



April 22, 2024

Secretary of Education Aimee Guidera  
Deputy Secretary of Education Emily Anne Gullickson  
Superintendent of Public Instruction Lisa Coons  
Members of the Board of Education  
Virginia Department of Education  
Patrick Henry Building  
1111 East Broad Street, 4th Floor  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Secretary Guidera, Deputy Secretary Gullickson, Superintendent Coons and Members of the Board of Education,

We strongly support the revised Accountability and Accreditation Framework. The current system is failing to provide the type of transparency families need to assess their child's school's performance while also complicating efforts to direct support to schools in greatest need.

We also applaud the Virginia Board of Education's decision to have the Framework give greater weight to mastery than growth. While both are important, it is critical that we move all students to mastery and not just journey toward it indefinitely.

We wanted to provide additional feedback on issues the Virginia Board of Education is currently discussing:

**1) Numeric Ratings Should Be Included.** We believe it is imperative to also assign one summative, numeric rating to schools that is clear and can be easily understood by families. In contrast, prose labels are neither clear nor precise. Maine's use of the words "Emerging, Developing, Meeting, Excelling" is confusing. For instance, which school performed better - an "emerging" or "developing" school? A significant number of parents and members of the public will have no idea. Furthermore, prose labels would be especially difficult for families whose first language is not English (notably, 25% of students at Arlington Public Schools are English Language Learners). Numeric rankings cross language barriers.

**2) We Strongly Prefer a 1-100 Numeric Scale.** Our strong preference is for a 1-100 numeric scale so that communities can see differences among schools within a school district, which could be obscured by using only 4 or 5 categories. (A similar alternative would be a 1-5 numeric scale with decimals to the tenths.) For instance, Arlington Public Schools generally does not produce school-by-school comparisons of academic results in their presentations to the public. The impediments to finding such information create

equity issues, considering such school-level comparisons often require complex data analysis using VDOE's Build A Table and/or Microsoft Excel.

**3) We Firmly Support a Mastery Index (vs. a Simplistic Proficiency Measure).** The use of a mastery index which weights differing student outcomes is critical in incentivizing districts to develop students to their full potential. At present, there is a focus on getting students to pass the SOL but no incentive to encourage students to more fully master material. Both the proposed Model One and Model Two Mastery Indices are a marked improvement to current practice.

**4) We Strongly Support the Middle School Advanced Coursework Readiness Indicator.** Every Virginia middle school student who is properly prepared for Algebra in middle school should have the opportunity to take it in middle school, something that civil rights leader Bob Moses referred to as a civil rights issue. A middle school advanced coursework readiness factor incentivizes Virginia school districts to offer Algebra to any properly prepared middle schooler (not just in 8th grade), and disincentivizes school districts from removing such crucial opportunities. It also will incentivize more robust Algebra readiness efforts, which are crucial for Virginia's future workforce. At the same time, we do support excluding from the denominator those kids who do not pass the Math 7 exam, similar to Florida's similar readiness factor noted in the proposed Board slides. As for an alternative advanced course, we think that Arlington Public Schools' 8th grade World Geography class for high school credit should be a great example for other Virginia school districts.

**5) Chronic Absenteeism Should Be a Key Part of The Readiness Factors,** especially for Kindergarten-Grade 8. Chronic absenteeism hurts individual students' academic performance and negatively impacts the classroom experience for all students. (Arlington Public Schools quantified the significant negative academic results for its chronically absent students [here](#).) It is critical to incentivize schools to ensure that all students receive the education they will need to thrive in post-secondary endeavors. In recent years, schools have taken actions that likely contribute to chronic absenteeism by reducing emphasis on student accountability – removing deadlines for homework, assigning minimum grades of 50, de-emphasizing study skills, loosely allowing for retakes of exams, and including many four-day weeks that de-emphasize the importance of regular attendance. By giving meaningful weight to chronic absenteeism in the framework, schools will have more incentive to restore student accountability.

**6) A Graduation Index Broader than FGI Should Be Used.** While the Federal Graduation Indicator (FGI) is required for certain purposes, it would be beneficial to use a broader measure similar to Virginia's Graduation Completion Index (GCI) where possible, as any student diploma or certificate of completion is a positive. Use of a GCI-like measure would also reduce districts' incentive to graduate students in four years even if they have unfinished learning, thus helping to maintain the integrity of a high school diploma.

**7) We Support Elementary and Middle School Research and Writing Performance Tasks.** We support the inclusion of research/writing performance tasks as an additive with current weighting emphasis on standardized test scores. We believe their inclusion will further incentivize Virginia schools to emphasize the development of these important skills. However, it will be important to have the performance tasks graded by state-level individuals and not by district teachers to ensure objectivity; we

also discourage use of AI for grading due to concerns around consistency and accuracy, among other unknowns. We recommend against tasks involving multimedia presentations or multimodal literacies as this could dilute the focus on critical research/writing skills.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments and for the excellent work that you are doing on behalf of Virginia's students.

Thank you,

Arlington Parents for Education

Board:

Alison Babb

Sheila Kelly

Sheila Leonard

Amy Rzepka

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