

# **Virginia's Plan to Ensure Excellent Educators for All Students**

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# ***VIRGINIA'S PLAN TO ENSURE EXCELLENT EDUCATORS FOR ALL STUDENTS***

## **Section 1: Introduction**

Virginia consistently ranks as one of the top states in the nation in overall educational quality and performance in *Education Week's* annual Quality Counts report and receives frequent acclaim nationally for its effective educational policies and practices. Virginia has continued to develop a strong educational system spanning early pre-K learning through advanced coursework at some of the premier higher education institutions in the country. Crucial to the state's educational success is the high quality of its teaching force. Providing a highly qualified and effective teacher in every classroom is an integral component of Virginia's ongoing efforts to ensure all children receive a first-class education.

Several factors impacting teacher equity deserve concerted attention. As veteran teachers and principals retire, Virginia is working to ensure an adequate number of skilled educators are available and well prepared to enter the profession to fill those vacancies. However, the state must also be prepared to grow the pipeline of educators due to expected growth across the Commonwealth. According to the *Enrollment Projections for Virginia Public Schools, 2009-2010 to 2014-2015* from the Demographics and Workforce Group at the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Services, enrollment in Virginia's public schools has increased steadily for the past ten years, and projections for the next five years indicate this trend will continue. Total student enrollment increased from 1.21 million to 1.27 million students in the 2014-2015 school year alone. Consequently, it is critical that the state maintains focus on efforts to recruit, retain, and support effective educators for the growing demand.

Virginia's public schools are also challenged by the changing demographic shifts that indicate an increasingly diverse population. Important demographic trends that have implications for Virginia's public schools include:

- English language learners (ELLs) - In Virginia, the ELL population has almost quadrupled since 1998. In 1998-1999, the number of ELLs was 26,525. By 2013-2014, that number had almost quadrupled to 93,746.
- Economically disadvantaged students - The economically disadvantaged student population has grown significantly from 331,088 in 2003-2004, to nearly 510,054 in 2013-2014.
- Students with disabilities - The number of students with disabilities has increased slightly from 157,929 in 2003-2004 to 161,538 in 2013-2014.

With these data trends in mind, it is incumbent on the state to ensure each of these students has access to high quality educators who are well prepared to meet each student's unique needs. These efforts are important in all schools, but particularly critical in our state's high-poverty and high-minority schools, which traditionally experience the most challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers.

By 2006, in accordance with Section 1111(b)(8)(C) under Title I, Part A, of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA), as amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), states were required to develop plans to ensure that “poor and minority students are not taught at disproportionate rates by unqualified, inexperienced, or out-of-field teachers.” Virginia developed its initial teacher equity plan at that time which provided baseline information on the state of teacher quality in the Commonwealth on the measures outlined in the statute from a state, regional, and school level perspective. Updates were posted to the plan in 2009, 2010, and 2012, outlining progress made on each of the measures, as well as updates related to the specific strategies and initiatives implemented to improve teacher and principal quality.

While the state has made significant progress in closing and even reversing several gaps that were evident in the initial plan, Virginia recognizes that ongoing efforts are necessary to bridge remaining gaps and engage in deeper analysis. This involves examining contextual factors at a regional, school division, and school level, with the ultimate goal of improving overall student achievement through ensuring all students have equitable access to high quality educators.

In July 2014, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced the *Excellent Educators for All Initiative* which included a requirement for all states to develop revised teacher equity plans. Draft guidance was provided to states in November 2014. In preparing for the development of the current equity plan, Virginia has undertaken the following steps:

1. Convened an internal Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) equity workgroup (internal VDOE Workgroup) in December 2014 to review the draft guidance provided by the United States Department of Education (USED);
2. Reviewed the state’s previous plan, its updates, and strategy implementation to identify areas of progress and areas potentially in need of additional focus;
3. Reviewed the state educator data profiles provided by USED, based on 2011-2012 data, and more recent pertinent data available at the state level to conduct a data analysis to determine equity gaps for the initial plan development;
4. Participated in webinars and other technical assistance opportunities provided by USED and the Equitable Access Support Network (EASN);
5. Convened stakeholder groups, both internally at the state level, as well as from across the state, representing a wide variety of interest groups, regions, and school divisions to discuss root causes and develop strategies to reduce equity gaps;
6. Contacted Dr. Ellen Sherratt at the Center for Great Teachers and Leaders (CGTL) at the American Institute for Research (AIR) for expert advice and guidance, particularly about the state’s plan for stakeholder engagement. Dr. Sherratt and a team from AIR provided valuable assistance and facilitation for a large external engagement session conducted in April 2015 that resulted in a comprehensive root cause analysis around identified equity gaps, along with identification of recommended strategies to address these gaps. The Department will engage in ongoing dialogue with her and her staff as Virginia moves forward in implementing its teacher equity plan;

7. Evaluated previous and current initiatives for effectiveness and alignment with identified root causes, and brainstormed potential additional strategies that may be considered;
8. Established measurable targets and created a plan for measuring and reporting progress with the goal of continuously improving this plan; and
9. Developed and began implementing a long-term strategy for engaging stakeholders in ensuring equitable access to excellent educators by identifying personnel and establishing timelines for follow-up on key activities during plan implementation.

This initial plan primarily relates to the statutory requirements around teacher distribution data to identify teacher access equity gaps according to poverty and minority status of schools and school divisions rather than focusing on achievement gaps. However, it was deemed important to review current student achievement results to determine whether gaps exist and to what extent. The results in the table below underscore the importance of this work in assuring that school divisions are able to adequately recruit and retain teachers in the neediest schools and that the teachers working in these schools are well prepared. The table below outlines student performance between high- and low-poverty and minority schools from 2013-2014 data.

**Table 1: Student Achievement Performance on Federal Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs): 2013-2014**

	Percentage of Schools Meeting All AMOs	Percentage of Schools Meeting Reading/English AMOs	Percentage of Schools Meeting Mathematics AMOS	Percentage of Schools Meeting Federal Graduation Indicator AMO
<b>All Schools</b>	51.3	77.5	61.2	76.9
High-poverty schools	26.6	74.1	45.3	76.0
Low-poverty schools	66.5	91.4	74.1	77.8
<b>Gap</b>	<b>39.9</b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>28.8</b>	<b>1.8</b>
High-minority schools	28.9	52.9	45.0	67.8
Low-minority schools	60.0	82.7	69.3	85.3
<b>Gap</b>	<b>31.1</b>	<b>29.8</b>	<b>24.3</b>	<b>17.5</b>

