



MEMORANDUM

FROM: State Superintendent Jillian Balow

TO: Virginia State Board of Education President Gecker and Members

RE: Superintendent's Update

On May 19, 2022, I released the education report [“Our Commitment to Virginians: High Expectations and Excellence for All Students.”](#) The report fulfills the requirement of Governor Youngkin's Executive Order One. The report serves as an inflection point in Virginia education and offers tenets for substantive positive change.

The report has received substantial media coverage including staff editorials in the [Washington Post](#) and the [Wall Street Journal](#). The report concludes with ideas for a path forward. This path depends on key decision makers and stakeholders, including the State Board, discussing the data and the actions needed to reverse downward trends. For example, the State Board should consider changing course on proficiency cut scores, where Virginia currently has the lowest cut scores in the nation in grades 4 and 8 reading, and grade 4 math. Additionally, the State Board should consider how student growth is weighted and recognized in school accreditation.

The report emphasizes the need for Virginia families, educators, and policymakers to have a sense of where students are performing in order to lay out an agenda that aggressively closes gaps that existed before March 2020 and were exacerbated by school closures.

Data from the Phonological Awareness Literacy Survey (PALS) were shared. The downward trends are alarming. The prioritization of early literacy instruction and the science of reading by this Board is critical. Despite not having a budget passed by the General Assembly at the time I write this, we have moved forward to meet the letter of the law including reorganizing staff around the work of implementing the Virginia Literacy Act. We look forward to providing regular updates to the Board about our progress.

In closing, the summer professional development season is upon us. The VDOE offers a wide array of opportunities for education professionals. If there is a training we offer that you would like to attend, please let Emily know so we can provide you with registration information. We welcome your participation in professional development events.