



# Commonwealth Listening Tour

Elevating the Voices of  
Virginians to Strengthen Public  
Education

Prepared by:  
Office of the Secretary of Education  
Virginia Department of Education

April 2026



# Table of Contents

- Executive Summary ..... 1**
- EO4 Priority Topics ..... 3**
  - Snapshot on EO4 Priority Topic: Mathematics Instruction ..... 4
  - Snapshot on EO4 Priority Topic: Literacy Instruction ..... 5
  - Snapshot on EO4 Priority Topic: Accountability ..... 6
  - Snapshot on EO4 Priority Topic: Assessment ..... 7
- Regional Summaries ..... 8**
  - Region 1: Central Virginia ..... 9
  - Region 2: Tidewater ..... 10
  - Region 3: Northern Neck ..... 11
  - Region 4: Northern Virginia ..... 12
  - Region 5: Valley ..... 13
  - Region 6: Western Virginia ..... 14
  - Region 7: Southwest ..... 15
  - Region 8: Southside ..... 16
  - Other Educator, Leader, and Parent Meetings, Virtual Sessions, and Survey Results ..... 17

# Executive Summary

## Fulfilling the Charge in Executive Order 4:

### A Summary of the Commonwealth Listening Tour

On January 17, 2026, her first day in office, Governor Abigail Spanberger set a new course for the future of Virginia's students by issuing Executive Order Four (EO4), which mandated a strengthening of the Commonwealth's public education system. As part of the EO4 charge, the Secretary of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction embarked on the Commonwealth Listening Tour, an initiative which aimed to gather feedback directly from the heartbeat of our schools—students, educators, families and the communities that surround them. This summary captures the narrative of that journey, documenting the perspectives of diverse community members on the successes that anchor our system and the critical opportunities for growth.

#### A Journey Across the Commonwealth



The Commonwealth Listening Tour included events and sessions in all eight superintendent regions to ensure every community had a voice. The Listening Tour launched with Governor Spanberger in Hampton. Secretary of Education, Dr. Jeffery O. Smith, and State Superintendent, Jenna Conway, then continued holding discussions with students, education partners and community members for over 50 hours. Each regional stop included structured

opportunities for engagement—student roundtables, small stakeholder discussions with teachers, school leaders, parents and community members, school site visits, and large public listening sessions—all designed to capture a wide variety of perspectives. In total, the Listening Tour provided a platform for more than 2,200 participants to provide direct feedback to state leaders.

#### Key Themes

*Gratitude for the Opportunity to Share:* Participants appreciated being able to share local successes and advocate for solutions directly with state leaders.

*Pride in Educators and Leaders:* Participants shared overwhelming appreciation for and pride in educators and principals that go above and beyond to meet student needs.

*Candor about Challenges:* Respondents were candid about challenges facing their schools and communities, and constructive in sharing ideas about potential solutions.

#### Voices of Success: What is Working

From Roanoke to Hampton, there was a shared sense of progress related to:

- **Literacy Gains:** The implementation of the Virginia Literacy Act emerged as a major success, with evidence-based phonics and structured literacy driving tangible reading gains for our youngest learners.
- **Workforce Readiness:** There is pride and excitement around the expansion and effectiveness of high-impact career and technical education (CTE) pathways and credentialing, and various high school Academy Models.
- **Reduced Distractions from Cell Phones:** Teachers and students consistently reported that recent cell phone restrictions have been a "game changer," successfully reducing distractions and creating more engaged classrooms.

## COMMONWEALTH LISTENING TOUR BY THE NUMBERS

2,282

Individuals  
Provided Feedback

113

Students Participated in  
Student Roundtables

562

Individuals Participated in  
Stakeholder Roundtables

422

Individuals Participated in  
Public Evening Listening Sessions

967

Survey Responses  
Captured

218

Individuals Participated in  
Virtual Sessions

53

Hours of  
Listening Sessions Hosted

74

VDOE Staff  
Volunteered

- **Strong School Level Leadership:** Participants shared that schools with consistent, supportive principals experience stronger staff morale and improved learning environments.
- **Targeted Academic Supports:** Small group instruction and high-dosage tutoring are helping students make progress.

### Facing the Challenges: Opportunities for Growth

While successes were celebrated, participants were equally candid about the challenges and areas for improvement:

- **Initiative Fatigue:** Stakeholders noted the difficulty in effectively implementing numerous changes to state policy, standards, assessment, and accountability in a few short years.
- **Assessment Concerns:** Students and educators alike reported concerns regarding the role, redundancy and volume of testing, which they described as fostering "teaching to the test" culture rather than content mastery.
- **Use of Educational Technology:** There is a growing consensus among parents and educators on high usage of digital platforms, prompting some to call for a return to traditional "pencil and paper" instructional materials.
- **Educator and Leader Pipelines:** Divisions continue to struggle with teacher and leader recruitment and retention from pre-Kindergarten through grade twelve. They also identified a continued need for competitive compensation, simplified licensure requirements, and mentor supports.
- **Behavioral and Mental Health Supports:** Many educators and families emphasized that academic success is impossible without urgent needs for better access to behavioral and mental health supports for students.

### Our Commitment to Action

Based on feedback from the Commonwealth Listening Tour, the Department will:

- **Continue to elevate the voices of local educators and leaders** to strengthen implementation of the Virginia Literacy Act and expand supports for math instruction;
- **Incorporate feedback in proposals to refine Virginia’s accountability system, the School Performance and Support Framework (SPSF),** in partnership with the Board of Education;
- **Support the educator workforce** by exploring opportunities for flexible licensure pathways and addressing recruitment and retention barriers;
- **Partner with divisions to provide wraparound student supports** for access to mental health, behavioral, and wraparound services; and
- **Strengthen partnerships with divisions.**



Together, these actions reflect the coordinated and deliberate approach that the VDOE will take to address stakeholder feedback and strengthen statewide coherence for divisions. The Department and the Office of the Secretary of Education are committed to transparency, collaboration, and accountability as we work with our education partners, families, teachers, communities, and divisions across the Commonwealth to improve outcomes for all students.

# COMMONWEALTH LISTENING TOUR

---

## STOPS & VISITS

### Region 1

Colonial Heights High  
Powhatan High

### Region 2

Bethel High  
Kecoughtan High  
Yorktown Elementary

### Region 3

Gloucester High  
Chancellor Elementary

### Region 4

Alexandria City High  
Jefferson-Houston PreK-8 IB

### Region 5

Carysbrook Elementary  
Central Elementary

### Region 6

G.W. Carver Elementary  
Roanoke County CTE Center  
Northside High  
Blacksburg High

### Region 7

EO Career Commons Hub  
SWVA Higher Education Center  
HEALS at Emory & Henry  
Oak Point Elementary School

### Region 8

Cumberland Middle School  
Nottoway High School

### Virtual Sessions

Principals  
Teachers  
Parents  
Business/Community  
Virginia Education Association  
Student Advisory Council

### Other Visits

NOVA Parent Roundtable  
NOVA Early Childhood Roundtable  
Region 4 Superintendents  
Region 7 Superintendents  
Region 7 Math Leaders  
UVA K-12 Advisory Council  
SPED Directors  
VDOE Staff



# E04

## Priority Topics

Snapshots on Math,  
Reading, Accountability, and  
Assessment



# Snapshot on EO4 Priority Topic: Mathematics Instruction

## Recent Virginia Context

Over the last few years, Virginia has expanded its focus on strengthening mathematics education to ensure all students graduate prepared with the math skills needed for success in postsecondary education and the workforce. These efforts have included a comprehensive revision of the *K–12 Mathematics Standards of Learning* and aligned updates to the corresponding assessments. Then, in 2025, the Board of Education adopted new, high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) to support standards-aligned instruction. The Commonwealth also adopted and is implementing an accelerated mathematics policy, expanding pathways for middle school students to access advanced coursework. Furthermore, ongoing professional development and resources have been developed to support division leaders, principals, and teachers in delivering rigorous instruction.



In 2025, the General Assembly appropriated funding ([Chapter 725, Item 117p](#)) to expand access to advanced math coursework virtually, broaden teacher endorsements for accelerated instruction, support HQIM implementation, strengthen regional mathematics hubs, and develop competency-based and mastery-based learning models. New state funds were distributed to divisions through a competitive grant process. Finally, a Mathematics Advisory Task Force was established to ensure local math leaders could provide recommendations for improving mathematics education across grade levels.

## Listening Tour Feedback on Math Instruction

During the Listening Tour, education leaders described both promising practices and pressing challenges shaping mathematics instruction. They pointed to high school CTE programs that successfully connect mathematical concepts to real-world applications. Many divisions also reported significant gaps, particularly a shortage of elementary mathematics specialists and educators licensed to teach accelerated math courses at the middle school level.



## EO4 Actions and Next Steps

These insights underscore the need to both sustain current progress and address persistent gaps in implementation and support. In accordance with EO4, the Department submitted a report on math instruction to the Governor in February 2026. Additionally, the Department recruited new members to expand the Mathematics Advisory Task Force to include an increased level of stakeholder feedback needed to inform next steps in elementary, middle, and high school instruction. The Department will build on this work by expanding its mathematics team, increasing targeted support for school divisions, continuing to support the use of professional learning related to HQIM in math, and continuing to offer professional learning for educators and leaders. Together, these efforts will support a more effective statewide approach to mathematics education by aligning policy, instruction, and resources with the needs identified by educators and communities, ultimately improving outcomes and expanding opportunities for all students.

# Snapshot on EO4 Priority Topic: Literacy Instruction

## Recent Virginia Context

Virginia recently adopted a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction through a new state law, the Virginia Literacy Act (VLA). The VLA set out parameters to ensure consistent implementation of the science of reading across all school divisions. In the first year, K–5 educators, reading specialists, and administrators adopted HQIM and implemented evidence-based literacy instruction and interventions. Divisions submitted literacy plans detailing instructional resources, interventions, professional development, and progress monitoring tools. More than 85,000 reading specialists and administrators enrolled in evidence-based professional learning, and 1,333 educators enrolled in the reading specialist microcredential course.



In year two of VLA implementation, support expanded into grades 4–8. Students who did not pass the Reading Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment received targeted reading plans and interventions based on Virginia Language & Literacy Screening System (VALLSS) data. The Virginia Literacy Partnership (VLP) at the University of Virginia provided training, screening support, and coaching to divisions, and the VDOE supported implementation of the *K–12 2024 English Standards of Learning* and data-driven instruction in partnership with VLP.

## Listening Tour Feedback on VLA Implementation and Literacy Instruction

During the Commonwealth Listening Tour, teachers, school leaders, reading specialists, and families all described early signs of progress associated with the VLA alongside ongoing implementation challenges. Many reported that the transition to evidence-based phonics and structured literacy instruction is already contributing to measurable gains in student benchmarks across several regions. At the same time, educators and administrators cited increased administrative demands and the pacing of the rollout as creating obstacles. School and division staff expressed that delays in receiving state-provided instructional materials hindered timely implementation in some divisions. Additionally, educators and families highlighted the need for better alignment with special education frameworks and expanded support services, such as universal pre-kindergarten access and dedicated English-learner resources.



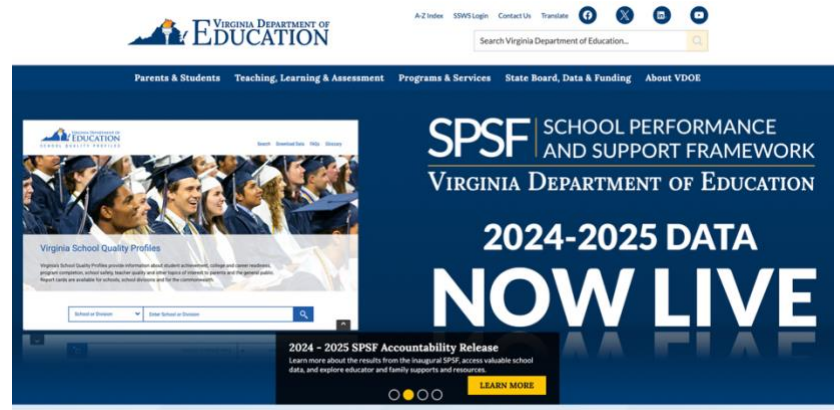
## EO4 Actions and Next Steps

These insights highlight both the progress achieved and the areas requiring refinement, providing a foundation for the Department’s next phase of implementation and support in the literacy space. In fulfillment of EO4, the VDOE recruited members from around the state and launched a new VLA advisory workgroup to review implementation and recommend improvements. Priorities include strengthening student reading plans, particularly in middle grades, aligning interventions with VALLSS data, enhancing platforms such as VAConnects, and elevating early literacy partnerships. By focusing on engagement and leveraging community partnerships, Virginia will ensure that high-quality reading instruction remains a central pillar of the state’s academic success.

# Snapshot on EO4 Priority Topic: Accountability

## Recent Virginia Context

In 2024, Virginia adopted a comprehensive overhaul of its state accountability system. In the fall of 2025, schools were evaluated under the new accountability system – the Virginia School Performance and Support Framework (SPSF) – for the first time. Initial implementation data from the state’s new performance framework illustrates its efficacy in identifying schools for nuanced support.



## Listening Tour Feedback on Accountability

During the Listening Tour, school division leaders articulated an appreciation for the foundational components of the new accountability system and the alignment of state and federal systems. However, they also expressed frustration with a lack of transparency about the business rules informing a school’s rating, the delayed release of the 2024-2025 school year results, errors in the released data, and slow release of school improvement grants tied to the results. Furthermore, community members noted concern about some policies within the system, particularly the significant weighting of proficiency overgrowth and the rigid weighting of chronic absenteeism, which many argue unfairly penalizes schools for external factors in students’ lives. School and community members alike also highlighted that the current school ratings like "On Track" and "Off Track" cause widespread confusion because they imply a trajectory rather than conveying a clear progression of performance.

## EO4 Actions and Next Steps

To ensure the accountability framework accurately measures performance and drives improvement, the Commonwealth is pursuing a phased revision of the SPSF that prioritizes transparency and stability. As directed by EO4, the VDOE secured an external vendor to provide an after-action report based on an analysis of the critical areas of the accountability and reporting system to include data collection, processing, verifying, and publishing of results. Impacted offices within the Department have already begun using these findings to develop new standard operating procedures, improve alignment across teams, and establish project management practices that ensure benchmarks are clearly documented and consistently met.



In addition, the Joint Legislative Audit Review Commission (JLARC) issued a December 2025 report, [Virginia’s K-12 Accountability System](#), with policy considerations to refine and strengthen SPSF. EO4 and legislation from the 2026 legislative session, [House Bill 643](#), require the VDOE and the Virginia Board of Education to consider all these recommendations.

Feedback from the Listening Tour and the JLARC recommendations are shaping a proposed timeline for changes to be considered by the Board of Education for the 2025–26 school year and for 2026–27 and beyond. As part of this ongoing work, the VDOE will partner with divisions to co-develop clearer performance terminology and reevaluate the weight of growth indicators, ensuring the system provides a more accurate and actionable reflection of each school's contribution to student learning.

# Snapshot on EO4 Priority Topic: Assessment

## Recent Virginia Context

Virginia currently relies on a statewide assessment program primarily composed of Standards of Learning (SOL) tests, some of which were recently revised to reflect more rigorous expectations for what students should know and be able to do following changes to the underlying content standards. Although these assessments are intended to provide meaningful insight into student achievement, the current assessment framework largely relies on a single test as the primary measure of success—an approach many Listening Tour participants believe does not fully reflect a student’s knowledge or abilities. Currently, the system is in a state of transition as education leaders work to implement recent legislative reforms and the VDOE prepares for a new assessment vendor selection process designed to modernize the state’s testing infrastructure.

In 2022, a statewide work group convened to recommend changes to the statewide summative assessments. In alignment with their recommendations, the Board of Education adopted new *Standards of Learning* in Mathematics and in History and Social Science in 2023 and in English in 2024. This adoption led to the development of new items for SOL assessments. Additionally, Parent Reports for SOL tests were revised to better support families and educators in understanding student performance. The Department continues to improve system coherence through the alignment of reports and connections to resources based on student performance.

In 2025, a new innovative assessment workgroup was established to analyze options for implementing a new statewide assessment system that supports high-quality teaching and learning in Virginia’s K-12 public schools. This workgroup is supported by an external consultant, WestEd, and has met multiple times to develop and refine recommendations for a coherent, balanced, and well-designed assessment system. This information, along with feedback from the Listening Tour, supports the development of a request for proposal (RFP) that the Department will release in the summer of 2026 for a new vendor.

## Listening Tour Feedback on Assessment

During the Listening Tour, parents, students and teachers across multiple regions expressed deep frustration with "assessment fatigue," noting that the high volume of testing fosters an anxiety-inducing culture that prioritizes "teaching to the test" over content mastery or critical thinking skills. Participants shared that over-reliance on single-day, computerized testing often fails to capture student growth or the critical thinking skills necessary for success later in life. Conversely, there was widespread celebration of innovative pathways such as CTE credentialing, and dual enrollment agreements, which participants said bridges the gap between classroom instruction, workforce readiness, and competency-based assessments of what students know and can do.



## EO4 Actions and Next Steps

Based on the feedback from the Listening Tour and the Innovative Assessment Workgroup, recent legislation, and in tandem with proposed refinements to the state accountability system, the Commonwealth is developing a cohesive vision for a modernized assessment system that best meets the needs of students. Additionally, to address testing volume concerns, in the 2026-27 school year, Virginia will eliminate the Virginia Growth Assessment (VGA) and the Integrated Reading and Writing (IRW) test for high school students. These strategic shifts are part of a broader aim to build a system that sets a high bar of excellence while providing educators with targeted assessments that clearly allow students to demonstrate knowledge and skills.



# Regional Summaries

*The following summaries reflect the opinions and feedback of Listening Tour participants throughout the Commonwealth.*



# Region 1: Central Virginia

## Key Regional Takeaways



Stakeholders in Region 1 expressed a need for increased wraparound services, long-term policy consistency, and modernized data collection and transparency.

- Division leaders and community members advocated for a comprehensive suite of wraparound services—ranging from affordable early childhood education to fully funded nutrition programs to dedicated mental health professionals and translation services personnel.
- Region 1 supported a commitment to policy stability (i.e., minimizing new initiatives and committing to careful rollout of major policies such as assessment), which will allow for better measurement of current interventions without shifting metrics.
- Principals and teachers requested the modernization of data infrastructure to provide actionable classroom-level interventions rather than high-level reporting.

## Progress and Successes

Region 1 emphasized improvements in student readiness and classroom engagement stemming from the Virginia Literacy Act (VLA), the benefits of specialized supports for English Learners and students with disabilities, and the value of expanded career pathway offerings in high school.

- Instructional specialists reported that the VLA has prepared teachers to utilize evidence-based reading lessons with additional training.
- Region 1 reported that “Grad labs” help English learners and students with disabilities demonstrate mastery through performance-based projects instead of standardized testing models.
- Expanded dual enrollment pathways prepare students to graduate into high-demand careers, higher education, or the military.

## Challenges and Barriers

Region 1 identified major challenges with recruiting and retaining strong educators as well as concerns about the new School Performance and Support Framework (SPSF) and its impact on divisions.

- Region 1 superintendents expressed that rigid licensure requirements continue to impede the recruitment of essential mathematics and career and technical education faculty.
- Region 1 teachers and school leaders expressed concerns about the current form of SPSF, which they perceive as judging school performance on variables beyond the control of schools, such as chronic absenteeism, and how much student growth is weighted.
- Parents and guardians identified a gap in assessment for students with disabilities, noting that standard pass-fail exams are often not the right fit for students with disabilities.

# COMMONWEALTH LISTENING TOUR REGION BREAKDOWN

Date  
April 7, 2026

Location  
Colonial Heights, VA

## Activities and Sessions Held

Classroom Visits  
Student roundtable  
Stakeholder roundtable  
Public evening listening session

Attendance Total  
**157**

Stakeholders in Region 1 expressed a need for increased wraparound services, long-term policy consistency, and modernized data collection and transparency.



## Region 2: Tidewater

### Key Regional Takeaways

Region 2 stakeholders focused on the need to move to more competency-based assessment models, modernize educator retention strategies, and invest in additional supports for educators related to both high-quality curriculum and behavior management.

- Region 2 participants requested increased opportunities for capstone and portfolio-based assessments, which they believe would allow students to demonstrate mastery through projects that apply learning.
- To address teacher retention challenges, regional leaders proposed clinical residency models for new teachers, a "Principal of Distinction" tier for veteran administrators, and eased degree requirements for dual enrollment faculty.
- School leaders recommended a "Virginia Mathematics Act," which would provide instructional supports similar to those provided in the Virginia Literacy Act.
- Participants raised concerns regarding student behavioral issues and made requests for statewide guidance to help educators manage behavioral problems with greater consistency.

### Progress and Successes

Region 2 highlighted the successes of evidence-based literacy instruction, demonstrations of content mastery through experience, and alternative models of educator development.

- Participants emphasized improvements in student readiness stemming from the Science of Reading, which has given instructional specialists the tools and information needed to improve foundational literacy.
- Feedback indicated that the Hampton Academies model has allowed students to demonstrate mastery through workplace-ready experiences and prepared students to graduate into high-demand careers, higher education, or the military.
- "Grow Your Own" programs and active teacher coaching have added mentorship opportunities and strengthened the recruitment and retention of teachers.

### Challenges and Barriers

Region 2 stakeholders reported feeling constrained by challenges in interpreting data within the School Performance and Support Framework (SPSF), increasing behavioral disruptions, and the practical limits of existing teacher training.

- The specific military demographics of Region 2 called for coordination with federal partners to ensure universal pre-kindergarten access for military families.
- Families noted difficulties interpreting data in SPSF, which they feel fails to capture student growth.
- The current standardized testing structure causes excessive student anxiety and takes away from valuable instructional time.
- School leaders observed that current teacher training programs do not sufficiently prepare new teachers for the rigorous daily tasks of behavior management and specialized student needs.

# COMMONWEALTH LISTENING TOUR REGION BREAKDOWN

### Date

March 4, 2026

### Location

Hampton, VA

### Activities and Sessions Held

Classroom and Hampton Academy  
Tours  
Stakeholder roundtable  
Public evening listening session

### Attendance Total

90

Region 2 stakeholders focused on the need to move to more competency-based assessment models, modernize educator retention strategies, and invest in additional supports for educators related to both high quality curriculum and behavior management.



## Region 3: Northern Neck

### Key Regional Takeaways

Stakeholders in Region 3 highlighted a need for a structural realignment of state funding formulas, additional wraparound services, and a return to analog learning.



- Division leaders and community stakeholders advocated for urgent state investment to address the unique fiscal and cultural needs of rural communities, specifically calling for a reform of the Local Composite Index, and efforts to ensure small tax bases are not overwhelmed by unfunded mandates or infrastructure repairs.
- To sustain academic gains, stakeholders expressed a desire to prioritize wraparound services—including fully funded nutrition programs to mitigate food insecurity and transaction fees—alongside integrated mental health supports to ensure students can maximize their opportunities to learn.
- Region 3 participants proposed in-person, parent-to-parent conflict resolution models to handle student conduct issues.
- Parents and students raised concerns about "digital saturation," warning that excessive screen time is taking a toll on focus and well-being. At the same time, they noted that overly restrictive internet filters create unnecessary friction that impedes advanced research.

### Progress and Successes

Region 3 has established a foundation for academic growth by pairing rigorous instructional standards with deep community engagement and expanded vocational opportunities.

- Superintendents and instructional specialists reported significant momentum in literacy stemming from the adoption of high-quality instructional materials and evidence-based lessons.
- School leaders also highlighted the efficacy of inclusive practices for students with disabilities, which have driven tangible results in math performance and fostered a highly cohesive school climate.
- Similarly, school leaders articulated that dual enrollment pathways help prepare students to graduate into high-demand careers, higher education, and technical trades.

### Challenges and Barriers

Region 3 continues to make instructional progress, but that momentum is increasingly undermined by compounding pressures — systemic assessment burdens, digital saturation, and growing classroom management challenges.

- Stakeholders identified major hurdles within the current testing landscape, specifically citing "assessment fatigue" and the struggle to extract actionable value from the fragmented data of nine-week testing cycles.
- Teachers, school leaders, and families expressed worry that the new School Performance and Support Framework fails to capture student growth.
- Educators and school leaders maintained that they face increasing stress from elementary behavioral disruptions and a critical lack of operational funding for basic classroom supplies and compensated planning periods.
- Division leaders and school board members requested a clear state framework for AI use in schools to ensure use of AI resources do not replace learning.

## COMMONWEALTH LISTENING TOUR REGION BREAKDOWN

### Date

March 9, 2026

### Location

Gloucester, VA

### Activities and Sessions Held

Classroom tours  
Student roundtable  
Stakeholder roundtable  
Public evening listening session

### Attendance Total

123

Stakeholders in Region 3 highlighted a need for a structural realignment of state funding formulas, additional wraparound services, and a return to analog learning.



## Region 4: Northern Virginia

### Key Regional Takeaways

**Region 4 stakeholders' feedback prioritized stability in state-level policies and initiatives, supporting multilingual learners and their families, restoring balance to digital and analog instructional materials, improving student safety, addressing wraparound service needs, and reducing infrastructure gaps.**

- Division leaders and community members expressed initiative fatigue and requested a phased approach to state policy changes, suggesting a slower ramp for new initiatives to allow educators time to adequately prepare.
- To mitigate administrative burden, school leaders suggested modernizing licensure rules for secondary teachers and implementing "Teacher Ladders" to reward talent and retain strong educators.
- School leaders reported on the challenges facing multilingual students, and realities of fearfulness of immigrant families and requested explicit state support to ensure every student feels safe in public schools.
- Some parents noted the overuse of technology in the classroom and articulated a desire to see better balance in use of digital and analog classroom materials.
- Other participants made suggestions to address "micro-infrastructure" gaps such as noisy cafeterias, flickering lights, and broken desks to improve the daily learning environment for students.

### Progress and Successes

**Region 4 emphasized its strong foundation in academic growth, driven by the effective implementation of evidence-based literacy practices and a diverse range of elective offerings.**

- Stakeholders emphasized improvements in student readiness stemming from the Virginia Literacy Act, where instructional specialists have utilized research-based phonics to close reading gaps for young learners.
- School leaders also highlighted the efficacy of the "Academy Model," which offers expansive course options to empower diverse learners and prepare them to graduate into high-demand careers or higher education.
- Widespread agreement on the need to increase access to early childhood programs by addressing the barriers that limit families' ability to enroll in high-quality options.

### Challenges and Barriers

**Region 4 identified major challenges with the current accountability framework and rigid compliance requirements that may exacerbate educator burnout.**

- School leaders identified concerns within the new School Performance and Support Framework, noting that it often acts as a "hammer" for punishment rather than a "flashlight" for showing areas that need support. School leaders and families alike feel that it fails to show the public how schools improve over time.
- Division leaders shared frustrations of state funding formulas and challenges of competing for talent given cost of living in the region.
- Educators report a perceived lack of control over daily lessons, which stifles local innovation and increases burnout among educators.



# COMMONWEALTH LISTENING TOUR REGION BREAKDOWN

### Date

April 8, 2026

### Location

Alexandria, VA

### Activities and Sessions Held

Stakeholder roundtable  
Public evening listening session

### Attendance Total

**151**

**Region 4 stakeholders' feedback prioritized consistency in state-level policy, reducing administration burden, improving student safety, addressing wraparound service needs, and reducing infrastructure gaps.**



## Region 5: Valley

### Key Regional Takeaways



Stakeholders in Region 5 showed support for performance-based assessment models, modernized educator licensure and pathways to the profession, and an expansion of wraparound services for students.

- Division leaders and community members advocated for a transition toward more performance-based tests in alignment with instruction from preschool through high school.
- Superintendents proposed more flexible licensure pathways for industry experts in mathematics and technical fields.
- Stakeholders want more dedicated translators to help multilingual families navigate the educational system.
- Participants articulated a need for expanded behavioral health teams that scale successful intervention models.
- Superintendents and division leaders identified a lack of reliable transit as a major barrier to attendance and a significant contributor to disparate student outcomes.
- Parent groups also suggested that gifted testing start before the third grade to help students access tailored supports earlier.

### Progress and Successes

Region 5 has built a strong foundation for academic growth through the strategic implementation of literacy initiatives, complemented by nationally recognized behavioral health systems and strong industry partnerships.

- Teachers, school leaders, and families emphasized improvements in student readiness stemming from the Virginia Literacy Act.
- School leaders also highlighted the efficacy of the region's behavioral health teams, which serve as national models for preventing students with disabilities from falling through the cracks.
- Partnerships with local businesses have allowed for expanded career and technical education offerings.

### Challenges and Barriers

There is ongoing confusion among administrators and parents regarding state accountability frameworks, and persistent barriers remain in digital engagement and language access.

- Division leaders expressed confusion and concern about the rollout of the School Performance and Support Framework, noting that the pace of implementation has made it difficult for staff to adapt effectively. Parents also report challenges in understanding new student growth data.
- Both parents and educators are worried about excessive screen time in class and also stated a desire for clear state rules for using artificial intelligence.
- Educators raised concerns about language barriers which prevent some parents from helping their children succeed.

## COMMONWEALTH LISTENING TOUR REGION BREAKDOWN

Date  
March 23, 2026

Location  
Fork Union, VA

### Activities and Sessions Held

Parent roundtable  
Stakeholder roundtable  
Public evening listening session

Attendance Total  
**146**

Stakeholders in Region 5 showed support for performance-based assessment models, modernized educator licensure and pathways to the profession, and an expansion of wraparound services for students.



## Region 6: Western Virginia

### Key Regional Takeaways



Region 6 stakeholders would like to see more performance-based assessments, expanded operational support systems that protect instructional time and better support “middle-tier” learners, and a continued preference for non-digital instructional materials.

- Students, educators, and school leaders support a shift toward performance-based assessments, which ask students to apply knowledge and demonstrate communication, critical thinking, and collaboration through projects and other types of assessments.
- High-school students and their instructors find that state tests often reward rote memorization rather than critical thinking skills.
- Educators reported burnout from managing non-instructional tasks.
- Parents want more interventions for "middle-tier" students who lack specialized gifted or special education supports.
- Parents in this region would like to see more physical textbooks and reduced screen time during instruction.
- To lower costs, educators and superintendents suggested that the state start regional healthcare consortia for school staff.

### Progress and Successes

Participants in Region 6 report that foundational literacy gains and high-impact vocational models are effectively aligning student mastery with the demands of the modern workforce, and they highlighted scalable regional models.

- Community members, parents, and educators indicated that the Virginia Literacy Act is driving tangible reading gains for the youngest learners.
- High-school students and educators praised local career and technical education programs in mass communication and medical training as high-impact models for student engagement. These programs use project-based mastery to prepare students for future careers.
- Community partners and parents identified the "3E" model (preparing students to be Enrolled, Enlisted or Employed after high school) as a success for linking school curricula with workforce needs.

### Challenges and Barriers

Region 6 stakeholders identified a range of barriers, including rigid mathematics pathways and behavioral challenges such as digital distractions.

- All kinds of stakeholders noted a conflict between legislated auto-acceleration requirements for middle school mathematics and their existing division middle school mathematics pathways.
- To maintain a focused environment, parents and educators identified vaping and cell phone use as hurdles to success that must be addressed.
- School leaders noted funding limitations and concerns about their inability to make needed infrastructure investments.

## COMMONWEALTH LISTENING TOUR

### REGION BREAKDOWN

#### Date

March 17, 2026

#### Location

Roanoke, VA

### Activities and Sessions Held

New CTE center construction tour  
Classroom tour  
Student roundtable  
Stakeholder roundtable  
Public evening listening session

#### Attendance Total

78

Region 6 stakeholders would like to see more performance-based assessments, expanded operational support systems that protect instructional time and better support “middle-tier” learners, and a continued preference for non-digital instructional materials.



## Region 7: Southwest

### Key Regional Takeaways



Region 7 emphasized the challenges related to funding formulas and the unique needs of rural divisions, the necessity of integrating comprehensive health services in schools and changes to instruction and assessment that prioritize long-term mastery and family involvement.

- Superintendents reported that many students live with chronic health conditions and advocated for state funding to place a full-time nurse in every building.
- Superintendents and educators use the community schools model to provide necessary wraparound services, including early childhood and after school programs, access to health services and more. Community members observed that local partners must often step in to bridge resource gaps.
- All groups agreed that state assessments must reward content mastery over rote memorization.
- Parents in this region specifically called for a return to traditional mathematics methods to help them support their children at home.

### Progress and Successes

There is shared regional sentiment that collaborative community partnerships and the implementation of literacy and vocational initiatives are successfully preparing students for postsecondary pathways.

- Region 7 stakeholders stated that community partners like local banks help bridge resource gaps in rural divisions. These partners help to ensure students can access and complete college-level coursework while in high school.
- Region 7 reports success through implementation of the Virginia Literacy Act.
- Division leadership identified nursing and electrical engineering programs as successful career and technical education pathways, which prepare students for immediate postsecondary success.

### Challenges and Barriers

Challenges identified by Region 7 include digital exhaustion, assessment-related stress, and varying levels of course rigor continue to impact student and teacher retention.

- Students cited “digital fatigue” from using laptop screens for long periods. This exhaustion causes many children to lose interest in daily lessons.
- Both educators and students reported that heavy testing creates high stress. This environment drives talented teachers away from rural classrooms.
- School and divisions leaders emphasized the challenges of fully funding school divisions and concerns about lack of funds for infrastructure and capital needs of their divisions.
- Parents and educators noted that dual enrollment courses often lack rigor, which leaves many students unprepared for the demands of postsecondary education.

## COMMONWEALTH LISTENING TOUR REGION BREAKDOWN

### Date

March 18, 2026

### Location

Marion, VA

### Activities and Sessions Held

Classroom Visits

Student roundtable

Stakeholder roundtable

Public evening listening session

### Attendance Total

165

Region 7 emphasized the necessity of integrating comprehensive health services in schools and changes to instruction and assessment that prioritize long-term mastery and family involvement.



## Region 8: Southside

### Key Regional Takeaways



**Stakeholders in Region 8 advocated for increased wraparound services, regionalized resource-sharing hubs that address the unique logistical constraints of rural education, and “analog balance.”**

- Community members reported that food insecurity and housing instability create barriers to student success. Superintendents and division leaders emphasized that these basic needs must be met to ensure academic readiness.
- Parents highlighted safety risks for students waiting at dark, rural bus stops.
- Furthermore, community members noted that geographic distance and transportation gaps limit access to off-site learning opportunities.
- Students reported that activity fees and family financial obligations often hinder participation in school clubs.
- Division leaders and community members advocated for regional specialists and resource-sharing hubs. These partnerships can help smaller divisions pool funds for professional development and career instructors.
- Students, parents, and educators expressed support for expanding performance-based assessments and student portfolios. These groups believe that these tools show student growth better than traditional testing alone.
- Stakeholders worried that reliance on artificial intelligence and classroom technology might hinder learning and emphasized that physical materials remain vital to the educational experience.

### Progress and Successes

**Region 8 reports gains in student engagement and classroom concentration through strong community ties and vocational training.**

- Educators, parents, and division leaders noted academic success through strong relationships between local families and their schools.
- Students, educators, and community members specifically noted that Region 8’s career and technical education programs excel in teaching workforce skills to students, especially in fields like welding, nursing, and the culinary arts.
- Students and educators observed that new cell phone restrictions improved student focus during classes.

### Challenges and Barriers

**Region 8 stakeholders report that their instructional momentum is hampered by delays in state resource delivery and a complex accountability framework, which complicates the communication of academic progress.**

- Educators and division leaders highlighted that teachers often start the school year without the tools they need for new standards.
- Students and educators reported that heavy testing burdens create high levels of anxiety for many students and staff.
- Stakeholders emphasized that the complex data reporting in the School Performance and Support Framework makes it difficult for communities to measure true, timely and steady academic progress.

## COMMONWEALTH LISTENING TOUR REGION BREAKDOWN

### Date

March 12, 2026

### Location

Cumberland, VA

### Activities and Sessions Held

Classroom tour  
Student roundtable  
Stakeholder roundtable  
Public evening listening session

### Attendance Total

74

**Stakeholders in Region 8 advocated for increased wraparound services, regionalized resource-sharing hubs that address the unique logistical constraints of rural education, and “analog balance.”**



# Other Educator, Leader, and Parent Meetings, Virtual Sessions, and Survey Results

In addition to the twenty-one in-person visits across all eight superintendent regions to hear from members of the public, the Secretary of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction also convened eight additional in-person sessions and six virtual sessions to solicit feedback from targeted stakeholder groups, including parents, school leaders, business community members, professional organizations, advisory councils, special education directors, and providers of early childhood care and education.

Many of the same themes emerged from these groups as in the regional listening sessions. A summary of key takeaways is included below.

### Key Takeaways

- Stakeholders across the Commonwealth recognized a successful foundation in early literacy and called for a similarly rigorous, evidence-based approach to mathematics.
- Emerging concerns regarding overuse of digital tools have prompted a widespread call to prioritize physical instructional materials over virtual platforms.
- To better measure and reflect student achievement, regional leaders and families are seeking a transition from complex, high-stakes testing to performance-based assessments and a greater emphasis on growth in the School Performance and Support Framework.
- State-level feedback underscores addressing the student mental health crisis and ensuring physical safety is foundational to student learning.
- The evolving role of schools as community support hubs necessitates a strategic expansion of nutritional programs, healthcare access, early childhood offerings, and specialized clinical pipelines to remove barriers to learning.
- Participants called for additional funding to address class sizes, staffing in instructional and support positions, as well as new methods for alleviating teacher burnout.
- Early childhood educators and leaders lauded the Virginia Department of Education’s responsiveness and policy leadership, and expressed pride in programs like the Virginia Preschool Initiative and Child Care Subsidy Program for expanding access to high-quality early learning statewide.
- Participants advocated for increased support for the lowest-paid educators, particularly within the early childhood workforce, as well as strengthened state strategies for recruitment and retention.

### Virtual Sessions

**59**

Teachers

**24**

Principals

**12**

Community and Business Partners

**56**

Families

### Advisory Groups

**150**

Special Education Directors

**8**

Commonwealth  
Student Advisory Council

**19**

Dinner with Region 7  
Superintendents in Marion

**33**

Public School Leaders Network  
(Northern Virginia)

**56**

UVA K12 Advisory Council

**5**

Arlington Parent Group

**24**

Early Childhood Groups

### Online Survey

February 25 to April 10

**967**

Distinct Responses



© 2026, Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Education

The Virginia Department of Education does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, color, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, political affiliation, or against otherwise qualified persons with disabilities. The policy permits appropriate employment preferences for veterans and specifically prohibits discrimination against veterans.