



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## BOARD OF EDUCATION

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*Christian N. Braunlich*  
*President*

December 17, 2014

The Honorable R. Steven Landes  
Chairman, House Committee on Education  
P.O. Box 12  
Verona, Virginia 24482

The Honorable Stephen H. Martin  
Chairman, Senate Committee on Education and Health  
P.O. Box 700  
Chesterfield, Virginia 23832

Dear Delegate Landes and Senator Martin:

On behalf of the Board of Education, I am pleased to transmit a preliminary plan for an A-to-F school performance grading system, submitted pursuant to amendments to § 2 of Chapter 672 and Chapter 692 of the Acts of Assembly of 2013.

Legislation enacted by the 2014 General Assembly delayed the reporting of school grades required by the 2013 Acts of the Assembly from October 2014 to October 2016. The legislation further directed the Virginia Board of Education to consider: (1) the inclusion of additional factors in deriving the school grades; and (2) the provision of multiple grades for each school rather than a single grade in the development of the school grading formula. Pursuant to the legislation, the Board has developed a preliminary plan for an A-to-F school performance grading system.

As the Board worked to meet the requirements of this legislation, it has struggled to develop a metric that would accurately capture a variety of factors that help to describe how Virginia's schools are meeting the varied educational needs of our students. The Board has concluded that utilizing a single letter grading system attempts to oversimplify and assign values to what are very complicated factors that Virginia schools work to address each and every day as they strive to meet the educational needs of each individual student.

The Honorable R. Steven Landes  
The Honorable Stephen H. Martin  
December 17, 2014  
Page 2 of 2

The Board is committed to redesigning our existing report card so that it is a better tool for communicating that myriad of factors but also so it will be understandable for our parents, our educators and our communities. Possible considerations include: (1) color coding the data so a quick look may highlight areas of concern, accomplishment and excellence; (2) creating a dashboard to give quick highlights as well as including detail for those who would like to explore the data in greater depth; (3) determining what is required to be included on the report card and what is not; and (4) exploring both the priority and placement of the many data points, to name just a few of the possible considerations.

While the Board believes that a report card which sets out multiple and varied factors and includes data points without assigning a grade can give parents, educators and the community a fuller understanding of how each school is meeting the educational needs of each of their individual students, the enclosed plan is being submitted in response to the legislative mandate.

Thank you for your continued support of the students of the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christian N. Braunlich', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Christian N. Braunlich

CNB/ml



**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**REPORT**

**Plan for the Development of an A - F  
School Grading System for Virginia  
Public Schools Approved by the  
Virginia Board of Education**

**JANUARY 1, 2015**

**The Virginia Board of Education**

## Introduction

Originally, House Bill 1999/Senate Bill 1207, as passed in the 2013 session of the General Assembly, required that the Board of Education report individual school performance using a grading system that included the standards of accreditation, state and federal accountability requirements, and student growth indicators in assigning grades. The grading system was to be based on an A-to-F grading scale. The Board was to (i) assign a grade from A to F to each public school in the Commonwealth; (ii) make both the system and the grade assigned to each school in the Commonwealth available to the public; and (iii) report to the General Assembly a summary of the system and the assigned grades. Student growth was defined as (i) whether individual students on average fell below, met, or exceeded an expected amount of growth based on a statewide average or reference base year on state assessments or additional assessments approved by the Board; (ii) maintained a proficient or advanced proficient performance level on state assessments; or (iii) made significant improvement within the below basic or basic level of performance on reading or mathematics assessments as determined by the Board. The Board did develop a grading system in response to that legislative requirement.

In the 2014 session of the General Assembly, House Bill 1229/Senate Bill 324 amended the law to require that the Board develop a preliminary plan for an A-F school performance grading system. In developing the system, the Board can consider (i) the standards of accreditation, (ii) state and federal accountability requirements, (iii) state-mandated assessments, (iv) any alternative assessments developed or approved for use by the relevant local school board, (v) student growth indicators, (vi) student mobility, (vii) the experience and qualifications of school staff, (viii) total cost and funding per pupil, (ix) school safety, and (x) any other factors that the Board deems necessary to produce a full and accurate grade for each public elementary and secondary school in the Commonwealth. Further, the Board shall also address, in consultation with the legislative education committees, whether to assign a single grade per school or assign multiple grades based on multiple factors.

The requirements of the 2014 legislation are provided below.

*An Act to amend and reenact § 2 of Chapter 672 and § 2 of Chapter 692 of the Acts of Assembly of 2013, relating to a grading system for individual school performance; delay.*

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 2 of Chapter 672 of the Acts of Assembly of 2013 is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 2. The Board of Education, by October 1, 2016, shall report individual school performance using a grading system that is based on an A-to-F scale. *No later than January 1, 2015, the Board shall develop and submit to the Chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education and Health a preliminary plan for an A-to-F school performance grading system.*

*The Board, in developing the school performance grading system, can consider (i) the standards of accreditation, (ii) state and federal accountability requirements, (iii) state-mandated assessments, (iv) any alternative assessments developed or approved for use by the relevant local school board, (v) student growth indicators, (vi) student mobility, (vii) the experience and qualifications of school staff, (viii) total cost and funding per pupil, (ix) school safety, and (x) any other factors that the Board deems necessary to produce a full and accurate grade for each public elementary and secondary school in the Commonwealth.*

*As part of its preliminary plan, the Board shall also determine, in consultation with the House Committee on Education and the Senate Committee on Education and Health, whether to (a) assign a single letter grade to each school or (b) assign a series of letter grades to each school based on some or all of the factors in clauses (i) through (x) or any combination of such factors. No later than July 1, 2015, the Board shall provide notice and solicit public comment on the preliminary school performance grading system plan.*

*No later than December 1, 2015, the Board shall finalize the school performance grading system, make a summary of the system available to the public, and submit a summary of the system to the Chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education and Health. No later than October 1, 2016, and each October 1 thereafter, the Board shall assign a grade or a series of grades to each public elementary and secondary school in the Commonwealth and make such grades available to the public.*

As the Board worked to meet the requirements of this legislation, it has struggled to develop a metric that would accurately capture a variety of factors that help to describe how Virginia's schools are meeting the varied educational needs of our students. The Board has concluded that utilizing a single letter grading system attempts to over-simplify and assign values to what are very complicated factors that Virginia schools work to address each and every day as they strive to meet the educational needs of each individual student.

The Board is committed to redesigning our existing report card so that it is a better tool for communicating that myriad of factors that our schools work to address each and every day but also so it will be understandable for our parents, our educators and our communities. Possible considerations include: (1) color coding the data so a quick look may highlight areas of concern, accomplishment and excellence; (2) creating a dash board to give a quick highlight as well as including detail for those who would like to explore the data in greater depth; (3) determining what is required to be included on the report card and what is not; and (4) exploring both the priority and placement of the many data points, to name just a few of the possible considerations.

While the Board believes that a report card which sets out multiple and varied factors and includes data points without assigning a grade can give parents, educators and the community a fuller understanding of how each school is meeting the educational needs of each of their individual students, the following plan is being submitted in response to the legislative mandate.

## Planned Steps in Developing an A-F Grading System in Response to 2014 Legislation

### Compare Requirements of 2014 Legislation to A-F Grading System Adopted in 2013

As a first step in preparing a plan to address the 2014 legislation, the requirements of the 2014 legislation will be compared to the A-F school grading formula adopted by the Virginia Board of Education in 2013. The purpose of this comparison will be to determine similarities and differences and action steps necessary to meet the requirements of 2014 legislation. The requirements of the 2013 Acts of Assembly are provided below.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

*1. § 1. The Board of Education shall approve student growth indicators by July 31, 2013. The Department of Education shall provide a report to the Governor and the General Assembly on the approval of the student growth indicators and their uses by December 1, 2013. The growth indicators shall be used in the standards of accreditation of schools and in teacher evaluations.*

*§ 2. The Board of Education shall report individual school performance using a grading system that includes the standards of accreditation, state and federal accountability requirements, and student growth indicators in assigning grades. The grading system shall be based on an A-to-F grading scale. The Board, by October 1, 2014, shall (i) assign a grade from A to F to each public school in the Commonwealth; (ii) make both the system and the grade assigned to each school in the Commonwealth available to the public; and (iii) report to the General Assembly a summary of the system and the assigned grades.*

*§ 3. As used in this act, for purposes of assigning grades, "student growth" means (i) whether individual students on average fall below, meet, or exceed an expected amount of growth based on a statewide average or reference base year on state assessments or additional assessments*

*approved by the Board; (ii) maintaining a proficient or advanced proficient performance level on state assessments; or (iii) making significant improvement within the below basic or basic level of performance on reading or mathematics assessments as determined by the Board.*

The Virginia School Grading System adopted in 2013 assigned a single letter grade, A-F, to Virginia public schools that are part of the state accreditation system. The grading system incorporated the legislative requirements by combining three primary focus areas that are important for students' long-term school and life success:

- 1) Proficiency of a school's students in core content areas of mathematics, English (reading and writing), science, and history and social science as measured by passing rates on statewide assessments
- 2) Growth or learning gains of an elementary or middle school's students in reading and mathematics as measured by year--to-year ("growth") on state assessments
- 3) College and career readiness of a high school's students as measured by indicators that students have graduated with college and career ready credentials, or are progressing on a pathway to graduating from high school prepared for college and careers.

### Research Other States' A - F School Grading Systems

Department staff will identify states that have implemented A - F school grading systems, including those which assign one overall grade and those which assign multiple grades. These systems will be reviewed to determine relevance to Virginia's plan.

### Evaluate Potential Inclusion of Additional Data Elements

Virginia Department of Education staff will 1) determine the availability of additional data elements required in the 2014 legislation through existing data collections and 2) identify those elements that would require the collection of additional information from school divisions. In addition, the Department staff will review current research on indicators of school quality to determine the



relevance of the data elements included in the 2014 legislation to school success. Finally, the Board will secure legal advice on any issues associated with the use of data not maintained by the Virginia Department of Education in the grading formula.

#### Consult with Education Committees of the General Assembly

As required by the 2014 legislation, the Board will consult with the House Committee on Education and the Senate Committee on Education and Health to determine whether to assign one grade or multiple grades. The results of this consultation will be used to further refine the plan.

#### Engage Stakeholders

By July 1, 2015, the Board will provide notice and solicit public comment on the school grading system from stakeholders, such as school division staff, educational organizations, parents, students, citizens, businesses, and representatives from higher education.

#### Finalize the A - F School Grading System and Report Grades

By December 1, 2015, the Board will finalize the school grading system, make a summary of this system available to the public, and submit a summary of the system to the Chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education and Health. By October 1, 2016, and each October 1 thereafter the Board will report a grade(s) for each public school.