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Board Raises the Bar on Teacher Licensure & Admissions Tests *Actions Set Higher Standards on Assessments for Teacher Licensure and Program Entry*

The Virginia Board of Education voted this week to increase the minimum acceptable scores on assessments required for entry into teacher-preparation programs and state licensure. The board also ended the practice of allowing would-be teachers to rely on composite scores that may mask weaknesses in a particular area.

The Virginia Communication and Literacy Assessment (VCLA) has been a requirement for initial licensure since 2006. It is also used as an entrance examination for college and university teacher preparation programs. The assessment includes three subtests: Reading, Writing Multiple Choice and Sentence Correction, and Writing Assignments. The board Thursday approved Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright's recommendation to raise the minimum acceptable scores for all three subtests as follows:

- VCLA Reading — from 20 to 26 correct items out of a total of 35;
- VCLA Writing Multiple Choice — from 23 to 29 correct items out of a total of 41; and
- VCLA Writing Assignments — from 23 to 29 correct items out of a total of 40.

The new VCLA cut scores go into effect on January 1, 2014. Aspiring teachers will have to achieve all three minimums as the board eliminated the option of achieving a minimum composite score. The new minimum scores will also apply for students taking the VCLA for admission into a teacher-preparation program.

"This is a significant increase in rigor," Wright said. "For example, on the reading subtest, the minimum percentage of items a would-be teacher must answer correctly for program admission or licensure is increasing from 53 to 83 percent."

"Virginia parents expect that their children will be taught — in every instance — by highly qualified and effective teachers," Board of Education President David M. Foster said. "This is also the state board's expectation and raising the bar for program admission and licensure moves the commonwealth closer to achieving this goal."

"The state board's action reflects Governor Bob McDonnell's focus on elevating the teaching profession and promoting policies that reward excellence and maintain accountability for student learning," Secretary of Education Laura Fornash said.

The board also barred the use of composite scores on the new Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators program-admissions assessment and raised the minimum acceptable scores on a series of Praxis assessments required for license endorsements in elementary education as well as middle and high school-level mathematics and English.

The new scores on the tests for middle and high school mathematics and English endorsements go into effect on January 1, 2014. The new minimums on the elementary endorsement tests go into effect on July 1, 2014.