



# VIRGINIA BOARD OF EDUCATION

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# AGENDA ITEM

**Agenda Item:** K

**Date:** February 27, 2025

**Title:** First and Final Review of Mastery Level/Standard Setting Review Committee Process

**Presenter:** Em Cooper, Deputy Superintendent of Teaching and Learning

## **Purpose of Presentation**

Action required by state or federal law or regulation

## **Executive Summary**

[Standard 3 of the Standards of Quality \(SOQ\)](#) states, in part, that “[t]he Board shall prescribe assessment methods to determine the level of achievement of the Standards of Learning objectives by all students. Such assessments shall evaluate knowledge, application of knowledge, critical thinking, and skills related to the Standards of Learning being assessed. The Board shall, with the assistance of independent testing experts, conduct a regular analysis and validation process for these assessments.”

The Board will oversee the process and make critical decisions around the setting of cut scores utilizing both the Technical Advisory Committee and Proficiency Setting Review Committee recommendations. Over the past three years, the Board has prioritized raising expectations for Virginia students through the adoption of more rigorous Standards of Learning (SOL) in History and Social Science, Mathematics, Computer Science, and English Language Arts and through the approval of a new School Performance and Support Framework. VDOE has also re-designed summative assessments to be innovative and more fully measure the rigor of the new academic content standards. Building on this foundation, the Board must set new assessment cut scores on these summative assessments to align proficiency to the increasing demands of the workplace and benchmarked to the highest definitions in the nation.

## **Federal Requirements for Setting Proficiency**

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) lays the foundation for state summative assessment systems and requires state education agencies to implement statewide assessments. [ESSA](#)

[requires](#) that all students in America be taught to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers; ensures that vital information is provided to educators, families, students, and communities through annual statewide assessments that measure students' progress toward those high standards; and maintains an expectation that there will be accountability and action to effect positive change in our lowest-performing schools, where groups of students are not making progress, and where graduation rates are low over extended periods of time. The responsibilities of the U.S. Department of Education and the responsibilities of states are outlined in Education Commission of the State's overview of [statewide summative assessments](#).

As part of this federal accountability requirement, states are required to determine cut scores that signify performance categories. The Board's action to re-set proficiency and benchmark it to the highest definitions in the nation is the final and vital step to complete the "high expectations" agenda that Governor Youngkin charged the board to implement in 2022. This proficiency benchmarking and cut score setting process will not only ensure that every student in the Commonwealth will be held to high standards, but will address the ["Honesty Gap."](#)

Since 2013, the definitions of proficiency have been far lower on Virginia tests than that of the Nation's Report Card. Virginia has had the lowest definition of proficiency for the past four years. This systematic lowering of expectations has resulted in Virginia's learning loss (see NAEP results, January 2025). The Board's actions over the past three years—including this last step to re-calibrate proficiency—have aligned standards, assessments and our School Performance and Support Framework to high expectations. The goal of all this work is to improve student learning and outcomes and to be ready for success in life.

Given that Virginia students continue to struggle on NAEP [as reported](#) in January 2025, the Board must ensure that statewide definitions meet national expectations to ensure that Virginia students can effectively complete in a national and global workplace.

### **Proficiency Setting Process Overview**

Four groups of stakeholders have roles and responsibilities in supporting the implementation of Virginia's assessment system and reporting progress to the Virginia Board of Education—including the setting of proficiency cut scores. These groups include VDOE, Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), the Proficiency Setting Review Committee, and the assessment vendor.

- **VDOE:** The Department executes the design of the assessment, vendor item development, test delivery, administration, scoring, and reporting. It also coordinates the TAC, standard setting, and review process of the Mastery Level/Standard Setting Review Committee. The Department also presents recommendations of TAC and the Committee to the Board for feedback and final approval.

- **Technical Advisory Committee (TAC):** The TAC consists of highly trained national psychometric and assessment experts that serve as technical advisors on test design, test item development, data and reporting, and standard setting processes.
- **Mastery Level/Standard Setting Review Committee:** The committees are comprised of 70% Virginia math experts and 30% Virginia community members. The Committee reviews data, current performance levels, and assessment item types to make recommendations on future content area cut scores for the Board of Education. The Mastery Level/Standard Setting Review Committee reviews assessment data, current performance levels, and assessment item types to make recommendations on future content area cut scores for the Board of Education. Review Committee members serve on a grade-level and content-specific committee (e.g., fourth grade Math) that ensures that rigor and mastery of standards are reflected in the number of correct items needed to obtain mastery. Depending on the mastery levels, the committee will identify the number of correct responses needed for each level. The Review Committee is responsible for recommending performance level cuts that not only reflect students' achievement status but also promote high expectations for all students in Virginia.
- **Assessment Vendor:** Under the supervision of VDOE, the contracted assessment vendor implements the assessment design, item development, administration, scoring, and reporting based on the public action of the State Board of Education.

The VDOE sought input on the Review Committee process from Virginia's Technical Advisory Committee, the Center for Assessment, and the Executive Director of the National Assessment Governing Board.

From these discussions, the following process is proposed to the Board:

- Committees will be made of 70% educator experts (e.g., teachers, instructional specialists) and 30% community stakeholders (e.g., parents, business and industry members).
- Educator experts will complete an application that includes an assessment of their knowledge and understanding of grade level content and assessments. Community members will not complete this level of application; they will have a selection process that includes the Board and Governor's Office.
- VDOE will solicit reading, math, and science educator experts, including higher education experts, and community stakeholders to apply to serve on the Mastery Level/Standard Setting Review Committees beginning in late March.
- Reading, Overall Literacy, Math, and Science Mastery Level/Standard Setting Review Committee members will be selected and notified of acceptance on the committee in April.

- Committees will convene in late May after a threshold of assessment data is collected for the 2025 assessment cycle.
- Proposed cut scores would be presented to the Board for first review in June and final review in July 2025.

### **Action Requested**

The action requested is first and final review of the proposed Mastery Level/Standard Setting Review Committee Process.

### **Superintendent’s Recommendation**

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education waive first review and approve the proposed recommendation for the Mastery Level/Standard Setting Process.

### **Previous Review or Action**

On August 28, 2024, the Board of Education received a presentation titled *Raising the Bar: Virginia's Standard Setting Process* for information only.

### **Background Information and Statutory Authority**

[Standard 3 of the SOQ](#) states, in part, that “[t]he Board shall prescribe assessment methods to determine the level of achievement of the Standards of Learning objectives by all students. Such assessments shall evaluate knowledge, application of knowledge, critical thinking, and skills related to the Standards of Learning being assessed. The Board shall, with the assistance of independent testing experts, conduct a regular analysis and validation process for these assessments.”

In 2019 and 2020, the State Board of Education under the prior Administration voted to lower the proficiency cut scores—meaning how many correct answers it takes to demonstrate proficiency—on the state assessment. In 2022, Governor Youngkin directed the Board of Education to raise Virginia’s expectations for students from the lowest in the nation to the highest as part of [Our Commitment to Virginians](#).

In addition, [Chapter 760, \(Regular Session, 2022\)](#) directed the Secretary of Education and the Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction to convene and consult a work group to revise the Virginia Standards of Learning summative assessments of proficiency that require students to demonstrate that they possess the skills, knowledge, and content necessary for success and to develop a plan for implementation of such revised assessments. The work group [recommended](#) five areas for the future of Virginia’s assessment system. The recommendations are as follows:

1. Clearer and more rigorous standards

2. More rigorous assessment items
3. More, timely, clear, and actionable reporting
4. Improved system coherence
5. Innovative assessment design

As a result of the Governor’s commitment and the recommendations of the HB 585 Workgroup, the Board adopted new Mathematics Standards of Learning in August 2023 and new English Standards of Learning in March 2024; these standards will be measured in the Spring 2025 test administration. Virginia test items have been reviewed and realigned to the newly adopted standards. When assessments change significantly, new cut scores must be developed. Since Virginia’s assessments are aligned to new standards, the standard setting process must take place to determine the cut scores on the new assessments.

Virginia’s Technical Advisory Council (TAC) consists of highly trained national psychometric and assessment experts that serve as technical advisors on test design, test item development, data and reporting, and standard setting processes. The TAC provides advice to the Superintendent of Public Instruction to ensure the validity and reliability of the state’s assessment program. After the shifts to new standards and aligned assessments were made, the cut scores for the new assessments must be created for each performance level. The TAC advised the Superintendent to include the Spring 2025 Virginia student data in the upcoming standard setting process by completing the standard setting process after the spring’s assessment cycle.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

The TAC and the National Assessment Governing Board were consulted on standard setting processes, and they prepared this proposal for Virginia’s Mastery Level/Standard Setting Process that will complete the vision for highest-in-nation mastery levels aligned to rigorous Standards of Learning and assessments.

### **Implementation and Communication**

VDOE will solicit reading, math, and science educator experts and community stakeholders to apply to serve on the Mastery Level/Standard Setting Review Committees beginning in late March. VDOE will provide an update on the implementation of the process to the Board at the May 22, 2025, Board meeting.

### **Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources**

There is no impact on fiscal and human resources.