaning (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Patterns and relationships across categories were considered and categories were sometimes grouped under a higher level category (Stern, 2008). The categories that emerged were then considered in relation to the research questions in order to reach conclusions (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

The constant comparative method required the researcher to consider each new unit of meaning in the context of all other units of meaning. Categories or themes were created initially but often changed as new units of meaning were added to the conglomeration of units. New categories were created throughout the process. The goal, according to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), was to create categories of meaning using inductive reasoning that could be justified and explained by the researcher in order to answer the research questions. In other words, the categories of meaning were operational definitions. Each category required a rule, or justification, explaining why each unit of data belongs in that category. Units of meaning were not mutually exclusive. Particularly with the interview transcripts, units of meaning sometimes went into more than one category. The researcher examined the categories to see if any patterns or relationships between categories could be identified (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Categories were sometimes moved into a higher level category as the themes emerged, and were considered in relation to the research questions (Stern, 2008).

## **IRB Approval**

Prior to beginning the study, the researcher gained approval to conduct the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Appendix H contains the letter of approval to conduct the study from the IRB. Following approval from the Institutional Review Board, the researcher began the study as detailed in Chapter 3. Appendix I contains a copy of the certificate verifying the researcher's completion of Training in Human Subjects Protection from the Institutional Review Board at Virginia Tech.

## **Summary of Chapter 3**

Chapter 3 described the design of the study, research procedures, development of the interview protocol, data management procedures, and data analysis procedures. This study sought to explain how and why the Commonwealth of Virginia arrived at the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards. An examination of documents from the Virginia Board of Education and the Virginia Department of Education allowed for a broad-based inquiry into how the Virginia Standards of Learning were implemented over time, and how and why the decision regarding the Common Core State Standards was made. Data gathered from interviews with elite members of the public education leadership in Virginia over the last twenty years provided insight into how and why the Commonwealth of Virginia arrived at the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards.

## **Outline of Succeeding Chapters**

Results of the study are presented in Chapter 4. The research questions were answered through analysis of data that were collected during the research process, and descriptive evidence is presented in Chapter 4 to illustrate the categories that were identified in relation to the research questions. Chapter 5 features conclusions of the study, implications for practitioners, recommendations for future research, and personal reflections of the researcher.

## Chapter 4

### Findings

#### Introduction

This chapter contains the findings of an analysis of data collected from documents and interviews in relation to the two research questions. An overview of the study opens the chapter. The first section of the findings presents findings for Research Question 1, including findings of the document analysis followed by findings of the interview analysis. The second section of the chapter presents findings for Research Question 2, again with results of the document analysis presented first and findings of the interview analysis presented next.

A two-stage process of data collection and analysis was used in this study. First, documents were collected and a document analysis was conducted. Second, using the findings of the document analysis to inform the interview process, interviews were conducted. Data for the first stage of this study were collected using documents from two sources over the 1995-2014 time period: Virginia Board of Education documents and Virginia Department of Education documents. From the Virginia Board of Education, documents included meeting agendas, meeting minutes, and briefing information. From the Virginia Department of Education, Superintendent's Memos were utilized. Data were collected from June 2014 through October 2014. Documents and interviews were analyzed using the constant comparative method as described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994).

Professional organizations' advocacy documents were an intended third category of documents. Contact was made with professional organizations to obtain advocacy documents, but individuals with the organizations were unable to find advocacy documents associated with the Common Core State Standards. Conversations with the individuals with the organizations indicated that there was continuing support for the Virginia Standards of Learning during the discussion of the Common Core State Standards decision. One interview participant, who has served as a Virginia Board of Education member, put it this way:

But I don't think anyone really came out for or against Common Core, that I recall. There may have been some behind scenes work, but I don't remember anyone coming before the Board and saying we don't want you to adopt Common Core [State] Standards, we want you to stay with the SOLs. I think that everyone felt like there needed to be some

reform added there. Whether Common Core was the reform that was needed, was questionable. I don't necessarily think that was the thought process. But I think everyone agreed there needed to be some work with the Standards of Learning. (P2-8)

The reference system utilized in this chapter uses codes to indicate the source of the data, as suggested by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). Documents from the Virginia Board of Education are identified by the letters BOE, followed by the type of document, a hyphen, and the date. The letter A indicates the document originated from a Virginia Board of Education meeting agenda, and the letter M indicates the document originated from Virginia Board of Education meeting minutes. For example, a Virginia Board of Education meeting agenda from December 10, 1999, would be noted (BOEA-12/10/99). Superintendent's Memos are identified by the letters SM, followed by the memo number, followed by a hyphen, followed by two digits for the year. For example, Superintendent's Memo number 41 from 1998 would be coded (SM41-98). Interview participants are identified by the letter P, followed by the participant number, a hyphen, and a number indicating the page number of origin from the interview transcript. For example, a quotation taken from page seven of an interview transcript with participant number three would be identified as (P3-7).

While the assessments associated with the Standards of Learning are a vital component of the accountability system in the Commonwealth of Virginia, the accountability system begins with the curricular standards themselves. The SOL assessments are inextricably linked with the curricular standards, and the Virginia system of accountability is based on the performance of students on the assessments. Participant 7 noted,

SOQ [Standards of Quality] are sort of, in an umbrella fashion, what school divisions are supposed to do. The SOAs are what schools are supposed to do, Standards of Accreditation, embedded under the SOQ. And then the SOLs are what students are supposed to do, embedded in the Standards of Quality. (P7-2)

In order to answer the research questions, it was necessary to include some information about the system of assessments and the system of accountability related to the Standards of Learning. The researcher attempts to clarify in Chapter 4 whenever the discussion refers to standards and when the discussion refers to assessments. However, the lion's share of the discussion to follow relates to curriculum standards. As one interview participant noted:

I'd say just distinguish between the content and the test, because that's the one area that always gets blurred....I mean, you could take away all the tests and still have Standards of Learning. You can't take away the content and have SOL tests. (P4-16)

**Research Question 1: When considering the history of the curriculum standards movement in the Commonwealth of Virginia in the context of the national standards movement, how has the Commonwealth of Virginia arrived at the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards?**

**Document Analysis Findings: Research Question 1**

Analysis of Virginia Board of Education documents and Virginia Department of Education documents from 1995-2014 in regards to the first research question resulted in five categories. The categories were: (a) Educator Input on the Standards of Learning; (b) Public Input on the Standards of Learning; (c) Professional Development on the Standards of Learning; (d) Instructional Resources to Support the Standards of Learning; and (e) Testing Procedures Developed Over Time. The following section includes a discussion of each category along with representative examples of each category.

**Educator Input on the Standards of Learning**

The first category that emerged from the document analysis was Educator Input on the Standards of Learning. Statewide committees consisting of Virginia educators were a major source of educator input into the development of the Standards of Learning. Examples that emerged from the Superintendent's Memos and the Virginia Board of Education documents included: content review committees, content area bias/sensitivity committees, special test form committees, standard setting committees, and textbook instructional material committees.

The Virginia Standards of Learning have a long history of K-12 educator input. The 1995 revisions of the Standards of Learning were written primarily by teams of Virginia teachers (Hess, 2006). The documents from the Virginia Board of Education and the Virginia Department of Education show evidence of educator input in a number of areas.

Virginia Board of Education minutes reflect the influence of teachers and other K-12 educators on the development of the Standards of Learning and related resources. For example,

the Virginia Board of Education accepted for first review the revised science Standards of Learning curriculum framework, as created in part by teachers. “Selected science teachers and specialists, along with science educators who had worked on the original Teacher Resource Guide, assisted department staff in reviewing and revising the guide to reflect the 2003 standards” (VBOEM-03/26/03).

Evidence in Superintendent’s Memos indicates that teachers and other educators were highly involved in committee reviews related to the Standards of Learning. There were 92 Superintendent’s Memos requesting nominations for various Standards of Learning committees between 1995 and 2014. Superintendent’s Memos seeking educator input included examples of educator input on items ranging from content review committees to textbook review committees.

The Standards of Learning have been revised with teacher input on the standards revision committees. Superintendent’s Memos reflect the input by teachers on the revision process. “The new standards were drafted by a small writing committee of teachers and mathematics specialists during work sessions in Summer 1997” (SM37-03/06/98).

Teachers served on content review committees to ensure alignment between the standards and assessments: “The Division of Assessment and Reporting is seeking nominations for membership on the 2002 Standards of Learning Assessments Content Review Committee. Approximately 12-15 members are needed for each of the 28 content committees” (SM2-01/17/02).

Teachers served on committees and also provided comments on revisions of standards. For example, comments from teachers were solicited on English as a Second Language standards:

As part of the review process for the English Language Proficiency Standards of Learning, the Department of Education is soliciting comments from classroom teachers, administrators, curriculum supervisors, English as a second language (ESL) educators, and others who have worked with the current standards. (SM227-11/10/2005).

Teachers also served on the SOL item and test review committees:

The Virginia Department of Education ... is seeking nominations for the 2010 Standards of Learning (SOL) Item and Test Review Committees, formerly called the SOL Assessment and Content Review and SOL Assessment Bias/Sensitivity Review

Committees. Fifteen members are needed for each of the 35 committees. (SM332-12/11/09)

### **Public Input on the Standards of Learning**

A second category that emerged from the document analysis was Public Input on the Standards of Learning. Public input has been solicited by the Virginia Department of Education throughout the time period under consideration in this study, 1995-2014. Public comment was solicited through several avenues, including public hearings, mailed comments to the department, making draft standards available on the VDOE website, and seeking emailed comments on the standards.

When revisions were made to Standards of Learning, the Virginia Department of Education solicited public input on the revised standards. A Superintendent's Memo from January 7, 2000 is an example of the Virginia Department of Education considering public comment on draft Standards of Learning in Fine Arts. "Following first review by the Board, there will be numerous opportunities for public comment. Before final approval, the Board is committed to reviewing all reactions and advice" (SM3-00). A Superintendent's Memo from December 6, 2000 announces the public hearings for revised History and Social Science Standards of Learning:

The Virginia Board of Education will hold four hearings across the state on January 8, 2001, to solicit public comment on the proposed revised Standards of Learning History and Social Science. The History and Social Science Standards of Learning identify the essential content, process, and skills for each grade level and/or courses in these areas.

The proposed standards are available on the Internet at:

<http://www.k12.va.us/vdoe/instruction/historysolrevise.pdf>.

The hearings will begin at 7 p.m. Registration of speakers will begin at 6:30 p.m.

Speakers will have three minutes to speak and should bring copies of their comments for the Board of Education. Comments may also be mailed by January 8, 2001, to the content specialists listed below. (SM215-00)

Another example of the Virginia Department of Education seeking public comment on the Standards of Learning relates to a draft of the revised English Standards of Learning Curriculum Framework.

The Department of Education invites you [division superintendents] to review and comment on the revised English Standards of Learning Curriculum Framework... In addition, public hearings will be held on February 10, 2003, at 7:00 p.m. in the following locations: Abingdon, VA; Richmond, VA; Fairfax, VA; Newport News, VA. (SM9-03)

Public input was sought on items such as the list of approved textbooks for the Commonwealth of Virginia. In 2011, for example, the VDOE made review copies of each proposed mathematics textbook available at colleges around the state. Superintendent's Memo 140 states that "Individuals are invited to examine the proposed recommended textbooks for K-12 mathematics at the examination sites and to submit written comments." Written comments on the proposed textbooks were accepted via fax, mail, or email (SM140-05/20/11).

In the Virginia Board of Education meeting agendas and minutes over the time period of the study, there was evidence of public input on curricular standards. For example, the Virginia Board of Education agenda for January 11, 2006, lists as an agenda item a call for public comment following their regular meeting: "Public Hearing on the Proposed Revisions to the Fine Arts Standards of Learning" (BOEA-01/11/06). A typical statement regarding public comment found in the minutes of the Virginia Board of Education was found in the November 20, 2002 meeting minutes. "Dr. Poorbaugh discussed with the Board the language added to the proposed English Standards of Learning based on a review of the public comments received by the Department" (BOEM-11/20/2002).

Another representative example of public input comes from the January 14, 2010 Board meeting minutes. In the minutes from the meeting, the solicitation of public comment is mentioned 10 times. One instance of public comment comes from an agenda item on the review of revised English Standards of Learning:

On October 22, 2009, the Virginia Board of Education accepted the proposed revised English Standards of Learning for first review. The Board held two public hearings on November 30, 2009, and three public hearings on December 1, 2009, to solicit comments on the proposed revised English Standards of Learning. The hearings were held at Linkhorne Middle School, Lynchburg City; Fort Chiswell High School, Wythe County; James River High School, Chesterfield County; Robinson Secondary School, Fairfax County; and Princess Anne High School, Virginia Beach City. Three speakers addressed

the proposed revised English Standards of Learning. In addition to the comments received at the public hearings, 51 comments were received online. (BOEM-01/14/2010)

### **Professional Development on the Standards of Learning**

A third category that emerged from the document analysis was Professional Development on the Standards of Learning. Throughout the years 1995-2014, documents provided evidence of professional development being offered throughout the Commonwealth. Professional development of various types were offered: SOL “share fairs,” training programs, summer institutes, workshops, courses, and webinars on the various content areas of the Standards of Learning. Professional development was sponsored by professional organizations in Virginia, colleges and universities in Virginia, and by the Virginia Department of Education.

Early professional development sessions, termed “share fairs,” were designed to encourage curriculum alignment with the revised Standards of Learning and networking with educators from other school divisions. Divisions could send up to eight educators to the share fair, who would then bring the information back to their division.

The Department of Education will host several SOL Share Fairs designed to provide opportunities for educators from every Virginia school division to participate in curriculum development/alignment seminars and to network with others who are involved in aligning curriculum to the revised Standards of Learning. (SM70-03/29/96)

Training workshops provided training to key division teachers who would take the information back to their colleagues in their schools and in their school division. The following example for a foreign language SOL workshop featured a request for divisions to send representatives: “Each school division is invited to send a team of two foreign language educators who will return to the division to serve as trainers and resources for other foreign language teachers” (SM92-05/02/00).

Summer institutes on content area Standards of Learning, sponsored by the Virginia Department of Education and other organizations, allowed teachers to delve deeply into the content area standards. Institutes were held at various locations around the state. One example is a summer science institute co-sponsored by the Virginia Museum of Natural History that was held in the summer of 2003 in Marion, Virginia. The institute served a total of 40 teachers from around the Commonwealth. “This six-day summer learning experience for fourth-, fifth-, and

sixth-grade teachers is designed to support the implementation of the 2003 Science Standards of Learning (SOL) and provide detailed training, print, and hands-on resources on the SOL content and skills” (SM83-05/09/03).

Documents provide evidence that the Virginia Department of Education systematically collaborated with colleges and universities to provide courses designed to enhance the skills of Virginia teachers. For example, Superintendent’s Memo 168 from 2011 announces a graduate-level course for K-12 teachers of English Language Learners. “The focus of the course will be effective reading and writing teaching strategies for use with ELLs. Participants will receive three hours of graduate-level credit through George Mason University upon successful completion of the course” (SM168-06/17/11).

Professional development provided by the Virginia Department of Education was also delivered through the use of technology. For example, online webinars have been used to provide training on the revised SOL writing standards.

The interactive webinar sessions will focus on the English Standards of Learning (SOL) online writing assessments, teaching strategies, lesson plans, SOL progression charts, and resource links to assist teachers at all grade levels in the instruction of the writing process. (SM319-12/09/11)

## **Instructional Resources**

A fourth category that emerged from the document analysis was Instructional Resources developed, revised and disseminated by the Virginia Department of Education on the Standards of Learning. The types of instructional resources included enhanced scope and sequence, testing blueprints, released tests, sample test items, and sample lesson plans. Following are several examples of the types of instructional resources produced for Virginia educators by the Virginia Department of Education.

One instructional resource offered by the Virginia Department of Education has been the curriculum framework. The curriculum framework is an instructional resource that provides details to educators about the Standards of Learning at each grade level, in terms of what is expected to be taught and what students should learn. Upon revision of the Standards of Learning, the VDOE provides a revised curriculum framework that highlights the differences in the prior standards and the newly revised standards for Virginia educators. For example:

The key that has been used is single underlines and single strikethroughs for changes that went to the Board for first review in June 2008. Double strikethroughs were used for additional changes based on public comments from May 23 through June 27, 2008, and were included in the document that went to the Board for final review on July 17, 2008. (SM175-08/01/08)

Curriculum “crosswalks” are another type of instructional resource provided to educators about the Standards of Learning. The crosswalks provide information to teachers about what exactly has changed in the Standards of Learning when a revision is completed. For example, a crosswalk was created when the English Standards of Learning were revised in 2010: “Additionally, an English Crosswalk between the 2002 and 2010 English Standards of Learning is posted to assist divisions in aligning existing curriculum to the 2010 English Standards of Learning at [VDOE website]” (SM86-04/01/11).

The Virginia Department of Education has provided teachers with released tests for over a decade. The released test items provide teachers with an instructional resource that helps them see what test items will be like for their students. Superintendent’s Memos regarding released tests in 2003 (SM109-06/20/03), 2004 (SM8-01/16/04), 2007 (SM104-05/18/07), and 2013 (SM167-06/21/13) provide examples of the VDOE providing this instructional resource to teachers.

Sample test items were another type of resource provided by The Virginia Department of Education. For example, in 1998, the VDOE produced booklets of sample test items for teachers in advance of the spring assessments (SM98-98). In 2011, the VDOE released sample history items that reflected the increased rigor of the newly revised History and Social Science assessments (SM207-11). And in 2014, Superintendent’s Memo 39 announced additional practice items for grades 3-8 in reading (SM39-04/14/14).

Testing blueprints released by the Virginia Department of Education provide teachers with information about which content areas will be tested, the number of items for each content area, and the number of overall test items. As new SOL assessments are developed and released, the VDOE produces new testing blueprints for educators. For example, new blueprints were released in 2009 for end-of-course history and social science tests: “The revised history test blueprints are being shared at this time to accommodate curriculum development and instructional planning” (SM239-08/28/09).

Recent Superintendent's Memos have highlighted all of the department's instructional resources in a curricular area in one combined memorandum. For example, Superintendent's Memo 332 in 2012 provided an annotated listing of instructional resources available to teachers to support instruction of the English Standards of Learning. The memo highlighted the curriculum framework, testing blueprints, enhanced scope and sequence, instructional videos, SOL practice items, online writing items, sample lesson plans, and other resources. All of the resources were available to educators on the VDOE website (SM332-12/14/2012).

Minutes from the Virginia Board of Education meetings showed evidence of agenda items related to instructional resources. The approval of textbook adoption lists is one example of the type of instructional resources considered by the board (BOEM-01/12/12). The Board of Education also approved curricular documents such as revised Curriculum Frameworks:

The Curriculum Framework provides additional guidance to school divisions and teachers as they develop an instructional program appropriate for their students. It assists teachers as they plan their lessons by defining the essential knowledge, skills, or processes students need to master. Mr. Goodman made a motion to accept the edits to the revised Science Standards of Learning Curriculum Framework and adopt the revised Science Standards of Learning Curriculum Framework. Dr. Ward seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously. (BOEM-05/28/03)

## **Testing Procedures**

A fifth category that emerged from the document analysis was Standards of Learning Testing Procedures developed and revised over time. As the curricular standards became linked with high-stakes assessments, a significant area of investment for the Department of Education became related to the enterprise of testing. Examples from the document analysis included field testing, testing windows, cut scores, calculator use, test ordering procedures, web-based testing initiative, and testing procedures audits.

Field testing of newly-developed test items was an area of testing procedures highlighted by Superintendent's Memos. For example, a Superintendent's Memo from 2003 stated: "To develop these item banks, the Department of Education will conduct field tests of new test items in the spring of 2003-04 and again in the spring of 2004-05" (SM154-09/26/03). Similarly, a

Superintendent's Memo from 2011 noted that "field test items in spring 2012 will include new content from the 2010 reading and writing SOL" (SM278-09/30/11).

Testing windows and testing schedules were publicized by the Virginia Department of Education through Superintendent's Memos each year. A 2007 Superintendent's Memo stated, "Please inform all personnel of these testing dates so that other activities can be scheduled without conflicts" (SM46-02/23/07). A 2014 Superintendent's Memo provided details of the 2014-15 SOL testing schedule for Fall and Spring SOL Writing tests, Fall and Spring Non-Writing tests (such as mathematics, reading, History, and science), and summer testing windows (SM133-05/23/14).

Superintendent's Memos on the Virginia Board of Education's approval of cut scores provided guidance to educators on the number of items students would need to correctly answer in order to receive a score at each achievement level. For example, Superintendent's Memo number 179 from 1998 provided educators information about achievement levels and scaled scores on the SOL assessments. The memo detailed the scaled scores needed to achieve a Failing score (a score of 0-399), a Pass/Proficient (a score of 400-499), or a Pass/Advanced score (a score of 500-600) on the SOL assessments (SM179-11/20/98).

Guidelines for calculator usage on mathematics SOL tests proved to be a frequent topic of Superintendent's Memos in the category of Testing Procedures as calculators became more sophisticated. For example, a 1997 Superintendent's Memo listed the acceptable graphing calculator models as well as guidelines for their use (SM188-12/12/97). A 2004 Superintendent's Memo described an additional approved calculator model, the Casio fx-260 Solar School Calculator (SM201-10/01/04). The memos on calculators sometimes provided reminders about test security: "Regardless of the graphing calculator used, it is important to remember that the memory must be reset prior to test administration, clearing all memory contents not built into the calculator's system" (SM66-03/21/08).

Test ordering procedures were also noted in the Superintendent's Memos prior to the introduction of online testing. Divisions were required to submit in the fall estimated numbers of students taking the SOL tests in the spring so that the VDOE could deliver sufficient numbers of test booklets and answer documents (SM178-11/20/98). By 2000, divisions could order their test booklets using a spreadsheet obtained from the VDOE website (SM11-03/31/00).

An online testing initiative began in Virginia in 2001 with the introduction of pilot web-based SOL assessments (BOEM-04/23/01). The VDOE provided guidance for the technical specifications for online testing readiness (SM37-07/13/01). Superintendent's Memo 27 from 2002 stated the purpose of the web-based testing initiative.

The intent of the Web-based Standards of Learning Technology initiative is to use Web-enabled systems to improve Standards of Learning instructional, remedial, and testing capabilities of high schools. Funding for this program is targeted to achieve four goals: (1) Provide student access to computers with a ratio of one computer for every five students, (2) Create Internet-ready local area network capability in every school, (3) Assure adequate high speed, high bandwidth capability for high school instructional, remedial, and testing needs, and (4) Establish a statewide Standards of Learning test delivery system. (SM37-07/13/01)

Technical advances in Standards of Learning assessments have continued since the introduction of computerized testing. For example, the introduction of technology-enhanced test items helped the VDOE increase the rigor of the SOL assessments (SM214-08/24/12). Further, a pilot program for computer adaptive testing in seventh and eighth grade mathematics (SM168-06/21/13) and in grade six mathematics (SM189-07/18/14) showed the direction SOL assessments are heading in Virginia.

Testing audits were another aspect of the Testing Procedures category. The Department of Education, in the early years of the SOL assessment program, worked with the testing contractor to conduct audits of randomly-selected school divisions in regards to their testing procedures. For example, Superintendent's Memo 129 noted that the purpose of the audits were "1) to observe actual test administration procedures to confirm whether prescribed standardized procedures are being followed; and, 2) to gather information on ways to improve procedures to maximize efficiency while maintain standards procedures and test security" (SM129-09/27/02).

The five categories from the document analysis discussed above informed the questions posed to the interview participants. Specifically, the interview participants were given index cards with one category listed per index card: (a) Educator Input on the Standards of Learning; (b) Public Input on the Standards of Learning; (c) Professional Development on the Standards of Learning; (d) Instructional Resources to support the Standards of Learning; and (e) Testing Procedures developed over time. Participants were asked questions about the index cards, as

noted in Appendix D. In this way, the findings of the document analysis informed the interview questions.

### **Interview Analysis Findings: Research Question 1**

Analysis of the data from the interviews resulted in five categories regarding the question of how Virginia made the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards. The categories were, in order of frequency of interviewee comment: (a) Educator Input; (b) Virginia Leadership in the Standards Movement; (c) Bipartisan Support for the Standards of Learning; (d) External Comparisons of the Standards of Learning; and (e) Weaving Standards of Learning into Regulatory Documents. The following section provides explanation and examples of each of the categories that emerged during the process of interview data analysis.

#### **Educator Input**

Interview findings indicated that participants viewed educator input on the Standards of Learning as an important factor in how the decision was made not to adopt the Common Core State Standards. Teachers had input into the earliest versions of the Standards of Learning. Participant 1 noted, “The SOLs were basically written by teams of teachers during the summer” (P1-5). Another participant recalled working with teachers and curriculum specialists in the development of the early Standards of Learning: “But I recall personally being involved along with other, not only superintendents but other teachers, and curriculum people, in conversations around what is it that students should know and be able to do” (P3-2). Participant 7 recalled the importance of teachers in both the development of revisions of the Standards of Learning and in the development of the accompanying assessments.

And I know on a personal basis, having been at the table with the people who were developing the standards, and then who were developing the tests, and then who were developing the cut scores, that they were heavily driven by teachers and to a lesser part by higher education. But teachers sitting around the table asking, "What should a third grader know in Science?" And if that standard was not an appropriate one for the third grade, teachers said that. (P7-11)

Teachers and other educators were mentioned by several participants as important to the review and revision process for the Standards of Learning. Participant 3 discussed the

contributions of teachers to determining gaps in curriculum alignment during the reviews of the Standards of Learning.

And so the educator input helped us to kind of acknowledge where, not only just where the gaps were, but where the misunderstandings were in terms of alignment of curriculum, teaching, and assessments to grade level expectations in off grade level years [non-tested grades]. (P3-3)

Participant 4 noted the importance of teachers and other content area specialists during the revision process of the Standards of Learning.

I mean, when you're developing content standards, if you want valid standards, you want them to be accurate, you go to the people who know the content. You go to the generalists, the organizations of generalists, or those who work on the administrative side, you go to those for policies around the implementation. But when it comes to the development of the content, you really have to rely on teachers and the curriculum specialists and your experts in the field. (P4-10)

Similarly, Participant 5 highlighted the importance of content area teachers in SOL revisions. "The content people would have been very, very influential in that they do the reviews [during SOL revisions]. I mean they are engaged in, and actually look at making changes to the standards themselves" (P5-5). Participant 5 spoke to the longstanding nature of educator input on the Standards of Learning:

But, with every revision from '95 through 2009 and 2010, we had committees of educators come together to articulate the standards from grade to grade, analyze national documents, and we had university folks who are Math educators, or Science educators, Reading specialists, all review the standards. (P4-2)

Superintendents were another group of educators that had influence on the historical development of the Standards of Learning, according to interview participants. For example, Participant 3 recalled the input provided by division superintendents when the initial accountability structure was created.

So I think superintendents also stepped up, and also we weighed in on things that we thought needed to be given consideration, and our voices were heard. I remember Bill Boshier was state superintendent at that time, he had been a [local] superintendent, he understood. (P3-13)

Professional organizations of educators in Virginia had continuing influence on the development of the Standards of Learning, according to interview participants. For example, Participant 6 noted the impact of several professional organizations on the Standards of Learning, including the Virginia Council of Teachers of Mathematics, Virginia Association of Science Teachers, the Virginia Association of Teachers of English, and the Virginia Council for the Social Studies (P6-9). One interview participant, who has served as a member of the Virginia Board of Education, agreed that educator input, particularly input from educators representing professional organizations, was influential in the ongoing review of the Standards of Learning.

I'm not sure what groups had the most influence because we heard from such a variety on issues dealing with the Standards of Learning. We'd hear from the principals, we'd hear from the teachers, we'd hear from the curriculum directors. We'd hear from the superintendents, we'd hear from the VSBA or school board associates and each would provide their input along with the public. And of course when you're speaking on behalf of a group or organization it does carry a lot of weight with us. (P2-7)

One reason that educator input was important, according to Participant 2, was the notion of continuity. Participant 3 noted, "So I think the educator input has become critically important to helping us to be aware of lessons learned, and how we make changes" (P3-3). Participant 2 stated that educators are involved in every aspect of the Standards of Learning review process, and have been involved since the inception of the Standards of Learning, providing continuity to the standards over time. Referring to the index cards used in the interviews, Participant 2 stated:

The reason I selected educator input number two, and of course this is not only educator input at the very beginning, but also over time, is educator input is the continuity piece. This is the piece that as policy makers, we would go through periodically to reevaluate existing standards on a certain timetable or even at the very beginning of this process back when the standards were being developed, these were committees that were formed to come up with what the department originally recommended. So to me, educator input is not only the planning piece in the very beginning, but it became the continuity piece that would be revisited periodically to ensure that the standards were kept up-to-date. (P2-2)

The credibility of the review process was enhanced by the input of educators, according to Participant 6, leading to educator buy-in to the Standards of Learning:

The system of educator input was more a validity and a credibility check, and it evolved over time. But this was really an opportunity to make sure that we could say the people who are responsible for teaching these [standards], the children who are responsible for learning these [standards], the parents who want their – who have entrusted their children to the public schools of Virginia, they've all had an opportunity to look at the way we're going to assess and the materials we're going to use to teach this content and it's not a small group of people behind closed doors at the Department of Education. Or it's not a group of handpicked friends that we have in our state that we've chosen to come in here. So educator input became critically important to get educator buy-in, because we never taught anybody at the Department of Education. The people who were responsible for making his happen had to know that the way it was going to be assessed, what the content standards were, or how the materials would be selected and aligned with the content in the standards, had to be done by the educators themselves in order for them to feel that they could be held accountable for this content. That was critically important. (P6-2)

### **Virginia's Leadership in the Standards Movement**

A second category identified from the interview findings related to the interview participants' perception of Virginia's leadership in the national standards movement. Each participant expressed the view that Virginia has been a leader in the national standards movement. Participants commented on the leadership provided by a system of common expectations, the rigor of the Standards of Learning compared to other states' standards, the emergence of Virginia as a leader in online assessment, and on Virginia being an early proponent of tying standards, assessments, and accountability into a unified system.

Professional development on the Standards of Learning has been important to the alignment of instruction in classrooms across Virginia, according to interview participants, particularly after the 1995 revisions of the Standards of Learning. Participant 3 stated,

Remember we had Standards of Learning, but people didn't see them as being important because there was no accountability to them. They were viewed as guides, this is what you should do.... So I think the professional development played a huge role, summer

institutes, workshops, courses, now with webinars. The DOE played a really important role. (P3-5)

Participants noted that the unification of disparate curricula across the Commonwealth of Virginia into a more standardized set of expectations with the Standards of Learning was a first step in Virginia's national leadership in the standards movement. For example, Participant 3 commented that prior to the Standards of Learning, "we didn't have, within a school system, a common set of expectations about what young people were exposed to, especially where there's lots of in-migration" (P3-4). The example of Algebra was mentioned by participants in terms of the standardizing effect of the Standards of Learning implementation in 1995. Referring to when the participant had been a division superintendent, Participant 7 noted: "We had come to the point where, and we had half a dozen high schools, we didn't know if Algebra 1 in one high school was the same as Algebra 1 in another high school" (P7-4). Participant 1 commented about how the implementation of the 1995 Standards of Learning led to a greater degree of standardization in classrooms across the Commonwealth.

Well, I think the biggest influence has been, here's a state system of 132 school divisions that plotted a course to standardize what Algebra I was, for example. Because in the past, Algebra I was a different class even in the same building, it was a different course. And so, the state moved in the direction of standardizing the content that was delivered, not only in specific grade levels, but in specific courses. That was a major accomplishment because, before, sometimes a course would bear no resemblance to the same course being taught elsewhere in the school. It was so vastly different, that after so many years you realized that we didn't really have a system of education, we had a bunch of fractured stuff that was going on, some very good, and some not so good. And so, that was a major influence I think that resounded across the country, especially when you move an entire state in that direction. (P1-9)

Statements from interview participants indicated that Virginia has been highly regarded for the rigor of its standards in the national standards movement from the beginning. Participant 3 stated, "Well, if you read the things in *EdWeek*, and you listen to the state chiefs across the 50 states, Virginia is in the top two or three in the standards movement" (P3-14). Participant 4 noted that "They [other states] hold Virginia up as a model for doing it right" (P4-10). Two participants reported that another state had duplicated the 1995 Standards of Learning "almost

word for word” (P1-6; P6-9). Participant 6 said that the Standards of Learning were influential nationally in 1995. “I mean quite honestly people were begging us for our standards once they were passed. Our standards had specificity in them that other standards didn’t” (P6-9).

Participant 1 described how information about the Standards of Learning was sought out by other states in the mid-1990s.

I think we're pretty high on the chart. On a regular basis, when I did presentations at national conferences, people would ask about the SOLs. They’d heard about them, they read about them, and so, there was a lot of awareness about the quality of the standards as well as how well they were put together and crafted. So, there was a lot of respect, and there still is a lot of respect for Virginia. (P1-7)

Participant 5 stated that Virginia became influential in the standards movement in part because of the combination of the standards and the instructional resources provided by the Virginia Department of Education:

I think our standards are model standards in the sense that they have the rigor and the clarity that many states would seek. And when I say that, I’m not just speaking to the standards themselves, but all those other documents and things that I’ve described that teachers have access to, that help inform them that help unpack the standards themselves. I’ll tell you right now, given the choice between 49 other state standards, I would still take what we have. It doesn’t mean that we don’t struggle with them -- understand that. (P5-4)

Interview participants noted that Virginia remains influential in the standards movement. Participant 4 said, “Our SOLs were used in the development of the Common Core, and quite honestly, before that, they were used by other states to develop their standards. So our standards are very comparable, if not higher, than other states” (P4-10). Participant 5 also stated that Virginia remains a national leader in curriculum standards. “So Virginia is recognized as being a leader in the standards movement even though we are not an adopter of the Common Core. And I think that’s a testimony to the quality of our standards themselves” (P5-5).

Technology was another area where participants reported that Virginia has had national leadership in the standards movement. The shift to online testing was a major change for divisions across the Commonwealth.

We were one of the leading states to conduct a feasibility study, and I was asked to chair that by the state superintendent, to determine the feasibility of online testing. Because prior to that, the state director of testing and measurement was 100 percent against online testing. And so that was a major shift. (P1-7)

Participant 3 stated, “We also recommended that we begin to explore online approaches so that it [testing] wasn’t so time consuming, even though it has been time consuming in some other ways” (P3-3). Participant 1 noted that the switch to online testing was a significant change in the way that the Standards of Learning were assessed: “And, that was a major, major, major shift and it scared teachers to death because they were leaving the paper and pencils. So that was a major shift, with the decision to go in that direction” (P1-5).

The online Virginia SOL assessments now include test questions known as technology-enhanced items. These test items require students “require students to demonstrate critical-thinking and problem-solving skills” to more closely approximate real-world problem solving situations (Virginia Department of Education, 2014a). Participant 4 pointed to the development of technology-enhanced assessment items as another example of how Virginia has had a leadership role in the national standards movement. “Using technology to make better [test] items. The technology-enhanced items are really what the Common Core assessment consortia are developing, and they used our items as models” (P4-9).

### **Bipartisan Support for the Standards of Learning**

The third category identified from the interview data analysis is related to political support for the Standards of Learning. Specifically, the category refers to the bipartisan political support for the Standards of Learning over time. Participants noted that the Standards of Learning received both Republican and Democratic support from legislators and the Governor’s office.

The relationship between the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the governor was noted by interview participants as being an important factor in the support of the Standards of Learning. One interview participant said that the support of the governor was key to moving forward with revisions to the Standards of Learning. “And so I had a verbal commitment from him on the standards themselves but we needed to work on the assessment side, which I agreed

to do” (P4-13). Participant 2 explained the importance of political alignment and support when crucial decisions are made, such as the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards.

No, I think dynamics, I think in relationships, and I think when you talk about dynamics you're talking about leadership and the philosophical underpinnings of who's in charge. The State Superintendent - what kind of relationship does the State Superintendent have with the Board Chair? What kind of relationship did the Board Chair have with the governor? And when you had to make sail not to move forward with the Common Core State Standards, how is that information disseminated and communicated, and agreed upon? Because you are not going to say, I mean Common Core is a big piece, it's a big policy piece. And the Virginia Department of Education and the State Superintendent is not going to say no unless they have the agreement of the Governor and the Governor agrees with them. (P2-4)

Participant 6 also noted the importance of successive governors' support for the Standards of Learning.

And quite honestly, Gary, that's what permitted the reform – that is three terms. Allen, Gilmore, and Warner, those 12 years permitted the reform enough time to get all the policies and codes and all the things in line to make sure that no one could ever just make it go away. (P6-8)

Bipartisan support at both the General Assembly level and the executive level was key to the Standards of Learning, according to interview participants. For example, Participant 4 noted: Because SOL is neither R [Republican] or D [Democrat] now. Yes, it started in '95, that was an R [Republican]. But, I mean, I've worked with Republican governors, and I've worked with Democratic governors, and what was common throughout is that they all support accountability, they supported the standards, they just wanted to make improvements. (P4.12)

Participant 2 agreed that the Standards of Learning, having been supported through both Republican and Democratic administrations, was a stronger initiative due to the bipartisan support:

I think that there's been some constants, and I think that Governor Allen pushed it into place. And I think that the key to the Standards of Learning surviving was, because there was a backlash, and because of the number of schools that were testing, and not meeting

accreditation and such. It survived Governor Gilmore, but I think it continued to survive and flourish under Mark Warner. It was a significant test because it had gone through Republican administrations. I think when it went through the third Democratic administration and with Mark Warner, I think that's the point when the standards movement was going to be here for a little while. (P2-10)

Participant 4 further noted that, “Politically, the state Board would never adopt a set of controversial standards without having the blessing of the General Assembly” (P4-15).

### **External Comparisons of the Standards of Learning**

A fourth category identified from the interview data analysis is the use of external comparisons of the Standards of Learning. According to interview participants, external comparisons were completed during the review process when the Standards of Learning came up for revision. External comparisons were also completed for the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards. As noted by Participant 2, it was important for the Virginia Department of Education to conduct comparisons of the Standards of Learning with standards of other states and other organizations.

I would think you had to have a frame of reference if you're going to compare your standards and say your standards are world class. You have to have some kind of frame of reference toward standards that others have developed. (P2-6)

One participant also noted that external comparisons of Virginia’s Standards of Learning were completed during his tenure as State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

There were lots of reviews...some of them were favorable, some of them were critical. I think you had to take all that information and look at it and see, so what do we learn from it, rather than trying to defend what we did. (P3-11)

Participant 4 noted that reviews of the standards, both by Virginia educators and by external organizations, were completed to improve the standards.

But, with every revision from '95 through 2009 and 2010, we had committees of educators come together to articulate the standards from grade to grade, analyze national documents, and we had university folks who are Math educators, or Science educators, Reading specialists, all review the standards. (P4-2)

Participant 4 explained that external organizations such as American Diploma Project, Achieve, College Board, and ACT all conducted reviews of the Standards of Learning during the revision process (P4-2). Participant 5 noted that the Standards of Learning in mathematics were compared with the standards of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (P5-4).

In regards to the process of making the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards, side-by-side comparisons of the Standards of Learning and Common Core State Standards were completed (Virginia Department of Education, 2010c). Interview participants referred to the comparisons as being key to the decision.

Staff [of the VDOE] actually did a side-by-side comparison in many of the content areas in order to say, all right, before we either accept or reject Common Core, we ought to go beyond the term and say, what do the standards say? And in doing a side-by-side comparison, came to the conclusion and ultimately recommended to the state Board, our Standards of Learning are at least as rigorous, and probably better serve our students than a switch over to the Common Core would be. So I think that side-by-side comparison allowed us to make as objective a decision as you can when you are subjectively involved in one of the two choices. And I think that likely helped drive the decision. (P5-2)

### **Weaving Standards of Learning into Regulatory Documents**

The fifth category identified from the interview analysis is the concept that the Standards of Learning were purposefully woven, or embedded, into regulations pertaining to several areas of Virginia education. Participants indicated that the purposeful weaving of the nomenclature of the Standards of Learning into various areas of education regulation helped institutionalize the Standards of Learning in Virginia. In the Standards of Learning revision process of 1995, for example, Participant 7 explained that some in Virginia wanted to place the Standards of Learning in the Code of Virginia.

And there were interesting debates around the passage because some people thought they ought to be codified, and Ohio had placed phonics instruction in the code of the state. I strongly believed, and with Board and legislators support and certainly the support of the governor, that we needed to regulate them, not codify them, which meant they could be changed by the Board of Ed. So they are actually embedded in the SOQ, the Standards of Quality. (P7-2)

Participant 5 noted that the Standards of Learning are embedded throughout the Standards of Quality (P5-3). Participant 4 explained that the term Standards of Learning is woven throughout teacher licensure regulations, technology initiatives, and the Standards of Quality in a purposeful manner. The participant referred to Mark Christie, a lawyer who served on the Virginia Board of Education from 1997-2003 and served as the Board president from 2002-2003:

So everything we did, and you'll even find that even in the teacher education arena, you'll find that the regulations for teacher preparation and teacher licensure, all have the Standards of Learning built in as requirements in those regulations. You'll find that in the technology initiatives that we launched and the policies, all have Standards of Learning built into those initiatives. And if you go back and you search the changes to the Standards of Quality, during this period of time, especially under Mark Christie's tenure as board president, the board recommended changes to the Standards of Quality that embedded the term, Standards of Learning, throughout the Standards of Quality. And it was a deliberate attempt to make sure that the Standards could not be undone by some political whim or through some unintended consequence of, say, state board policy. (P4-1)

Participant 7 stated that the idea of purposefully weaving the language of the Standards of Learning throughout other education areas in Virginia, "in a rearview mirror, that's probably true" (P7-3). Participant 6 stated that the Standards of Learning were woven throughout education regulations in Virginia on purpose:

So you know, I think that – I don't know whether it fits your index cards, but if time were the variable and you looked at issues around the Code of Virginia today, the Standards of Accreditation, the Standards of Quality, Board procedures and policies. The Standards of Learning have been embedded into all of those, and it wasn't by chance that was done. It was a very purposeful... it was very strategic to do that. So that no one person, whether a governor or a legislator or board member, could come into office and wave a magic wand and make this all go away. So it's embedded into the very fiber of what makes public education what it is today. (P6-4)

The intentional embedding of the Standards of Learning into the Standards of Quality and other education initiatives in Virginia had the objective, according to Participant 4, of improving student achievement on the Standards of Learning.

In Virginia, everything that we did instructionally was centered around the Standards of Learning, and that was a deliberate effort. And that was true of state superintendents from, really from Bill Boshier [on to the present]. The initiatives that we developed and launched, policies that we developed, legislation that we advised on, all had student achievement on the Standards of Learning as an ultimate goal. (P4-1)

Thus, interview participants viewed the weaving of the Standards of Learning into Virginia education regulations as a deliberate effort to maintain the standards initiative. Hess (2006), in his assessment of the early years of the accountability system in Virginia, took a similar stance. “History may be relevant to an understanding of how the whole design makes the standards more or less politically immune to attack” (Hess, 2006).

## **Summary**

This section included a description of the categories that were identified from the document analysis and the interview analysis regarding the first research question: When considering the history of the curriculum standards movement in the Commonwealth of Virginia in the context of the national standards movement, how has the Commonwealth of Virginia arrived at the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards? Categories from the data analysis and interview analysis were presented, along with representative examples of the descriptive evidence for each category.

Analysis of documents and interviews relative to the first research question yielded five categories each. Categories that emerged from the document analysis included: (a) Educator Input on the Standards of Learning; (b) Public Input on the Standards of Learning; (c) Professional Development on the Standards of Learning; (d) Instructional Resources to support the Standards of Learning; and (e) Testing Procedures developed over time. Interview analysis yielded five categories as well. Categories that emerged from the interview analysis included: (a) Educator Input; (b) Virginia Leadership in the Standards Movement; (c) Bipartisan Support for the Standards of Learning; (d) External Comparisons of the Standards of Learning; and (e) Weaving Standards of Learning into Regulatory Documents. Educator Input was a category that

spanned both sources of data. The following section includes the findings related to the second research question in the form of categories and representative examples of descriptive evidence.

**Research Question 2: Based on the descriptive evidence, why has the Commonwealth of Virginia not adopted the Common Core State Standards?**

**Document Analysis Findings: Research Question 2**

Document analysis of Virginia Board of Education documents and Virginia Department of Education documents from 1995-2014 for the second research question focused specifically on evidence found in documents referring to the Common Core State Standards. The category that was identified from document analysis was Direct Comparison of Standards of Learning to the Common Core State Standards. An explanation of the category and examples of evidence from the data found in documents are presented below.

**Direct Comparison of Standards of Learning to the Common Core State Standards**

Virginia Board of Education documents provided evidence that the Common Core State Standards were discussed at the Board of Education level. Superintendent's Memos did not contain language specifically addressing the Common Core State Standards. The Virginia Department of Education has created a webpage with information on the comparison of the Standards of Learning with the Common Core State Standards (Virginia Department of Education, 2014c).

On June 6, 2010, Virginia Board of Education President Eleanor Saslaw released a statement supporting the Virginia Standards of Learning over the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). In her statement, Saslaw noted: (a) the Standards of Learning met national benchmarks for college and career readiness; (b) comparable content and rigor between the SOL and CCSS; (c) Virginia's instructional program was based on the SOL; (d) the disruption that adopting CCSS would cause; (e) instructional resources that had been developed by the VDOE; (f) validated assessments were still undeveloped for the CCSS; and (g) the monetary investment made in the Standards of Learning since 1995 (Virginia Department of Education, 2010a, paragraph 2). Saslaw further commented:

The Standards of Learning are clear, rigorous and understood and trusted by Virginia teachers. Whatever adjustments that might be needed to ensure alignment of the SOL

with the Common Core can be made without disrupting instruction and accountability, and within the existing process through which the board exercises its constitutional authority to establish standards for the commonwealth’s public schools. (Virginia Department of Education, 2010a)

The Common Core State Standards are noted in the minutes of the Virginia Board of Education during the Discussion of Current Issues portion of its June 24, 2010, meeting. “The board endorsed Virginia’s decision not to abandon the Standards of Learning in order to adopt the Common Core State Standards and approved a statement” (VBOEM-06/24/10). The statement lists several reasons for VBOE support for the Standards of Learning over the Common Core State Standards. The reasons listed by the Board of Education echo the reasons listed by President Saslaw in her statement of June 6, 2010 (Virginia Department of Education, 2010b). The Board of Education statement concludes by noting,

The Board of Education supported – and continues to support – the development of internationally benchmarked standards for states to adopt outright or to use as models to improve their own standards. The board, however, opposes the use of federal rulemaking and the peer review process as leverage to compel word-for-word adoption of the Common Core State Standards. (Virginia Department of Education, 2010b)

The second agenda item on the February 23, 2012, meeting of the Virginia Department of Education was the Final Review of Virginia’s Application for U. S. Department of Education Flexibility from Certain Requirements of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA). The agenda item contains evidence that Virginia had completed a direct comparison of the Common Core State Standards with the Standards of Learning in reading and mathematics (VBOEA-02/23/12). For example, the agenda item summarized the comparison process of the Standards of Learning and the Common Core State Standards for mathematics:

In September 2010, the Board received for first review a preliminary analysis of the content of Virginia’s 2010 *English Standards of Learning* compared with the *CCSS* for English. In October 2010, the Department convened a committee of K-16 English educators to further review and refine the analysis to ensure full alignment. The committee made minor revisions including language for clarification or enhancement of content. The 2010 *English Standards of Learning* and revised *Curriculum Framework*

together have full alignment with the *CCSS*, and in some areas, exceed the content of the national document. (VDOEA-02/23/12)

The agenda item also summarized the comparison process of the Standards of Learning and the Common Core State Standards for mathematics:

To ensure full alignment of the 2009 *Mathematics Standards of Learning and Curriculum Framework* with the *CCSS for Mathematics*, the VDOE staff conducted a preliminary analysis of the content from the two sets of standards, and presented a report to the Board at its September 2010 meeting. Both the *CCSS* and the *SOL* appeared to provide a detailed account of mathematics expectations for student learning and understanding. The content topics covered in both documents were clearly defined and sequential. Students progressing into high school mathematics content through the *CCSS* or *SOL* would have received most of the same mathematical content delivered through different learning progressions. In October 2010, the Department convened a committee of K-16 mathematics educators to further review and refine the analysis. The review committee identified certain concepts in the *Curriculum Framework* for the 2009 *Mathematics Standards of Learning* that needed to be strengthened to ensure that Virginia's standards were equal to or more rigorous in content and scope than the *CCSS*. (VDOEA-02/23/12)

Mathematics Standards of Learning were compared side-by-side with the Common Core State Standards in 2011 (Virginia Department of Education, 2011).

In areas where the Standards of Learning were found to be less rigorous than the Common Core State Standards, revisions were suggested to the Revised Curriculum Framework of the Standards of Learning. For example, the comparison document in English Language Arts and Literacy (ELAL) notes,

In developing the draft of the Revised Curriculum Framework for 2010 English Standards of Learning, Virginia Department of Education staff met with a review committee of educators from school divisions who assisted in the revision process. As a part of the process, committee members reviewed the *CCSS* for ELAL and if it was determined that a *CCSS* provided an enhancement to the 2010 English *SOL* and was appropriate to the standard, the content was added to the Curriculum Framework for 2010 English Standards of Learning. (Virginia Department of Education, 2010c)

Both the English and the mathematics comparison documents note that the student learning expectations in the Standards of Learning are equivalent or more rigorous than the Common Core State Standards. In English, for example, the Virginia Department of Education notes similarities in content but differences in organization between the Standards of Learning and the Common Core State Standards:

Both the CCSS for ELAL and the Virginia *English Standards of Learning* (SOL) are rigorous and provide a progression of expectations for student learning and understanding in English Language Arts. By the time students have graduated from high school, they will have been exposed to the same content through different learning progressions, although there is some content in the SOL that is not covered in the CCSS. The CCSS and the SOL generally have a strong alignment. (Virginia Department of Education, 2010c)

In mathematics, the direct comparison shows that Virginia's Standards of Learning are on par with, or in some areas exceeding, the rigor of the Common Core State Standards, according to the Virginia Department of Education:

By the time students have progressed into high school mathematics content through the CCSS or SOL, they have received at least the same mathematical content delivered through different learning progressions. Virginia's SOL are equal to or in some instances more rigorous in content and scope than the CCSS. While learning progressions may not completely mirror one another, the content from both is aligned. (Virginia Department of Education, 2011)

The side-by-side comparison documents for the revised Standards of Learning and the Common Core State Standards in English and mathematics are posted on the Virginia Department of Education's CCSS website (Virginia Department of Education, 2014c).

This section discussed the findings from document analysis related to the second research question: Based on the descriptive evidence, why has the Commonwealth of Virginia not adopted the Common Core State Standards? One category of evidence emerged from the document analysis, Direct Comparison of Standards of Learning to the Common Core State Standards. The following section features findings from the interview analysis related to the second research question.

## **Interview Analysis Findings: Research Question 2**

Analysis of the data from the interviews resulted in four categories regarding the question of why Virginia did not adopt the Common Core State Standards. The categories were: (a) Longstanding Standards of Learning System; (b) Uncertainty about the Common Core State Standards; (c) Federal Intrusion into State Matters; and (d) the Standards of Learning Brand. The following section provides explanation and examples of each of the categories that emerged during the process of interview data analysis.

### **Longstanding Standards of Learning System**

One category that developed during the process of data analysis of the interviews in regards to the second research question was the idea that the Standards of Learning is a longstanding system. The Standards of Learning have been in existence since the 1980s, but starting with the revision of the standards in 1995, the current system is nearing two decades of existence in Virginia. Interview participants spoke of the importance of the Standards of Learning being intertwined with assessments and accountability measures. There were growing pains associated with the new system of accountability, according to the interview participants.

The development of assessments to determine the level of student proficiency on the standards was noted in interview participants' comments. The Virginia school accountability initiative of 1995 was a comprehensive system of school improvement, according to Participant 4 (P4-2). The system included the Standards of Learning, high-stakes assessments tied to the Standards of Learning, Standards of Accreditation which linked student achievement on the assessments to possible accreditation consequences, and School Performance Report Cards to give patrons information about school performance (Duke et al., 2008). Participant 7 noted, "And the accountability system was very simply standards, assessment, report cards, and consequences. We used the platform that already existed, the SOLs, which had existed for several years" (P7-1). Participant 1 spoke to the importance of the decision to tie accreditation to assessments:

Of course, the decision that the SOLs would be the key to accreditation -- that changed the accreditation standards dramatically. I can remember sitting with the members of the state board. Sitting with the chairman of the state board and one or two other members, going line-by-line through the standards of accreditation, scratching out stuff, writing

new statements. I mean, you are sitting there thinking, this is going to change the world, change how we look at accreditation in this state. And it was done at the board room, sitting at a table over a couple of weeks. So it dramatically impacted a number of things and those decisions are continuing to impact us today. (P1-1)

Interview participants noted the importance of the introduction of the high-stakes assessments into the system of school improvement in Virginia. For example, Participant 1 said that the introduction of high-stakes assessments into the accreditation process was a big change for school divisions in Virginia. “And then tying that [standards] to accreditation, means there was an accountability component that not only did you have standards, not only did you have the assessment, but you are being held accountable for what occurred” (P1-9). Participant 7 spoke to the importance of high-stakes assessments in raising expectations for student achievement:

Once we had standards that were high-stakes, which meant that you could use them for graduation, I mean, theoretically, you could have used them for promotion, retention. I will tell you that the Standards of Learning -- that the accountability system – standards, assessment, report cards and consequences -- was never intended to be a Super Bowl. It was always intended to be used for moving towards meeting or exceeding the expectations. (P7-3)

Participant 7 said that the Standards of Accreditation in Virginia differed from the previous regulations on accreditation because the new regulations required certain levels of student achievement on the SOL tests. The previous version of the Standards of Accreditation, in other words, was more of an inputs model that did not take into account the outputs of student achievement and aggregate school achievement.

In order to be an accredited school in Virginia, you had to have the right number of books, the right number of teachers, the right number of acres, a flag up the pole. You didn't have to learn everything. So, the standards, the accountability system that included the Standards of Learning, were all about academic progress. (P7-7)

Participant 1 noted that accountability tied to student performance Standards of Learning was a move away from previous accountability measures.

Anyway, during Governor Allen's tenure and then Governor Gilmore's tenure, they decided that the SOL assessments would be tied to accreditation. This was a major, major shift because all of a sudden this wasn't a matter of teacher resource materials, these were

accreditation issues, where you could decide to withhold accreditation from a school or a school division. So that sent shockwaves through the department as well as out in the field, and radically changed the program. (P1-1)

The newly-linked system of standards and accreditation requirements was an important event in the history of the Standards of Learning, in part because of low pass rates in the early years of the new high-stakes assessments, as noted by Participant 6.

But I remember, I would say to people the Standards of Learning program is on life support and [the Virginia Board of Education President] was holding the plug in the wall. I mean that's how fragile our reform was at one time. (P6-5)

Participant 6 recounted the difficulty in sustaining the Standards of Learning program after the first round of high-stakes assessments.

So the issue was how much failure will the public tolerate, the first year of the testing program, when their school isn't fully accredited? And there was a boatload of them. That was a very tenuous time for the reform because ... only 6.5% of the Commonwealth's 1791 schools met the accreditation standard. Although achievement increased on all tests. So the achievement went up, but only 6.5% [were accredited]. And we had predicted that the public would not tolerate more than 10%. You know, if less than 10% of our schools were fully accredited. And it would call into question the validity of this whole thing. (P6-7)

The growing pains associated with revising the standards in 1995, followed by implementing the new assessments, and followed by implementing the accountability linked to the assessments was discussed by Participant 6:

Well, everybody hated the standards. They didn't like the standards. When I say everybody obviously that isn't true, but a lot of people didn't like the standards, content standards. They didn't like the content standards until the tests came along. Then they loved the content standards, but they hated the tests. Then the accountability piece came into play and then all of a sudden people said, you know the standards are okay, and yeah, we do need some way to measure whether kids know this content, but don't hold us accountable for it. So I think each stage of it to me, and I was in different roles, each stage seemed kind of painful, but the most painful part was when we got to the accountability piece, quite honestly. And that really to me is the most important piece.

We'd had standards since the '80s. We had some tests you could use because I remember I was a principal then. There were tests out there you could give. But there were no consequences for not doing well. (P6-6)

Interview Participant 7 spoke of the differences between the previous system of accountability in Virginia and the new Standards of Accreditation linked to the SOL assessments. Participant 7 noted how the system was vastly different from the previous system since accountability had been increased.

Our system almost collapsed, because the Board of Ed, a few months in said, "Give us some illustrations about what the consequences [of low pass rates] might be." And using field-based people and others of us, we developed a couple of pages. And when people saw what the consequences might be, the system almost died then. (P7-7)

Subsequent revisions of the Standards of Learning and associated assessments also resulted in low pass rates, but by the mid-2000s the Standards of Learning and the Standards of Accreditation had been in place for a number of years. Participants referred to subsequent revisions in the mathematics Standards of Learning, along with new assessments that resulted in low pass rates in certain grade levels. For example, Participant 4 stated,

But when we added the middle school tests in sixth and seventh grade back in 2006 because we were under the Federal mandate to do that, the scores were awful. They were awful. But, you know, we are better off for it now, our middle school scores are probably higher than some high school scores and elementary [scores] because we worked harder at it. (P4-12).

Participant 3 noted, "So it was grades six and seven that created the greatest shock for everyone. Similar to what we saw with the Math expectations and what happened with the first administration of the test" (P3-3).

Participants spoke of the investments that the Commonwealth of Virginia has made in the Standards of Learning, specifically referring to the investments of time and investments of money into the SOL. Participant 1 explained,

The state has developed the Standards of Learning over a 20-year period. It's been 20 years. The SOL tests have been in place for 16 years. Millions, millions of dollars were spent to design, implement, print, distribute, provide professional development, assessment, online testing, as well as technology support for online testing. (P1-2)

Participant 6 commented about the investments that Virginia has made in the Standards of Learning:

I mean we have put so much money and time and energy and heart into this reform. And our testing program is the most complicated testing program in the nation. Because of all of these things, to abandon that would be a huge step backwards for Virginia, huge step backwards for our children too, I think. (P6-3)

Participant 2 stated that,

We had this process that had been long developed and lots of money had been put into developing our standards. Our standards had gone through a very rigorous process before being published and tested upon. So, in my opinion we were on the right track and we had a process in place that would take us in new directions with our Virginia standards. (P2-6)

The investment in the Standards of Learning and the widespread acceptance of the Standards of Learning were important factors in the Common Core State Standards decision, according to the interview participants. Participant 3 spoke of not abandoning the Standards of Learning system that had been developed over time.

No, I think it was more, from the state board perspective, I think it was, why should we abandon the work that has been evolving over the last 15 years? And, that [work] has resulted in some significant accomplishments for children. (P3-13)

Participant 5 spoke to the notion that the Standards of Learning are well-known and accepted by the public.

So I think the long history and the deep understanding is a real positive for us. I think people believe in the Standards of Learning as a legitimate vehicle. And there is no need to go out and do a PR campaign to convince them of that. (P5-5)

Participant 3 stated that the time investment and political support for the Standards of Learning were both important in the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards:

We had been working on our accountability system in Virginia for well over a decade. And, it had been owned by the legislative branch, Democrats and Republicans, two Republican governors, and two Democratic governors, and there had been a huge investment of not only time but resources to develop the system. And people were unwilling to abandon that and wait for a new system. (P3-7)

Similarly, Participant 7 noted,

I was in Colorado recently ... and they were saying, “You know, Virginia just has one of the strongest systems in the country.” But it also means you’ve got to constantly evaluate that [system] and make adaptations, but you shouldn’t abandon it. (P7-12)

Participant 4 cited the alignment assured by external reviews of the Standards of Learning as being important to the decision regarding the Common Core State Standards:

You see, it was the same organizations, Achieve and the College Board, who were movers and shakers in the Common Core. So we felt fairly confident, we felt fairly confident that what we had as revised math and English standards would line up with what was going to come out of the Common Core effort. Close enough that we didn’t feel that we needed to abandon all of this work, and start the whole development process, or put it on hold. Because the other thing going on was the assessment development. If you put standards on hold, then you have to put assessment on hold. And so Virginia never gets updated assessments until you have a new set, and then that's about, well, 14-15 [2014-2015]. Whereas we were able to roll out the new math in 11-12 [2011-2012]. And now we're well on our way to seeing some positive changes in mathematics versus teachers in flux for those numbers of years. And so all of that fed into the policy decisions around a Common Core versus SOL. (P4-3)

### **Uncertainty about the Common Core State Standards**

A second category that developed during the process of data analysis of the interviews in regards to the second research question was the uncertainty about the Common Core State Standards. Participants discussed the uncertainty of how the Common Core State Standards would compare with the current Standards of Learning. Participants also noted a change from the Standards of Learning to the Common Core State Standards would have had major implications for the assessment and accountability system in Virginia. Participant 2 stated,

So, my personal philosophy was, based upon the information I had was, that we had longstanding standards in place that have gone through a rigorous process that you’ve described, very adequately described, in the index cards. And that we were head and shoulders above in this process because we had been doing it. We had been practicing it for so many years in Virginia. That's not to say that someone else can't come along and

do it better. But why take a chance on something that's newly developed, when you have something that's in place? (P2-8)

Participant 3 stated, "...show me what's going to be in its place while we're waiting. And if not, let us continue with this work. And we've been doing it for [more than] 10 years" (P3-8).

Educating Virginia educators about the Common Core State Standards, as well as developing new instructional resources, were mentioned by two participants. Participant 4 stated that the decision not to adopt the CCSS kept Virginia from having "...to disrupt the whole state with pulling back on the brand SOL and trying to re-educate folks on Common Core" (P4-7).

Referring to the instructional resources that have been developed by the Virginia Department of Education and made available on the VDOE website, Participant 6 noted,

I mean... any parent, any teacher, you go on there and get sample lesson plans, you can see copies of the test, released items, the blueprints tell you what's going to be on the test and how many questions there are, the enhanced scope and sequence digs into the standards and gives definition to them. I mean would we have to do all this over again? So that's kind of where I am. That would be my speculation on why [the decision was made]. (P6-4)

Participant 3 explained that the external reviews of the Virginia Standards of Learning were important to the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards:

I think Virginia was wise in saying, the Standards [of Learning] were appropriate, we want to make certain they are aligned. If we exceed them [CCSS], we don't think we should throttle back. But if we are not there, we think we should, and so we agreed on that part. It's just that we didn't adopt, in full, the whole package called Common Core. Because they were [still] developing it. We already had been working on how do we help kids meet higher expectations, the standards were being vetted, not only within the state but against – increasingly against other states, and we found that our standards were higher, in some cases lower, but for the most part, higher. And where we're lower, we did something about it. So, I think that's primarily the reason. (P3-14)

Question marks about the assessments that would be tied to the Common Core State Standards, and the time it would take for the assessments to be developed, were factors mentioned by participants. Participant 3, for example, stated that "One [reason] is, there was not

a clear indication of what the assessment system would look like tied to the Common Core. In the absence of that, how do you know if you're actually achieving what you intended to" (P3-7)?

Participant 6 noted,

So the worst thing would be to embrace some standards content that didn't align with our tests, or we couldn't afford to align our tests. And then hold our schools accountable for something else. So that accreditation piece, I think is a huge barrier, unless we chose not to accredit our schools that way, which we did for many years. But that requires a change in the SOA and that requires time as well. (P6-6)

Participant 3 spoke to the idea of question marks about the assessments related to the Common Core State Standards:

Why should we abandon that to wait for, not only the new standards, but the assessments that go along with them? So I think that that was from a state board perspective, I think from the General Assembly perspective, whether you're a Democrat or Republican, I think they had more confidence in what we had developed than what was going to be developed. (P3-13)

Adverse publicity and backlash occurring in some states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards was noted by Participant 1:

Well, you noticed right now, a number of them aren't even calling them the Common Core, they're calling them the Vermont Standards, or whatever. They change the name, and in a couple of places they're in a big fight as to whether they're going to pull out of it [CCSS] or not. (P1-10)

Participant 5 also noted the backlash against the Common Core State Standards:

But the Common Core, I think we'd be starting over. I think going to any other system would lead to battles and discussions that we have avoided because we already have the Standards of Learning. In fact, we've had people now come before the state Board saying, "We think this standard is too close to a Common Core Standard and you're trying to secretly adopt the Common Core -- don't do it." But we're not. But it shows the deeply held beliefs both in our current system and mistrust of the changes to a Common Core. So I think by keeping our system, the benefit is we've avoided all that political shrapnel that would have distracted us from doing some other things. (P5-5)

Participant 2 stated that at the State Board of Education level, there had been no lobbying for or against the Common Core State Standards. Rather, the focus was on improving the existing Standards of Learning:

But I don't think anyone really came out for or against Common Core, that I recall. There may have been some behind the scenes work, but I don't remember anyone coming before the board and saying we don't want you to adopt Common Core Standards, we want you to stay with the SOLs. I think that everyone felt like there needed to be some reform added there. Whether Common Core was the reform that was needed, was questionable. I don't necessarily think that was the thought process. But I think everyone agreed there needed to be some work with the Standards of Learning. (P2-8)

One participant noted the politicization of the Common Core State Standards discussion.

So I think that the Common Core conversation jumped real quickly to, 'This will be better and why don't you adopt it,' without looking at each place to find out where they were and then how do you help people to kind of build off of where they were. So initially it was more of a political conversation than it was an academic one. (P3-9)

### **Federal Intrusion into State Matters**

A third category that developed during the process of data analysis of the interviews in regards to the second research question was the idea of federal intrusion into state matters. Participants discussed the role of the federal government both generally and specifically when it came to the decision regarding the Common Core State Standards.

And of course my perception there, and it's strictly perception, is that if you believe in local control and limited federal government access into public education, then that may probably explain why Governor McDonnell stayed the course, as opposed to moving in that direction. (P2-10)

Participant 7 spoke of the distance between localities and state and federal regulations:

And yet, accountability not only is still with us, but needs to be with us. The question is, how far can you be from those who are being held accountable, and do it reasonably? You know, I would contest even on a general basis that to do it from the Fed [Federal Government] is just too far. To do it from Richmond to Lee [County], it is far, it's pretty far. (P7-10)

Participant 4 discussed the perspective taken by one Virginia governor regarding federal intrusion into state education matters:

And I knew enough from his [the governor's] team at the beginning of his administration through the legislative session that his position was state autonomy, you know, and we're going to fight the Federal government when you intrude too much into where the state authority is. So I felt very comfortable about our position around Common Core, and I had briefed the transition team and they loved it. (P4-8)

Participants referred to the federal school reform program Race to the Top. Virginia withdrew its application for the federal Race to the Top program prior to the second round of the grant competition (Anderson & Helderman, 2010). Participant 7 noted,

And the reality is, when the Fed trumps with money, not with constitutional authority but with money, they literally say, even though yours [Standards of Learning] may be good, well you need to look like ours [Common Core State Standards] because we've got the money. And that's just the wrong reason to have to acquiesce. (P7-10)

Participant 4 also referred to the Race to the Top program and requirements that states adopt the Common Core State Standards:

We put in the first application just to see what feedback we would get on our state standards because the Race to the Top application required states to adopt – word for word – the Common Core and you couldn't deviate more than 15 percent. So it's dictating to states, you set aside everything that you have, you adopt the Common Core, and you have to be a part of the assessment consortia. We put in the application and refused to do that. We defended the standards and refused to do that. (P4-8)

Participant 7 stated,

I think Virginia's not doing Common Core, a positive is – whether you want to call it a state's rights initiative -- that they have refused to be bullied into acquiescing with a set of standards that may not only conflict with but may be less rigorous than our standards. And the contention has always been, why should we accept standards that are less demanding than our own? And nationally, I think researchers have indicated that Virginia has very demanding standards. I think another positive is that education is not a Federal initiative, it's a state initiative. There's nothing constitutional that gives the Fed

the authority to control education. So they shouldn't use standards as a proxy and money as leverage. (P7-11)

Assessments that were under development for the Common Core State Standards were mentioned by Participant 4 in the context of the role of the federal government in Virginia education:

And so, I think decisions about education, I think decisions about assessments, I think those decisions are best left to the individual states in collaboration with other states. But individual states have to decide how much collaboration you need, you want, and then you balance out the Federal role, because the Federal government right now is calling all the shots. To change an assessment program, you have to have permission from the Federal government, and that's what a lot of people in Virginia still don't understand. (P4-11)

Participant 5 spoke to the notion of flexibility regarding certain matters such as revisions to the teacher evaluation system when the decision was made not to adopt the Common Core State Standards.

When you take the federal money, you accept some of the things the feds require you to do. We've had a little more flexibility in seeking waivers to the Federal ESEA because we're not a Common Core state. So we didn't sign off saying we agree to some things. We're able now to try and negotiate on some of those things. And that means changes in our testing program, looking at our evaluation system on teachers. We have adopted the federal one, but we did it in our way, in our timeline, where others have been forced to do it whether they wanted to do it or not. (P5-6)

Participant 1 disagreed with the notion that Virginia had to adopt the Common Core State Standards in order to be in the running for Race to the Top funds in the grant competition:

And that is, Governor McDonnell made the statement that because Virginia decided to keep its standards that it couldn't apply because feds required Virginia to adopt the Common Core in order to apply for Race to the Top funds. That's not true. (P1-10)

### **The Standards of Learning Brand**

A fourth category that developed during the process of data analysis of the interviews in regards to the second research question was the notion of a "Virginia Way," or brand, in relation

to the Standards of Learning. Several participants spoke of the Standards of Learning in terms of a brand name. Others spoke of “the Virginia Way” when it came to the system of curriculum standards, with a meaning similar to the notion of brand name. Participant 5 noted, “It [Standards of Learning] is certainly the calling card for public education in Virginia. People understand that. When we talk about Standards of Learning, it is at the core of our educational system” (P5-6). Referring to the categories from the index cards used in the interview, Participant 6 stated, “Well, I think that branding has happened over two decades as a result of all the items that you have on these cards” (P6-12).

Participant 3 discussed the notion of “the Virginia Way,” referring to the manner in which Virginia approached the Standards of Learning based on the process of revisions over time. “So, the Virginia way for me is that we were thoughtful, intentional, and [with] what we learned about what we were doing, we were willing to make changes based on that learning without being forced from the outside” (P3-17). Participant 4 stated, “And quite honestly, politics. Standards of Learning is a brand name. It's like Xerox and copy machines. We have a lot of latitude to change what's under the SOL brand. You don't have that latitude with Common Core” (P4-12).

Interview participants noted that the failure of the Common Core of Learning program was an important event in the history of the Virginia Standards of Learning. The administration of Virginia Governor Wilder in 1990 proposed education reforms called the World Class Education Program. The main thrust of the proposal was a set of education outcomes known as the Common Core of Learning. The Common Core of Learning was an attempt to focus on improved academic skills along with increased integrity, self-management and self-esteem (Duke & Reck, 2003). The outcomes-based education of the Common Core of Learning was met with vocal criticism (Harris, 1993).

The Common Core of Learning was discontinued in 1993, which is prior to the time delineation of this study. However, the effects of abandoning the Common Core of Learning program were still felt in the years immediately following the decision. The timeline for revision of the original Standards of Learning, for example, had been delayed by the Common Core of Learning program, the ensuing controversy, and the program's eventual discontinuation. One participant recalled the delay in standards development brought on by the Common Core of Learning:

Initially, the State Superintendent, Joe Spagnolo, had asked the department to cease and desist the publication of any standards while they were developing what ironically was called the Common Core of Learning. And the strong public debate, over the Common Core of Learning initiatives, was focused almost primarily on the values component that was related to the Common Core [of Learning]. There were many who believed in the Raths, Simon, and Harmin values clarification effort, that this mastery of skills was also going to be an effort to try to teach values. And of course, then the subsequent debate was around whose values and what values. Governor Wilder, in the midst of that debate, placed a moratorium on the department, to cease and desist its development of standards. So, you had about three years prior, a cease and desist. So no standards came out of the department. And then, the ones [standards] they were working on, proceeded. So when I entered the picture in '94, we had a void of some four years of any kind of standards development, or even publication, I mean, there were no standards. (P7-1)

When the Common Core of Learning was discontinued, all publications about the program had to be discarded and the label of Common Core of Learning was no longer used. One participant recalled that,

We could not distribute anything to the field that had Common Core of Learning on it. So I mean, you can imagine, all these public relations that went on. Brochures and everything --whole pallets had to be destroyed. World Class Education went down. It went down, and it was a failed effort (P4-18).

The decision to discontinue the Common Core of Learning still resonated nearly two decades later for some participants with the discussion of Virginia's participation in the Common Core State Standards. One participant noted that the nomenclature of the Common Core State Standards would be problematic in Virginia, where the discontinued program of the Common Core of Learning was part of the educational history in Virginia.

Which is why I argued with CCSSO [Council of Chief State School Officers], I said, "If you're going to do this, don't call it Common Core, common anything." I said, "In Virginia it's not going to sell anyway, because of a failed effort." (P4-17)

One participant noted that the decision was made to revise the Standards of Learning under a familiar name when the Standards of Learning were revised in 1995.

So, the political decision was to go back and resurface a brand people were familiar with, but to redo the content. So, we changed the content radically in 1995, but it was under the SOL brand. See, you can do most anything under the hood. But you don't take the hood off, you don't put a new hood on. (P4-17)

Participant 3 emphasized the importance of improved teaching and learning as the “Virginia Way” when it came to the Standards of Learning:

So the Virginia way was, we tried something, we were thoughtful about what we do, we get buy-in. And it doesn't mean everyone buys it, but enough buy-in from multiple groups. We do it, we learn from it, we acknowledge where it's strong and weak and we go about changing the things that are weak to make it stronger. If that's the Virginia way, that's great. But if the Virginia way is just, it's my way or the highway – no. Because there were a lot of different people on that highway and that we challenged each other, colleagues challenged each other, we challenged the state department, we challenged the General Assembly. And I think that being able to kind of blend those different perspectives and then say we can make it better, I think that's – if that's the Virginia way, I like it. (P3-18)

## **Summary**

This section included a description of the categories that emerged from the document analysis and the interview analysis regarding the second research question: Based on the descriptive evidence, why has the Commonwealth of Virginia not adopted the Common Core State Standards? Categories from the data analysis and interview analysis were presented, along with representative examples of the descriptive evidence for each category. The category identified as Direct Comparison of Standards of Learning to the Common Core State Standards was presented along with examples of evidence from the document analysis. Interview data resulted in the development of four categories, including: (a) Longstanding Standards of Learning system; (b) Uncertainty about the Common Core State Standards; (c) Federal Intrusion into State Matters; and (d) the Standards of Learning Brand.

## Summary of Chapter 4

Chapter 4 included the findings of the study. Findings were presented sequentially for the two research questions in the study. Virginia Department of Education documents were analyzed for the study using the constant comparative method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994), including Superintendent's Memos and Virginia Board of Education meeting agendas and minutes. Interviews with seven major figures in public education in Virginia over the last 20 years were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed using the constant comparative method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

For the first research question, five categories were identified and discussed from the document analysis portion of the study, including: (a) Educator Input on the Standards of Learning; (b) Public Input on the Standards of Learning; (c) Professional Development on the Standards of Learning; (d) Instructional Resources to Support the Standards of Learning; and (e) Testing Procedures Developed Over Time. Interview data analysis identified five categories, including: (a) Educator Input; (b) Virginia Leadership in the Standards Movement; and (c) Bipartisan Support for the Standards of Learning; (d) External Comparisons of the Standards of Learning; and (e) Weaving Standards of Learning into Regulatory Documents.

For the second research question, one category from the document analysis was identified and discussed: Direct Comparison of Standards of Learning to the Common Core State Standards. Interview data analysis yielded four categories discussed in the chapter, including: (a) Longstanding Standards of Learning system; (b) Uncertainty about the Common Core State Standards; (c) Federal Intrusion into State Matters; and (d) the Standards of Learning Brand.

In Chapter 5, conclusions are presented based on the findings of the study. Implications for practitioners are discussed, as well as recommendations for additional research. The researcher also discusses personal reflections on the study.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Summary of the Study**

This study sought answers to two research questions relating to Virginia's decision regarding the Common Core State Standards. The research questions were: (1) When considering the history of the curriculum standards movement in the Commonwealth of Virginia in the context of the national standards movement, how has the Commonwealth of Virginia arrived at the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards? (2) Based on the descriptive evidence, why has the Commonwealth of Virginia not adopted the Common Core State Standards?

A qualitative methodology was utilized to answer the research questions. A two-stage process of data collection and analysis was used in the study. First, documents from the Virginia Board of Education and the Virginia Department of Education from 1995-2014 were collected and a document analysis was conducted. The types of documents analyzed included Superintendents Memo's, Virginia Board of Education meeting agendas, Virginia Board of Education meeting minutes, and briefing information. Second, using the findings of the document analysis to inform the interview process, seven interviews with elite members of the Virginia education field from the last twenty years were conducted.

Documents and interviews were analyzed using the constant comparative method as described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). Documents and interview transcripts were coded, units of meaning were identified, and unitized data were organized under categories of meaning. The constant comparative method was used throughout the process as each new unit of data was compared with the others as patterns developed. Categories related to both research questions eventually emerged and were refined during the constant comparative process (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

#### **Summary of the Findings**

Findings were presented sequentially by research question and by source of data, with document analysis findings followed by interviews analysis findings, for each research question. For the first research question, five categories emerged from the document analysis portion of

the study, including: (a) Educator Input on the Standards of Learning; (b) Public Input on the Standards of Learning; (c) Professional Development on the Standards of Learning; (d) Instructional Resources to Support the Standards of Learning; and (e) Testing Procedures Developed Over Time. Data analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in five categories for the first research question, including: (a) Educator Input; (b) Virginia Leadership in the Standards Movement; and (c) Bipartisan Support for the Standards of Learning; (d) External Comparisons of the Standards of Learning; and (e) Weaving Standards of Learning into Regulatory Documents.

For the second research question, one category from the document analysis emerged: Direct Comparison of Standards of Learning to the Common Core State Standards. Data analysis of the interview transcripts resulted in four categories, including: (a) Longstanding Standards of Learning system; (b) Uncertainty about the Common Core State Standards; (c) Federal Intrusion into State Matters; and (d) the Standards of Learning Brand.

## **Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings**

When considering the descriptive evidence from each category in regards to how and why the Commonwealth of Virginia did not adopt the Common Core State Standards, three major conclusions are asserted. The major conclusions are:

Conclusion 1: The Virginia Standards of Learning are an institutionalized system.

Conclusion 2: The Virginia Standards of Learning had bipartisan political support.

Conclusion 3: Confidence in the Standards of Learning outweighed confidence in the Common Core State Standards.

The following section of Chapter 5 presents each of the three major conclusions, with discussion and interpretation.

### **Conclusion 1: The Virginia Standards of Learning Are an Institutionalized System.**

The first major conclusion is that the Virginia Standards of Learning are an institutionalized system. The Virginia Standards of Learning are more than just statements, by grade level, of what students are expected to know and to be able to do. The Virginia Standards of Learning have become a system that incorporates a feedback loop for the revision process, a process that extends to curriculum resources for teachers. Further, the system of curriculum

standards known as the Standards of Learning has become institutionalized over time. The Standards of Learning are institutionalized in terms of Virginia education regulations and the fact that the standards are one leg of the accountability system of curriculum standards, assessments based on the standards, accreditation based on performance on the assessments, and school report cards.

More than just being part of the four-part system of education accountability in Virginia, the Standards of Learning are institutionalized in other, less obvious ways. These include:

- Investments in the Standards of Learning
- Feedback loop for periodic reviews
- Battery of resources for instruction and assessment
- Weaving of SOL language into regulatory documents

The investments made in the Standards of Learning are an important factor in the institutionalization of the Standards of Learning. Monetary investments in the Standards of Learning have been significant, according to interview participants, but in Virginia there has been much more than dollars put into standards. Participant 6 noted that “we have put so much money and time and energy and heart into this reform” (P6-3). Virginia has had Standards of Learning since the 1980s. The Standards of Learning have changed over the last 20 years, but the current Standards of Learning are in large part recognizable in the Standards of Learning that were put into place in 1995. At first glance, the 2009 mathematics Standards of Learning do not immediately convey the nearly two decades of work that has been put into the standards, for example. Categories from the data analysis that lead to this conclusion include the investments of time, effort, and expense noted in the categories from the first research question of Educator Input, Public Input, Professional Development, Instructional Resources, and Testing Resources. The category of Longstanding Standards of Learning System from Research Question 2 also applies when considering the investments into the Standards of Learning.

Another way in which the Standards of Learning have been institutionalized is in the system of feedback, which is here termed a feedback loop, developed over time. The Virginia Department of Education has a well-established cycle of input, starting with educators writing and revising the standards, continuing with opportunities for educator input through committees, forums and in written comments, continuing with calls for public input in writing and at public input forums, and culminating in Virginia Board of Education review and approval. When the

process is completed for a revision for each subject, the feedback loop begins again. Processes for developing and revising Standards of Learning assessments follow a feedback loop that differs somewhat from the feedback loop for the standards, but the system echoes the review process for the standards. The test items themselves often originate from the testing contractor and are then revised and enhanced by Virginia assessment committees, and field testing analyses are conducted to ensure the validity of the test items (P4-5). Categories from the data analysis that lead to this conclusion include Educator Input, Public Input, and External Comparisons of the Standards of Learning from Research Question 1.

A third way in which the Standards of Learning have been institutionalized is in the battery of resources that are produced by the Virginia Department of Education. As the Standards of Learning in each subject area are revised, the associated curricular documents are revised as well. For example, when the mathematics Standards of Learning were revised in 2009, the Virginia Department of Education revised the Curriculum Framework, Enhanced Scope and Sequence, Test Blueprints, and SOL Practice Items (Virginia Department of Education, 2010a). Categories from the data analysis that lead to this conclusion include Educator Input, Instructional Resources, Professional Development, and Testing Resources from Research Question 1.

A fourth way in which the Standards of Learning have been institutionalized is in the way that the Standards of Learning have been woven into the regulatory documents throughout K-12 education in Virginia. Interview participants brought this aspect of the institutionalization of the Standards of Learning to light in their discussion of how the current Standards of Learning system began in the 1990s. The category from the data analysis that leads to this conclusion is Weaving Standards of Learning into Regulatory Documents from Research Question 2.

### **Conclusion 2: The Virginia Standards of Learning Had Bipartisan Political Support.**

The second major conclusion that can be made from the descriptive evidence for the research questions is the notion of bipartisan political support for the Virginia Standards of Learning. Evidence for the conclusion of bipartisan political support is noted in three areas: governor and General Assembly support, educator support, and surviving political challenges. These three areas, and how they support the conclusion that there has been bipartisan political support for the Standards of Learning, are presented below.

As noted in Chapter 2, the governor of Virginia wields a great deal of power over education matters in the Commonwealth. The governor appoints the members of the Virginia Board of Education, the Secretary of Education, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and proposes the budget for public schools (Szakal, 1997). The importance of a supportive governor and General Assembly was noted by each interview participant. Interview participants indicated that the Standards of Learning have been supported by each successive governor during the time period of the study, 1995-2013 (P3-17). Likewise, the General Assembly has played an active role in the shaping of education policy, according to the participants. The alignment of support from the top down was noted as important to the decision made about the Common Core State Standards, as noted by Participant 1: “So, when you have the Governor, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Secretary of Education and the Board, which is appointed by the Governor, all lining up, I can see why the decision was made the way it was” (P1-3). Each participant referred to the General Assembly in their answers relating to the political support for the Standards of Learning. For example, Participant 3 noted that “from the General Assembly perspective, whether you’re a Democrat or Republican, I think they [General Assembly] had more confidence in what we had developed than what was going to be developed” (P3-13). Categories from the data analysis that show evidence of the importance of governor and General Assembly support for the Standards of Learning include Bipartisan Support for the Standards of Learning from Research Question 1 and Federal Intrusion into State Matters from Research Question 2.

A second area of political support for the Standards of Learning stems from Educator Support. Educator Support is a category that stemmed from both the document analysis and from the interview analysis. Interview participants noted that educator input, as explicated in data presented for Research Question 1, has led to educator buy-in and support for the Standards of Learning system. Educator Support and buy-in has been important, as Participant 3 explained, “Because it’s that input that has driven some of the major changes [in the Standards of Learning]” (P3-3). Categories from the data analysis that support the conclusion of Educator Support for the Standards of Learning include Educator Input from Research Question 1 and Longstanding Standards of Learning System from Research Question 2.

A third area relating to the political support for the Standards of Learning is not another constituency, but the notion of the SOL surviving political challenges. The Standards of

Learning have survived over the last 20 years despite some challenges. For example, the shock of the low pass rates on the first rounds of the Standards of Learning assessments and resulting accreditation issues for schools and divisions was an early challenge to the Standards of Learning system itself. Subsequent revisions of the standards and assessments saw similar challenges with lowered pass rates, as noted by interview participants. Categories from the data analysis that lend support to the idea of surviving political challenges include Bipartisan Support for the Standards of Learning from Research Question 1, and Longstanding Standards of Learning System from Research Question 2.

### **Conclusion 3: Confidence in the Standards of Learning Outweighed Confidence in the Common Core State Standards.**

The third major conclusion that can be made from the descriptive evidence for the research questions is that confidence in the Virginia Standards of Learning outweighed the confidence felt for the emerging Common Core State Standards. The descriptive evidence demonstrates that education leaders in Virginia had confidence in the Standards of Learning when considering whether or not to adopt the Common Core State Standards. Conversely, a lack of confidence in the Common Core State Standards is indicated in the descriptive evidence. Four reasons are identified as to why there was confidence in the Standards of Learning as opposed to the Common Core State Standards, including: (a) national leader in standards movement; (b) external reviews showed the rigor of the Standards of Learning; (c) lack of confidence in the Common Core State Standards; and (d) the brand of Standards of Learning.

The first reason behind the conclusion that there was confidence in the Standards of Learning is Virginia's leadership in the national standards movement. The descriptive evidence shows that education leaders believed Virginia had long been a leader in the national standards movement. Categories from the data analysis that lend support to the notion of Virginia's leadership in the standards movement include, from Research Question 1, Virginia Leadership in the Standards Movement and External Comparisons of the Standards of Learning, along with Longstanding Standards of Learning System and the Standards of Learning Brand from Research Question 2.

The second reason for coming to the conclusion that there was confidence in the Virginia Standards of Learning relates to the comparisons made during external reviews between the

Standards of Learning and to other standards, including the Common Core State Standards. Interviews with participants and documents indicated that external reviews of Virginia Standards of Learning validated the rigor of the standards. Categories from the data analysis that support the comparisons include, from Research Question 1, External Comparisons of the Standards of Learning, and Longstanding Standards of Learning system from Research Question 2.

A third reason for the conclusion that there was confidence in the Standards of Learning relates to a lack of confidence in the Common Core State Standards. There were questions about the Common Core State Standards, as well as questions about the assessments that would be used to ascertain student mastery of the Common Core State Standards. Categories from the data analysis that support the conclusion of lack of confidence in the Common Core State Standards include, External Comparisons of the Standards of Learning from research question 1, and Uncertainty about the Common Core State Standards from Research Question 2.

The fourth reason for the conclusion that Virginia had confidence in the Standards of Learning relates to the notion of the Standards of Learning brand. When looking at the Standards of Learning as a brand, a brand that had been well-delineated and accepted by educators over the nearly two decades, it is clear that the brand helped lead to the confidence in the Standards of Learning versus the Common Core State Standards. The category from the data analysis that supports the conclusion of the Standards of Learning brand comes from the interview analysis from Research Question 2, Standards of Learning Brand.

The development of the Virginia Standards of Learning system demonstrated both incrementalism and punctuated equilibrium (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; True, 2000). Incrementalism was demonstrated with the slow and steady process of standards revision over the last two decades as the Standards of Learning system became institutionalized, as described in Chapter 5. However, the development of the Virginia Standards of Learning system also showed evidence of punctuated equilibrium. Data from the document analysis and interview analysis indicated there were several critical events over the last 20 years that challenged the status quo of the Standards of Learning system, including:

- Major revisions of the Standards of Learning in 1995
- Linkage of Standards of Learning and assessments into a unified system of accountability with the revised Standards of Accreditation in 1997
- The shock of low pass rates on initial SOL assessments in 1998

- The beginning of online SOL testing in 2001
- Assessments in additional grade levels and new accountability measures as a result of the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2001
- External reviews of the Standards of Learning as part of the College and Career Readiness Initiative in 2007
- Side-by-side comparison of the Standards of Learning with the Common Core State Standards in 2010

These important events helped move the Standards of Learning system forward, punctuating the status quo. However, the overall equilibrium of the institutionalized Virginia Standards of Learning system has remained, as the Commonwealth of Virginia stayed the course with the Standards of Learning rather than adopt the Common Core State Standards.

In sum, three major conclusions were presented and discussed in Chapter 5. First, the conclusion that the Virginia Standards of Learning Are an Institutionalized System was presented. The conclusion of Virginia Standards of Learning Had Political Support was presented next. Third, the conclusion of Confidence in the Standards of Learning Outweighed Confidence in the Common Core State Standards was discussed.

### **Implications for Practice**

Several implications for practitioners are suggested by the conclusions of this study. The first three implications of the study relate to why quality education standards are important in the first place. Why do the Standards of Learning or the Common Core State Standards matter at all? Why does it matter that the Commonwealth of Virginia decided to stay the course with the Standards of Learning? The conclusions of the study lead to the implication that the Standards of Learning are, indeed, important for Virginia students, teachers, and the general public.

First, the Standards of Learning matter to students in Virginia. It is in our students' best interest to provide the quality of education that leads to career readiness and college preparedness. Student learning is where the rubber meets the road, as the saying goes. The Standards of Learning detail the progression of knowledge and skills that students need to be successful.

Second, the Standards of Learning matter to teachers and other educators in Virginia. Teachers live with the Standards of Learning day in and day out. It matters that the standards are

rigorous, lead to quality outcomes for our students, and that the standards are reachable. Educators need to take advantage of the input process for the Standards of Learning and participate in the standards revision process. It is clear from the interview participants in this study that educators who are on the front lines are taken seriously during the revision process. Educators who live with the standards on a daily basis have the most to give and the most to gain from the standards revision process.

Third, and more fundamentally, the quality of curriculum standards matters to the general public. Whether or not the Commonwealth of Virginia decided to adopt the Common Core State Standards, it matters that the adopted curriculum standards detail what is important for every student in the Commonwealth to know and be able to do so that K-12 education is producing Virginians who are prepared to contribute to their communities. The Virginia Standards of Learning are presented in a progression that leads to college and career readiness with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills – knowing that college and career readiness is a moving target, and our standards need to change accordingly. If our goal as a society is to produce an educated citizenry, as Thomas Jefferson first proposed in 1779 (Szakal, 1997), then the quality of our curriculum standards does matter. It makes a difference to the quality of life in the Commonwealth that the Standards of Learning are at least as rigorous as the Common Core State Standards. Participant 3 commented on the importance of quality standards, whether through the Standards of Learning or the Common Core State Standards, in this way:

So, I think that the pros [of rigorous standards] are, you prepare people for citizenship, and how they contribute as a citizen, how to improve the democracy and protect it. I think it is valuable to have a common set of standards that leads to that kind of behavior. I think it's important to have a common set of standards so that people, when trying to go into the workplace, that they are equipped with the knowledge and skill sets and competencies that are not judged simply by where you came from or which school system you are in. That we ensure that every child starts at a minimum, at a floor, that is valued by the marketplace. I think it's a reason to have common standards to make that happen. And it's a reason to have common standards for those students who plan to continue their learning, so that they can enter into a career or that they can add to the body of knowledge that helps to improve the quality of life. So I see there's a reason for standards there. (P3-15)

One conclusion of this study was that the Standards of Learning has become an institutionalized system, but the systemic nature of the Standards of Learning does not imply that the system is static or unchanging. Rather, the Standards of Learning system has developed over time with a process for revisions built into the system. The seven-year review process for each curricular area is not merely a symbolic process; changes are expected to be made in the standards with each revision cycle. The related curriculum support documents produced by the Virginia Department of Education and the assessments associated with the Standards of Learning are also dynamic, not static. Again, it is important for practitioners to participate in the standards review process to advocate for changes to the Standards of Learning that will lead to better outcomes for students.

Another implication for practitioners is related to the theory of punctuated equilibrium, as discussed in Chapter 2. The movement toward the Common Core State Standards has certainly been a jolt to the status quo of curriculum standards in most states across the nation. The experience of Virginia with the development of the Standards of Learning system over the last two decades demonstrates both incrementalism, with the slow and steady development of the SOL, and punctuated equilibrium, with several critical events. In Virginia, the Common Core State Standards movement has encouraged education leaders to continue to ensure that Virginia standards are equivalent to, or more rigorous than, national standards. Practitioners can learn from the history of the Standards of Learning by viewing future developments through the lenses of punctuated equilibrium and incrementalism.

Finally, given the political backlash to the Common Core State Standards, Virginia remains a leader in the national standards movement. The long-term reputation of Virginia for having a top-notch standards and assessment system has not been supplanted by the emergence of the Common Core State Standards coalition. Influential educators in Virginia need to continue to press to have a seat at the national standards table.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

As noted in Chapter 3, this study is not generalizable to the experience of other states when considering how and why the decision regarding the Common Core State Standards was made. How does the experience of Virginia differ from other states that have had leadership roles in the national standards movement? What were the differences in the experience of other

states that did not adopt the Common Core State Standards compared to the experience of Virginia? An exploration of the Common Core State Standards decisions of other states could extend the findings of this study.

One topic that was unexpected to the researcher involved the evidence related to the purposeful weaving of the Standards of Learning into regulatory documents in Virginia. Interview participants brought this notion to life during the course of the interviews. Though beyond the scope of this particular study, the concept would benefit from additional study, including document analysis of the Standards of Quality, teacher licensure regulations, and other education regulations in Virginia. Thus, more research is needed into the notion of how policymakers have woven the Standards of Learning into education regulations in a purposeful manner.

The interview portion of data collection for this study relied on elite interviews. The elite group of educators interviewed for this study provided a unique perspective on the historical development of the Standards of Learning and the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards. As noted in Chapter 3, possible bias and the limits of interview participants' memories are limitations to the study. During the interviews, interview participants were open and candid in their interpretation of events as they saw them. But it must be acknowledged that participants' responses were framed by their own personal experiences and viewpoints. The elite perspective explored in this study is only one of several possible perspectives. For example, how did teachers feel about the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards? Research into the perceptions of teachers and other educators about the decision to remain with the Standards of Learning would provide another perspective. The results of this study indicated that there was widespread political support for the Standards of Learning, but it should not be assumed that all educators have been enamored with the Standards of Learning, the SOL assessments, or the accountability system in Virginia. Further research into the perspectives of teachers and other educators regarding the decision to remain with the Standards of Learning would be useful to extend the findings of this study.

The researcher did not go into the study with the notion of branding in mind. The interview participants brought up the concept of branding in relation to the Standards of Learning. The notion of the Standards of Learning as a brand is an intriguing one, and additional research would be useful in this area. In particular, research to explore the relationship between

the failed Common Core of Learning in Virginia and the brand of the Common Core State Standards would help shed light on the notion of branding in education initiatives.

### **Personal Reflections**

As a researcher, I learned a great deal by completing this study. I learned that qualitative research is painstaking, yet exhilarating. All the long hours of document collection, coding, and analysis led up to some of the most deep and thought-provoking education conversations I have ever been involved in, once the interviews finally commenced. I have learned that qualitative research is time-intensive, but deeply meaningful.

With the completion of the study, there are aspects of the study I would conduct differently if I were to do the study again, or if other researchers were to try to replicate the study. One aspect that I would change would be the timetable for the interviews. Scheduling the interviews with the elite participants was difficult, in part because of time commitments that several of the participants had during the academic year. If the interviews had been scheduled over the summer, the interviews may have been easier to schedule and the interview appointments may not have been bookended by other appointments.

Another reflection at the conclusion of this study is the thin line between my research questions. Several units of data answered both the “how” and the “why” research questions regarding the decision on the Common Core State Standards. Due to the open-ended nature of the participants’ responses, the units of data often fit into more than one category and helped answer both of the research questions, thereby making the analysis more complicated. If I were to repeat the study, I would work to craft my research questions differently.

As a school leader, I reflect on the controversy surrounding the Common Core State Standards. The experience of the Virginia Standards of Learning, with the drop in pass rates when the standards and assessments were revised, gives me pause when thinking about the Common Core State Standards coalition. What may happen if, or more likely when, states in the Common Core State Standards coalition experience low pass rates after the first few testing seasons? Will the national standards movement, in the form of the Common Core State Standards, be able to withstand such a challenge? Teachers are resilient, and will adjust their teaching methods to improve student achievement, if given time.

I am also struck by the sheer scope of the work that has been done on the Standards of Learning. From the initial authors of the standards, to the review committees, to the VDOE staff members that have created the various support materials for the SOL, there has been a tremendous amount of work put into the Standards of Learning. Not touched upon in this study is the tremendous effort that teachers, curriculum directors, principals, and superintendents have given at the classroom, school, and division levels toward coming up with effective teaching methods in order to reach all students.

Another aspect of the research that was only barely touched upon was the deep reach of the testing program in Virginia. The Standards of Learning assessments are truly high-stakes tests. As a school leader, I have lived with the highs and lows of each testing season. Watching the test results roll in is a nerve-wracking experience for principals and teachers. Sometimes forgotten is the fact that many students find the process nerve-wracking themselves, and students anxiously await their scores, sometimes for weeks. There are small victories and small disappointments. A student that improves 50 points over their previous year's score needs to be considered a success, even if the student still had a failing score. The SOL assessment system does not currently account for such individual improvement, when passing the test remains the bottom line.

And finally, as a school leader, I come away from the research project with a renewed appreciation for individuals who have served the Commonwealth in important positions such as the Virginia Board of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Interview participants demonstrated a deep knowledge base, justifiable pride in their accomplishments, and appreciation for the history of Virginia education. Despite the discussion of political aspects of the Standards of Learning and the Common Core State Standards, the subtext of the interviews, made explicit by some of the participants, was always the same question: What course of action is best for the students of Virginia? Perhaps participant 6 stated it best. "But I was convinced based on falling national test scores, especially in reading, that the Standards of Learning, the entire standards based reform, was the best thing for 1.2 million children" (P6-5).

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**Appendix A**  
**Content Validity Check Cover Letter**

Date  
Name  
Address

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for being willing to participate in the content validity check for the interview questions I will be using as part of my research project. I am currently the principal of Oak Point Elementary School in Marion Virginia and I am a doctoral candidate at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University working under the direction of Dr. N. Wayne Tripp. My dissertation topic is an historical study of the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Common Core State Standards.

In terms of your participation in the content validity check, you should be aware of the following:

- Your participation is voluntary
- All responses will be completely confidential
- You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty
- There will be no compensation for your participation
- Though I cannot anticipate every circumstance, I do not anticipate any potential risk to you by participating in the content validity check
- At the conclusion of the research study, all responses will be destroyed

Your assistance will help improve the questions for the interview protocol, thereby improving the chances to obtain useful information for the research study. Thanks very much for your willingness to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix B

### Content Validity Check for Interview Protocol

This is an instrument to check the content validity for interviews used in the proposed study. Your feedback will be used to improve the questions used in the interview protocol. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

The research questions for this study are:

1. When considering the history of the curriculum standards movement in the Commonwealth of Virginia in the context of the national standards movement, how has the Commonwealth of Virginia arrived at the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards?
2. Based on the descriptive evidence, why has the Commonwealth of Virginia not adopted the Common Core State Standards?

Directions: Please evaluate the interview protocol questions for clarity and relevance by circling 3 for High, 2 for Moderate, and 1 for Low. Any suggestions for rewording or additional questions are appreciated.

### Content Validity Check for Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol Questions	Clarity of Question	Relevance of Interview Question to Research Questions	Suggestions for Rewording
<p><b>The first three questions relate to index cards that the participants will receive, each with an important event, process, or influence on the development of the SOL and the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards as found in the document analysis.</b></p> <p>1. Please choose the three most important cards as they relate to the historical development of the Virginia Standards of Learning. Why were these important?</p>	<p>3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low</p>	<p>3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low</p>	

(table continued)

**Content Validity Check for Interview Protocol (cont.)**

<b>Interview Protocol Questions</b>	<b>Clarity of Question</b>	<b>Relevance of Interview Question to Research Questions</b>	<b>Suggestions for Rewording</b>
2. Choose which cards, from your perspective, would have had the most influence on the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards. Why are these important to that decision?	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	
3. Here are some blank index cards. Are there any important events, influences or processes related to the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards that should be added? Why are these important?	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	
<b>The remaining questions are probes to be used as necessary following discussion of the index card probes.</b>			
4. What would you consider to be some of the most important events in the development of the Standards of Learning during your term? Why?	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	
5. Were the standards of other states or standards of professional associations reviewed? What did you learn from them?	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	
6. In your view, how did Virginia Standards of Learning compare to national standards during your term?	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	v	

(table continued)

**Content Validity Check for Interview Protocol (cont.)**

<b>Interview Protocol Questions</b>	<b>Clarity of Question</b>	<b>Relevance of Interview Question to Research Questions</b>	<b>Suggestions for Rewording</b>
7. There have been changes to the Standards of Learning over the last 20 years. When thinking about your term, do you recall if any professional organizations influenced the Standards of Learning?	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	
8. Do you think any of these organizations had any influence on the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards?	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	
9. As you look across the country at leadership in the standards movement, how does Virginia fare in terms of influence or impact?	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	
10. What specific influence has Virginia had in the standards movement?	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	
11. What are the pros and cons of Virginia being one of five states not joining the Common Core State Standards?	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	
12. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about Virginia's decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards?	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	
13. Who else do you think I should speak with that would have insight into these questions?	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	3 = High 2 = Moderate 1 = Low	
<b>Please list any additional questions that you think should be added.</b>			

## Appendix C

### Participation Agreement for Interview Protocol Field Test

Date  
Name  
Address

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for being willing to participate in the field test for the interview protocol I will be using as part of my research project. I am currently the principal of Oak Point Elementary School in Marion, Virginia, and I am a doctoral candidate at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University working under the direction of Dr. N. Wayne Tripp. My dissertation topic is an historical study of the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Common Core State Standards.

The field test is expected to take no longer than one hour. In terms of your participation in the field test for the interview protocol, you should be aware of the following:

- Your participation is voluntary
- You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty
- There will be no compensation for your participation
- Though I cannot anticipate every circumstance, I do not anticipate any potential risk to you by participating in the content validity check
- The interview will be digitally recorded with two digital recording devices
- All transcripts will be kept in a locked file
- All digital files will be kept on a password-protected computer
- The interview will be professionally transcribed
- At the conclusion of the research study, all responses will be destroyed

Your assistance will help improve the questions for the interview protocol, thereby improving the chances to obtain useful information for the research study. The completed study will enhance our knowledge of the standards movement in Virginia. Thanks very much for your willingness to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Appendix D**

### **Interview Protocol Field Test Script**

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study. Before we begin, I would like to explain the purpose of the study.

The study is historical in nature and seeks to look at the development of the Common Core State Standards alongside the Virginia Standards of Learning. Specifically, I am interested in knowing how Virginia has come to the decision to not join the coalition of states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards. I will gather information from former State Superintendents of Public Instruction and other important figures in the development of the Standards of Learning. I will analyze the responses from the interviews to look for common themes about the Standards of Learning and the Common Core State Standards. In addition, I will examine documents such as Superintendent's Memos and Virginia Board of Education agendas and minutes over the last twenty years.

I will be using two digital devices to record our conversation today. Your responses will be anonymous throughout the research process and any identifying information will be changed or omitted. As soon as possible following the interview, the file will be transcribed verbatim and a copy of the transcript will be sent to you to review. Please feel free to make changes in the transcript that are inaccurate or do not reflect your thoughts.

The files and documents will remain completely confidential throughout the process. The digital audio file and the digital transcript will be kept on a password-protected computer and the transcripts will be stored in a locked file. After the successful completion of the study, all digital and physical copies of files will be destroyed.

You will not receive compensation for participation in the study. The risk to you as a participant is minimal, and the risk is chiefly through the possibility of you being identified through the content of your responses. As noted before, personally identifying information will be changed or omitted. However, your insights will add information to the study on how Virginia came to remain with the Standards of Learning for its curriculum standards. This study will add to the historical record of the Standards of Learning in Virginia and may enhance the profession through a careful historical consideration of what students should know and be able to do.

If you wish, you may decide not to participate. You may withdraw at any time today or throughout the study at no penalty to you. If you prefer, you may choose to not answer any questions without penalty.

Do you have any questions?  Yes  No

Are you willing to become a participant in this study?  Yes  No

I am grateful for your willingness to participate in this study.

May I digitally record our interview?  Yes  No

Do you have any questions before we begin?  Yes  No

Index cards with findings from the document analysis will be presented to the participants.

System of **Educator Input** on Standards of Learning developed over time.

*For example:*

Content Review Committees  
Content Area Bias/Sensitivity Committees  
Special Test Form Committees  
Standard Setting Committees  
Textbook/Instruct. Material Committees

Professional organizations-sponsored and VDOE-sponsored **Professional Development** on Standards of Learning.

*For example:*

Summer Institutes  
Workshops  
Courses  
Webinars

System of **Public Input** on Standards of Learning.

*For example:*

Request for Public Comment on SOL  
Public Hearings on SOL

**Instructional Resources** developed, revised and disseminated by VDOE on Standards of Learning.

*For example:*

Enhanced scope & sequence  
Testing blueprints  
Released tests  
Sample test items  
Sample lesson plans

Standards of Learning **Testing Procedures**  
developed and revised over time.

*For example:*

Field testing

Testing windows

Calculator use

Test Ordering (Booklets)

Web-Based testing initiative

Testing procedures audits

**Participants will be asked:**

1. Please choose the three most important cards, from your perspective, as they relate to the historical development of the Virginia Standards of Learning. Why were these important?
2. Choose which cards, from your perspective, would have had the most influence on the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards. Why are these important to that decision?
3. Here are some blank index cards. Are there any important events, influences or processes related to the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards that should be added? Why are these important?

**Follow-Up Probes, as needed:**

**Probe 1:** What would you consider to be some of the most important events in the development of the Standards of Learning during your term? Why?

**Probe 2:** Were the standards of other states or standards of professional associations reviewed? What did you learn from them?

**Probe 3:** In your view, how did Virginia Standards of Learning compare to national standards during your term?

**Probe 4:** There have been changes to the Standards of Learning over the last 20 years. When thinking about your term, do you recall if any professional organizations influenced the Standards of Learning?

**Probe 5:** Do you think any of these organizations had any influence on the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards?

**Probe 6:** As you look across the country at leadership in the standards movement, how does Virginia fare in terms of influence or impact?

**Probe 7:** What specific influences has Virginia had in the standards movement?

**Probe 8:** What are the pros and cons of Virginia being one of five states not joining the Common Core State Standards?

**Probe 9:** Is there anything else you would like to tell me about Virginia's decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards?

**Probe 10:** Who else do you think I should speak with that would have insight into these questions?

**Appendix E**  
**Confirmation Email for Interview Participants**

Date  
Name  
Address

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for being willing to participate in an interview with me as part of my research study. Our interview is scheduled for:

\_\_\_\_\_ (Date) \_\_\_\_\_(Time) \_\_\_\_\_(Location)

Again, the purpose of the study is an examination of the development of the Common Core State Standards alongside the Virginia Standards of Learning. Specifically, I am interested in knowing how and why Virginia has come to the decision to not join the coalition of states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards. I will gather information from former State Superintendents of Public Instruction. I will analyze the responses from the interviews to look for common themes about the Standards of Learning and the Common Core State Standards.

If you decide to change your mind or need to reschedule for any reason, please let me know. Please remember if you do not want to participate in the study or feel the need to drop out of the study, there is certainly no penalty for doing so at any time. Thank you very much!

Sincerely,

Gary Foulke  
Principal, Oak Point Elementary School  
138 Oak Point Drive  
Marion, VA 24354  
276-783-2609 school  
276-706-0565 cell

## Appendix F

### IRB-Approved Informed Consent Form and Study Information for Interview Participants

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY  
Informed Consent for Participants  
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: Virginia's Standards of Learning and the Common Core State Standards

Investigator(s): Dr. Wayne Tripp  
Name

[wtripp@vt.edu](mailto:wtripp@vt.edu) (540)387-0632  
E-mail / Phone number

Gary Foulke  
Name

[garyfoulke@scsb.org](mailto:garyfoulke@scsb.org) (276-706-0565)  
E-mail / Phone number

#### I. Purpose of this Research Project

The national curriculum standards movement has culminated in what is today known as the Common Core State Standards. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are a set of curriculum standards in reading and mathematics that provide detailed descriptions of what students should know and be able to do in each grade level.

The Commonwealth of Virginia has had versions of curriculum standards, known as the Standards of Learning (SOL), in place for over three decades. Like the Common Core State Standards, the Virginia Standards of Learning describe what students should know and be able to do at each grade level in order to earn a high school diploma. As of 2014, however, the Commonwealth of Virginia has not joined the group of 45 states, the District of Columbia, four United States territories, and Department of Defense schools in approving the Common Core State Standards. Only Alaska, Minnesota, Nebraska, Texas, and Virginia and two United States territories have not adopted the Common Core State Standards.

The purpose of this study is to examine the history of the curriculum standards movement in the Commonwealth of Virginia in the context of the national standards movement in order to explain how the Commonwealth of Virginia has arrived at the decision not to adopt the Common Core State Standards, and why this occurred based on the descriptive evidence.

The study has two phases of data collection. First, a document analysis of Virginia professional association advocacy documents, Virginia Board of Education documents, and Virginia Department of Education documents since 1995 will be conducted. Second, interviews will be conducted with former State Superintendents of Public Instruction for the Commonwealth of Virginia since 1995. A total of seven individuals who served as State Superintendent of Public Instruction are the intended interviews participants for this study.

#### II. Procedures

Should you wish to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer questions about the Virginia Standards of Learning and the Common Core State Standards. The interview will be conducted with you in person if possible, or by telephone.

There is a base set of interview questions proposed for use in the study. Questions relate to the history of the Virginia Standards of Learning and the Common Core State Standards. In addition to the base set of questions, index cards will be presented to you as

question prompts. The index cards are based on a document analysis of Virginia professional association documents, Virginia Board of Education documents, and Virginia Department of Education documents. Each index card will have written on it one factor that has been important to the development of the Virginia Standards of Learning. Follow-up questions were developed to elicit further response to the questions.

The interviews will be conducted by Gary Foulke at a location of your convenience. It is anticipated the interviews will take no longer than one hour. The interviews will be digitally recorded and will be transcribed by Synergy Transcription Services. Each participant will be given the opportunity to review the transcription to ensure accuracy.

### **III. Risks**

The only anticipated risk of participating in the study is the possibility of being identified by the content of your responses. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of the interview for accuracy.

### **IV. Benefits**

You may benefit from participating in this study by contributing to the field of education.

No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

### **V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

The interviews will be digitally recorded so the dialogue can be transcribed by Synergy Transcription Services. You will be provided a copy of the transcriptions in order to ensure it captured your thoughts and ideas. The digital recordings will be securely located until the study is complete. After final defense of the dissertation, the recordings and paper copies of the transcriptions will be destroyed.

The research team will store your information in a confidential and secure manner. All of the information collected from the participants will be compiled, and no differentiation will be made identifying the participants in the results. Only the researchers will have access to the information collected. At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent.

The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

## VI. Compensation

There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

## VII. Freedom to Withdraw

It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions that you choose or respond to what is being asked of you without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a subject should not continue as a subject.

Should you withdraw or otherwise discontinue participation, you will be compensated for the portion of the project completed in accordance with the Compensation section of this document.

## VIII. Questions or Concerns

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact one of the research investigators whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at [moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu) or (540) 231-4991.

## IX. Subject's Consent

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Subject printed name

**Appendix G**  
**Note of Appreciation for Interview Participants**

Date  
Name  
Address

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

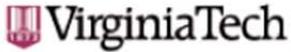
Thank you for meeting with me today to interview for my research study. I appreciate your time and willingness to share your experiences. I also appreciate all that you have done for Virginia children. Thanks again!

Sincerely,

Gary Foulke  
Principal, Oak Point Elementary School, Marion, VA  
Doctoral Candidate, Virginia Tech  
garyfoulke@scsb.org

# Appendix H

## Institutional Review Board Letter of Approval



Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959  
email [irb@vt.edu](mailto:irb@vt.edu)  
website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** July 28, 2014  
**TO:** Wayne Tripp, Gary Brian Foulke  
**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires April 25, 2018)  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Virginia's Standards of Learning and the Common Core State Standards  
**IRB NUMBER:** 14-453

Effective July 25, 2014, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the Amendment request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

### PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5,6,7  
Protocol Approval Date: June 24, 2014  
Protocol Expiration Date: June 23, 2015  
Continuing Review Due Date\*: June 9, 2015

\*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

### FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

*Invent the Future*

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY  
*An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution*

Date*	OSP Number	Sponsor	Grant Comparison Conducted?

\* Date this proposal number was compared, assessed as not requiring comparison, or comparison information was revised.

If this IRB protocol is to cover any other grant proposals, please contact the IRB office ([irbadmin@vt.edu](mailto:irbadmin@vt.edu)) immediately.

**Appendix I**  
**Training in Human Subjects Protection**

