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New State Accreditation Ratings to Recognize Improving Schools

The Virginia Board of Education has revised its school accreditation standards to better inform the public about the progress of schools toward meeting the commonwealth's high expectations for student learning and achievement. The revised Standards of Accreditation (SOA) — which will become effective on October 8 — create new ratings to differentiate schools that are close to meeting the requirements for full accreditation, or that are making significant progress, from those that are not.

“Schools that are close to meeting Virginia’s high expectations for student learning and achievement, or that are making substantial progress toward these goals, should be recognized and not labeled as failing,” Board of Education President Billy K. Cannaday Jr. said. “The board’s revised accreditation regulations acknowledge the success of these schools without lowering the standard for full accreditation.”

The achievement levels on Standards of Learning (SOL) tests required for schools to earn a rating of “Fully Accredited” have not changed. Schools close to earning full accreditation, or making acceptable progress, will now earn one of the following “partially accredited” ratings:

- **Partially Accredited: Approaching Benchmark-Pass Rate** — Schools that are not Fully Accredited but that are within a narrow margin of the adjusted SOL pass rates required for full accreditation in one or more subject areas
- **Partially Accredited: Approaching Benchmark-Graduation and Completion Index** — High schools that have attained the adjusted pass rates required for full accreditation and that are within a narrow margin of the Graduation and Completion Index (GCI) required for full accreditation
- **Partially Accredited: Improving School-Pass Rate** — Schools that are not Fully Accredited, and do not qualify for a rating of Partially Accredited: Approaching Benchmark-Pass Rate, but that are making acceptable progress toward full accreditation
- **Partially Accredited: Improving School-Graduation and Completion Index** — High schools that have attained the adjusted pass rates required for full accreditation, and that have improved their GCI by at least one point from the previous year, but that are not within a narrow margin of the GCI required for full accreditation.

“These new ratings are especially appropriate given the rigor of the academic standards and assessments implemented during the last five years,” Superintendent of Public Instruction Steven R. Staples said. “They also allow the commonwealth to focus resources and technical assistance on the schools that are most in need of support.”

The “Accredited with Warning” and “Conditionally Accredited-Reconstituted School” ratings have been replaced by the following three ratings:

- **Partially Accredited: Warned School-Pass Rate** — Schools that are not within a narrow margin of, nor making acceptable progress toward, achieving the adjusted SOL pass rates required for full accreditation

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- **Partially Accredited: Warned School-Graduation and Completion Index** — High schools that have achieved the adjusted SOL pass rates required for full accreditation, but that are not within a narrow margin of, nor making acceptable progress toward, achieving the GCI required for full accreditation
- **Partially Accredited-Reconstituted School** — Schools that fail to meet the requirements for full accreditation for four consecutive years and receive permission from the state Board of Education to reconstitute. A reconstituted school reverts to accreditation-denied status if it fails to meet full accreditation requirements within the agreed-upon term, or if it fails to have its annual application for Partially Accredited-Reconstituted School renewed.

At its October 22 meeting, the state Board of Education is scheduled to approve criteria for awarding partial accreditation. The proposed criteria are displayed in the following tables.

Partially Accredited: Approaching Benchmark		
	Full Accreditation	Narrow Margin
English	75%	73%
Mathematics	70%	68%
Science	70%	68%
History/Social Science	70%	68%
Graduation & Completion Index	85	84

Partially Accredited: Improving School			
Mathematics, Science & History		English	
Previous Pass Rate	Required Improvement	Previous Pass Rate	Required Improvement
66-67%	See note below	71-72%	See note below
65%	2 points	70%	2 points
60-64%	3 points	65-69%	4 points
50-59%	9 points	60-64%	7 points
40-49%	10 points	45-59%	11 points
Below 40%	15 points	Below 45%	15 points
Graduation and Completion Index (GCI)			
Previous GCI		Required Improvement	
Below 83		1 point	
<i>Note: Schools with previous pass rates of 71-72 percent in English and/or 66-67 percent in mathematics, science and history/social science are ineligible for a Partially Accredited: Improving School rating and must meet the criteria for Partially Accredited: Approaching Benchmark or be rated as Partially Accredited: Warned School.</i>			

Under the revised SOA, schools rated as Partially Accredited: Approaching Benchmark-Pass Rate, Partially-Accredited: Approaching Benchmark-Graduation and Completion Index, Partially Accredited-Improving School-Pass Rate, Partially Accredited: Improving School-Graduation and Completion Index, or Partially Accredited-Warned School that do not earn full accreditation within three years are denied state accreditation, unless allowed to reconstitute by the state board.

If a school ultimately is denied state accreditation, the local school board must submit a corrective action plan to the Board of Education and enter into a binding memorandum of understanding with the state board detailing steps to be taken to raise student achievement to state standards. Schools denied accreditation, however, do not lose state funding, nor are they subject to state takeover.

The revisions align the Board of Education's accreditation regulations with legislation approved by the 2015 General Assembly. House Bill 1873 and Senate Bill 1320 require the board to amend the Standards of Accreditation to establish additional accreditation ratings that recognize the progress of schools. School accreditation ratings for the 2015-2016 school year — based on the revised standards and criteria — are scheduled to be released on October 27.