



*Commonwealth of Virginia
Office of the Governor*

Executive Order

NUMBER FOUR (2026)

COMMITTING TO ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND AFFIRMING THE COMMONWEALTH'S COMMITMENT TO PROVIDING A HIGH-QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS

By virtue of the authority vested in me as Governor under Article V of the Constitution of Virginia and under the laws of the Commonwealth, including, but not limited to, §§ 2.2-103 and 2.2-110 of the *Code of Virginia*, I hereby announce a comprehensive approach to academic excellence in the Commonwealth and affirm the rights of parents, students, and teachers to a high-quality public education in a safe and welcoming environment conducive to learning.

Importance of the Initiative

Every child, along with their parents and guardians, deserves the assurance that their education will meet rigorous standards and equip them with the knowledge and skills needed for a successful future. As such, the Virginia Constitution directs the Commonwealth to seek to ensure its public schools deliver a high-quality education. Yet, despite progress, Virginia still has meaningful work to do.

Thanks to the dedicated efforts of our educators, principals, and school system leaders, Virginia has made significant gains in literacy since the General Assembly passed the landmark Virginia Literacy Act in 2022. However, far too many students still struggle to read at grade level. In the 2024-2025 school year, less than three-quarters of Virginia students met state benchmarks on the Standards of Learning (SOL) reading assessment. Rates are even lower for students who are low-income, Black, Hispanic, or have disabilities.

The challenges facing our Commonwealth's students extend beyond reading. According to the Education Recovery Scorecard, Virginia is ranked last in the nation in supporting students' math recovery since the COVID-19 pandemic. One-third of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds could not meet grade-level benchmarks in math, and more than half of English learners and students with disabilities struggled to meet benchmark expectations.

Virginia students are as capable as any students in the nation. These numbers show the need to improve outcomes, better support our 87,000 educators, and continually measure progress along the way. Without immediate, focused action, these setbacks in learning will only compound, leaving students without the foundational skills necessary for post-secondary education, career, and civic life. To ensure every child is able to meet their full potential, the Commonwealth must maintain an accountability and support system that directs additional resources to schools with the greatest need. In the first year of implementation of the School Performance and Support Framework ("SPSF"), more than 350 schools were identified to receive additional support and resources because one or more individual groups of students, like students from low-income backgrounds or students with disabilities, were falling behind. Eighty Virginia schools were identified as needing comprehensive support.

These schools and educators proudly serve Virginia's most vulnerable students and communities. They require practical, effective resources and tools to ensure all their students have access to high-quality instruction every day. These schools should be the priority for supportive services that address the unique and diverse challenges their students face. The SPSF must provide useful tools, resources, and funding – and the impact must be measurable. Educators should be provided with high-quality instructional materials, receive targeted professional development and coaching from qualified individuals, and be supported by effective instructional leaders like principals or specialists at every level.

By investing in these schools and empowering educators with the practical and useful tools and guidance they need, we can support every student to read and do math on grade level, build their confidence, deepen their engagement in school, and ensure that they all – regardless of zip code and circumstance – have the opportunity to succeed.

Directive

Pursuant to the authority vested in me as the Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth, and pursuant to Article V of the Constitution of Virginia and the laws of the Commonwealth, I hereby direct the following actions.

Commonwealth Listening Tour

The Secretary of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction shall host a statewide listening tour within the first 100 days of this order to hear directly from students, parents, educators, school leaders, superintendents, school board members, and community members about the challenges and successes facing their schools. The Secretary and the Superintendent are directed to summarize the findings of these listening sessions and report back to the Office of the Governor.

Committing to Academic Excellence

Literacy

Since the passage of the Virginia Literacy Act, teachers, principals, system leaders, and partners have worked tirelessly to implement its directives and have made notable gains in literacy. To sustain and build upon these gains, the Superintendent of Public Instruction must promptly address operational challenges and deepen stakeholder engagement. To this end, the Superintendent shall convene a state advisory workgroup consisting of, at minimum, local school divisions, special education experts, English language learner experts, higher education, education associations, K-8 teachers, and literacy researchers to strengthen implementation of the Virginia Literacy Act. The workgroup shall:

- Recommend improvements to the student reading plan process and implementation, especially in the middle grades;
- Provide input to the Department of Education as they update student reading plan guidance and templates to align specific Virginia Language and Literacy Screening System skill deficits with evidence-based interventions;
- Advise the Department of Education on ways to continue to strengthen VAConnects to ensure that the technology meets the needs of the field and that data are being used to improve student outcomes; and
- Help the Department of Education elevate the importance of early literacy in partnership with associations, divisions, parents, and others.

Math

The Superintendent of Public Instruction shall provide an update to the Office of the Governor on the Department of Education's mathematics work in response to directives in the 2025 state budget, including staffing and grant awards, within 30 days of the effective date of this Executive Order. This update shall also include information from all the Mathematics Advisory Task Force's 2025 and 2026 meetings and the current plan to develop a task force report. The Department of Education is further directed to expedite the implementation of credentialing changes to increase the number of educators qualified to teach advanced mathematics in middle school, as authorized in 2025 legislation.

School Accountability

The Secretary of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction shall present the results of an after-action report to the Office of the Governor and the Board of Education on lessons learned from year 1 of implementation of the SPSF and an action plan to consider and incorporate recommendations from the JLARC December 2025 report. This update must also address how the Superintendent will consistently and effectively implement a state program to support the improvement of schools in need of support, including clear and transparent implementation metrics. This update must be provided before submitting any accountability changes to the federal government.

The Secretary of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction shall consult, at minimum, accountability and technical experts, Virginia parents, division and school leaders, educators, representatives of students (including disability and civil rights groups), community organizations, and state and local officials.

Assessment

The Secretary of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction shall convene the innovative assessment workgroup within 60 days of the effective date of this Executive Order and shall continue to convene the workgroup on a quarterly basis. The innovative assessment workgroup shall serve as an advisory board to the Department of Education as the Department finalizes the legislatively mandated report on a new assessment system, in collaboration with WestEd, and to the Office of the Governor with respect to budgeting priorities for a new assessment contract.

The Secretary of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction shall evaluate the existing membership of the innovative assessment workgroup and appoint new members as needed to ensure a diverse range of perspectives and representation.

Affirming Student, Parent, and Teacher Protections and Rights in Virginia's Public Education System

The Secretary of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction are directed to support local school divisions in affirming student, parent, and teacher protections and rights in Virginia's public education system by providing the following:

- Excellent educational experiences to open up opportunities and enable every child and every student to fulfill their potential and achieve a successful future;
- Recognition and elevation of educators, principals, and school leaders;
- High-quality instruction and wraparound services centered on meeting all students' needs, regardless of their background or circumstances;
- Policies and regulations aimed at increasing accessibility and preventing discrimination for all students, including historically marginalized students;
- High-quality curricula that cover history accurately and completely to ensure Virginia learners are equipped to be active and informed citizens in their communities;
- Services to support student well-being, independence, learning, and achievement;
- Efforts to close gaps in learning and address contributing factors to disparities in outcomes, including discriminatory policies, resource inequities and opportunity gaps, and other factors;
- Policies to expand and promote access and excellence in early childhood options and public schools, including schools that rely on selective admissions practices;

- Reminders of the provisions in federal law barring federal involvement in curricula in the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, the *General Education Provisions Act*, and the *Department of Education Organization Act*;
- Real-time and actionable data to support children and learners from birth through grade 12 and beyond to ensure that supports meet the individual needs of the students and schools; and
- Technical assistance, timely responses, and meaningful dialogue with divisions to improve opportunities for children and students.

Effective Date of the Executive Order

This Executive Order shall become effective upon its signing and shall remain in full force and effect until amended or rescinded by further executive order. Executive Order No. 1 (2022) is hereby rescinded.

Given under my hand and under the Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia this 17th day of January 2026.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Abigail D. Spanberger".

Abigail D. Spanberger, Governor

Attest:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer B. Moon".

Jennifer B. Moon, Secretary of the Commonwealth