

Position Statement Requesting Implementation Delay of At Least One Year of the Commonwealth's School Performance and Supports Framework

Developed by Northern Virginia's Public School System Leaders

Northern Virginia's public school divisions educate nearly 1/3 of Virginia's 1,261,962 PreK-12 students including nearly 33% of the Commonwealth's students with disabilities and nearly 60% of students acquiring English language skills. We fully support a strong accountability framework for our schools and understand its role in ensuring educational excellence. We believe the Virginia Department of Education's Guiding Principle 2: *Transparency and access to actionable information* is a key to successful implementation.

In August 2024, the Commonwealth of Virginia's State Board of Education adopted a new School Performance and Supports Framework for public schools and districts across the state. We want to be good partners with the state in our shared mission to foster the success of each and every student; however, we are concerned that school divisions have not been provided that appropriate amount of time to address the new accountability requirements the Commonwealth has established.

The Board of Education adopted the Framework only recently, and well after school divisions planned, budgeted, and staffed for the current school year, and after students had selected their courses. One-quarter of the 2024-25 school year has already passed, and many of the Framework's measures have still not yet been fully defined nor has detailed modeling been shared with school divisions. Additionally, the Commonwealth has yet to identify the types of support it will provide to schools in need of improvement and secure the necessary related funding.

Because of our serious concerns, we urge the Board of Education and VDOE to delay implementation of the Framework for at least one year and directly engage with school division leaders, educators, and families across the state to refine it.

In the spirit of collaboration, we offer the following comments and recommendations for improvement and we stand ready—starting today—to work with you on these action steps.

To achieve our shared goal of advancing education in Northern Virginia and in the Commonwealth, **we recommend** that the following 5 actions be taken prior to implementation:

- ***Reinstate student knowledge growth and alternative measurement*** alongside mastery as key Framework components.

Professional educators understand that learner variability is not the exception but the norm. To ensure access and drive toward success for all students, effective educators know they must meet students where they are to support them in meeting their personal academic goals as well as the Commonwealth's standards. Mastery measurement that does not build from this understanding risks demoralizing students, confusing parents and discouraging educators.

Unfortunately, the SOL Mastery-focused model as adopted has short, unrealistic runways for English Language Learners (3 semesters for Mastery rather than the current Demonstration of Growth standard), students with disabilities, and other students who have been historically impacted by interrupted learning or a lack of access to education. Providing students with multiple opportunities to experience success improves student confidence, encourages them to take academic risks, and ultimately moves them to academic achievement.

- ***Fully build out and transparently vet all new components*** of the Framework's calculations, including the underlying algorithms, and provide ample time for professional, parent and public review, comment and testing.

At present, the Framework is not fully developed, funded, or tested, which raises concerns about its ability to meet its intended goals.

It's important to note that several of the *new Framework components are TBD* (e.g. the "5 C's" performance task for elementary and middle school, advanced coursework in middle school, and high-demand, high wage CTE offerings in HS) and rely heavily on advanced planning and staffing decisions which must be made during the prior school year and require parent engagement and collaboration early on in the planning process.

The Framework requirements are also coming on the heels of *multiple content standard changes during the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years* affecting the majority of the core content areas including Math, Reading, Science, and Social Studies. Never before have we seen so many changes required in such a short period of time. Teachers—the key to successful educational change implementation—have not been given the *essential time and training* to successfully incorporate the new standards into their practice.

Change management takes time. A rushed approach that does not involve all stakeholders with sufficient time to work through potential challenges and kinks presents a significant risk of coming to false conclusions which could negatively impact our students. Parents, educators and school divisions, as well as the General Assembly, need valid and reliable data—not rushed interpretations—to make informed decisions about the true needs of our students as we all work to

prepare young people to reach their ultimate goal—preparedness for post-secondary engagement, including college, career, and life.

- **Test and validate** the fully built out Framework prior to full conversion.

As has been done in the past, provide at least one year in which the old and new *systems are run in parallel* to identify anomalies or other issues. We also recognize that grade level testing by its nature tests a different group of students every year. We urge you to use a *three-year rolling average score* to make determinations of next steps for schools and school divisions. This method will also allow for a more reliable assessment of our progress in implementing all of the new standards.

- **Clarify and publicly vet the components and intent of any MOU** that will be required of low-performing schools and/or school divisions, and create *percentage tiers based on school division size* that would trigger the imposition of any MOU, rather than straight cut scores.
- **Prioritize an immediate increase in appropriated funding** for any Commonwealth school that is identified “Off Track” or “In Need of Support”, as well as for *comprehensive professional development* related to the new Framework, for all school divisions based on their actual number of instructional FTEs. In the longer term, provide sufficient state funding for the state Standards of Quality as identified by the 2023 JLARC study.

We stand ready to begin working with you and other stakeholders to perfect the Framework. Time is an essential ingredient in any educational change. We respectfully ask that our primary recommendation to delay full implementation for at least one year be adopted immediately. We offer this in service of our goal to provide excellent education to all Virginia’s students.



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Mary Kadera, Chair, Arlington County School Board



Carolyn Pitches – Chair, City of Fairfax School Board



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