



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
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**VIRGINIA ONE OF 10 STATES TO RECEIVE
HIGH SCHOOL REFORM GRANT**

~National Governors Association awards grants on eve of annual meeting in Des Moines, Iowa~

WASHINGTON—The National Governors Association, through its Center for Best Practices, announced today that Virginia is one of 10 states selected in the first phase of NGA’s Honor States Grant Program, which will capitalize on the national momentum to dramatically increase high school graduation rates and improve college readiness for all students. Virginia will use its two-year grant to establish a P-16 council to streamline governance and improve alignment between high school requirements and postsecondary expectations.

The program provides grants to the selected states to continue work begun under **NGA Chairman** and **Virginia Governor Mark Warner’s** [*Redesigning the American High School*](#) initiative. The work also builds on ideas to improve America’s high schools outlined in the NGA/Achieve *Action Agenda* released in conjunction with the 2005 National Education Summit on High Schools held in Washington in February. The grants will fund Governors’ comprehensive state plans to raise high school graduation and college readiness rates.

“As chairman of the National Governors Association, I’ve spent the past year urging fellow governors to redesign the high school experience,” said Governor Warner. “We heard from more than 12,000 high school students on how to get them engaged and make them better prepared for college or the workplace. Thirty-one states competed for these funds to keep the high school reform movement going. I’m grateful to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for keeping these 10 states, including Virginia, on the road to real reform. Our economic competitiveness depends on strengthening our high schools.”

After a thorough evaluation process, a committee, independent of NGA, selected the grantees who will implement new policies and tools to help more young people graduate from high school prepared for college and work success. The committee unanimously recommended 10 states receive grants: **Arkansas, Delaware, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Rhode Island, and Virginia**. The grants are worth up to \$2 million over two years. The selected states are required to, at least, match their grant amounts dollar-for-dollar. States worked through a rigorous analytical blueprint to identify those Action Agenda items likely to be most effective in their states. Thirty-one states had submitted detailed

proposals based on elements of the *Action Agenda* customized to meet specific high school redesign and graduation goals.

“These Honor States grants will go far in helping continue the ‘prairie fire’ NGA has started around high school reform,” said NGA Executive Director Raymond C. Scheppach. “When governors focus on change, good things can happen quickly.”

American high schools were designed for a different era, and are not adequately preparing high school students for success in the 21st century global, technology driven economy. According to a recent Manhattan Institute report, nearly one-third of America’s young people fail to graduate, and nearly half of those who do graduate leave high school unprepared for college-level work at a time when the skills required by colleges and employers are increasingly the same. Only about half of African-American and Hispanic youth make it to graduation day and fewer than 20 percent are ready for college-level academics.

“We have a moral imperative, as Americans, to make sure that *all* of our students graduate from high school with a range of options and opportunities open to them,” said Tom Vander Ark, executive director of education for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which funded the grants. “Thanks to the strong leadership and commitment by the governors in the 10 Honor States and others, we are moving forward with momentum toward building an American high school system that will prepare every student for college, work, and citizenship.”

The ten selected states submitted both short-term and long-term strategies for high school reform. Each proposal focuses on increasing college and work readiness of students through efforts such as improving standards, aligning curricula and assessments, and increasing the rigor of graduation requirements. Additional state strategies vary based on the specific needs and circumstances of the state. For example, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, and Rhode Island will use grant resources to expand college level learning opportunities in high schools. Arkansas, Maine, Minnesota, and Virginia will establish P–16 councils to streamline governance and improve alignment between high school requirements and postsecondary expectations.

Communications is another common theme among applicants. Arkansas, Delaware, Louisiana, Maine, and Minnesota all stressed the importance of raising students’ and parents’ awareness about the value of earning a high school and college diploma, and building community support for reform. Indiana and Minnesota concentrated their proposals on improving science, technology, engineering, and math education. Massachusetts and Rhode Island plan to enhance their current data systems to better track performance of students, schools, and districts. Detailed state-by-state proposal summaries are available at www.nga.org.

“This is an exciting time for the Center,” said NGA Center for Best Practices Director John Thomasian. “The Honor States program and the opportunities that follow will continue to enhance the Center’s mission of helping governors apply cutting edge solutions to real life challenges.”

The Honor State Grant Program is supported by funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and administered by the NGA Center for Best Practices. The selection committee

was chaired by Brenda Welburn, executive director, National Association of State Boards of Education. The other selection committee members were Pat Callan, president, National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education; Ron Cowell, president, The Education Policy and Leadership Center; Christopher E. Goode, senior director–corporate government affairs & public policy, EMC Corporation; Charles Kolb, president, The Committee for Economic Development; Sandy Kress, partner, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, LLP, Larry Rosenstock, CEO, High Tech High Learning; and Stefanie Sanford, senior policy officer, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Grant awards are expected to be finalized within several weeks based on activities proposed in state plans.

An RFP for the second phase of Honor States Grants Program will be released at the NGA Annual Meeting in Des Moines later this week. As with the first phase, all states will be allowed to submit proposals. Phase two grants are designed to help states interested in smaller scale and more targeted high school reform initiatives, such as those described [*An Action Agenda for Improving America's High Schools*](#) and [*Getting it Done: Ten Steps to a State Action Agenda*](#), which were released earlier this year.

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