**Educational Attainment and Community Leadership**

**Virginia PreK-12 Education: 2013 and Beyond**

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More than a million students are enrolled in Virginia’s public schools, and for many of those students Virginia’s current PreK-12 education system is producing positive outcomes. The number of students completing Advanced Placement (AP) tests in Virginia has risen from 57,530 in 2009-2012 to 67,805 in 2011-2012 (VDOE, 2012). In the past two years, the number of Virginia students enrolled in International Baccalaureate (IB) and Dual Enrollment courses, as well as the number in attendance at Governor’s Schools has also increased. Since 2010, the number of academies in Virginia focused on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) has doubled from the original six STEM Academies in 2008 to a total of seventeen academies in 2013. Starting in 2011-2012, students across the Commonwealth of Virginia were tested on more rigorous statewide standards in mathematics. This year, students will be tested on more rigorous content in English and science. Overall, Virginia’s on-time graduation rate for the class of 2012 was 88%, up 3.0% since 2009 (VDOE, 2012).

Virginia’s fourth and eighth-graders outperformed the nation on reading and math achievement on the National Assessment of Education Progress at both basic and proficient levels (SREB, 2012). In 2011-2012, 86% of third-grade students were reading on grade level; that is an increase of three percent since 2009-2010 (VDOE, 2012). Virginia’s Early Intervention Reading Initiative implementation of the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) assessment made Virginia the first in the nation to practice universal reading screening in grades K-3. Data from the PALS assessment help teachers target early intervention strategies in reading. The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has recently developed an Algebra Readiness Diagnostic Test (ARDT) that includes improved diagnostic and reporting features as well as technology-enhanced items.

In Virginia and across the nation, technology is rapidly changing how learning takes place through such innovations as blended learning environments and online coursework. Beginning with the ninth grade class of 2013-2014, graduation requirements for earning a standard or an advanced diploma will include the successful completion of at least one virtual course. As of September 2012, Virginia was one of only five states to require students to complete an online course in order to graduate. The other four states are Alabama, Florida, Idaho, and Michigan. Virginia is using technology to ensure equal access to education for all students. Virginia’s virtual school, Virtual Virginia (VVA), offersAP and other core academic and elective courses. VVA reported 6,460 course enrollments in credit-bearing courses in 2011-2012, up 2% from the previous school year. Over 64% of VVA’s enrollment is in AP courses (Evergreen Education Group, 2012).

The *Code of Virginia* allows school divisions to offer online instruction to students in multiple school divisions by entering into a contract with any private organization, educational institution, or nonprofit virtual school organization that has been approved by the superintendent of public instruction to operate as a multidivisional online provider. Criteria for approving and monitoring multidivisional online providers were approved by the Virginia Board of Education (VBOE) in 2010. Virginia students seeking a full-time online school can access Virginia’s Virtual Academy (VAVA), formed through a partnership between the Carroll County Public Schools and K12 Inc. located in Herndon, Virginia. Although virtual schools are a positive resource for many families, providers of full-time online schools have been criticized for not providing research-based evidence that students perform as well in a virtual setting as compared to a standard classroom.

Virginia is also expanding options to education through the development of charter schools. Currently Virginia has four public charter schools serving students in Albemarle and York counties and in the City of Richmond. Legislation from the 2013 Session of the Virginia General Assembly provides that charter school applications initiated by one or more local school boards are not subject to review by the Board of Education. An effort to give the Board of Education authority to establish charter schools was denied.

Providing all young learners access to preschool education is considered another key aspect of a successful PreK-12 program. In his 2013 State of the Union Address, President Obama announced a plan to provide preschool for all four-year old children living in the United States. Currently, Virginia’s preschool programs target students from low-income families. President Obama’s plan will likely include a cost sharing partnership with states to extend federal funds to expand high-quality public preschools.

Overall, Virginia’s system of education was ranked fourth in the nation on the Education Week: *Quality Counts* 2013 Report. Statewide school accreditation ratings in Virginia are based upon student performance on the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests and other approved assessments. Virginia is one of only four states that chose not to adopt the national Common Core standards, preferring instead to keep Virginia’s state standards in place. Alaska, Nebraska, and Texas have also not adopted the Common Core. Increasingly, determining the quality of education includes making international comparisons. Standardized tests like the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development are being used to provide a means for making global comparisons between education systems. Comparative international assessments can provide government’s with information necessary to make education policy that can result in preparing students for life and work in an increasingly global economy.

Of course, there are areas for growth and challenges to be addressed for Virginia’s schools to remain among top performing PreK-12 school programs. New legislation coming from the 2013 Virginia General Assembly includes creating school report cards to provide a clear rating system (A-F) for parents and educators. (The 2012 Virginia statewide report card is presented on page 5.) Chronically underperforming schools would become part of a new statewide division (The Opportunity Educational Institution) focused on turning around failing schools.

Virginia’s Board of Education recognizes that there remain persistent and disturbing achievement gaps among groups of students, specifically those from the African American and Hispanic communities. Although many achievement gaps have been narrowed, Virginia did not meet the 2012-2013 annual federal graduation indicator (FGI) requirements for all subgroups. Black students, students with limited English proficiency, and students with disabilities did not meet the FGI objective (VDOE, 2012). According to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB, 2012), from 2009 to 2011 gaps in reading achievement of fourth grade white and Hispanic students in Virginia widened. Data from the 2010 U.S. census finds Hispanics comprise 7.9% of Virginia’s population; a 91.7% change from 2000.

Achievement disparities also exist between students from low-income families and those from more affluent families. Successful strategies must be employed in schools to close those gaps among groups of students and to ensure that students at greatest risk of failure remain in school, graduate, and enroll in college or participate in some other post-secondary experience.

Another issue gaining national and local attention is school safety. In 2000, the *Code of Virginia* established the Virginia Center for School Safety (VCSS) which collects and analyzes school safety data and provides technical assistance to Virginia schools. More recently, in 2012 Governor McDonnell established the Task Force on Safety. The task force provided its recommendations in January 2013 and from those recommendations legislation was submitted and approved for the creation of threat-assessment teams in schools, mandatory lockdown drills and improvements to the school division safety audit process.

The statistics on violent crimes in Virginia schools is encouraging. The number of weapons offenses is down from 3,099 in 2009-2010 to 2,848 in 2011-2012 (VDOE, 2012). In fact, all offense categories were down in 2011-2012 from the previous year with the exception of the alcohol, tobacco, and other drug offenses category. Shootings and extreme violent acts are rare. More common is disruptive behavior. Nationally, school wide behavior management programs including Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) are challenging zero-tolerance policies and severe options for addressing misbehavior. In 2009, VDOE released the [*Functional Behavioral Assessment, Behavior Intervention Plans and Positive Intervention and Supports*](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/student_conduct/functional_behavioral_assessment.pdf) as a state guide to address misconduct.

Addressing challenges in PreK-12 education typically requires additional financial and human resources. Although the General Assembly provided additional funding for education in the 2013 session, local divisions continue to struggle with financial deficits resulting from the current national economic crisis. The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) 2013 report on Virginia compared to other states reported the Commonwealth of Virginia ranked 38th in state per pupil funding for PreK-12 and 21st in combined local and state funding. Data from the National Education Association (NEA) ranked Virginia 30th in average public school teacher salary for 2011-2012. Adjusting for inflation, the NEA estimates the average teacher salary in Virginia has decreased by 8.7% in the decade from 2001-02 to 2011-12.

Given the pressures placed on local school budgets across Virginia, utilizing resources effectively has become increasingly critical. Decisions often come with a cost. Salary increases must be weighed against other necessities, such as increasing the number of teacher positions and support staff, or expanding overpopulated facilities and classroom size. School leaders are under pressure to make such decisions with available resources. A 2012 JLARC study, *Encouraging Local Collaboration through State Incentives* cited examples of collaboration among school divisions as one strategy for reducing overall costs.

To maintain and improve its position in education, the Virginia Board of Education set the following goals in its most recent six year plan for education:

Virginia Board of Education Goals for 2012-2017:

**Goal 1: Accountability for Student Learning**  
**Goal 2: Rigorous Standards to Promote College and Career Readiness**  
**Goal 3: Expanded Opportunities to Learn**  
**Goal 4: Nurturing Young Learners**  
**Goal 5: Highly Qualified and Effective Educators**  
**Goal 6: Sound Policies for Student Success**  
**Goal 7: Safe and Secure Schools**

**Virginia Board of Education’s Report Card on Performance Measures for 2012**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Results 2011-2012** | **1 Year Trend** | **3 Year Trend**  **Change from 2009-2010** |
| **Percent of third-grade students reading on grade level** | **86%** | **↑ (3)** | **↑ (3)** |
| **Percent of 8th grade students taking Algebra I or higher in middle school** | **52.5%** | **↑ (3.7)** | **↑ (7.6)** |
| **Virginia on-time graduation rate** | **88%** | **↑ (1.4)** | **↑ (2.5)** |
| **High school dropout rate** | **6.5 %** | **↑ (-0.7)** | **↑ (-1.7)** |
| **Federal graduation indicator (students earning Advanced Studies or Standard Diplomas in at least four years)** | **82.9%** | **↑ (1.3)** | **↑ (3.1)** |
| **Percent of graduates earning advanced studies diplomas**  **9th grade cohort graduates earning advanced studies diploma** | **55%**  **48.6%** | **↔**  **↑ (1.3)** | **↑ (2.5)**  **↑ (2.9)** |
| **Percent of students scoring advanced proficient on statewide assessments**  **English (Reading and Writing)** | **35.1%** | **↓ (1.2)** | **↓ (1.4)** |
| **Mathematics** | **11.1%** | **NA1** | **NA** |
| **History and Social Science** | **29.1%** | **↑ (0.5)** | **NA2** |
| **Science** | **29.2%** | **↑ (0.7)** | **↑ (0.4)** |
| **Number of at-risk four-year-olds served by Virginia Preschool Initiative** | **16,618** | **↑ (737)** | **↑ (717)** |
| **Number of National Board Certified educators**  **Percentage of National Board Certified educators** | **1,890**  **1.96%** | **↑ (95)**  **↑ (0.14)** | **↑ (208)**  **↑ (0.27)** |
| **Number of CTE students who earned one or more Board-approved credential(s)** | **42,218** | **↑ (11,605)** | **↑ (17,963)** |
| **Percent of schools rated fully accredited** | **93%** | **↓ (3)3** | **↓ (5)4** |
| **Number of innovative options reviewed by the Board**  **Charter School Applications** | **3** | **↑ (3)** | **X5** |
| **College Lab School Applications** | **0** | **↔** | **X6** |
| **Governor's STEM or Health Science Academies** | **5** | **↑ (4)** | **↑ (5)** |
| **Percent of schools that maintain a passing rate on Virginia assessment tests of 95% or above in each of the four core academic areas** | **0.6%** | **↓ (3.02)** | **↓ (4.22)** |
| **Number of schools earning recognition under Virginia Index of Performance** | **4477** | **↓ (281)** | **↓ (275)** |
| **Number of schools that are chronically low performing by state and federal standards8** | **8 schools** | **↓ (1 school)** | **↑ (1 school)** |
| **Percent of schools and divisions meeting or exceeding federal accountability measures** | **68%** | **NA9** | **NA** |

**1 Represents 9th grade cohort**

**2 New, more rigorous Mathematics tests were implemented in 2011-2012.**

**3 New, more rigorous History and Social Science tests were implemented in 2010-2011.**

**4 Results of the new college-and career-ready mathematics tests, first introduced during 2011-2012, are included in the accreditation ratings**

**5 The Board introduced a "graduation and completion index" in 2010-2011 as a new accountability factor for high schools, in addition to student achievement on state tests**

**6 Process for Board review of charter school applications was not in place until January 2011**

**7 Process for Board review of college lab school applications was not in place until January 2011**

**8 The Board revised the criteria for awards in 2012 to promote an increasing focus on college and career readiness and STEM**

**9 Schools accredited with warning, denied accreditation, or conditional accreditation (not new) for 3 or more years**

**10 The Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) and related accountability requirements were established by the Board as part of the Commonwealth’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) flexibility waiver in 2012.**

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