

Our Commitment to Virginians: High Expectations and Excellence for All Students November 2025



Since Day One, Governor Youngkin has been laser-focused on restoring excellence in education. He came into office with a mandate from parents and voters to address a system that had lowered expectations, lacked transparency, and masked academic performance. He has delivered on this agenda, as seen in the work below.

2021:		2025:
The prior Standards of Learning lacked in rigor and content; Fordham Institute rated Math a 4/7 and English/Language Arts a 2/7 in 2018	Standards ➡	Revised Standards in core subjects of Math, ELA, History & Social Studies and Computer Science are now considered best in class
SOL Assessments were multiple choice and prioritized rote memory over analysis	Assessments ➡	More rigorous tests that require critical thinking skills with more content covered <i>Future of Assessment Workgroup</i> recommendations overhauled assessment to fully align with more rigorous assessment with additional innovative questions
State Board lowered proficiency expectations from 2017-2020 for reading and math; since then, Virginia has had the lowest proficiency expectations in the nation	Mastery ➡	Proficiency is being reset to align with scores NAEP proficient, states with the highest definitions of proficiency, and with the entry expectations of Virginia employers, colleges, and military
The revised Standards of Accreditation in 2017 prioritized growth over mastery, allowed expedited retakes for all students and was based on a confusing algorithm that did not provide a clear picture of school performance In 2022, 100% of schools are accredited despite our 4th graders having the nation's largest learning loss in math and ELA	Accountability ➡	The <i>School Performance and Support Framework</i> provides a clear picture of how well every school is serving every student. This new accountability system values both mastery and growth, reinforces importance of attendance, and prepares graduates to be ready for enrollment, employment, and enlistment by incentivizing the earning of college credit, industry recognized credentials and the ASVAB military entry test
The discrepancy between the definition of proficiency on the <i>Nation's Report Card</i> /NAEP and on Virginia's SOL is called the "Honesty Gap" by national education reform leaders Expectations were set too low for all Virginia's students, and by hiding this reality behind inflated proficiency definitions and the obfuscating use of averages, there was no sense of urgency or desire for change	Transparency & Supports ➡	The Board voted unanimously on September 25 th to raise the proficiency cut score, closing the Honesty Gap There is greater transparency of how well every school is serving every student The VDOE is prioritizing resources—funding and proven interventions—to the schools and students who need the most assistance to get on track for success

VIRGINIA: RESTORING EXCELLENCE BY RAISING EXPECTATIONS & SUPPORTING STUDENTS



Raising the definition of proficiency – closing Virginia’s Honesty Gap – was the final step in the Youngkin Administration’s four-year effort to raise academic expectations to ensure every Virginia student is prepared for success in life.

“When we expect more of our students, they achieve more.”
-Governor Glenn Youngkin

The Honesty Gap: What We Did About It

Virginia had the lowest definition of proficiency in the nation; that meant that Virginia students were told through their *Standards of Learning* results that they were mastering content when they were not actually at the level expected by most states. Because we’ve closed the “Honesty Gap,” parents and teachers will now have access to accurate information about how prepared their child is to move onto higher-level material and is on track to graduate ready for college, career and military. In addition to adopting stronger academic standards, and developing a more impactful accountability system, the Governor and State Board continue to support the return to high expectations by taking the following actions:

Raising proficiency cut scores from lowest in the nation to now aligned with NAEP-Proficient and with states with the highest expectations, as well as benchmarked to the entry requirements of Virginia employers, colleges and the military

Preparing students for success in life, Virginia is one of only **six states** that requires mastery of fundamental knowledge in reading, writing, and math to graduate

Investing nearly \$35M in schools to use proven efforts to raise student achievement in addition to the \$418M+ ALL In Virginia investment into high-intensity tutoring, expanding literacy, and combatting chronic absenteeism

In their **September** meeting, the Board of Education voted unanimously to raise proficiency cut scores and committed to a multi-year phase-in. The Board affirmed at the **November** meeting that the 2025-26 school year will serve as a planning year to help parents and teachers understand why high expectations matter and get more support to implement well for students. Virginia's expectations for mastery of content are now benchmarked to NAEP, to best-in-class state definitions, and to Virginia employer and college entry standards.

Next Steps:

On **December 11, 2025**, the Board will discuss and approve the final implementation plan.

VIRGINIA RAISES EXPECTATIONS WHILE OTHER STATES LOWER THEM:



“Colorado’s state board of education voted Wednesday to temporarily lower the passing score on high school math tests used to meet graduation requirements.”

Colorado Public Radio, 2024



“Illinois State Superintendent Tony Sanders said the move is not a lowering of standards, but rather adjusting to better match the reality of students’ abilities.”

Becky Vevea, Chalkbeat Chicago, 2025



“Students will no longer have to pass the MCAS exam to earn a diploma in Massachusetts.”

NBC 10 Boston, 2024



“Why are New York’s public school students showing steadily higher proficiency levels on state-administered tests when their scores on federal tests have been getting worse?”

Bill Hammond, Empire Center, 2025



“The most recent changes to the Wisconsin Academic Standards and state assessment have both lowered the bar for what we expect from our students and muddled the picture of student outcomes and school performance across years.”

Colleston Morgan, executive director of a Milwaukee-based education nonprofit, 2025



“The Oregon Department of Education has just decided that basic reading, writing and math skills are not required for students to graduate with a high school diploma.”

The Hill, 2023