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ALERT TOP STORY

transparency of process unclear

Board of Education rejects Youngkin's proposed revisions to K-12 history standards

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The **state Board of Education**, with a majority appointed by Gov. Glenn Youngkin, on Thursday rejected a revised version of the state’s K-12 history standards proposed by his administration, which had caused a public uproar due to several missteps and a **reframing of race relations**.

The state education department released a new draft of K-12 history standards on Friday that was developed over the course of a few months, disregarding a draft document **developed under former Gov. Ralph Northam’s administration** over the course of nearly two years.

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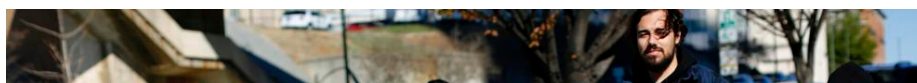
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The board on Thursday evening delayed action on the new draft and voted 8-0 to direct the department to create a new draft document, using the Youngkin draft as a baseline, fixing all mistakes and incorporating elements of the Northam document. (One of the four holdover Northam appointees was absent Thursday.)

The board had been set to vote on the original Northam draft in August, but state Superintendent of Public Instruction Jillian Balow **urged the board to delay a vote** to give more time for review by newly appointed members.

Despite a statement from a VDOE official, who **said two months ago that the department did not anticipate making significant changes**, the draft released Friday was an entirely different document containing several botches.

One gaffe was a statement in the document that Native Americans are “America’s first immigrants.”





Mitch Chan (right) of Hamkae Center led participants in a gathering near the James Monroe Building in Richmond on Thursday to oppose the Virginia Department of Education’s new draft of K-12 history standards.

Daniel Sangjib Min/TIMES-DISPATCH

Virginia residents showed up in droves to Thursday’s state Board of Education meeting at the James Monroe Building, leading to a public comment period that lasted about four hours.

Virtually all of the speakers opposed the new draft standards developed under the Youngkin administration.

“I never ever was an immigrant to my homelands that my father God, creator Jesus Christ gave to my people. I will not stand here today and accept this. We are not immigrants,” said Dona Richardson-Craft, who identified herself as a member of the Pamunkey Indian Tribe.

“We are educated individuals. Many of us we’re doctors, lawyers, educators. Treat us as such. Come to us to learn. Learn our heritage. Learn our history. We’re here to help you.”





Ting-Yi Oei, center right, of the 1882 Foundation, and others gather in downtown Richmond in mid-November to oppose the Virginia Department of Education's new draft of K-12 history standards.

Daniel Sangjib Min/TIMES-DISPATCH

Following the public comment period, Balow spoke to a group of reporters and apologized for the mistake.

“I am deeply sorry for mislabeling, or not catching, that the American Indians were mislabeled in the standards document,” she said. “The Indigenous peoples of Virginia were here long before any other settlers or any other immigrants here, and it was wrong to label them as immigrants in the standards document, and we will make sure that that is corrected.”

Board members appointed by Northam questioned the process by which the new Youngkin standards were written. Although Balow has repeatedly said the process has been transparent, it remains unclear.

Balow and VDOE spokesman Charles Pyle did not directly answer questions from the Richmond Times-Dispatch on Thursday about how much of a role institutions like the conservative Thomas Fordham Institute or Michigan's Hillsdale College played in drafting the new proposed standards.

When asked by board members, Balow said she could not think of all of the institutions that contributed off the top of her head, but committed to send a list later.

“Public trust is at stake with the way this process has been handled. That cannot be denied,” said board Vice President Tammy Mann, a Northam appointee. “I think it's critically important to be transparent about exactly who was consulted and conferred with and the revision of the standards.”

Another mistake was the omission of Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Juneteenth from holiday sections in elementary education. The VDOE quietly updated the draft on Wednesday morning to include the King holiday and Juneteenth, but did not publicly acknowledge the update, leading to criticism by some public officials on social media.

Board member Anne Holton, who served as state secretary of education in Gov. Terry McAuliffe's administration, called the November revisions a major step backward from the 2015 standards, which are in place now.

Typically, third-graders in Virginia study about Greece, Rome, the empire of Mali, China and Egypt. The new Youngkin document moves Egypt down to second grade where U.S. history is typically taught, and China and the Mali Empire are gone altogether.

"Africa and Asia have disappeared from the elementary school curriculum. ... I'm sure that much of that wasn't intentional, but it's just sloppy," Holton said. "It's so Eurocentric, it's just mind-boggling."

Holton said that because the Youngkin draft is a total rewrite from the current standards, it would require years of developing new curriculum and reteaching elementary school teachers.

The new Youngkin draft includes many additional references to President Ronald Reagan, but no references to President Barack Obama.

"The first African American president in a country with the original sin of slavery that continues to have the impact that it does in our nation. How many references to the first African American President Barack Obama? Zero? I don't know how you can't call it whitewashing," Holton said.

Andy Rotherham, a Youngkin appointee to the board, said: "Some of the problems we've had just today I would say are quality-control problems."

He said he noticed a document "that I know is not trying to say there was lots of causes of the Civil War — the cause of it was slavery. ... But it could read to somebody, just because of how it's written, that we're trying to say ... there's lots of causes for the Civil War besides slavery."

After the board's vote, Balow said: "This is difficult, but I think that these struggles equate to a great document at the end."

The board indicated that members intend to schedule a special meeting in January to

accept a first review of the draft that will merge elements from the Youngkin and Northam versions of the document, if it is ready by January.



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