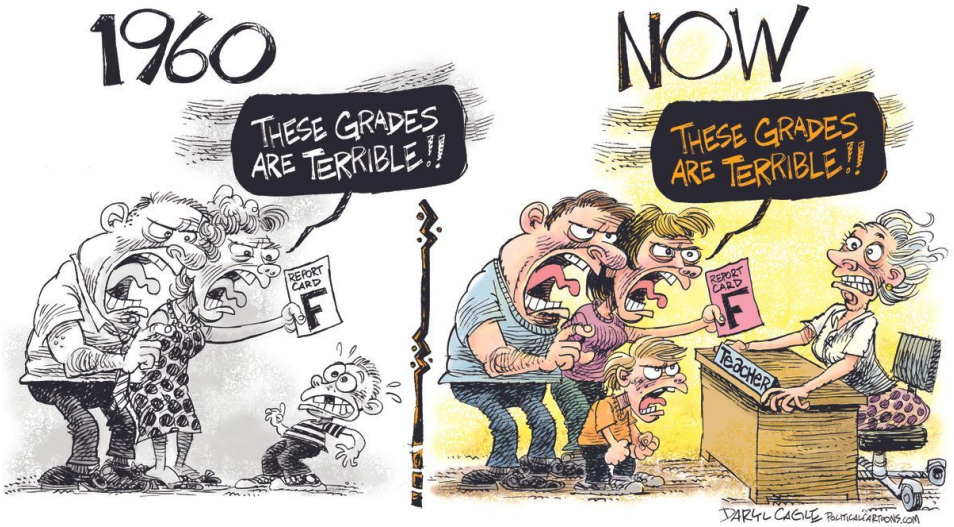
Getting Ahead of the Curve

Preparing for Virginia’s New Cut Scores

Parent Perspectives

- What do most parents regard as the point of truth when evaluating their children's academic prowess?
- How likely are parents to intervene in their child's education when they see good grades?



Virginia’s Educational Expectations

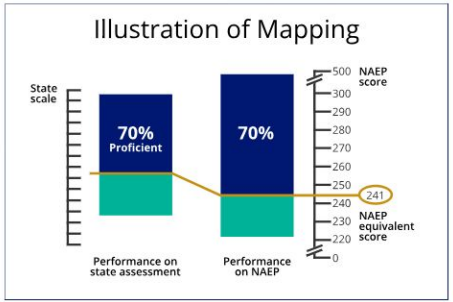
- Despite lower SOL scores and declining state rankings over time, 90% of Virginia’s schools met the mark under the old accreditation system
- According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, Virginia currently has the lowest standard for student proficiency in the nation
  - Similar results published in 2021 and 2026
  - What does this mean?
    - A student who scores 400 on a Virginia SOL test would likely not be able to pass any other state’s assessment
  - Please keep in mind that Virginia lowered Math cut scores in 2019 and lowered reading cut scores in 2021

Home › Special Reports › Mapping State Proficiency Standards

Mapping State Proficiency Standards

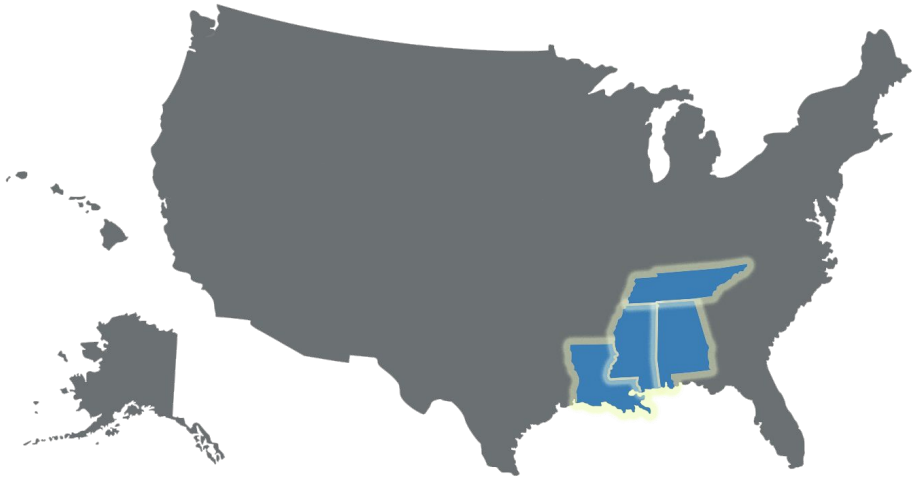
Since 2003, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has compared each state's standard for proficient performance in reading and mathematics at grades 4 and 8 by placing the state standards onto common scales from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This process of "state mapping" shows where each state's standards fall on the NAEP scales and in relation to the NAEP achievement levels— *NAEP Basic*, *NAEP Proficient*, and *NAEP Advanced*—providing important contributions to the discussion of state standards.

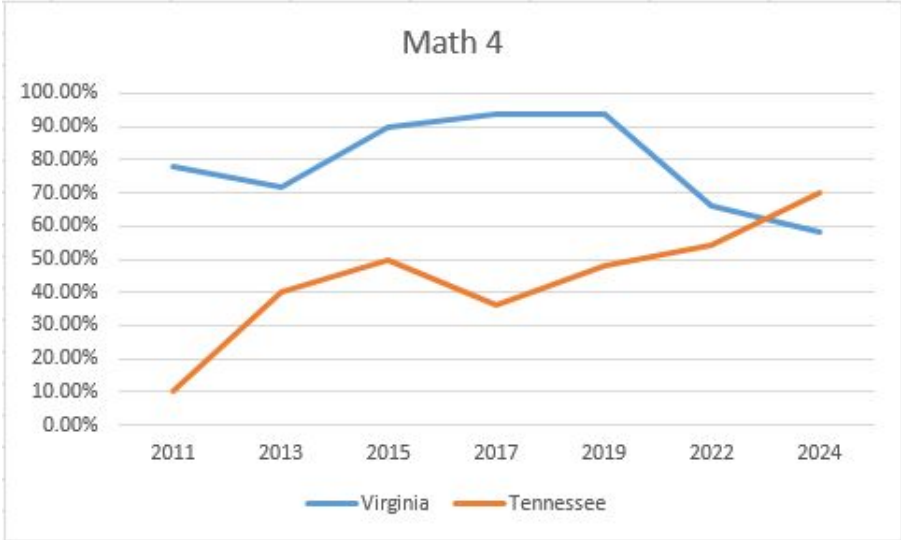
These mapping results do not suggest an evaluation of state assessments or of the quality of state achievement standards because state and NAEP assessments are developed for different but related purposes and can vary in format and administration. The results of this study do not suggest that NAEP achievement levels are more valid or states should emulate NAEP standards.



Examples of Improving Outcomes- The “Southern Surge”

- Implemented the “Science of Reading”
- A-F Accountability Systems
- Increased standards for proficiency
- Ended social promotion (to an extent)

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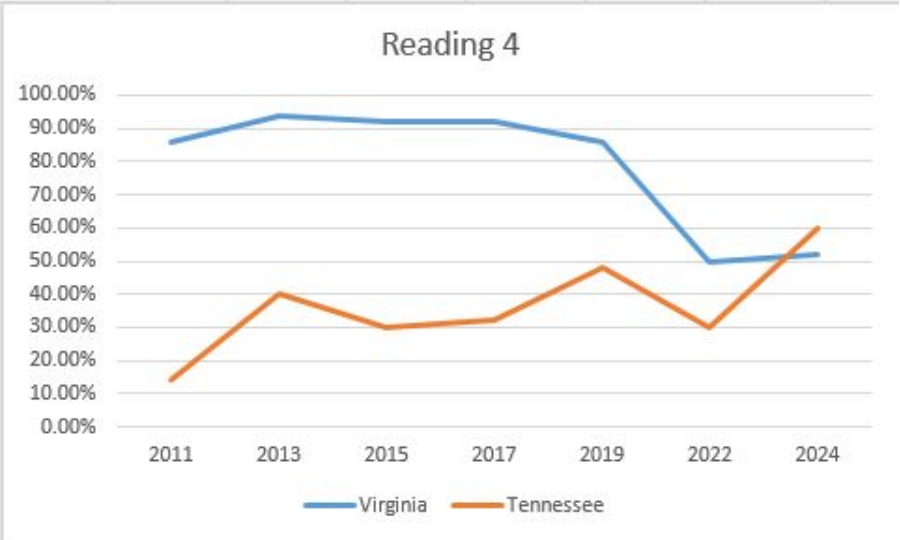
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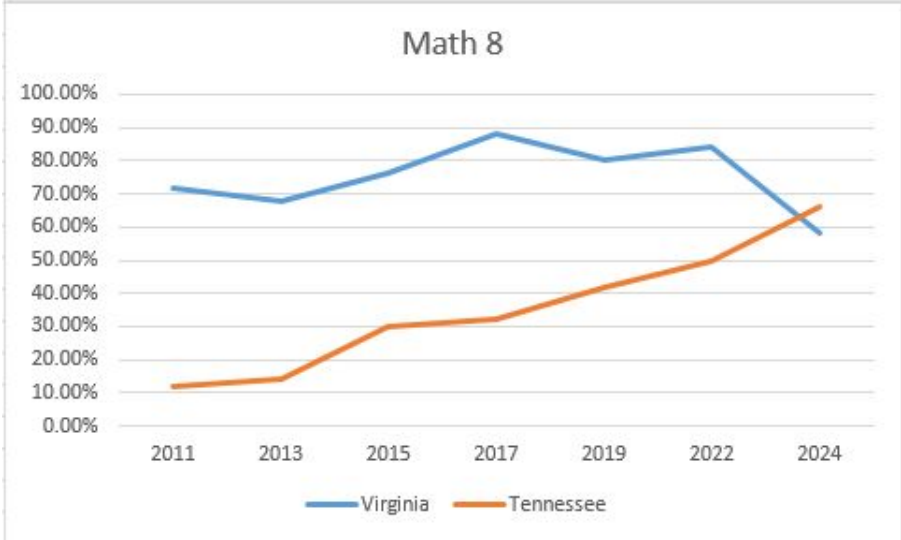
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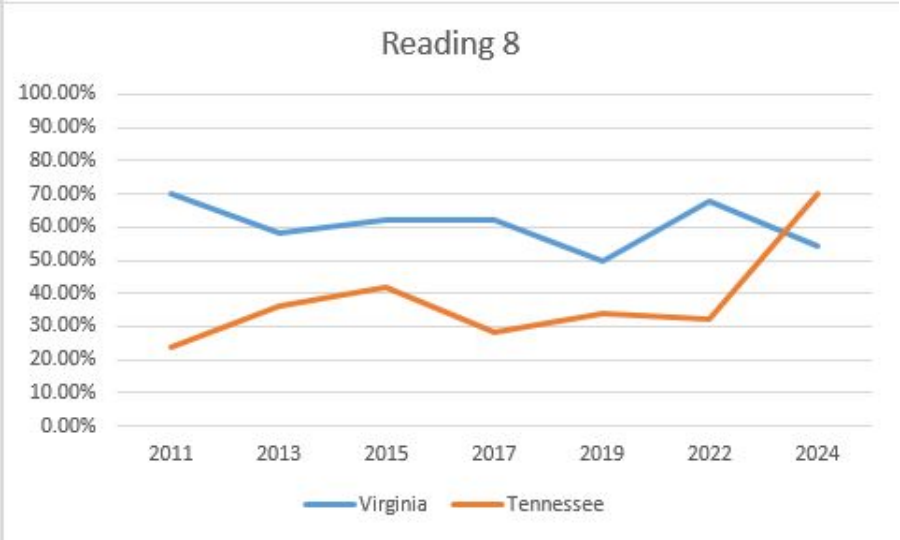
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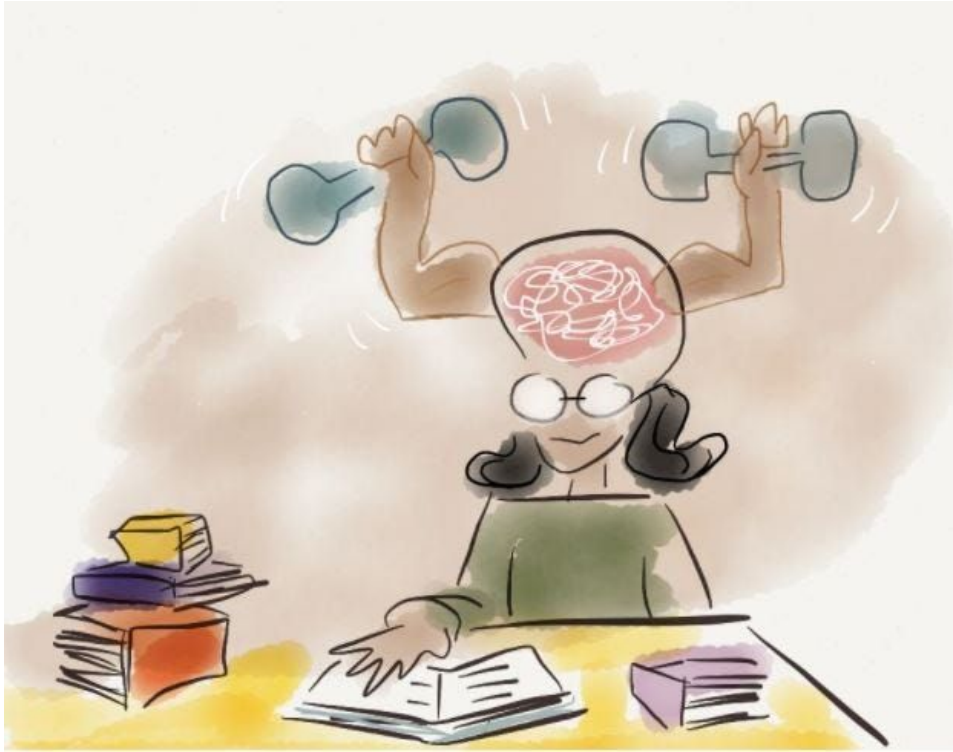
New SOL Cut Scores

Reading Performance Cut Levels				
	Below Basic	**Basic**	**Proficient**	**Advanced**
Grade 3	408	409	444	502
Grade 4	414	415	451	514
Grade 5	401	402	446	510
Grade 6	389	390	449	515
Grade 7	375	376	449	511
Grade 8	385	386	449	516
End-of-Course Reading			479	543
Math Performance Cut Levels				
Grade 3	375	376	443	521
Grade 4	383	384	445	518
Grade 5	378	379	445	511
Grade 6	379	380	433	507
Grade 7	387	388	430	508
Grade 8	387	388	430	503
Algebra I			453	518
Algebra II			443	505
Geometry			452	510

	Pass Rates			
Test	New Cuts	Old Cuts	Diff	% Change
Algebra I	35.84%	83.56%	-47.73%	-57.11%
Algebra II	55.66%	87.87%	-32.21%	-36.66%
EOC Reading	34.16%	84.15%	-50.00%	-59.41%
Geometry	32.06%	77.67%	-45.61%	-58.73%
Gr 3 Math	41.63%	73.40%	-31.78%	-43.29%
Gr 3 Reading	35.56%	67.35%	-31.79%	-47.20%
Gr 4 Math	38.74%	72.37%	-33.63%	-46.47%
Gr 4 Reading	37.95%	72.57%	-34.62%	-47.71%
Gr 5 Math	38.61%	70.83%	-32.22%	-45.48%
Gr 5 Reading	35.54%	69.88%	-34.34%	-49.14%
Gr 6 Math	37.40%	65.62%	-28.22%	-43.00%
Gr 6 Reading	34.85%	71.19%	-36.34%	-51.05%
Gr 7 Math	37.30%	62.92%	-25.62%	-40.72%
Gr 7 Reading	35.24%	71.18%	-35.93%	-50.48%
Gr 8 Math	36.68%	61.41%	-24.73%	-40.28%
Gr 8 Reading	36.02%	70.89%	-34.87%	-49.19%

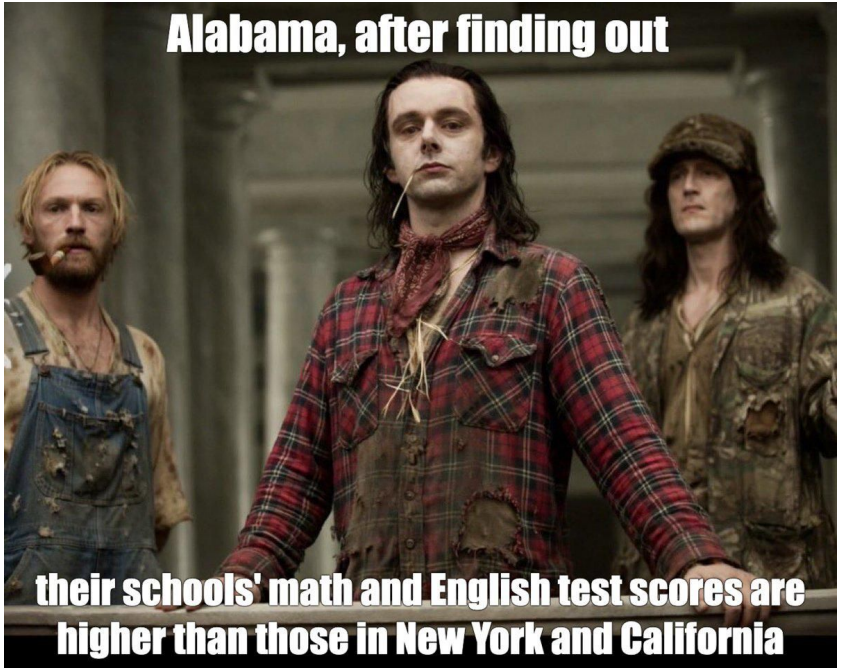
Increasing Rigor

- The BOE has increased rigor with the new SOL cut scores
    - They may dispense with the the approaching cut scores and rip the band-aid off in the 2029-2030 school year
    - BOE will discuss this week and possibly decide in August
- Other increases in rigor could potentially stem from changes in SOL testing that could more accurately assess certain skills in the future- think “Justify”



Rigor in Our Classrooms

- Do all standards have the same level of rigor?
- How well does the rigor in our classrooms align with the rigor found in the standards?
- How can we measure the rigor in our classrooms?
- If the rigor in our classrooms aren’t sufficient under the current cut scores, what will likely happen when the new cut scores are implemented?

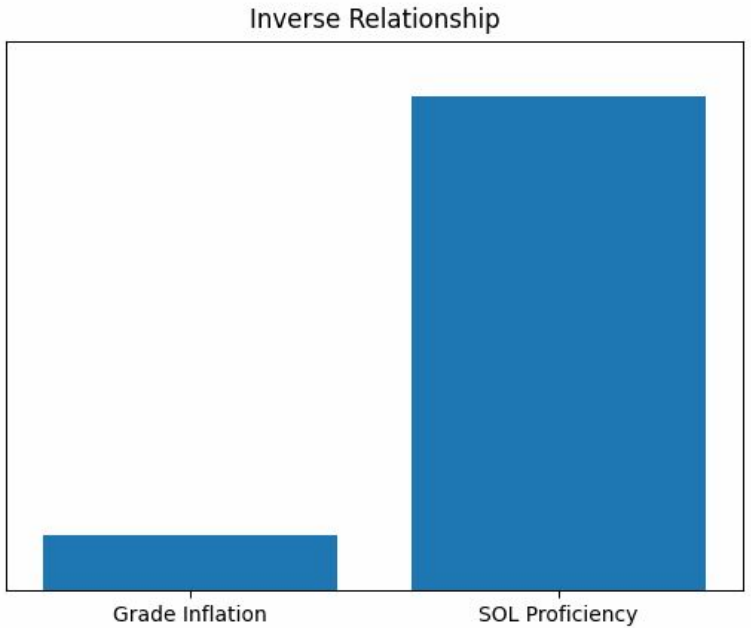


Factors That Impact Student SOL Outcomes

Analysis	Comp	2025 Factor (SOL Pass Rates)	n	r	r^2	p-value
Division	Pass	Evaluation Alignment Index	20	0.851	72.42%	<.001
Division	Pass	Grade Alignment Index	67	0.818	66.91%	<.001
Division	Pass	GPA	67	0.708	50.13%	<.001
Division	Pass	% White Enrollment	131	0.624	38.94%	<.001
Division	Pass	% Black Enrollment	131	-0.610	37.21%	<.001
Division	Pass	% Econ Dis Enrollment	131	-0.565	31.92%	<.001
Division	Pass	Unfilled and Provisional Teachers	131	-0.542	29.38%	<.001
Division	Pass	Federal Poverty Rate	131	-0.525	27.56%	<.001
Division	Pass	Course Pass Rates	67	0.500	25.00%	<.001
Division	Pass	% of Students in Single Parent Families	129	-0.475	22.56%	<.001
Division	Pass	% Unfilled Teacher Positions	131	-0.470	22.09%	<.001
Division	Pass	% Provisional Teachers	131	-0.438	19.18%	<.001
Division	Pass	Grade Align Ind Change/Pass Rate Diff	67	0.428	18.32%	<.001
Division	Pass Diff	Instructional Hours/Pass Rate Diff	131	0.333	11.09%	<.001
Division	Pass	% EL Enrollment	131	-0.320	10.24%	<.001
Division	Pass	% Hispanic Enrollment	131	-0.281	7.90%	<.001
Division	Pass	Per Pupil Funding (2024 Table 15)	131	-0.226	5.11%	0.009
Division	Pass	SWDs Reading and Read Aloud/Audio	73	0.211	Not Sig	0.074
Division	Pass	% SWDs Enrollment	131	0.077	Not Sig	0.381

Grade Inflation and SOL Proficiencies

- Over the years we have compared student final grades and SOL outcomes
- We have found misalignment in all schools and divisions to some degree
- We have found that the higher the degree of grade inflation, the lower the performance on the SOL test
- We also have found different degrees of grade inflation of subgroups within the same organization
    - The bigger the subgroup gap in grade inflation, the bigger the subgroup gap in SOL proficiencies



Year	Grade	Total	Fail	Pass	Pass ADV
2019	A	37687	3.33%	69.05%	27.62%
2019	B	41792	14.67%	80.19%	5.14%
2019	C	25562	37.97%	61.18%	0.85%
2019	D	10704	59.80%	39.84%	0.36%
2019	F	4915	79.98%	19.84%	0.18%

Year	Grade	Total	Fail	Pass	Pass ADV
2022	A	56624	7.42%	70.16%	22.42%
2022	B	50063	25.78%	69.97%	4.24%
2022	C	30516	50.94%	47.88%	1.18%
2022	D	14757	66.35%	33.01%	0.64%
2022	F	8122	82.66%	17.03%	0.31%

Year	Grade	Total	Fail	Pass	Pass ADV
2023	A	68877	6.73%	69.76%	23.51%
2023	B	62504	24.89%	71.22%	3.88%
2023	C	36380	50.05%	48.80%	1.15%
2023	D	17282	66.12%	33.21%	0.67%
2023	F	9077	84.12%	15.48%	0.40%

Year	Grade	Total	Fail	Pass	Pass ADV
2024	A	77050	8.50%	69.51%	21.99%
2024	B	74118	24.59%	71.55%	3.85%
2024	C	45383	50.83%	48.17%	1.00%
2024	D	23241	66.31%	33.08%	0.62%
2024	F	12338	84.28%	15.48%	0.24%

Year	Grade	Total	Fail	Pass	Pass Adv
2025	A	101651	6.85%	68.71%	24.43%
2025	B	102971	22.24%	73.49%	4.27%
2025	C	63567	49.36%	49.46%	1.18%
2025	D	31152	66.81%	32.50%	0.69%
2025	F	15009	83.04%	16.47%	0.49%

Group	Grade	Fail	Pass	Pass Adv
Non-White	A	12.22%	69.17%	18.61%
White	A	5.50%	68.60%	25.90%
Not SWDs	A	5.64%	69.18%	25.18%
SWDs	A	27.21%	60.91%	11.88%
Econ Dis	A	10.21%	71.90%	17.89%
Not Econ Dis	A	4.86%	66.82%	28.32%

All Students									
Grade	Total	Fail	Pass	Pass Adv	Grade	Total	Fail	Pass	Pass Adv
A	733	23.06%	67.26%	9.69%	A	3756	1.62%	69.68%	28.70%
B	1872	46.37%	50.96%	2.67%	B	2550	11.49%	82.98%	5.53%
C	1933	73.10%	26.02%	0.88%	C	1016	37.60%	60.14%	2.26%
D	1030	84.76%	14.47%	0.78%	D	380	60.79%	38.95%	0.26%
F	478	89.96%	9.41%	0.63%	F	106	78.30%	20.75%	0.94%

Students with Disabilities									
Grade	Total	Fail	Pass	Pass Adv	Grade	Total	Fail	Pass	Pass Adv
A	44	50.00%	43.18%	6.82%	A	293	7.17%	75.09%	17.75%
B	112	61.61%	33.04%	5.36%	B	452	19.69%	77.21%	3.10%
C	210	83.33%	15.24%	1.43%	C	302	54.64%	44.70%	0.66%
D	152	88.16%	10.53%	1.32%	D	135	73.33%	26.67%	0.00%
F	78	94.87%	5.13%	0.00%	F	35	91.43%	8.57%	0.00%

SOL Pass Rates			
All Students	37.93%	All Students	86.55%
SWDs	20.47%	SWDs	66.64%
% Gap	-46.03%	% Gap	-23.01%

		2025			
Test	Grade	#	Fail	Pass	Pass Adv
Gr 6 Math	A	24	0.00%	83.33%	16.67%
	B	30	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
	C	28	57.14%	42.86%	0.00%
	D	10	90.00%	10.00%	0.00%
	F	7	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Gr 6 Reading	A	32	0.00%	68.75%	31.25%
	B	27	22.22%	77.78%	0.00%
	C	25	52.00%	48.00%	0.00%
	D	12	41.67%	58.33%	0.00%
	F	3	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%

		2024			
Test	Grade	#	Fail	Pass	Pass Adv
Gr 6 Math	A	21	0.00%	90.48%	9.52%
	B	37	27.03%	72.97%	0.00%
	C	40	80.00%	20.00%	0.00%
	D	20	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	F	0	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Gr 6 Reading	A	28	14.29%	85.71%	0.00%
	B	56	41.07%	58.93%	0.00%
	C	26	57.69%	42.31%	0.00%
	D	7	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	F	1	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%

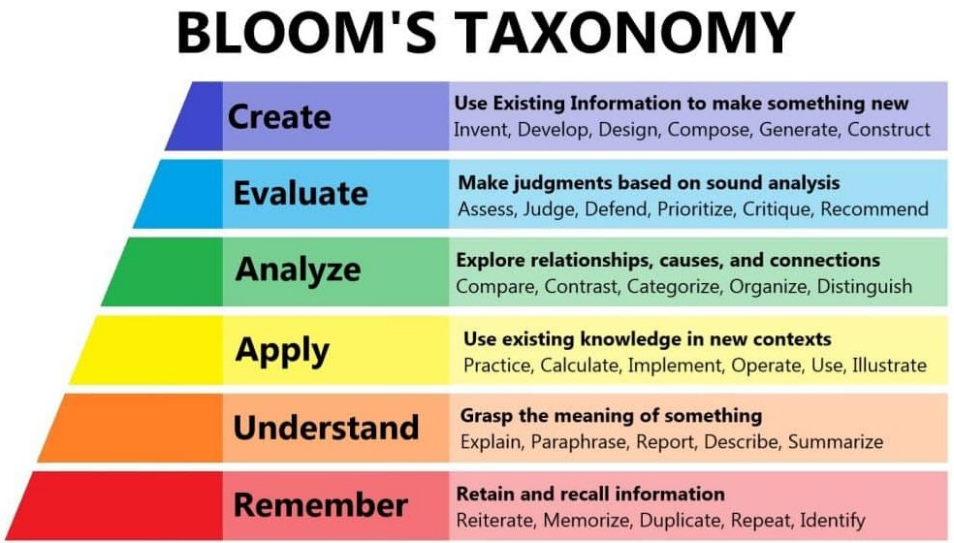
	2025					2024					Difference				
Test	#	Pass	PR	ADV	ADV PR	#	Pass	PR	ADV	ADV PR	#	Pass	PR	ADV	ADV PR
Gr 6 Math	99	67.68%	47.89%	4.04%	43.66%	118	47.46%	16.08%	1.69%	21.68%	-19	20.22%	31.80%	2.35%	21.98%
Gr 6 Reading	99	72.73%	44.44%	10.10%	60.00%	118	57.63%	13.14%	0.00%	5.11%	-19	15.10%	31.31%	10.10%	54.89%

Common Factors that Contribute to Grade Inflation

- Systemic problem, not caused by any one group (teachers, parents, etc)
- Tests and assignments below grade level rigor/content
- Grading Philosophy
    - What is a grade supposed to represent, mastery or effort?
- Policy/practice
    - 50% rule
    - Weighting of grades
- Fear of Conflict, Lack of Trust
- “Squishy” grading in the early primary grades
- Lack of focus on this problem
- The degree to which we believe our students can achieve grade level mastery

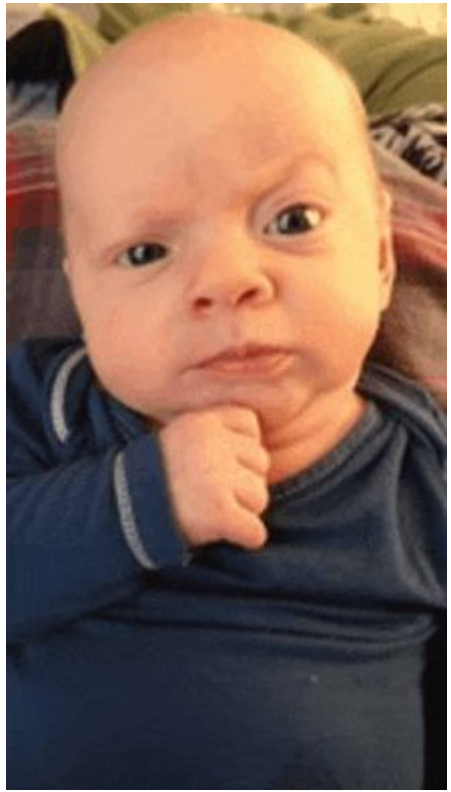
Increasing Classroom Rigor to Align with State Standards

- High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIMs) are intended
    - Caution- not all HQIMs are sufficiently aligned to Virginia Standards!
- Work with teachers to unpack the standards so they fully understand what their students are expected to know, understand, and be able to do
- Ask teachers to collaboratively develop and implement common assessments that fully align with the standards
- Assessment audits rather than reviewing lesson plans



Questions to Ponder

- If we don’t ask kids to work at the level of rigor in class that aligns with the rigor on the test, how can they do well on the test?
- If our grades do not accurately reflect student mastery of grade level content, why would we expect parents to intervene?



Recommendations to Reduce Grade Inflation

- The following is an outline of a protocol developed over the course of a year by Virginia school and division leaders.
- This is intended to be a document to guide divisions through their own process, not simple paint by the numbers
    - Phase 1: Investigate & Build Readiness
    - Phase 2: Professional Learning & Shared Understanding
    - Phase 3: Pilot Implementation & Progress Monitoring
    - Phase 4: Scaling, Integration, and Accountability
    - Ongoing Support Structures (Non-Negotiable)

Conditions Necessary to Reduce Grade Inflation

- Leadership is critical at the division level
  - All constituent groups need to understand the negative impacts that grade inflation has on our students
  - A collaborative approach must be devised to tackle the problem
  - Data should be collected and evaluated periodically, and adjustments made as needed
  - Trust must be developed/cultivated/maintained across all constituencies within the division
- Support
  - Teachers need strong, visible support from their principals.
  - Principals need equally strong support from the central office.
  - Central office staff need equally strong support from the school board.

In conclusion…..

- Reducing Grade inflation is not the end, it's a means to improve student achievement which is the ultimate goal
    - When grades become less inflated, student achievement improves
    - When student achievement improves, grades become less inflated
- Without systemic changes, the systemic problem cannot be solved.

Questions, comments, concerns, observations???