



# Education Reform in Virginia: The Need and the Opportunity

February 2019

# Virginia has sought to improve its public K-12 education system through a variety of investments and initiatives

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Virginia received a U.S. Department of Education federal Preschool Development Grant (PDG) to serve additional at-risk four-year-olds

Virginia created the Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports (VTSS) to provide social-emotional supports needed for a school to be an effective learning environment for all students

The Virginia Board of Education has approved nine Governor's STEM Academies, eight Governor's Health Science Academies and one Governor's Health Science Academy.

The Virginia Board of Education developed the Profile of a Virginia Graduate to set standards for the knowledge, skills, competencies, and experiences students should attain during their K-12 education

# Nonetheless, Virginia's progress on key outcome measures has been anemic — and masks troubling gaps

20 years ago

**26 pts** GR4 Reading  
FRL Gap

**23 pts** GR8 Math  
FRL Gap

**Worse\***

Today

**26 pts** GR4 Reading  
FRL Gap

**29 pts** GR8 Math  
FRL Gap

**82%**

of high school  
students graduated  
in four years

**Better**

**87%**

of high school  
students graduated  
in four years

**72%**

of high school  
graduates go to  
college

**Worse**

**70%**

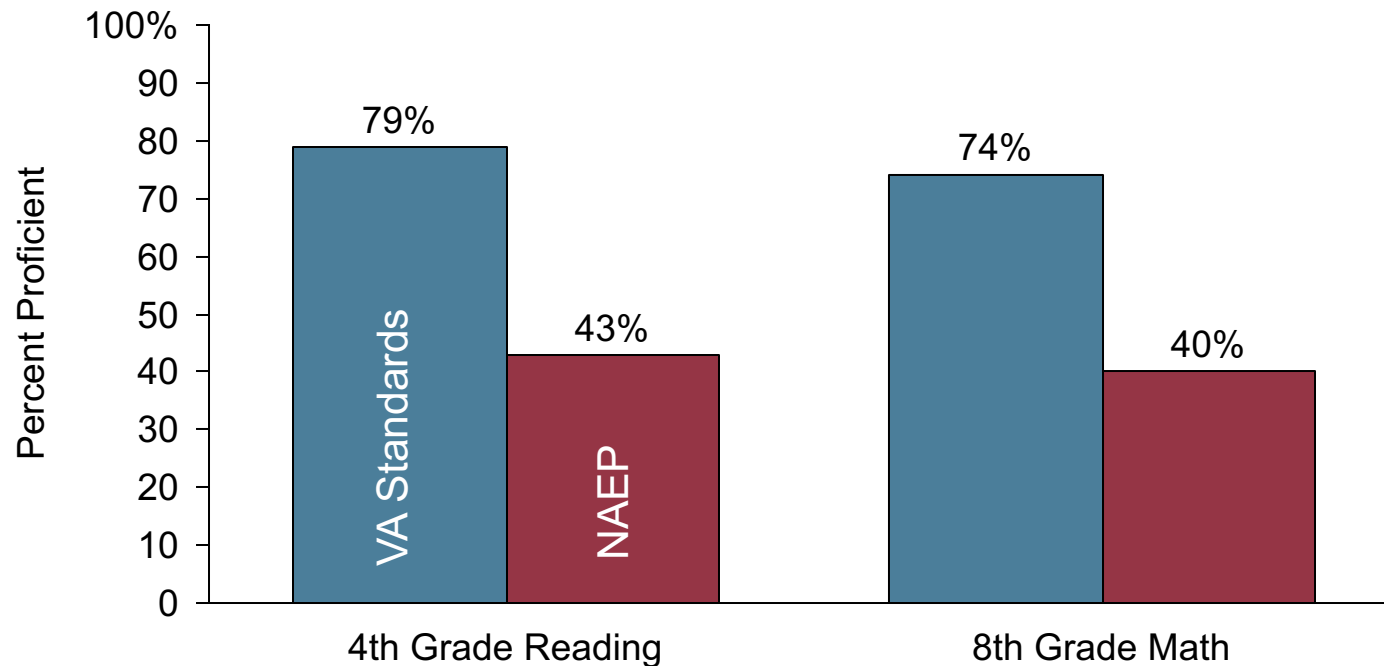
of high school  
graduates go to  
college

\*Proficiency gap between students who do/do not qualify for FRL

Sources: NAEP, VA\DOE, NCES

# Virginia's Standards of Learning set a low bar for what students should know and be able to do

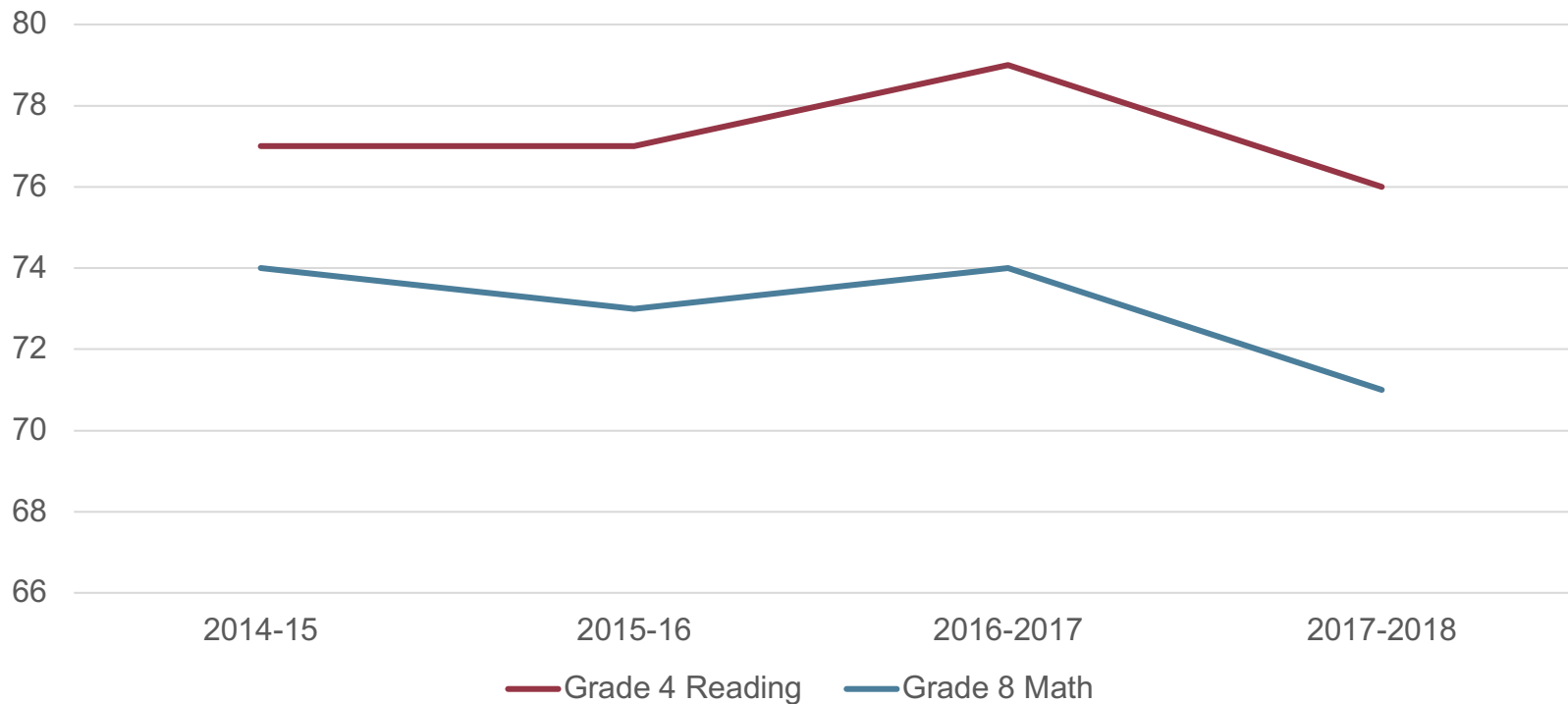
Virginia's Standards of Learning tests are not aligned with the level of performance today's students need to be prepared for post-secondary opportunities or complete with international peers.



# During SY2017-2018, standards of learning pass rates decreased

Changes from 2017 to 2018 include: updated test delivery system and completed implementation of computer adaptive testing

### Virginia SOL Pass Rates\*



\*Passing score: raw score of at least 400 points out of 600 possible

# At the same time changes in requirements for school accreditation made it easier for schools to become accredited

Under the revised accreditation system, performance is measured on multiple school quality indicators and encourages continuous improvement for all schools

For the 2018-2019 school year, 92% of Virginia schools were fully accredited (all school quality indicators at either Level 1 or Level 2), compared to 86% under the old accreditation system

## Level 1

Meets or exceeds state standard or sufficient improvement

## Level 2

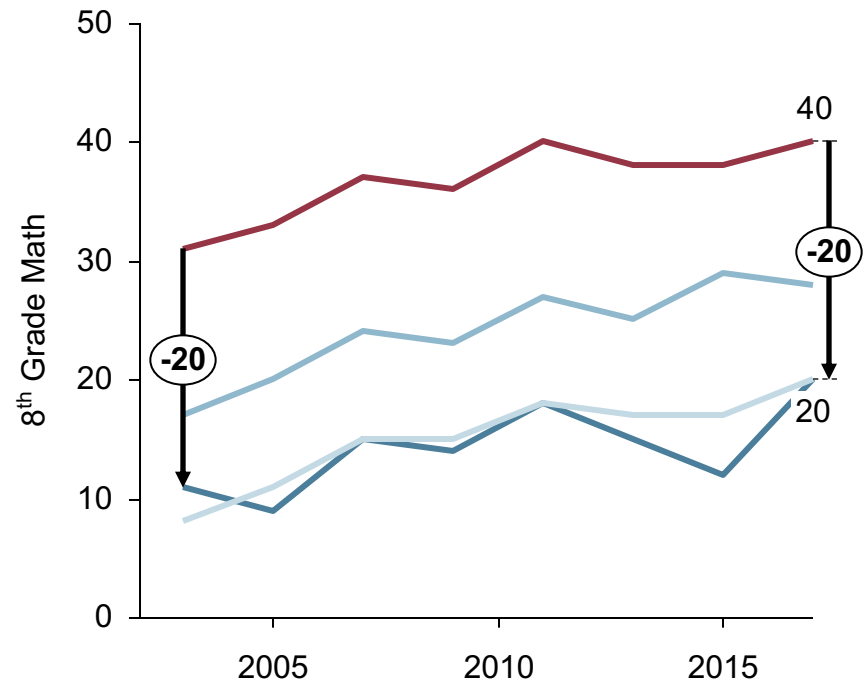
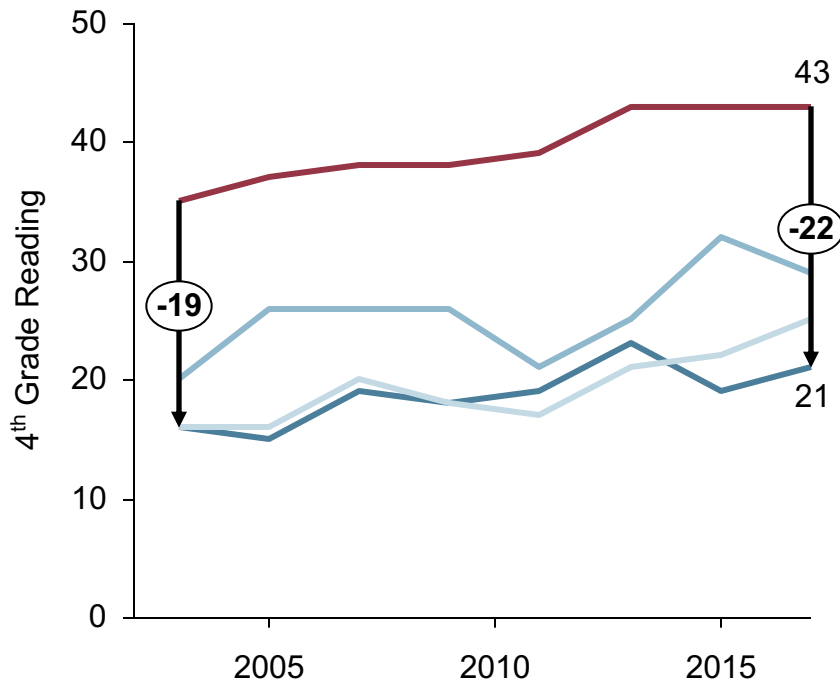
Near state standard or sufficient improvement

## Level 3

Below state standard

# The 2017 NAEP shows that Virginia is struggling to support low-income students and students of color

Virginia's overall performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress has improved since 2000, but achievement gaps have remained large



— All students      — Hispanic students  
— Black students      — Economically disadvantaged students

Sources: NAEP

# Achievement gaps in elementary and secondary school manifest again in high school graduation rates

Of every 100 ninth graders in Virginia...



92 of all ninth graders will graduate

90 of black ninth graders will graduate

81 of Hispanic ninth graders will graduate

Currently, Less than three quarters (71 percent) of high poverty high schools offer at least one AP or IB class compared to 99 percent of low poverty high schools.



# And overall graduation rates obscure important differences in diploma requirements

## Advanced Studies Diploma

Student must earn at least 26 standard units of credit and at least five verified units of credit. Student must also complete one virtual course.

## Standard Diploma

Students must earn 22 standard units of credit, at least five verified credits, a board-approved career and technical education credential, and one virtual course.

## Modified Standard Diploma

Intended for certain students at the secondary level who have a disability and are unlikely to meet the credit requirements for a Standard Diploma.

## Applied Studies Diploma

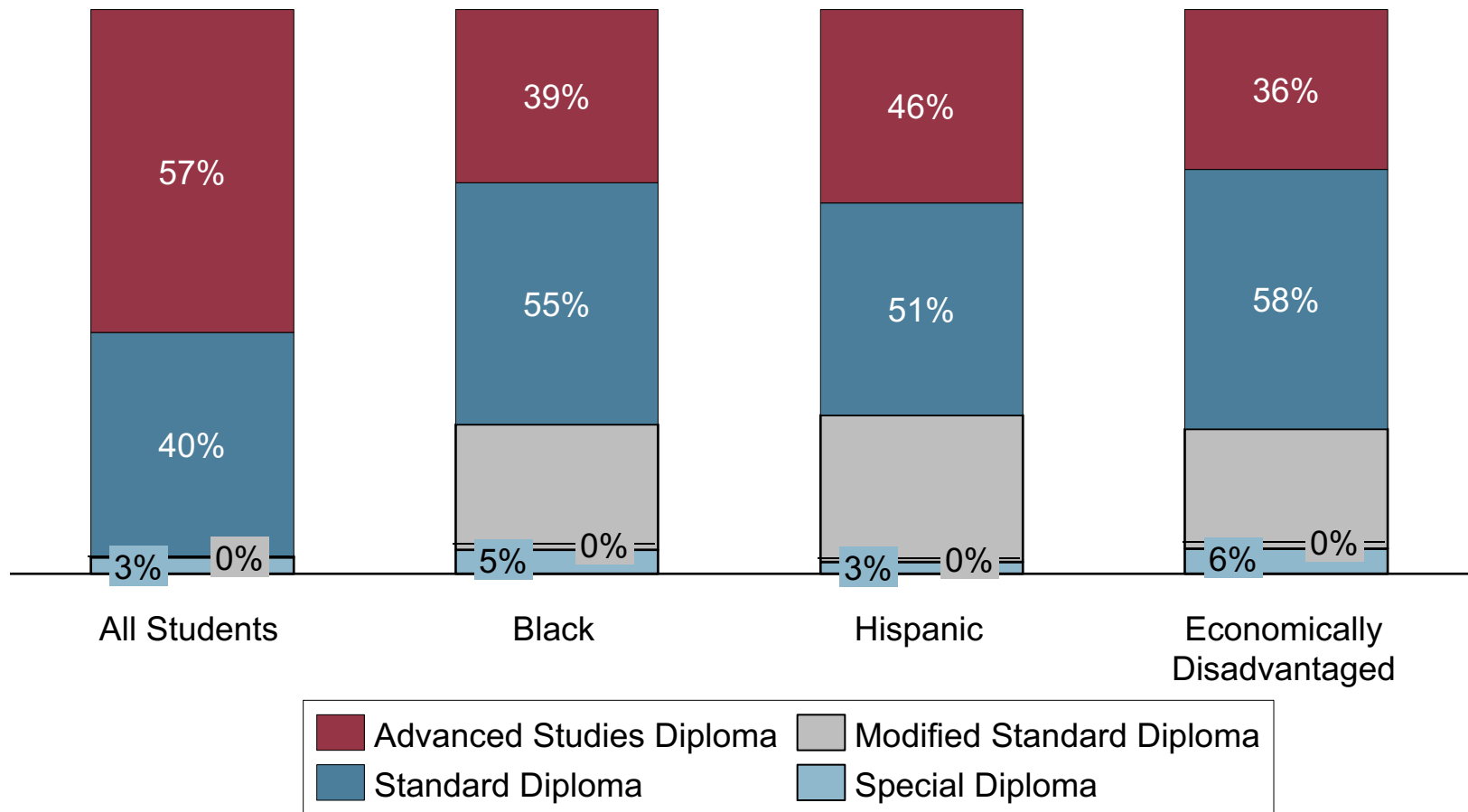
Available to students identified as having a disability who complete the requirements of their individualized education programs (IEPs) and meet certain requirements prescribed by the Board of Education.

## General Achievement Adult Diploma

Intended for individuals who are at least 18 years of age and not enrolled in public school or not otherwise meeting the compulsory school attendance requirements.

# In fact, low-income students and students of color are significantly more likely to earn a diploma of lower rigor

## Graduates from the 2014-15 9<sup>th</sup> grade cohort



# Many of those who do graduate are nonetheless unprepared for postsecondary education



Virginia spends **\$37,036,000** per year on out-of-pocket costs for remedial education.



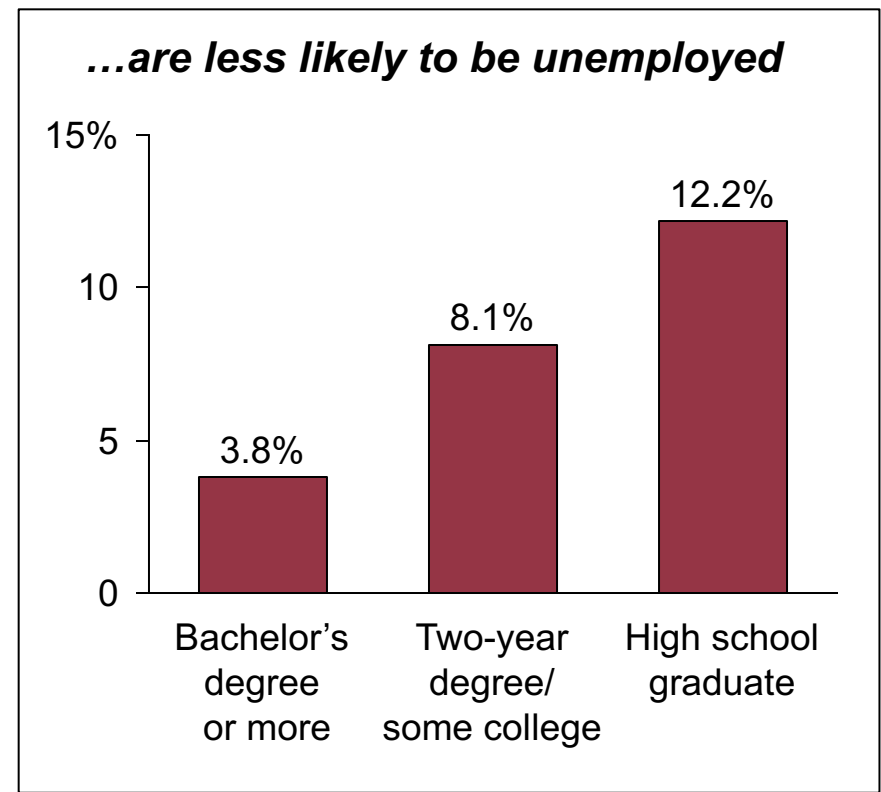
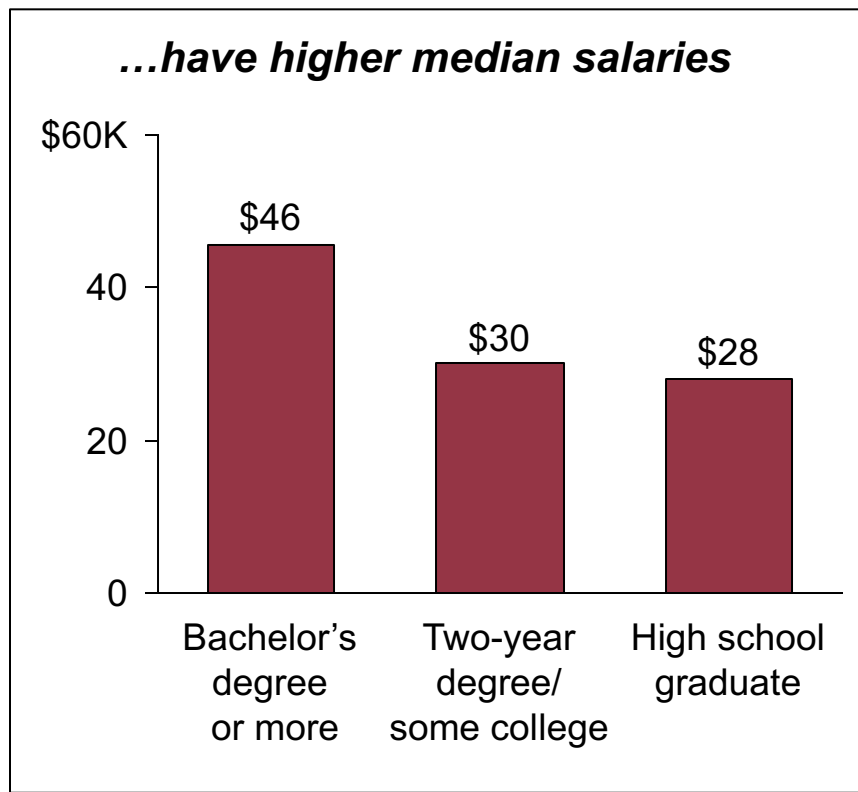
Of Virginia's first-time students enrolled in postsecondary education, **39%** require remedial courses.



Of those who enroll in remedial courses, just **55%** receive a degree within six years, compared to 71% of students who do not.

# Post-secondary education is increasingly important for achieving a family-supporting income

***For the rising Millennial generation, those with bachelor's or associate's degrees...***



# Unfortunately, many Virginia students are ill prepared for 21<sup>st</sup> century economy

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81% of Virginia's jobs are middle- or high-skill and require some postsecondary education or training

## ***However...***

Only 45% of Virginia adults have an associate's degree or higher

Only 45% of Virginia's high school graduates meet all four of the ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks

***“Leaders must wake people out of inertia.  
They must get people excited about  
something they've never seen before,  
something that does not yet exist.”***

***- Rosabeth Moss Kantor***

# While other states are stepping up their educational game, Virginia risks falling behind

22 states and D.C. now require ALL students to meet college and career ready graduation requirements in English (4 years) and math (at least 3 years through Algebra 2 or the equivalent). Virginia does not. Only 52% of Virginia students meet this standard.

Moreover, respected national organizations give Virginia poor grades for its policies on teacher effectiveness, charter schools, accountability, and financial equity

**C+**

From NCTQ on  
teacher preparation  
programs

**94 / 240**

From NAPCS on  
state charter law

**15 / 45**

From Bellwether on  
ESSA accountability  
plan

**F**

From Education Law  
Center on Funding  
Equity

# Public opinion suggests support for strengthening (most of) these policies, but its up to policymakers to act

## Among Virginians...

- 69 percent would be willing to contribute more in taxes to maintain current levels of education funding; 52 percent would be willing to contribute more in taxes to *increase* funding.
- 55 percent would be willingness to pay more in taxes to target additional funding to high-poverty, low-performing schools.
- 45 percent opposed a constitutional amendment “in order to give charter schools more independence from local school boards on decisions about hiring and firing teachers in charter schools” and only 40 percent favored such a change.
- 61 percent think that, when rating public schools, there should be more emphasis on how much students improve overall, compared to 33 percent who thought more emphasis should be placed on how many students reach a particular level of proficiency.
- 55 percent agree that Virginia’s Standards of Learning hold schools accountable for student achievement