

SENATE OF VIRGINIA

SCHUYLER T. VANVALKENBURG
16TH SENATORIAL DISTRICT
PART OF HENRICO COUNTY
P.O. Box 396
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA 23218



COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
EDUCATION AND HEALTH
GENERAL LAWS AND TECHNOLOGY
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
PRIVILEGES AND ELECTIONS
REHABILITATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES

June 2, 2025

Members of the Virginia Board of Education
Virginia Department of Education
P.O. Box 2120
Richmond, Virginia 23218

Dear Esteemed Members of the Virginia Board of Education,

In August 2024, you approved a new accountability system, the School Performance and Support Framework (SPSF). Included in that accountability system are growth and mastery measures for Standards of Learning (SOL) and Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP) test scores in reading, writing, mathematics and science. Noticeably, social studies is missing. We acknowledge that Virginia is stronger than many other states in emphasizing social studies education. Even so, in recent years history and social studies education have been de-prioritized. Only one verified credit is required for high school graduation, and in middle school, social studies knowledge is not formally assessed at all.

The co-signers of this letter have differing opinions on Virginia's new accountability standards. However, we all agree that creating informed citizens is a key mission of public education and that prioritizing social studies education is the most direct and important way that schools succeed in furthering that mission, particularly by teaching civics and United States history. We also agree that in this era, civics and history knowledge are more important than ever to developing critical analysis and thinking skills; yet, Virginia students are getting increasingly less of such instruction, especially with cuts to humanities and civics programs.

Our offices and the signatories to this letter are asking you to join states like Georgia, New York, Florida, and California in adding social studies as a measure of school quality and incorporating it into Virginia's accountability structure. Specifically, we are asking you to incorporate civics into the middle school rubric and U.S. history into the high school one. This is important not just for the sake of social studies knowledge and skills, but because when students have deeper content knowledge and vocabulary, it bolsters their reading proficiency, their ability to make sense of the world around them, and their confidence in navigating our public democratic institutions.

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Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Schuyler T. Van Valkenburg".

Senator Schuyler Van Valkenburg, 16th District

James Grossman, Executive Director
American Historical Association

Jennifer Morgan, President
Anton Schulzki, Interim Executive Director
National Council for the Social Studies

Dr. Keith A. Kline, President
Virginia Social Science Association

Samantha Futrell, President
Jessica Mahoney, Legislative Liaison
Virginia Council for the Social Studies

Dr. Shawn Healy, Senior Director of Policy and Advocacy
iCivics and the CivxNow Coalition

Jen Patja, Co-Executive Director
Virginia Civics

CC: Virginia Secretary Of Education Aimee Rogstad Guidera
Superintendent of Public Instruction Emily Anne Gullickson