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EDITORS NOTE: Adds quotation from Secretary of Education

New College- and Career-Ready SOLs Impact 2013-2014 School Accreditation Ratings *Students Challenged by New English and Science Tests*

The percentage of schools meeting state accreditation standards dropped sharply as a consequence of the introduction of rigorous new reading, writing and science Standards of Learning (SOL) tests during 2012-2013, as well as a second year of results from more challenging mathematics assessments, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) announced today.

Seventy-seven percent, or 1,413, of Virginia’s 1,828 public schools are rated as Fully Accredited for 2013-2014 compared with 93 percent for 2012-2013. The number of schools accredited with warning nearly quadrupled to 395, and six schools have been denied state accreditation because of chronically low achievement.

“Over the last five years, the accreditation bar has been raised through the introduction of more rigorous curriculum standards and challenging new assessments that test students’ problem-solving and critical-thinking skills as well as their content knowledge,” Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright said. “In addition, the benchmark pass rates required for full accreditation have increased, and high schools must meet goals for improving graduation rates.”

“The focus of the SOL program has shifted to the ambitious but vital goal of college and career readiness for all students,” Board of Education President David M. Foster said. “Temporary declines in SOL scores and accreditation ratings are signs that the commonwealth is expecting more, not that students are learning less.”

2013-2014 SOL Accreditation Ratings						
Grade Span	Fully Accredited	Accredited with Warning	Provisionally Accredited	Conditional (New Schools)	Accreditation Denied	To Be Determined
Elementary	913	235	0	6	3	1
Middle	238	69	0	2	2	0
High	234	73	3	2	0	0
Combined	28	18	0	0	1	0
Total	1,413	395	3	10	6	1

The impact of the challenging mathematics tests introduced two years ago grew as three-year averaging provided less mitigation in the calculation of accreditation ratings. Only 257 Fully Accredited schools were able to meet the mathematics benchmark based on achievement over three years, compared with 750 last year. Of the 395 warned schools, 349 are warned in mathematics and 224 are warned in math alone.

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The new reading and writing SOL tests were a factor for 146 schools warned in English; 32 of these are Accredited with Warning for 2013-2014 solely because of English. Another 495 schools relied on three-year averaging to reach the benchmark for English and achieve full accreditation.

Of the 37 schools warned in science, eight — all elementary schools — are warned exclusively because of achievement on the new science tests. Eighty-two Fully Accredited schools relied on three-year averaging to meet the benchmark in the content area.

Six schools in three divisions are denied state accreditation for 2013-2014 because of chronically low student achievement:

- Alexandria — Jefferson-Houston Elementary for a second consecutive year
- Norfolk — Lafayette-Wynona Middle for a fourth consecutive year; William H. Ruffner Middle for a second consecutive year; and Lindenwood Elementary, which had been granted Conditional Accreditation for 2012-2013
- Petersburg — Peabody Middle for an eighth consecutive year and A.P. Hill Elementary, which had been Accredited with Warning for three consecutive years

Under legislation proposed by Governor Bob McDonnell and approved by the 2013 General Assembly, the six schools denied accreditation are subject to the authority of the state's newly created Opportunity Educational Institution (OEI). The law gives OEI the power to manage these schools in whatever manner it determines as most likely to achieve full state accreditation, including conversion to charter schools or college laboratory schools.

The legislation also gives OEI the authority — upon a majority vote of its governing board — to supervise and operate 19 schools that have been Accredited with Warning for three consecutive years.

“The vast majority of warned schools turn around before losing state accreditation as school boards, administrators, teachers and parents pull together and — with assistance from the commonwealth — focus their efforts on improving instruction and raising achievement to state standards,” said Secretary of Education Laura Fornash said. “By achieving full accreditation for 2014-2015, these 19 schools would no longer face potential transfer to OEI.”

The 19 accredited with warning for a third consecutive year schools, by division, are as follows:

- Dinwiddie County — Dinwiddie County Middle
- Hampton — Jane H. Bryan Elementary
- Henrico County — L. Douglas Wilder Middle
- Lynchburg — Sandusky Middle
- Newport News — Newsome Park Elementary, Sedgefield Elementary and Willis A. Jenkins Elementary
- Norfolk — Booker T. Washington High, Campostella Elementary, Lake Taylor Middle and Tidewater Park Elementary
- Petersburg — Vernon Johns Junior High
- Portsmouth — I.C. Norcom High
- Richmond — Armstrong High, Fred D. Thompson Middle, George Wythe High, John Marshall High and Thomas C. Boushall Middle
- Virginia Beach — Bayside Middle

The status of one school, Kiptopeke Elementary in Northampton County, is expected to be determined by the Board of Education at its October meeting. Northampton County is seeking a third year of Conditional Accreditation for the school based on progress made under a reconstitution plan approved by the state board at the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year.

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Under Virginia's SOL accountability program, a school that has been on academic warning for three consecutive years and fails to meet state standards for a fourth consecutive year can apply to the Board of Education for conditional accreditation — if the local school board agrees to reconstitute the school's leadership, staff, governance or student population. A reconstituted school can retain conditional accreditation for up to three years if it is making acceptable progress toward meeting state standards.

Two high schools — Freedom High in Prince William County and Woodrow Wilson High in Portsmouth — are Provisionally Accredited. These schools met all requirements in English, mathematics, science and history and came within three points of the minimum Graduation and Completion Index required for full accreditation. The index awards full credit for students who graduate with diplomas and partial credit for other outcomes, such as earning a GED.

A third high school, Fairfax County Adult High, also is Provisionally Accredited. Its rating is based on the school's progress toward meeting the goals of an alternative accreditation plan approved by the state board.

Ten newly opened schools are automatically rated as Conditionally Accredited for 2013-2014.

All schools are fully accredited in 36 of the commonwealth's 132 school divisions, compared with 87 last year. Divisions with all schools fully accredited (other than new schools that automatically receive conditional accreditation) are:

- Charlottesville
- Clarke County
- Colonial Heights
- Falls Church
- Floyd County
- Franklin County
- Fredericksburg
- Giles County
- Goochland County
- Hanover County
- King George County
- King William County
- Lexington
- Mathews County
- Middlesex County
- Nelson County
- New Kent County
- Northumberland County
- Norton
- Orange County
- Page County
- Patrick County
- Poquoson
- Powhatan County
- Prince George County
- Richmond County
- Roanoke County
- Rockingham County
- Salem
- Shenandoah County
- Stafford County
- Surry County
- Warren County
- West Point
- Williamsburg-James City County
- Wise County

For a school now to earn full accreditation, at least 75 percent of students must pass reading and writing SOL tests, and at least 70 percent must pass state assessments in mathematics, science and history. High schools must also meet a benchmark for graduation. Previously, the reading and writing benchmark in middle and high schools was 70 percent and the required pass rate in grade-3 science and history was 50 percent.

Accreditation ratings also may reflect credit earned by schools that successfully remediate students who failed reading or mathematics tests during the previous year. Adjustments also may be made for students with limited-English proficiency and for students who have recently transferred into a Virginia public school.

Updated accreditation ratings for 2013-2014 for all schools are available on the VDOE website.