

Virginia Deeper Learning Policy Landscape

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has passed legislation over the past few years that encourages deeper learning to take place in schools through changing graduation requirements in **Profile of a Virginia Graduate**, transforming assessments through **Local Alternative Assessments** and the **Networked Improvement Community (NIC)**, encouraging innovation in districts through the **Virginia is for Learners Innovation Network**, and providing funding to make changes to the development and implementation of programs through **Innovation Grants**. These policies improve the alignment between deeper learning and graduation requirements, assessments, new innovations, and funding.

Profile of a Virginia Graduate

The development of the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate* began in 2015 as a comprehensive review and revision of the Standards of Accreditation, including student achievement and graduation requirements, and recently went into effect during the 2018/19 school year. The Profile describes the knowledge, skills, competencies, and experiences that students should attain during their K-12 education to be “life-ready,” or competitive for job opportunities in tomorrow’s economy. The Profile established a set of expectations to prepare students with the content knowledge and skills to successfully apply it after graduation, the **5 Cs**:

- Critical thinking
- Creative thinking
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Citizenship

Along with the 5 Cs, they also aim for the development of core skill sets in the early years of high school and the provision of multiple paths towards college and career readiness with opportunities for internships, externships, and credentialing. The **competencies** high school graduates should attain include *content knowledge, workplace skills, community engagement and civic responsibility, and career exploration*. A successful Virginia graduate should be able to:

- Achieve and apply appropriate academic knowledge;
- Align knowledge, skills, and personal interests with career opportunities;
- Attain and demonstrate productive workplace skills, qualities, and behaviors;
- Value and build connections with diverse communities; and
- Understand personal and civic responsibility

Proposals that have already been endorsed that support deeper learning include: expanding career exposure, exploration, and planning; encouraging internships and work-based learning (WBL) for all students; and expanding the use of locally-developed performance assessments for history and social science. Proposals that support deeper learning which are under further consideration include: establishing a requirement for applied knowledge and experiential learning to demonstrate the 5 Cs, with the possibility of a capstone project; and increasing mathematics requirements and expectations for all students.

Profile of a Virginia Leader

The Profile of a Virginia Education Leader was modeled after the Profile of a Virginia Graduate, but instead focuses on the educator's role and how their competencies, skill sets, and dispositions are linked to the education standards. Virginia education leaders are educators who have growth mindsets, are strategic thinkers, lead Deeper Learning, focus on equity, and provide a learner-centered, personalized education in their classrooms. These leaders have a foundational domain consisting of:

- Visions, values and culture
- Personal skills, mindset and values
- Capacity building
- Shared responsibility

Profile of a Virginia Classroom

The Profile of a Virginia Classroom ensures educators have a commitment to lead professional learning that aligns with the best practices in instruction. According to the VASCD Pedagogy Project, Virginia classrooms focus on 5 areas:

1. Planning for deeper learning
2. Providing quality instruction
3. Redefining teacher and student roles
4. Embedding feedback and assessment
5. Creating a culture of respect

Planning for deeper learning requires teachers to create authentic experiences, understand their students' backgrounds and needs, focus on big ideas and standards, and provide a driving question for their students. In order for teachers to **provide quality instruction**, they must make class meaningful and worthwhile, adjust for diverse learners, show how the work is transferable to real life situations, create opportunities for collaboration, and consider their students' prior knowledge and experiences.

Redefining teacher and student roles occurs when teachers acknowledge students as partners, teach students to be active learners, and shift the balance from teacher-led to student-led activities. Teachers can **embed feedback and assessment** through clear learning criteria, ongoing feedback and assessment, a reflection and adjustment period, and multiple pathways for assessing student progress. **Creating a culture of respect** happens when a teacher shows empathy, a growth mindset, healthy relationships, cultural competence, restorative practices, and diversity celebration.

Student Assessments

Virginia has approved the use of several different types of assessments to support deeper learning in the classroom. **Local Alternative Assessments** were first implemented to replace the state-developed Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in various subject matters with locally developed alternative assessments including performance assessments, and the **Networked Improvement Community (NIC)** was created to transform assessment to create more student-led assessment opportunities and develop *Profile of a Graduate* attributes.

1. Local Alternative Assessments

Local Alternative Assessments were created by legislation in the General Assembly in 2014 to eliminate the state-developed SOL tests in grade 3 science and history, grade 5 writing, and United

States history to 1865 and from 1865 to the present. School divisions were expected to use at least one performance assessment in 2016-17, share examples of performance assessments across divisions in 2017-18, and partner with other divisions to score each other's assessments in 2018-19. Desk reviews are conducted annually to verify that schools are teaching the appropriate content, to determine the types of assessments being used, to identify exemplars that can be shared with other school divisions, and to assist teachers, schools, and school divisions in strengthening their own alternative performance assessments. These reviews allow the VDOE to identify best practices.

Regional grants were available to support the transformation of assessment options, which encouraged integrated assessments of multiple subject areas. School divisions are encouraged to provide professional development for teachers with less experience designing and implementing alternative assessments in a manner that emphasizes collaboration between teachers. To achieve constant expectations for Virginia students across districts, the Virginia Quality Criteria Tool for Performance Assessments and common rubrics developed by VDOE were made available.

2. Networked Improvement Community

Eleven school districts participate in the *Networked Improvement Community* with the main goal of transforming assessment to better evaluate deeper learning. The NIC focuses on creating student-led assessment that measures growth towards content mastery and Portrait of a Graduate attributes. These transformations emphasize the process of assessment, providing students with varied assessment opportunities and more voice, enabling students to take more ownership over their learning process and assessment structures. The changes in assessments can include student evaluation through capstone projects, student-curated portfolios, senior projects, presenting work during Exhibitions of Learning, and self-assessment by completing rubrics.

Virginia is for Learners Innovation Network

The *Virginia is for Learners Innovation Network* formed to promote deeper learning at all grade levels and align instruction and assessment with the expectations of the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate*. The Innovation Network builds capacity in school divisions for innovations. The Network seeks to leverage resources and provide customized support for schools; implement innovations including internships, interdisciplinary curriculum, and innovative performance assessments; and share innovations and best practices. The Innovation Network is supported by Advanced Learning Partnerships, which provide a coach for each team in the cohort.

The first network cohort consists of 31 school divisions grouped into 26 teams. The network's activities are funded through a \$125,000 federal Title II grant from VDOE to James Madison University; a \$35,000 grant to the Virginia School Consortium for Learning from Jobs for the Future (JFF); and a \$125,000 grant to the consortium from philanthropist Ted Dintersmith. Applications to apply to participate in the second cohort will open to school divisions that did not participate in the first cohort in early 2020.

Innovation Grants

Innovation grants help prepare students for 21st century career paths. They help districts meet the graduation requirements of *Profile of a Virginia Graduate* by providing them with resources to develop and implement programs that are aligned with the graduation requirements and emphasize personalized learning and the use of performance assessments to measure achievement. Five school

divisions received \$50,000 in *first-year planning grants* and five school divisions received \$50,000 in *second-year implementation grants*:

First-year planning grants:

1. **Chesterfield County:** Next Generation Career Academies at Clover Hill High, Matoaca High, Meadowbrook High and Midlothian High will incorporate personalized learning, performance-based assessment, project-based learning and workplace experiences.
2. **Cumberland County:** The Ticket 2 Tomorrow program will meet student needs through personalized career exploration on and off campus while incorporating career-based credit, including allowing students to accumulate portable credentials and digital badges to gauge acquisition of the 5 C's.
3. **Montgomery County:** For students in grades 9-10, Blacksburg High's Bruin Academy will provide work-based learning experiences with a focus on personalized instruction and project-based interdisciplinary courses. Career Pathways will offer routes to a diploma while preparing Blacksburg High juniors and seniors for careers in applied mathematics, health services, communications, computer technologies, natural sciences or engineering.
4. **Staunton:** The grant will support the development of three "college/career corridors," a performing arts center, and a "multi-level" media center at Robert E. Lee High. The corridors and centers will offer courses aligned with college and career pathways, and student learning will be assessed through performance assessments and tasks.
5. **West Point:** The grant will support division-wide K-12 reforms, including the adoption of performance-based learning and performance assessments in all grades; the redesign of curricula to incorporate technology and workplace skills; the creation of flexibility in teaching, learning and scheduling; and the fostering of a learning climate that promotes leadership by teachers.

Second-year implementation grants:

1. **Chesterfield County:** Monacan High and Thomas Dale High will continue working to create opportunities for students to work with county agencies to address local issues while developing citizenship skills. The program employs project-based learning and real-world experiences to prepare students for the expectations of the workforce.
2. **Fairfax County:** J.E.B. Stuart High will utilize a curriculum to meet the instructional needs of English learners with little formal education while providing these students with opportunities for mentoring, career exploration and internships. The instructional program focuses on literacy, numeracy and workforce readiness.
3. **Manassas Park:** Manassas Park High will continue to expand and streamline several current programs to improve outcomes for English learners and students with little formal education. Through its Creative Opportunities at Manassas Park to Achieve Student Success program, students who otherwise might not graduate or acquire English and other foundational skills necessary for success after high school will have customized pathways for achieving their educational/employment goals.
4. **Radford:** Radford High will continue its three-year transformation from a traditional secondary school into an integrated program that combines core academics with STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), career and technical education and training in

cybersecurity. The program emphasizes inquiry-based learning and real-world experiences to engage students and promote 21st-century skills.

5. **Rockbridge County:** Rockbridge County High will implement the Solutions STEM Academy that offers students career paths in 21st-century agriculture, energy and power, and environmental technology, and features flexible scheduling and emphasis on problem solving, cross-curricular and project-based learning, and teamwork.

James Lane, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, said:

“High school innovation is woven into the Board of Education’s Profile of a Virginia Graduate. Innovation to provide the academics, workplace skills, career planning opportunities and citizenship skills students must possess to meet the profile is some of the most exciting — and important — work in the Commonwealth’s public education system today.”