



OUR COMMITMENT TO VIRGINIANS

*HIGH EXPECTATIONS
AND EXCELLENCE
FOR ALL STUDENTS*

MAY 2022



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FOREWORD

Governor Youngkin and Secretary Guidera,

In accordance with Executive Order One, I am issuing this update on the status of our efforts to restore excellence and close K-12 achievement gaps. The ensuing report—told through data—goes well beyond a compliance exercise. It is full of stark facts about gaps in student achievement that have existed for years, but have not been adequately addressed by state leaders. In short, the gaps diminish access to opportunities for many learners, especially for Black, brown, and impoverished students.

Since January 15, I have traveled to multiple school divisions, talked with teachers, built an understanding of the issues, and collaborated with leaders. I can tell you firsthand there are heroic educators and leaders in every school and community. They are making a difference. This report establishes a shared focus essential to our work moving forward. I have reached out to many stakeholders for advice and feedback, including regarding this report. Their contributions and feedback hold great weight and I am grateful for their dedication and partnership. Our continued work together is critical.

This report should create a sense of urgency and importance for all of us. Decisions made at the state level created confusion in Virginia education and downplayed troubling trends. It is noteworthy that the rhetorical emphasis on equity coincided with the widened gaps in student achievement. And now, decisions at the state level must correct those errors and reverse these disturbing trends.

It is important to point out that already-present declines in student achievement were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic school closures in Virginia. Research is emerging regarding learning losses that occurred nationwide. There is consensus that school closures widened achievement gaps, more so for Black and brown students, and those in high-poverty schools. We must—and we will—immediately assess and report on the magnitude of Virginia’s learning loss. In one recent study¹ of eleven states, Virginia showed the greatest decline in state assessment pass rates. The same study also found that Virginia offered in-person school for an average of 9.7% of the 2020-2021 school year, the lowest of the states studied.

Today, we commit to placing Virginia education on a new path—more opportunities for every student, integrity in reporting the performance of our students, greater transparency through the use of data, and increased engagement by all stakeholders, especially parents.

Sincerely,



Jillian Balow
Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Virginia's public schools have been long regarded as among the best in the nation. The Commonwealth is home to schools and school divisions with national reputations for excellence. *But this has been changing in recent years.*

Our reputation and overall high-average performance masks widening students achievement gaps in the Commonwealth's schools and a recent slip in comparison with other states on a range of academic achievement measures. Further, state leaders have lowered expectations for students and redefined success for both students and schools. Accordingly, our trend lines on key measurements are heading in the wrong direction.

By not addressing the downward performance that has been happening for years, more students are bearing the brunt and falling even farther behind. This is unacceptable.

VIRGINIA'S CURRENT STATE: LOWER EXPECTATIONS, WIDER GAPS, AND LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

Lower Expectations

- The State Board of Education changed its accreditation requirements in 2017 to de-emphasize grade-level proficiency in reading and math.
- Despite the gaps between state and national proficiency standards, the State Board of Education voted to lower the proficiency cut scores—meaning how many correct answers it takes to demonstrate proficiency—on Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in math and reading in 2019 and 2020, respectively.

Wider Gaps

- Virginia has wide gaps between student proficiency standards on state reading and math assessments and the grade-level proficiency benchmarks on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—also known as “The Nation’s Report Card.” This is called the “Honesty Gap,”² a term of art used to describe the discrepancy between NAEP and state assessment scores.
 - In fact, only 38% of Virginia fourth graders and 33% of eighth graders were proficient in reading on the 2019 NAEP, compared to 75% and 76%, respectively, on the 2019³ state fourth- and eighth-grade SOL reading tests.
- The honesty gap is wider for Black and brown students. Seventy-one percent (71%) of Black fourth graders demonstrated proficiency on the 2019 math SOL compared to 26% on the NAEP. For Hispanics, the gap was 77% on SOL compared to 36% on NAEP.
- Further compounding these issues, pandemic-related learning loss in reading and math in Virginia is worse than the national average according to Renaissance⁴, a publisher of widely used K-12 assessments.

² [Definition of the Honesty Gap](#)

³ 2019 is the most recent NAEP data and Virginia did not administer a state assessment in 2020.

⁴ [Renaissance: How Kids Are Performing](#)

FIVE FAST FACTS

ONLY 33%

Virginia 8th graders are proficient in reading on 2019 Nation's Report Card.

ONLY 38%

Virginia 4th graders are proficient in reading on 2019 Nation's Report Card.

↓ 2017 TO 2019

Reading SOL test scores grades 3 through 8 declined every year from 2017-2019.

ALARMINGLY 42%

Virginia second graders scored below reading benchmark on PALS in Fall 2021.

3RD ↓ 9TH

Virginia has fallen from third to ninth in the nation in students earning college credit on AP exams.

Lack of Transparency

- An overly complex school accreditation system diminishes awareness and urgency around the fact that too many students in accredited schools are not achieving at grade level.
- The SOL review process does not sufficiently leverage many critical customers of our schools—including parents, employers, colleges and universities, and the military—to ensure our standards are aligned to the skill and content needs of the knowledge economy.
- Evidence of literacy deficiencies, such as 42% of second graders scoring below the reading benchmark in the fall of 2021⁵, are not widely shared and, thus, have been largely ignored. (The Virginia Literacy Act, enacted in 2022, changes this.)
- Virginia’s honesty gap persists after eighteen states took the necessary steps to better align their state test proficiency benchmarks to the NAEP.

Lower Achievement

- Reading scores declined in grades 3-8 from 2017-2019 on SOL and other state assessments.
- Virginia students in grades four and eight posted statistically significant declines in reading performance on the 2019 NAEP.
- 45% of all Virginia public high school seniors in 2019, including 76% of Black and 56% of Hispanic seniors, were not college-ready in math on the SAT.
- The achievement of Virginia students on Advanced Placement (AP) examinations has fallen from third to ninth in the nation.

Leaving Public Schools

- Virginia parents are taking their kids out of public schools.
- The number of home-schooled students has soared with a 90% increase in transfers from Virginia public schools to home schools from 2019-2020 to 2020-2021.
- Based on preliminary data for 2021-2022, the current public school-to-home schooling transfer percentage represents a 52% increase over 2019-2020 and could increase as final data are reported in August.
- 5,828 students have transferred from Virginia public schools to in-state private schools since the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year.

OUR COMMITMENT TO VIRGINIANS:

The significant lowering of expectations, a lack of transparency with data, and weak accountability for results must end. In the next four years, we will:

- Establish and maintain high expectations for students, schools, and ourselves.
- Advance parent and teacher empowerment to best serve students in partnership.
- Demand zero-tolerance for discrimination in education and beyond.
- Foster innovation in all education environments.
- Provide transparency and accountability so that each child is seen and receives what they need to succeed.
- Ensure post-secondary readiness so that all learners can succeed in life.
- Protect and nurture freedom of speech and inquiry to ensure every student is taught how to think, not what to think.

Leadership Matters

We know this work cannot be done solely from Richmond. The most important education decisions are not made in state capitals; they are made around kitchen tables, in classrooms, and in communities across the Commonwealth. Working together with all stakeholders from the kitchen table to the classroom and from the floor of the General Assembly to the dais of the school board, we will prioritize these commitments and refocus our efforts. We must do the urgent work of ensuring every child in the Commonwealth is prepared to prosper.

5 [Examining the Impact of COVID-19 on the Identification of At-Risk Students: Fall 2021 Literacy Screening Findings](#)

VIRGINIA IS LOSING ITS NATIONAL STANDING: WE MUST BE A BEACON OF EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Historically, Virginia's students have been regarded as among the best in the nation. The Commonwealth is home to schools and school divisions with national and international reputations for excellence. Historically, Virginia students have outperformed their peers on national measures such as the NAEP, AP examinations, and the SAT and ACT college admissions tests.

But today tells a different story. Our reputation and overall high average performance masks widening achievement gaps in the Commonwealth's schools, as well as a recent downward slide in comparison with other states on a range of academic achievement measures. In 2017, downward performance trend lines on the state SOL assessments foreshadowed the declines to come in 2019 on national reading tests for elementary and middle school students. We also have seen this in the performance of our students' on AP exams. Since 2015, the percentage of Virginia students earning a passing score has fallen from third to ninth in the nation. And we have widening gaps in achievement, access to opportunities, quality of schools, and college and career readiness across communities.⁶

We now see that Virginia education has experienced:

- Lack of transparency around negative data trends on key student and school success indicators.
- Lowered expectations and shifted definitions.
- Widening gaps in achievement and access to excellence.

On February 8, 2021, The Washington Post editorial board opined, "Virginia officials have long boasted about requiring more of their students than what is mandated by the federal government. Their constituents should be asking them why they would want to abandon that principle."⁷

**We are asking that same
question now.**

**Virginians are ready
for the answer—
and for change.**

"Virginia officials have long boasted about requiring more of their students than what is mandated by the federal government. Their constituents should be asking them why they would want to abandon that principle."

*-Washington Post
February 8, 2021*

⁶ See Appendices E through H for more detailed data and analyses.
⁷ Opinion: Virginia made a mistake by easing its academic standards

VIRGINIA HAS MOVED IN THE WRONG DIRECTION: TROUBLING TRENDS

Virginia cannot afford to rest on its past reputation. We are facing declines in student performance that started long before the pandemic and were illuminated and exacerbated over the last two years. We must act now to change the alarming trajectory that will otherwise lead to increasing numbers of our students ill-prepared for success in life after high school and beyond.

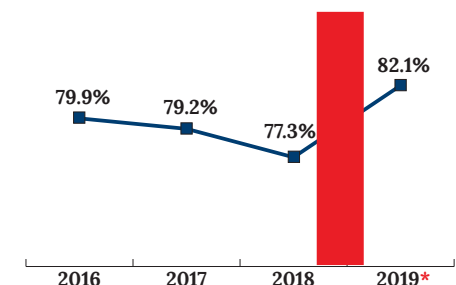
READING AND LITERACY

- 42% of the Commonwealth's second graders scored below the reading benchmark on the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS) in fall 2021. When disaggregated, these results show that a majority of Black, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged students lack knowledge of the important literacy fundamentals that are predictive of future reading success.
- 55.6% of Black, 56.5% of Hispanic, and 56.8% of economically disadvantaged students were below the second-grade PALS reading benchmark.⁸
- Only 61% of third graders demonstrated proficiency on state reading tests in 2021, compared with 71% before the pandemic and similar declines occurred in grades 4-8. In addition, the actual declines in reading achievement on the 2021 SOL tests are masked by lower proficiency cut scores on new assessments introduced last year.

MATHEMATICS

- In 2019—before the pandemic—45% of Virginia public high school graduating seniors were unable to demonstrate college readiness in mathematics on the SAT, including 76% of Black and 54% of Hispanic graduates.
- Virginia's performance in fourth- and eighth-grade math on the NAEP has been higher than the national rate. But in recent years, Virginia's performance has been slipping while the rest of the nation has been trending upward.
- The relatively high SOL pass rate in mathematics in 2018-2019 was largely the product of the State Board of Education's decision to lower proficiency standards and masked several years of declining achievement.⁹

Virginia SOL: Mathematics
Percent Passing



* March 2019: Board of Education lowers proficiency standards on tests.

KINDERGARTEN READINESS

- 4 out of 10 children are not ready for kindergarten.¹⁰
- Today, more than 21,000 Virginia kindergartners are at serious risk of reading failure in the absence of intervention.
- Greater percentages of historically underperforming children began the 2021-2022 school year below the overall readiness benchmark.

8 See Page 5 [Examining the Impact of COVID-19 on the Identification of At-Risk Students: Fall 2021 Literacy Screening Findings](#)
9 See Item G, March 21, 2019, Board of Education Business Session Agenda
10 [VKRP Statewide Kindergarten Readiness Landscape - Fall 2021](#)

LEARNING LOSS: WORSE THAN FEARED

No issue, however, is more pressing than the learning loss. Some call it “unfinished” or “disrupted” learning. These terms minimize what has taken place in schools in Virginia and across the nation. A recently released analysis from the National Bureau of Economic Research documents that students denied in-person instruction experienced the greatest learning loss. This research also documents that those already most behind—Black, Hispanic, students living in poverty—were more likely to not be learning in school and therefore experienced the most devastating loss.¹¹ For example, the average high poverty school that remained remote for 2020-21 lost more learning than a year of high-dosage tutoring (30 minutes, 3-5 times per week) can recover.

- During the 2020-2021 school year, Virginia’s students received in-person instruction for 9.7% of the school year—the lowest of the eleven studied. Not surprisingly, Virginia’s decline in student pass rates on the state assessment was the sharpest of the states.¹²
- Virginia’s math performance dropped seven points more than the national average from 2020 to 2022.¹³
- English performance in the Commonwealth dropped one point more than the national average.¹⁴
- The pandemic also exacerbated long-standing achievement gaps, resulting in Black, Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students falling farther behind. For example:
 - 45% of Black third-grade students passed their SOL reading assessment in 2021, compared with 61% in 2017.
 - 43% of Hispanic third graders passed in reading in 2021, compared to 66% in 2017.
 - 45% of economically disadvantaged third-grade students passed in 2021, compared to 62% in 2017.
 - 72% of white third graders passed in 2021, compared to 81% in 2017.

SLIPPING MEASURES OF COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

Virginia is experiencing achievement gaps and declines in college admissions testing and AP examinations, two indicators of college and career readiness identified through Virginia’s College and Career Readiness Initiative.¹⁵

Our goal must be to prepare every learner for success in life and in a career. We have many measures to gauge if our learners are on track to graduate from high school with the skills necessary for the next steps in life. College admissions tests such as the SAT or ACT, AP scores which signal if a student is producing college level outcomes, and our SOLs which are supposed to be calibrated to the demands of the knowledge economy. Historically, the overall performance of Virginia students on the SAT has compared favorably with achievement nationwide and in other SAT-dominant states. However, the relatively high overall achievement of Virginia students on the SAT masks wide gaps in performance and college readiness when state data is disaggregated by race/ethnicity.

11 [The Consequences Of Remote And Hybrid Instruction During The Pandemic](#)

12 [Pandemic Schooling Mode and Student Test Scores: Evidence from U.S. School Districts](#)

13 [For more information on Math performance, see Appendix K.](#)

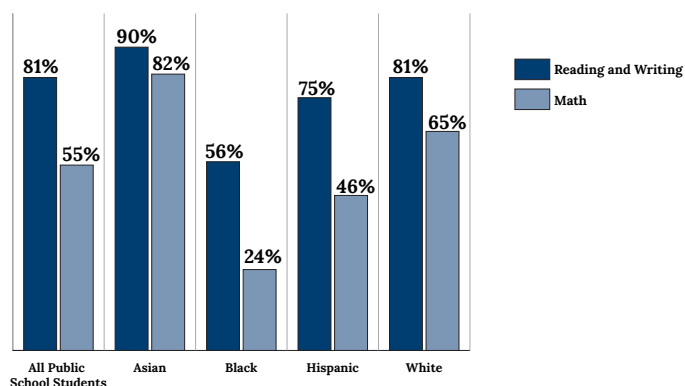
14 [For more information on English performance, see Appendix L.](#)

15 [Virginia’s College and Career Readiness Initiative](#)

- According to pre-pandemic data for the class of 2019, 54% of the Commonwealth's graduating seniors met all of the College Board's college-readiness benchmarks on the SAT, compared with 45% nationwide. Yet, only 22% of Virginia's Black public high school graduates and 44% of Hispanic public high school graduates met all of the benchmarks, compared with 64% of white graduates and 79% of Asian graduates.
- Disparities across race/ethnicity were largest in math, as only 24% of Black graduates and 46% of Hispanic graduates met the college-readiness benchmark for math, compared with 65% of white graduates, 82% of Asian graduates, and 55% of graduates overall.

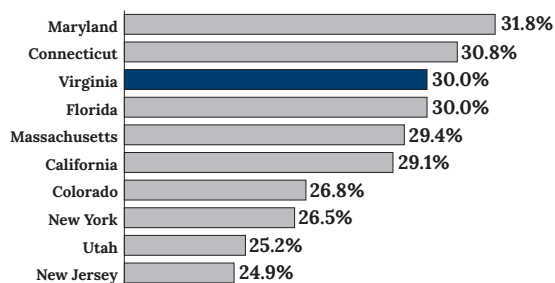
Virginia SAT 2019

Percentage of Students Meeting Benchmarks by Race/Ethnicity

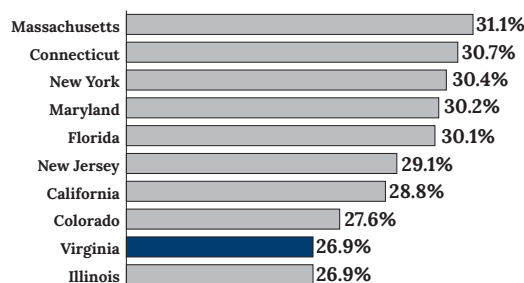


Student performance on AP examinations in Virginia has also declined over the past seven years. In 2015, Virginia was third in the nation in the percentage of high school graduates qualifying for college credit on at least one AP test. Since then, the Commonwealth has fallen to ninth. To improve Virginia's standing in college and career readiness, the state must work with school divisions to improve strategies to increase access to and mastery of rigorous advanced coursework.

2014: Top 10 AP States Graduates with Qualifying Scores



2021: Top 10 AP States Graduates with Qualifying Scores



EXPECTATIONS FOR VIRGINIA'S STUDENTS ARE Too Low

The NAEP is the gold standard of student assessment and is a critical tool for measuring if students are on track to be college and career ready. It is the only assessment that can make an apples-to-apples comparison about student proficiency for all fifty states and compare academic rigor. State policymakers typically use NAEP as a benchmark for ensuring that their education systems are calibrated to prepare students for college and career demands. In fact, it was the dramatic decline in the reading performance of Virginia fourth graders on the 1992 NAEP that served as a catalyst for Virginia to raise academic standards in 1995 and implement a more rigorous state assessment system in the late 1990s.

Because of concerns that many states were not accurately benchmarking their state standards and assessments to the actual rigors of the economy, the nonprofit Achieve created a measurement tool to draw attention to the lack of transparency and accurate and useful information. Achieve's resulting honesty gap refers to the discrepancy—or gap—between scores that are considered to demonstrate student proficiency on the NAEP and state assessments. In 2013, eighteen states, including Virginia, had honesty gaps of more than 20 points. By 2017, the Commonwealth was alongside just two other states—Arkansas and Georgia—with gaps of more than 20 points.

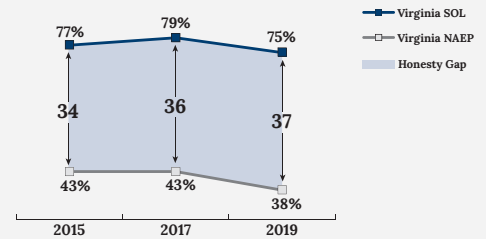
Today, the honesty gap persists in Virginia. For example, proficiency cut scores were lowered in mathematics in 2019, followed by reading in 2020. Virginia is the only state to define proficiency on its fourth-grade reading test below the NAEP Basic level and also sets the lowest bars in the nation for fourth-grade math and eighth-grade reading.¹⁶

THE HONESTY GAP

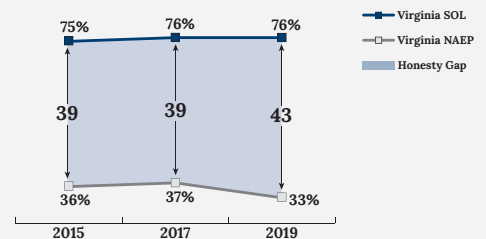
For nearly a decade, researchers have looked at the discrepancy between proficiency on the NAEP and each state's assessments. In 2013, over half of the states had a gap of 30 points or more. In short, these states reported that many more students were "proficient" than actually were, hence the term, honesty gap. Most states immediately addressed the gap by better aligning their state assessments to be at least as rigorous as NAEP. Yet, Virginia declined to narrow or close its own honesty gap. The following data points demonstrate the disconnects between NAEP and our state reading and math results, which are even more troubling when considering the existing disparities across race and ethnicity.

¹⁶ See Appendices B, C, and D for charts on proficiency cut scores.

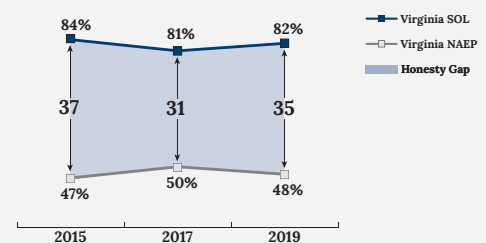
Virginia NAEP vs SOL: Honesty Gap Grade-4 Reading | Percent Proficient and Above



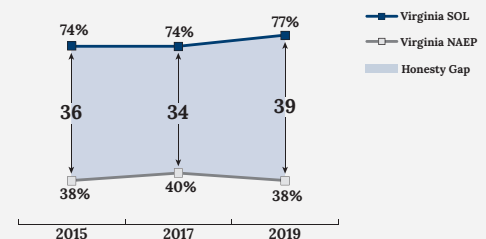
Virginia NAEP vs SOL: Honesty Gap Grade-8 Reading | Percent Proficient and Above



Virginia NAEP vs SOL: Honesty Gap Grade-4 Math | Percent Proficient and Above



Virginia NAEP vs SOL: Honesty Gap Grade-8 Math | Percent Proficient and Above

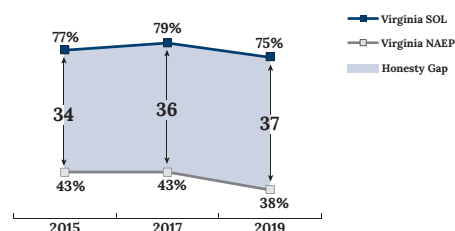


1. According to the 2019 NAEP, only 38% of Virginia fourth-grade students were proficient or above in reading, while SOL reading data indicate 75% are proficient or advanced.

1

Virginia NAEP vs SOL: Honesty Gap

Grade-4 Reading | Percent Proficient and Above

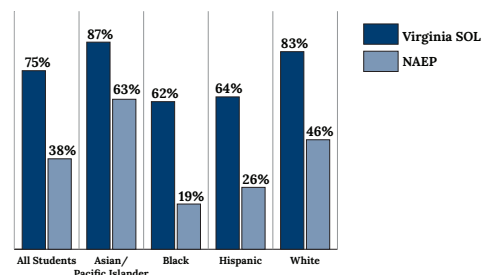


2. 62% of Black fourth graders demonstrated proficiency on their SOL reading tests in 2019, while only 19% were proficient according to NAEP. 64% of Hispanic students demonstrated proficiency on state reading tests, compared to 26% on NAEP.

2

Virginia NAEP vs SOL: Demographics

Grade-4 Reading | Percent Proficient and Above

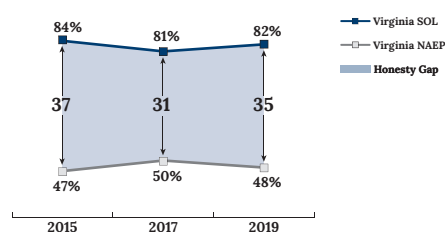


3. 2019 NAEP data also indicate that only 48% of Virginia fourth-grade students are proficient or above in math, while 83% of Virginia fourth-grade students scored proficient or advanced on SOL math assessments.

3

Virginia NAEP vs SOL: Honesty Gap

Grade-4 Math | Percent Proficient and Above

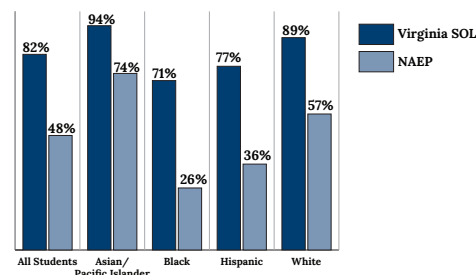


4. 71% of Black fourth graders scored proficient on their SOL math tests in 2019, while only 26% were proficient according to NAEP. 77% of Hispanic students demonstrated proficiency on state math tests, compared to 36% on NAEP.

4

Virginia NAEP vs SOL: Demographics

Grade-4 Math | Percent Proficient and Above



EXPECTATIONS FOR VIRGINIA’S SCHOOLS ARE TOO LOW

Our school accreditation system does not provide a clear, consistent, and understandable picture of how well schools are serving students. Past state policy decisions to lower proficiency benchmarks for students on the state’s reading and mathematics assessments as part of the Commonwealth’s school accreditation standards have resulted in Virginia having the lowest expectations for student proficiency in the nation.¹⁷ In addition to lowering student proficiency expectations, school performance expectations were also altered to de-emphasize student proficiency. As a result, our current school accreditation system does not make it clear when a school is or is not serving all students well.

Yet, this was not always the case. Virginia began accrediting schools based on the achievement of students on state SOL assessments in 1999. In that year, students in only a handful of the Commonwealth’s schools met the benchmark pass rates required for full accreditation. But student achievement improved as VDOE and school divisions worked in partnership to meet the accreditation standards. By 2005, 92% of schools were fully accredited and a bipartisan consensus had emerged around the importance of maintaining high standards for schools and students.

The State Board of Education subsequently increased the rigor of its accreditation standards by including a graduation benchmark for high schools, adopting higher expectations for elementary reading, and replacing multiple choice tests with online assessments that required students to apply content knowledge. With each of these changes, the number of fully accredited schools initially fell but rebounded as school divisions adjusted instruction and more students were able to meet the higher expectations. The improved performance of Virginia students on the SOLs was mirrored by higher levels of achievement on national assessments, including NAEP.

But this culture of excellence took a wrong turn in 2015 as the State Board of Education began a review of its accreditation regulations, culminating in a 2017 adoption of accreditation standards that watered down the importance of grade-level proficiency. These

changes resulted in a student who is unable to meet Virginia’s lowest-in-the-nation proficiency standards, but meets a minimal objective for growth, being weighed equally with a proficient student in calculating for accreditation ratings. The new accreditation standards made it possible for such a student to support a school’s accreditation without being proficient for as many as three consecutive years.

A steady decline in student achievement on state SOL tests followed these accreditation changes. Ensuing NAEP scores also declined, with the 2019 declines in reading described as “statistically significant” by the National Center for Education Statistics.

[Appendix N](#) explains the many variations in the state accreditation system that have diminished its ability to provide a clear picture of student progress and achievement. Growth measures are very important, but should not be used at the expense of the primary goal of grade-level proficiency.

A thorough review of the 2017 Standards of Accreditation is a starting point in our larger discussion of ensuring excellence in education.

THOUSANDS OF BELOW-BENCHMARK STUDENTS COUNT TOWARDS VIRGINIA SCHOOL ACCREDITATION

— Virginia Grade-5 Reading —

10,974

fifth-grade students who failed their SOL reading test in 2019 **also failed** to meet Virginia’s lowest-in-the-nation reading benchmarks as fourth and third graders.

3,117

of these students were weighed equally with passing students in calculating accreditation ratings for the 2019-2020 school year.

— Virginia Grade-5 Math —

9,837

fifth-grade students who failed their SOL math test in 2019 **also failed** to meet Virginia’s lowest-in-the-nation reading benchmarks as fourth and third graders.

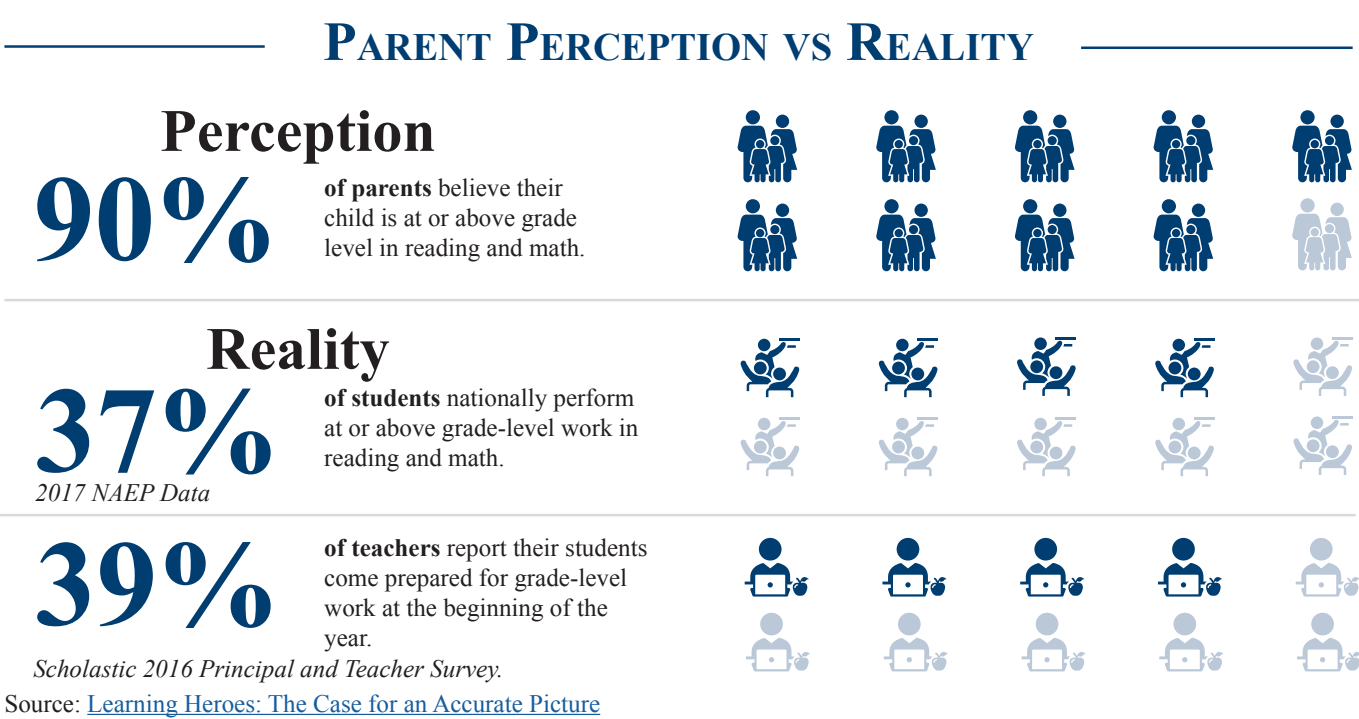
2,077

of these students were weighed equally with passing students in calculating accreditation ratings for the 2019-2020 school year.

¹⁷ See [Appendices B, C, and D for charts on proficiency cut scores.](#)

Parent perception of student achievement is inflated, which is unsurprising considering the lack of transparency in Virginia. As the national research below documents, 90% of parents believe their child is at or above grade level in reading and math. In reality, only 37% of students nationally perform at or above grade-level work in reading and math, meaning there is a 53 percentage point gap between parent perception and reality. However, this national research also shows teachers know how their students are doing.

Given teachers are parents’ most trusted source of information, parents and teachers empowered by timely, actionable data can change the trajectory of a child’s education and life. With the learning loss experienced by students following the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more imperative than ever to provide teachers the tools and training necessary to effectively partner with parents to meet every learners’ unique needs.



ERODING PARENT CONFIDENCE IN VIRGINIA K-12 SCHOOLS

School shutdowns and prolonged virtual instruction had a devastating impact on learning and, as a result, led to an overall lack of confidence in the education system. Thousands of families have “voted with their feet” by leaving Virginia’s public schools since the beginning of the pandemic. For example:

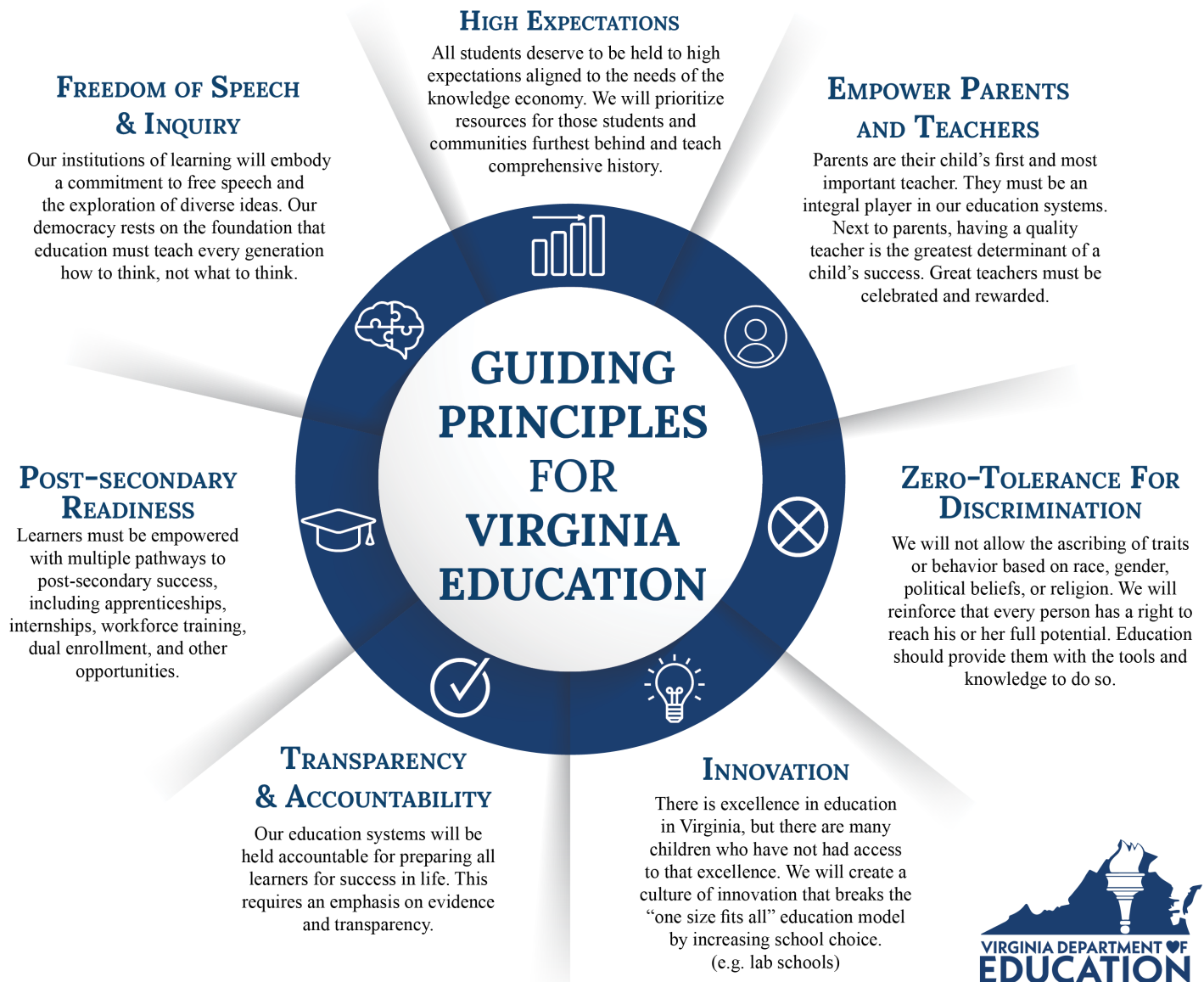
- During the 2019-2020 school year, 38,282 students were home-schooled in the Commonwealth. Home schooling increased 56% in 2020-2021 as the parents of 59,638 school-age children chose not to send their children to public schools.
- Despite the return in 2021-2022 to in-person instruction, the parents of 55,769 home-schooled students elected not to enroll or return their children to public school.
- 3,748 Virginia students transferred in 2020-2021 from a public school to an in-state private school.

The exodus of thousands of families from Virginia’s public schools was noted by UVA’s Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service in a [January 2022 report](#) and [presentation](#). The Center—whose estimates of school-age population are used for the distribution of state sales tax revenue for public schools—reported that the pandemic accelerated a pre-pandemic trend since 2010 of growth in homeschooling and private education outpacing growth in public school enrollment.

MOVING FORWARD: OUR COMMITMENT TO VIRGINIANS

We commit to raise expectations for students and schools, support them to meet those high standards, and hold them accountable for results. We will restore excellence and the opportunity to access quality education for all. We commit to close honesty and achievement gaps and prioritize transparency and accountability. We commit to historic investments in education and collaboration with all stakeholders to realize our goals.

Underpinning our work is a set of principles for how we will conduct business. These principles represent a new approach to education in the Commonwealth and will guide everything we do. In order to directly address the challenges facing Virginia students, schools, and families, we commit to taking the following actions over the next four years.



WE COMMIT TO:

Establish and maintain **HIGH EXPECTATIONS** for students, schools, and ourselves.

- Virginia’s assessment system must provide quality information about student achievement and growth, as well as the health of our state’s education system. We must close the honesty gap by raising proficiency cut scores and improving SOL rigor to align with the demands of the knowledge economy.
- Alongside a bipartisan study group of stakeholders and assessment experts, we will lead efforts to create a best-in-class state assessment system, including providing recommendations to the General Assembly in fall 2023.
- We will ensure that evidence-based literacy instruction is prioritized across Virginia’s schools through faithful implementation of the *Virginia Literacy Act of 2022*, which requires alignment with the science of reading in all instruction. The *Virginia Literacy Act of 2022*:
 - Creates new individualized reading plans for those students not on track to be on grade level by 3rd grade implemented in partnership with parents.
 - Provides new reading specialists to support learners and reading coaches to support teachers across the Commonwealth.
 - Ensures teachers in and preparing for the classroom have mastery of the science of reading aligned instructional practices.
 - Provides tools for parents to support literacy growth at home.



It was passed with the overwhelming support of bipartisan patrons and members of the General Assembly and signed into law as a “Governor’s bill.” This legislation and its implementation will serve as a model for the nation.

- We must have content standards that are best-in-class in depth and breadth, including in history, math, reading, and science, which are due for review in 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 respectively. We will revamp the process for reviewing and revising academic standards to honor the critical role employers, families, subject-matter experts, and other key stakeholders have in shaping and aligning our expectations with the needs of the Commonwealth. We will expand our public engagement efforts, which have been historically limited to submission of public comments to VDOE and the State Board of Education, so that all voices are heard when decisions are made about what Virginia’s students learn.

Advance **PARENT AND TEACHER EMPOWERMENT** to best serve students in partnership.

- To empower parents and increase family engagement, VDOE will create opportunities for intentional and ongoing collaboration and communication. VDOE’s recently announced Office of Parental Engagement will empower parents with information and prepare and train teachers to work with parents as partners in the shared effort to support student learning.
- We commit to providing honest, timely, accurate, and actionable information. Parents, educators, and learners will know where every student is succeeding and where they are off track. They will be supported in acting upon this information, providing interventions that put learners back on track for short- and long-term success.

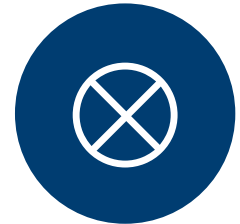


- Parents are a child’s first and most important teacher; after parents, the greatest determinant of student achievement is a quality classroom teacher. We are making historic investments in teachers, and will find innovative ways to reward and incentivize great teaching, especially benefiting those who need it most.

In recognition of the importance of a high-quality teacher, VDOE will work to strengthen the teaching profession in Virginia. We will work with our education partners in the Commonwealth and across the nation to implement best practices for growing a diverse and excellent educator workforce to better reflect our student population.

Demand **ZERO-TOLERANCE FOR DISCRIMINATION in education and beyond.**

- All students deserve an education that does not teach nor practice discrimination, whether it be through the funding their schools receive, the opportunities they have to learn, or preconceived judgments.
- Every student in the Commonwealth deserves access to high-quality, comprehensive, and unbiased history education. VDOE will ensure that state standards support a civic education that allows Virginia students to fully understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens under our foundational documents, including the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Constitution of Virginia.
- We will not tolerate violations of Title IV and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, including policies, programs, training, and curricula that advance discrimination.



Foster **Innovation in all education environments.**

- One-size-fits-all education does not work. We will fuel a culture of innovation, informed by data and built on the examples of excellence that currently exist in the Commonwealth.
- We will continue to support innovative education by increasing school choice and opportunities for all students, including through our goal to support the launch of 20 new lab schools across the Commonwealth.
- VDOE’s recently announced Department of Strategic Innovation will catalog innovative education opportunities and schools—including lab, Governor’s, magnet, and charter schools—and disseminate best practices. The department aims to inspire and incubate innovation across school divisions and the Commonwealth.
- There are examples of education greatness across the Commonwealth. We will seek out examples and work to replicate in other communities. Every student deserves to go to a great school. Parents need to be empowered with more choices, including within our public schools.
- Leveraging pandemic relief funds, we will establish and support evidence-based programs that address learning loss and provide direct support to students and families.
 - This work will include creating a supplemental educational micro-grant program for families to purchase additional educational resources for their children.
 - In partnership with schools and community-based organizations serving families with the greatest needs, we will identify and re-engage students who have disappeared from our school systems.



Provide **Transparency and Accountability so that each child is seen and receives what they need to succeed.**

- The people of Virginia—including students, parents and teachers—have not had a clear picture of the academic performance of their students and schools. This will change. Virginia will aim to be the most transparent and accountable state in the nation by first providing a clear picture of student achievement. By the fall of 2022, we will produce a data report that provides a snapshot of learning proficiency, growth, and gaps from March 2020 to June 2022 for every student in the Commonwealth in grades 1-8. While individual reports will be provided directly to students, families, and educators, a general report summarizing the findings will be made available on the VDOE website.
- The changes to the accreditation system over the past decade have diminished the importance of every student being proficient in critical knowledge and skills, including in reading and math. A school that is not fully accredited is a red flag for parents, communities, and taxpayers. Working with the State Board of Education, we will revise the Standards of Accreditation to ensure that schools that earn full accreditation are truly preparing the students in their care for the demands of the workplaces of tomorrow. Accreditation ratings will accurately and clearly reflect the quality of our individual schools. Schools that fail to achieve accreditation cannot operate in the same manner year after year. Such schools will receive enhanced support and direct intervention that engages families, educators, and the community to ensure that all students are receiving a high-quality education that supports their success.



Ensure **POST-SECONDARY READINESS so that all learners can succeed in life.**

- Schools will provide multiple pathways to post-secondary success, including apprenticeships, internships, workforce training, college preparation, dual and concurrent enrollment, and career and technical education.
- VDOE will audit and revise the current career and technical education program offerings to ensure they are aligned with high-wage, high-demand fields.¹⁸
- In order to ensure our students are ready for the global economy, we will prioritize STEM, computer science, and cybersecurity in our future standard setting processes in 2025.



Protect and nurture **FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND INQUIRY to ensure every student is taught how to think, not what to think.**

- A great education must address complicated and uncomfortable topics in ways that support critical thinking and vigorous classroom discussions—without injecting trendy political views or inhibiting free speech. We will support this by providing training to our teachers and school leaders on teaching such subjects and facilitating difficult conversations.



CLOSING THOUGHTS

The interim report, released on February 25, 2022, sparked conversations across the Commonwealth and nation on “divisive concepts” and anti-discrimination efforts. Likewise, this report articulating our commitment to Virginia intends to spark conversations across the Commonwealth and nation as we grapple with difficult realities about student performance. We sought input from partners in education on the drafting and finalization of this report. Setting and implementing strategies and sharing our principles requires continued partnership and shared commitment. This report is an initial step in our work to ensure high expectations and excellence for all students—efforts that will continue for years to come.

There are numerous issues and topics that were not addressed in this report—rural education, early care and learning, English learners, gifted and talented education, special education, and a deeper dive into school operations and capital construction funding—to name a few. Our goal—to provide a best-in-class education for every Virginian—can be accomplished when we work together. Parents, teachers, policymakers, stakeholders, even students cannot be partners without first being informed—this is the first step. The guiding principles serve as the foundation for many conversations and actions about education in the coming months and years. Supported by a foundation of actionable data and our guiding principles, we must work together to ensure high expectations and excellence for all learners in Virginia.

Our

COMMITMENT

To VIRGINIANS

DATA APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: THE HONESTY GAP

The proficiency percentages on Virginia’s state SOL assessments are significantly higher than on NAEP. This gap is referred as [the honesty gap](#). For example, in Virginia, 75 percent of 4th graders had a reading pass rate on SOL assessments in 2019. But only 38 percent of 4th graders were proficient in reading on NAEP that same year.

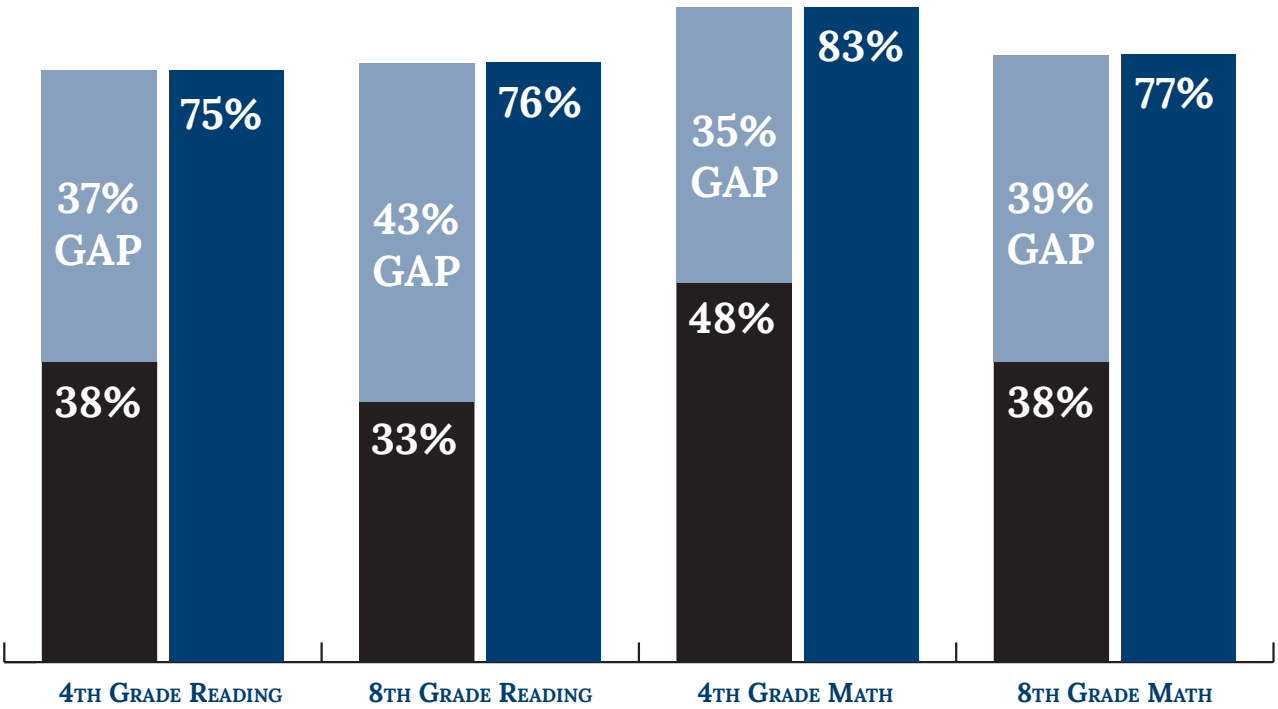
THE HONESTY GAP

LEGEND

2019 NAEP:
Virginia Students Proficient and Advanced

2019 SOL:
Virginia Students Proficient and Advanced

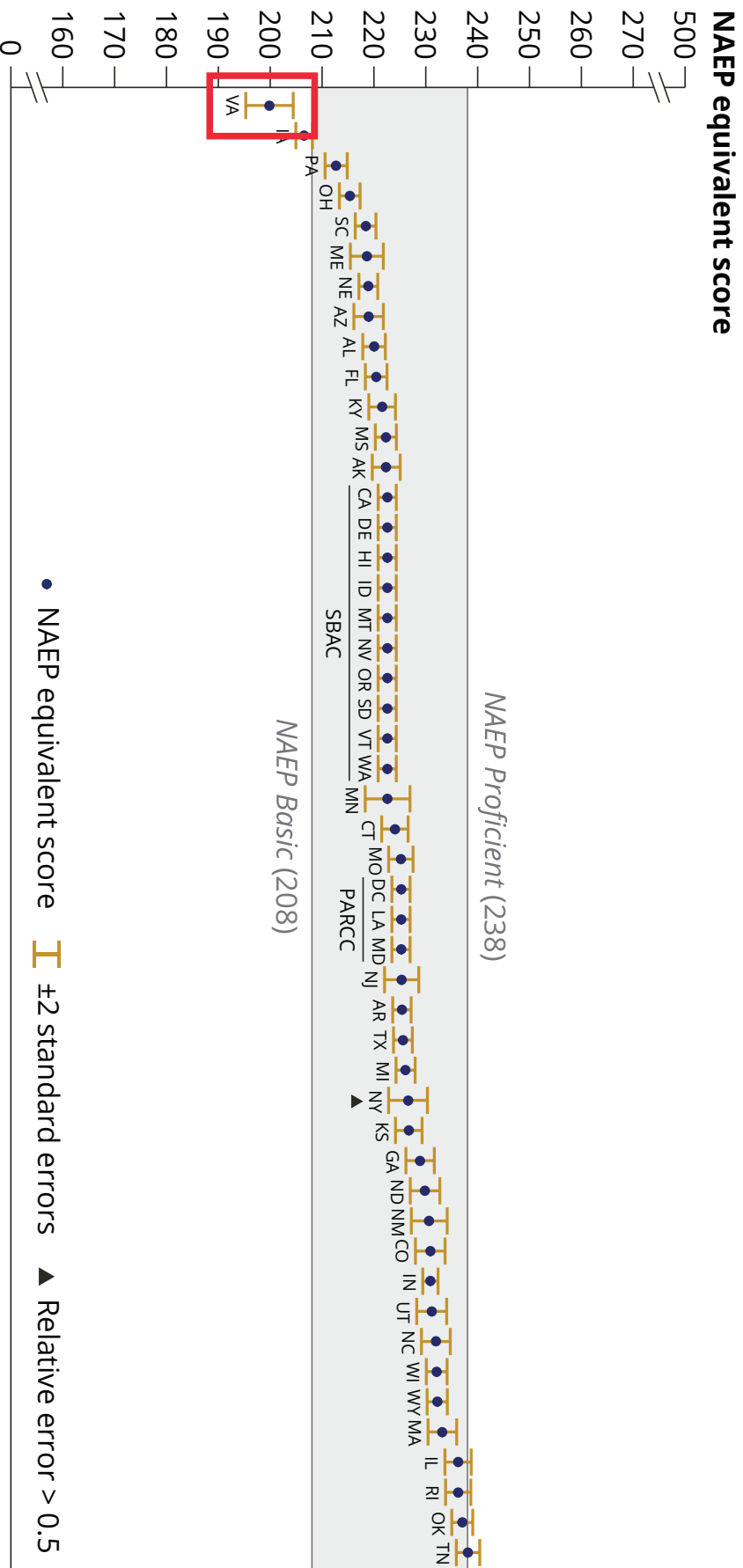
The Honesty Gap



2019 Virginia NAEP v.s. SOL	Reading Grade 4	Reading Grade 8	Math Grade 4	Math Grade 8
2019 NAEP Proficient and Advanced	38%	33%	48%	38%
2019 SOL Proficient and Advanced	75%	76%	83%	77%
NAEP difference from SOL Proficient and Advanced	-37%	-43%	-35%	-39%

APPENDIX B: LOWEST PROFICIENCY CUT SCORES - GRADE-4 LITERACY

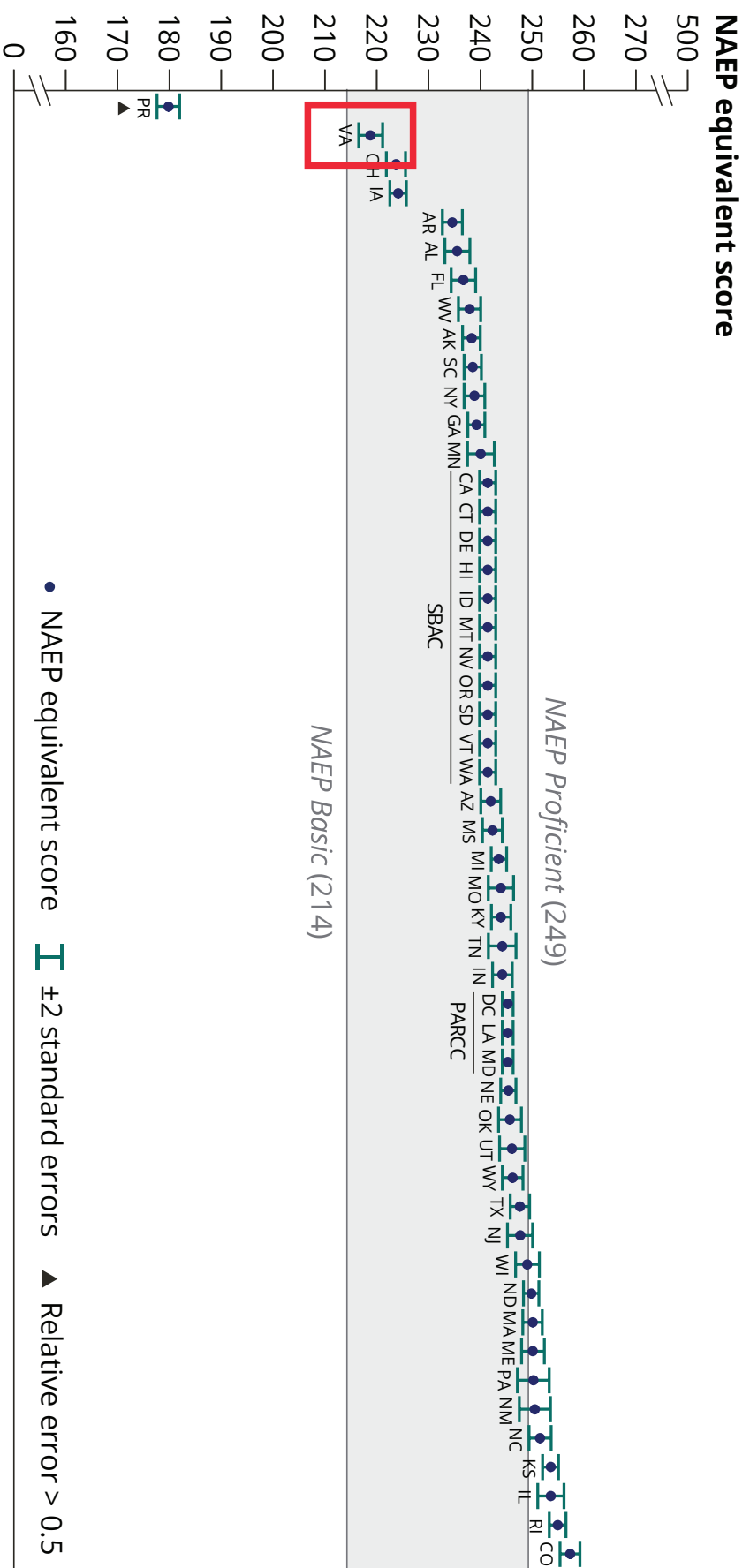
State grade-4 reading proficiency standards compared with NAEP proficiency levels by state: 2019



Source: [Mapping State Proficiency Standards Onto the NAEP Scales: Results From the 2019 NAEP Reading and Mathematics Assessments](#)

APPENDIX C: LOWEST PROFICIENCY CUT SCORES - GRADE-4 MATH

State grade-4 math proficiency standards compared with NAEP proficiency levels by state: 2019

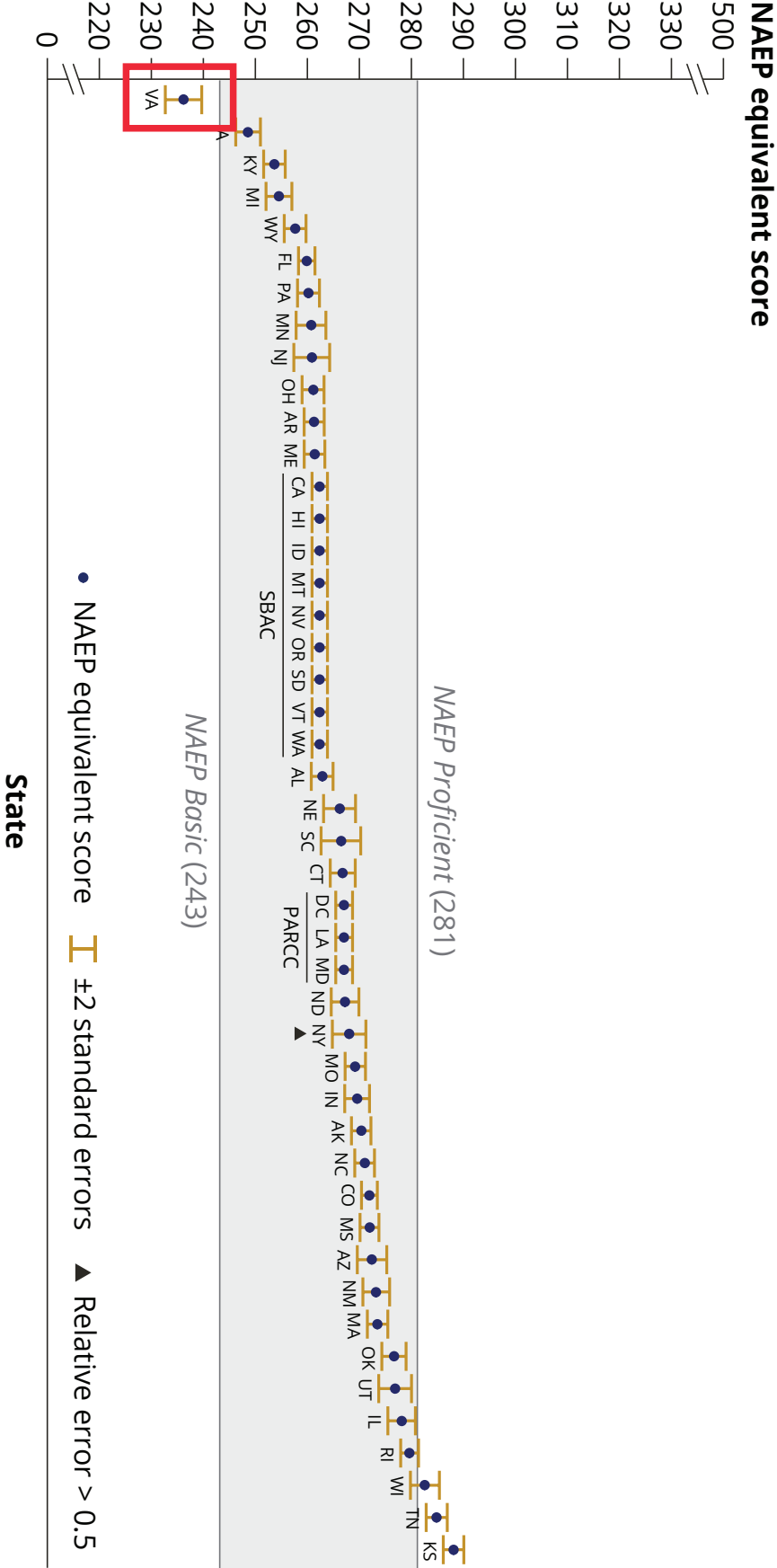


Note: NCES did not compare Virginia's 2019 grade-8 math proficiency standard with NAEP proficiency levels due to the relatively small number of students who took the eighth-grade SOL math assessment, as opposed to the Commonwealth's end-of-course mathematics assessments (Algebra I, Geometry, etc.).

Source: [Mapping State Proficiency Standards Onto the NAEP Scales: Results From the 2019 NAEP Reading and Mathematics Assessments](#)

APPENDIX D: LOWEST PROFICIENCY CUT SCORES - GRADE-8 LITERACY

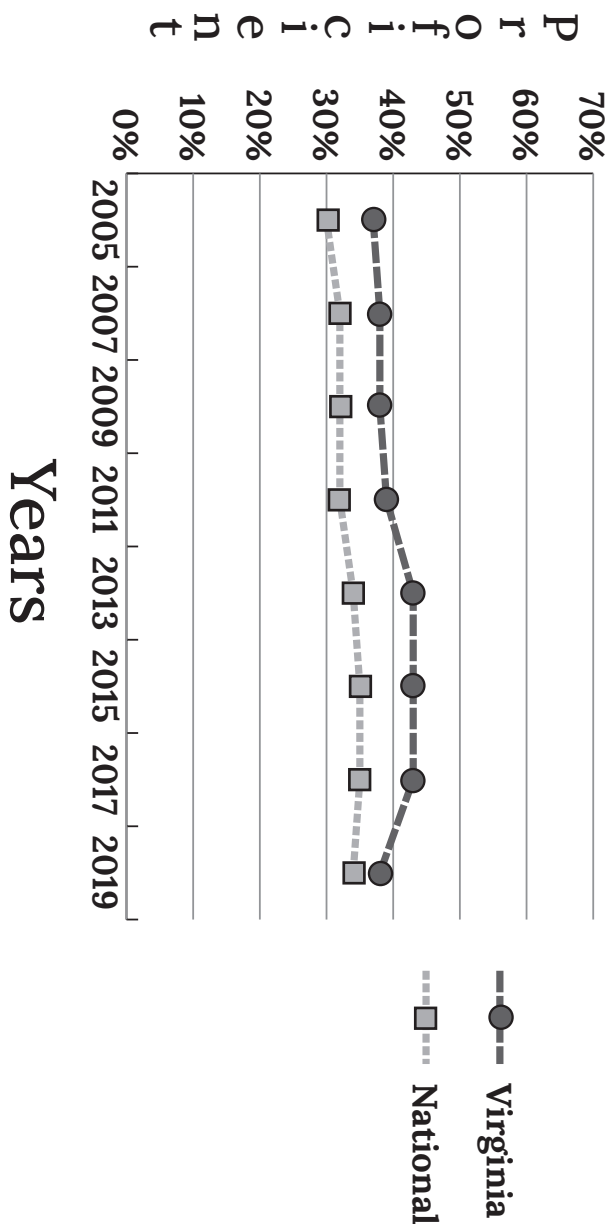
State grade-8 reading proficiency standards compared with NAEP proficiency levels by state: 2019



Source: [Mapping State Proficiency Standards Onto the NAEP Scales: Results From the 2019 NAEP Reading and Mathematics Assessments](#)

APPENDIX E: 4TH GRADE LITERACY DOWNWARD

Virginia NAEP Grade-4 Reading
Percent Proficient or Above

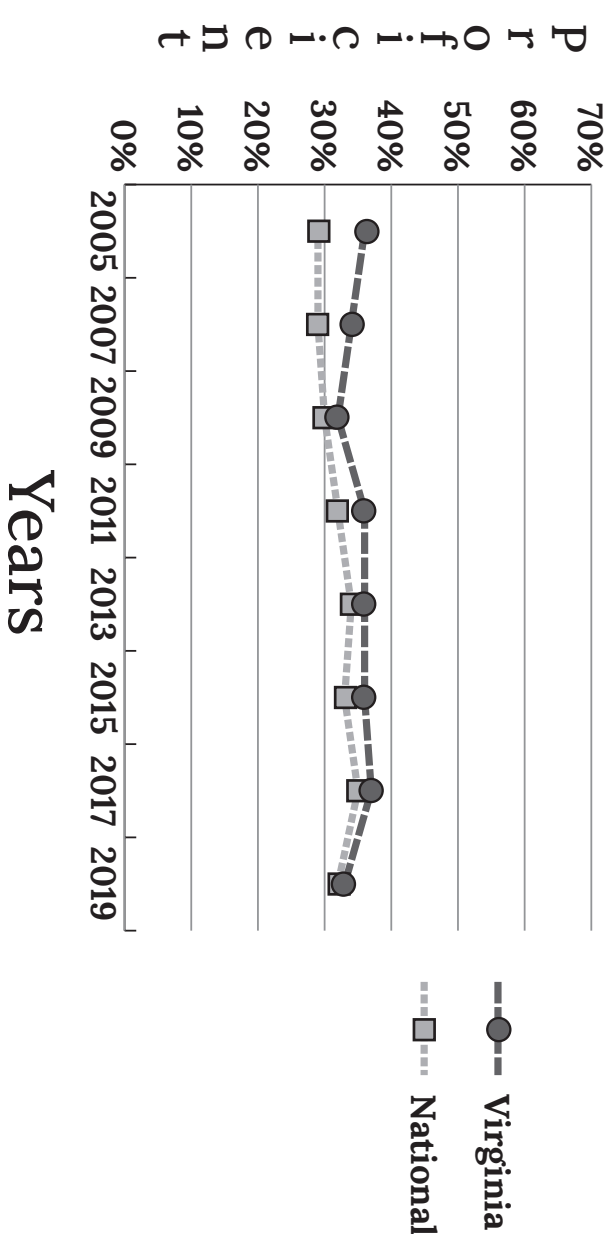


Location	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019
National	30%	32%	32%	32%	34%	35%	35%	34%
Virginia	37%	38%	38%	39%	43%	43%	43%	38%

Source: [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\), Reading Assessment](#).

APPENDIX F: 8TH GRADE LITERACY DOWNWARD

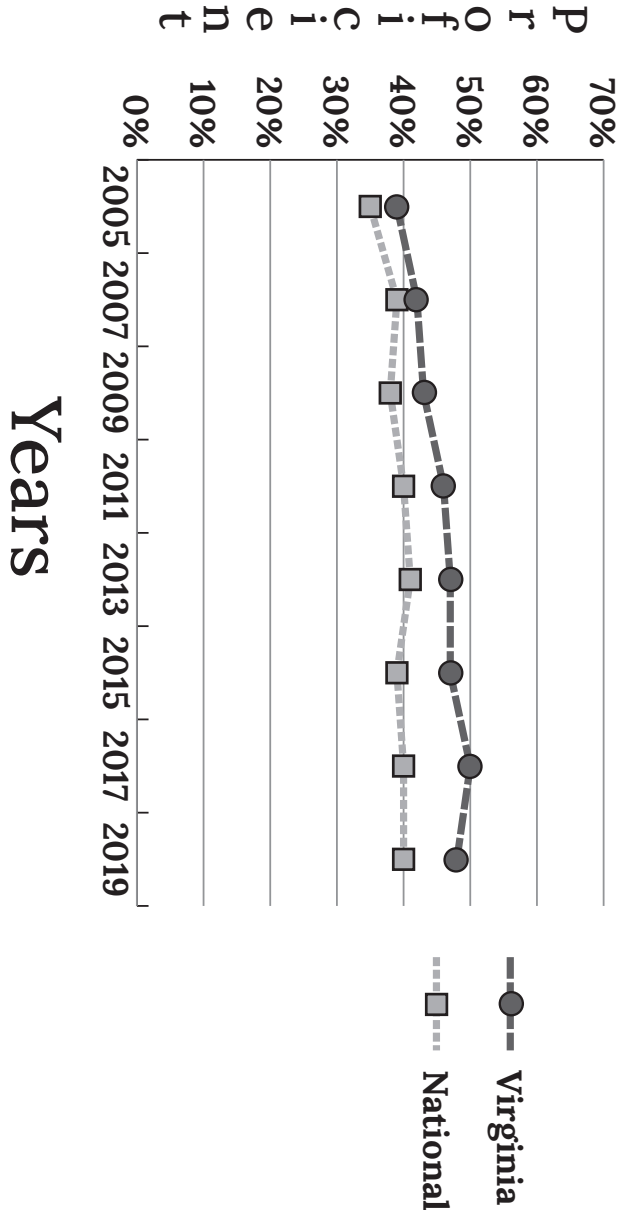
Virginia NAEP Grade-8 Reading
Percent Proficient or Above



Location	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019
National	29%	29%	30%	32%	34%	33%	35%	32%
Virginia	36%	34%	32%	36%	36%	36%	37%	33%

APPENDIX G: 4TH GRADE MATH DOWNWARD

Virginia NAEP Grade-4 Mathematics *Percent Proficient or Above*



Location	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019
National	35%	39%	38%	40%	41%	39%	40%	40%
Virginia	39%	42%	43%	46%	47%	47%	50%	48%

Source: [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\), 2019 Mathematics Assessment](#)

APPENDIX H: 8TH GRADE MATH DOWNWARD

Virginia NAEP Grade-8 Mathematics
Percent Proficient or Above



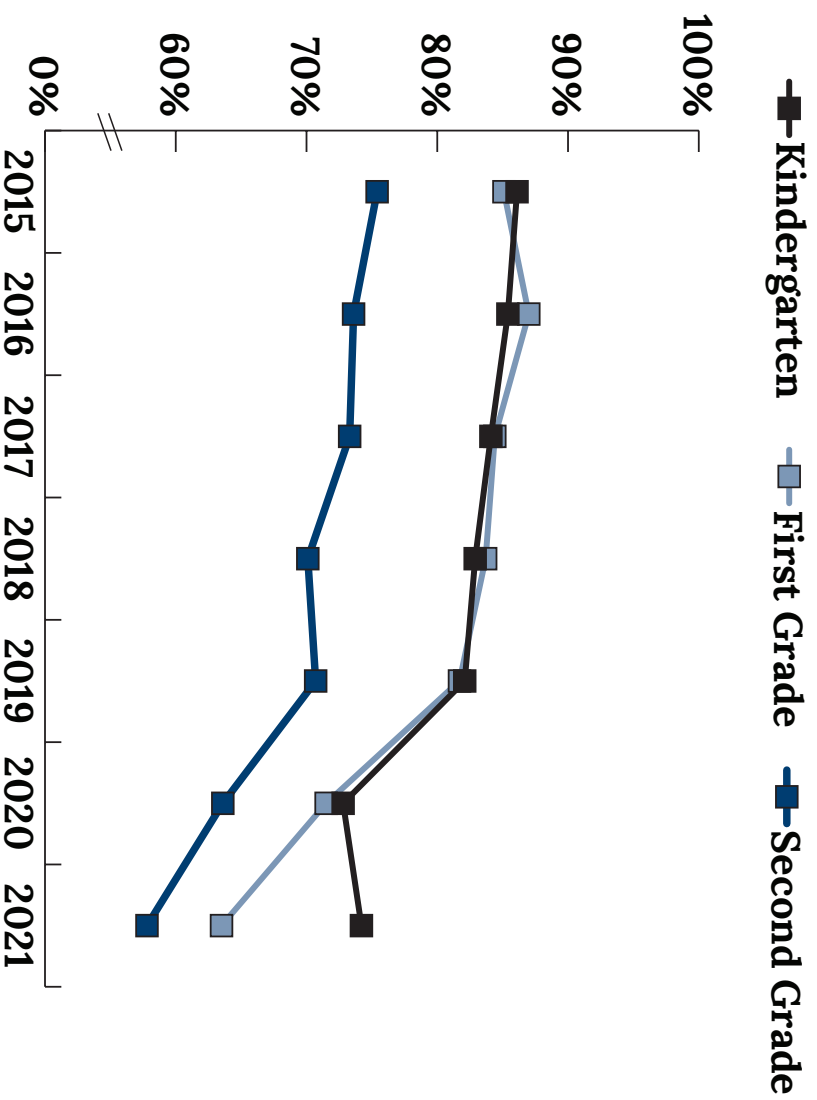
Location	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019
National	28%	31%	33%	34%	34%	32%	33%	33%
Virginia	33%	37%	36%	40%	38%	38%	40%	38%

Source: [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\), 2019 Mathematics Assessment](#)

APPENDIX I: PALS GRADE-LEVEL SCORES DECLINING

—— Percent of K-2 Students At or Above the PALS Benchmark ——

Fall 2015-2021



Grade	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Kindergarten	86.1%	85.4%	84.1%	82.9%	82.1%	72.8%	74.2%
First Grade	85.1%	87.0%	84.4%	83.7%	81.7%	71.5%	63.5%
Second Grade	75.4%	73.6%	73.3%	70.1%	70.7%	63.6%	57.8%

Source: [Examining the Impact of COVID-19 on the Identification of At-Risk Students: Fall 2021 Literacy Screening Findings](#)

APPENDIX J: DECLINING READING PROFICIENCY

Declining SOL English/Reading Proficiency 2016-2021

Percent Proficient and Advanced

Grade	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	Point Percent Change from 2016-2017 and 2018-2019	Percent of Decrease from 2016-2017 and 2018-2019
3	75%	72%	71%	-4	-5%
4	79%	76%	75%	-4	-5%
5	81%	80%	78%	-3	-4%
6	78%	80%	77%	-1	-1%
7	82%	81%	79%	-3	-4%
8	76%	77%	76%	0	0

APPENDIX K: MATH LEARNING LOSS

MTSS Risk Categories for Math

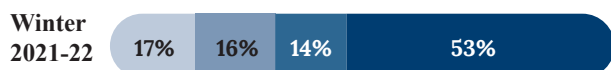
Winter comparison of the distribution of students by [Multi-Tiered Systems of Support \(MTSS\)](#) risk categories for Math, 2021–2022 school year compared to 2020–2021 school year



Virginia

↓ | -9%

From Winter to Winter, the percentage of students at or above benchmark **decreased by 9%**.



Nationwide

↓ | -2%

From Winter to Winter, the percentage of students at or above benchmark **decreased by 2%**.



Urgent intervention
 Intervention
 On watch
 At/above benchmark

Notes

1. This presentation summarizes selected analyses by state and subject using Star assessment data through the end of January 2022. Refer to the national How Kids Are Performing: A Snapshot of K–12 Academic Performance and Growth for details on samples, methods, and limitations. The sample used for this How Kids Are Performing snapshot differs from our 2021 How Kids Are Performing report series, so we caution against directly comparing findings from this report with prior editions and presentations.
2. For more information about the Star Assessments, [start here](#).
3. Not all states have been included in this presentation due to small sample sizes. We excluded states if there were fewer than 10 schools and/or fewer than 2,500 students per subject. Please also note that the state-level results presented here may not be representative of any state's student population.
4. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Source: [Renaissance: How Kids Are Performing](#)

APPENDIX L: LITERACY LEARNING LOSS

MTSS Risk Categories for Literacy

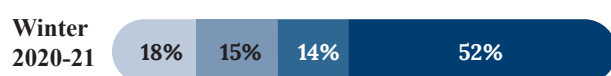
Winter comparison of the distribution of students by [Multi-Tiered Systems of Support \(MTSS\)](#) risk categories for Literacy, 2021–2022 school year compared to 2020–2021 school year



Virginia

↓ | -3%

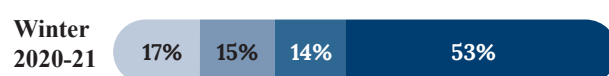
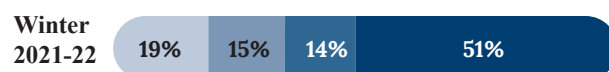
From Winter to Winter, the percentage of students at or above benchmark **decreased by 3%**.



Nationwide

↓ | -2%

From Winter to Winter, the percentage of students at or above benchmark **decreased by 2%**.



● Urgent intervention ● Intervention ● On watch ● At/above benchmark

Notes

1. This presentation summarizes selected analyses by state and subject using Star assessment data through the end of January 2022. Refer to the national *How Kids Are Performing: A Snapshot of K–12 Academic Performance and Growth* for details on samples, methods, and limitations. The sample used for this *How Kids Are Performing* snapshot differs from our 2021 *How Kids Are Performing* report series, so we caution against directly comparing findings from this report with prior editions and presentations.
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4. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Source: [Renaissance: How Kids Are Performing](#).

APPENDIX M: SCHOOL ACCREDITATION IN BRIEF

In Brief: School Accreditation



June 2018

The Virginia Board of Education is revising its accreditation standards to provide a more comprehensive view of school quality while encouraging continuous improvement for all schools and placing increased emphasis on closing achievement gaps. School accreditation ratings for the 2018-2019 school year will be the first to reflect this new approach to accountability.

School Quality Indicators

The revised accreditation standards measure performance on multiple school-quality indicators, not just on overall student achievement on state tests.

Elementary and middle schools are evaluated on the following indicators:

- Overall proficiency and growth in English reading/writing achievement (including progress of English learners toward English-language proficiency)
- Overall proficiency and growth in mathematics
- Overall proficiency in science
- English achievement gaps among student groups
- Mathematics achievement gaps among student groups
- Absenteeism

High schools are evaluated on the following school-quality indicators:

- Overall proficiency in English reading/writing and progress of English learners toward English-language proficiency
- Overall proficiency in mathematics
- Overall proficiency in science
- English achievement gaps among student groups
- Mathematics achievement gaps among student groups
- Graduation and completion
- Dropout rate
- Absenteeism
- College, career and civic readiness (effective 2021-2022)

Performance Levels

Performance on each school-quality indicator is rated at one of three levels:

LEVEL ONE: Meets or exceeds standard or sufficient improvement

LEVEL TWO: Near standard or making sufficient improvement

LEVEL THREE: Below standard

All schools must develop a multi-year plan to support continuous improvement on all indicators. Specific local and state actions and interventions are required to improve performance on indicators rated at Level Two and Level Three.

Performance Level	Action or Intervention
LEVEL ONE: At or Above Standard <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance at or above state standard for indicator Sufficient improvement toward state standard for indicator from Level Two 	Monitor performance on indicator and update multi-year school improvement plan as needed
LEVEL TWO: Near Standard or Improving <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Below state standard for indicator but approaching Level One performance Sufficient improvement on indicator from Level Three 	Revise multi-year improvement plan and implement revisions to improve performance on indicator
LEVEL THREE: Below Standard <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance on indicator below state standard Performance on indicator at Level Two for more than four consecutive years 	Implement state-approved corrective action plan following academic review conducted by Virginia Department of Education

Accreditation Ratings

Under the new system, schools earn one of the following three accreditation ratings:

Accredited — Schools with all school-quality indicators at either Level One or Level Two

Accredited with Conditions — Schools with one or more school-quality indicators at Level Three

Accreditation Denied — Schools that fail to adopt or fully implement required corrective actions to address Level Three school-quality indicators. A school rated as Accreditation Denied may regain state accreditation by demonstrating to the Board of Education that it is fully implementing all required corrective action plans.

SAMPLE SCHOOL: South Middle School			SAMPLE SCHOOL: North High School		
Achievement	English Combined Rate	Level ONE	Achievement	English Combined Rate	Level ONE
	Math Combined Rate	Level ONE		Math Pass Rate	Level ONE
	Science Pass Rate	Level ONE		Science Pass Rate	Level ONE
Achievement Gaps	English	Level TWO	Achievement Gaps	English	Level TWO
	Math	Level TWO		Math	Level THREE
Student Engagement	Chronic Absenteeism	Level TWO	Student Engagement	Chronic Absenteeism	Level TWO
OVERALL	ACCREDITED		Graduation & Completion	Dropout Rate	Level ONE
				College, Career & Civic Readiness	Level TWO
					(2021-2022)
OVERALL			ACCREDITED WITH CONDITIONS		

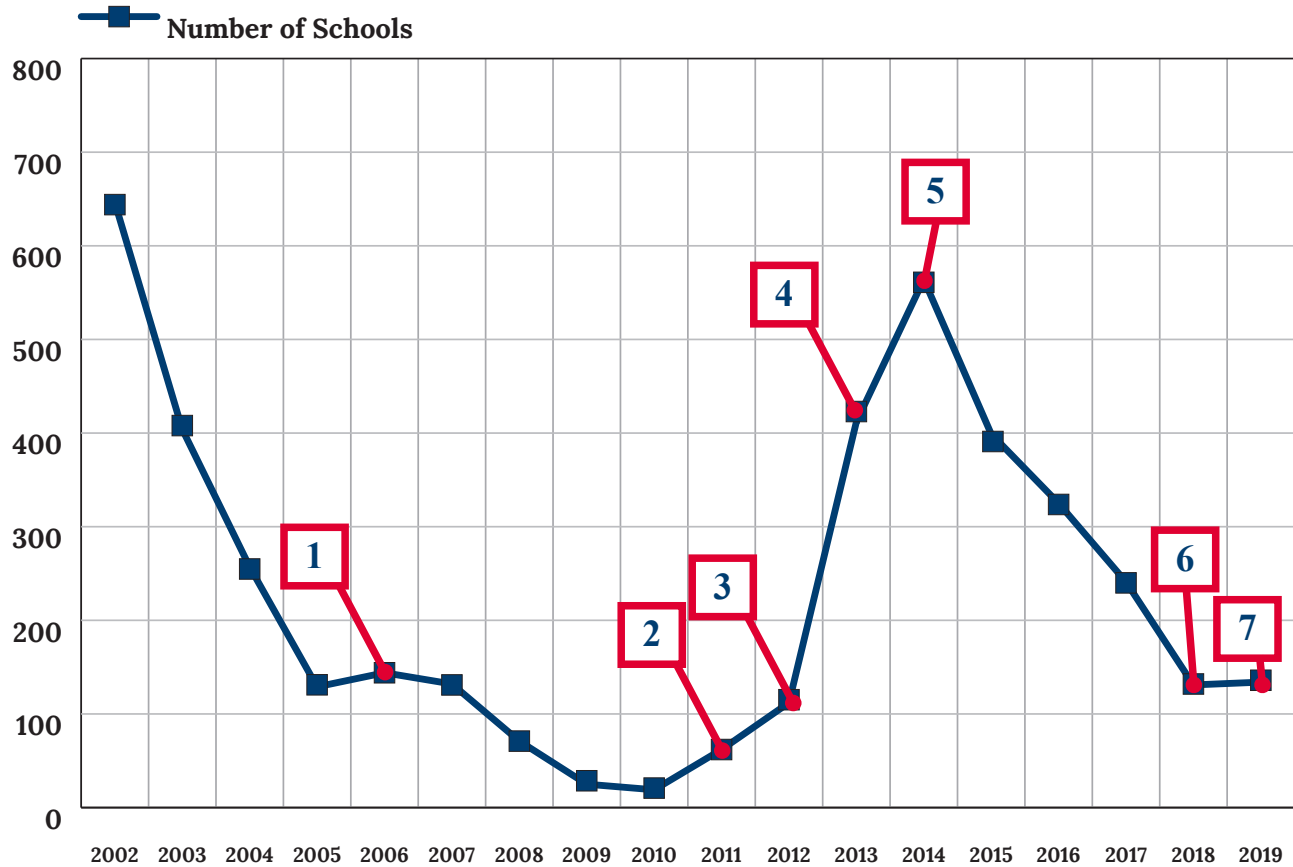
For more information, please visit www.doe.virginia.gov

APPENDIX N: ACCREDITATION VARIATION

Virginia School Accreditation

Schools in Virginia Not Fully Accredited

2002-2020



Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Schools Not Accredited	646	404	257	129	144	132	71	25	19	63	112	412	564	399	325	241	131	134

- 2006: To meet NCLB requirements for reading and mathematics: Assessments added for grades 4, 6, and 7; grades 5 and 8 tests no longer cumulative.
- 2011: New history/social science assessments; Board of Education adopted new cut scores.
- 2012: New mathematics assessments; Board of Education adopted new cut scores.
- 2013: New reading, writing, and science assessments; Board of Education adopted new cut scores; Accreditation benchmarks increased for Grade-3 Science and History from 50% to 70%, and for Grades 6-12 English from 70% to 75%.
- 2014: Board of Education allows expedited retakes of SOL tests by elementary and middle school students (previously only allowed on tests for high school credit).
- 2018: First year of new accreditation model under the Revised 2017 Standards of Accreditation.
- 2019: New mathematics tests; Board of Education lowered proficiency cut scores.



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