



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

April 1, 2016

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Steven R. Staples, Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: 2016-2017 Federal Accountability Determinations: Priority Schools, Focus Schools, and Other Title I Schools In Improvement

As announced in a February 22, 2016, Superintendent's E-mail, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) will not report performance against federal annual measurable objective (AMO) targets for the 2015-2016 assessment year. This adjustment is based on guidance in a December 18, 2015, communication from the U.S. Department of Education (USED) regarding its plan for an orderly transition from the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA) to the newly authorized *Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015* (ESSA). As a reminder, report cards will be made available through the VDOE Web site in fall of 2016. These report cards will display achievement results similar to previously released report cards, but will not display whether the results meet the state's AMO targets.

In the December 18, 2015, communication, USED announced that states must continue to identify and serve priority and focus schools in the 2016-2017 school year. States were provided two options for identifying schools:

- **Option A:** The state maintains its existing lists of priority and focus schools for the 2016-2017 school year and does not exit schools from the lists; or
- **Option B:** The state exits priority and focus schools meeting the state's exit criteria and identifies new priority and focus schools to replace the exited ones.

Noting that the 2016-2017 school year will be a transition year between ESEA and full ESSA implementation in the 2017-2018 school year, VDOE submitted another option to USED for consideration: *Allow VDOE to exit priority and focus schools meeting the state's exit criteria and do not require the state to identify new priority or focus schools for the 2017-2018 school year.*

After considerable discussion between USED and VDOE regarding the merits of the state-proposed option, USED determined that the state must choose either Option A or Option B. According to USED, the state is obligated to continue in the 2016-2017 school year to identify and serve the **same** percentage of priority and focus schools as required under ESEA flexibility: 1) five percent of the lowest-performing Title I schools as priority schools; and 2) ten percent of Title I schools with the greatest gaps in subgroup performance as focus schools. In response, **VDOE selected Option B – to exit priority and focus schools meeting the state's exit criteria and identify new priority and focus schools to replace the exited schools.**

The VDOE will use pass rate data to determine which schools exit priority and focus status for the 2016-2017 school year and which schools will be newly identified in either category. As in past years, schools identified for priority and focus status for 2016-2017 will be announced in the fall.

Although USED is requiring the state to identify and serve the same percentage of priority and focus schools as required under ESEA flexibility, the state is **not** required to identify other Title I schools that miss one or more AMOs for improvement status. Therefore, the category of “Other Title I Schools in Improvement” will be retired for the 2016-2017 school year.

Please note that state accreditation determinations, as required under the state’s *Standards of Accreditation*, remain in place and are not affected by the changes in federal accountability for the 2016-2017 school year.

Questions regarding federal accountability determinations for the 2016-2017 school year may be submitted to ESSA@doe.virginia.gov.

SRS/vt

Links:

- <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/transition-dcl.pdf>
- <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/accreditation/>