



Operations and Performance of the Virginia Department of Education

Study mandate

- Review the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE)
 - Agency organization and staffing
 - Supervision of school division compliance with requirements
 - Support and technical assistance for school divisions
 - Relationship with the Board of Education

Note: JLARC staff are also reviewing special education services and will release their report at the December JLARC meeting.

Research activities

Interviews

- VDOE staff
- School division staff
- Stakeholders & subject-matter experts

Data and document analysis

- VDOE spending and staffing
- Identification and assessment of VDOE responsibilities

Surveys of

- VDOE staff
- School division staff
- Virginia Board of Education members

In brief

VDOE is generally well managed.

School divisions and other key stakeholders view VDOE positively and note recent improvements.

VDOE supervision of division compliance with state standards is efficient but heavily relies on self-certification, and lacks independent verification or thorough monitoring of corrective actions.

VDOE provides adequate support to school divisions in most areas. However, the agency's support for low-performing school divisions and teacher recruitment and retention should be improved and could benefit from additional staffing.

In this presentation

Background, spending, & staffing

Agency management

Key stakeholder perceptions of VDOE

VDOE supervision & compliance activities

VDOE school improvement & other support activities

Board of Education

VDOE and the Board of Education oversee Virginia's public education system

- Virginia Board of Education is responsible for the “general supervision of the public school system”
- Superintendent of public instruction leads VDOE and is charged with “proper and uniform enforcement of the provisions of the school laws ...”
- VDOE has several major roles:
 - Distributing more than \$8B annually in funding
 - Ensuring local school division compliance with federal and state requirements
 - Providing support and assistance to school divisions

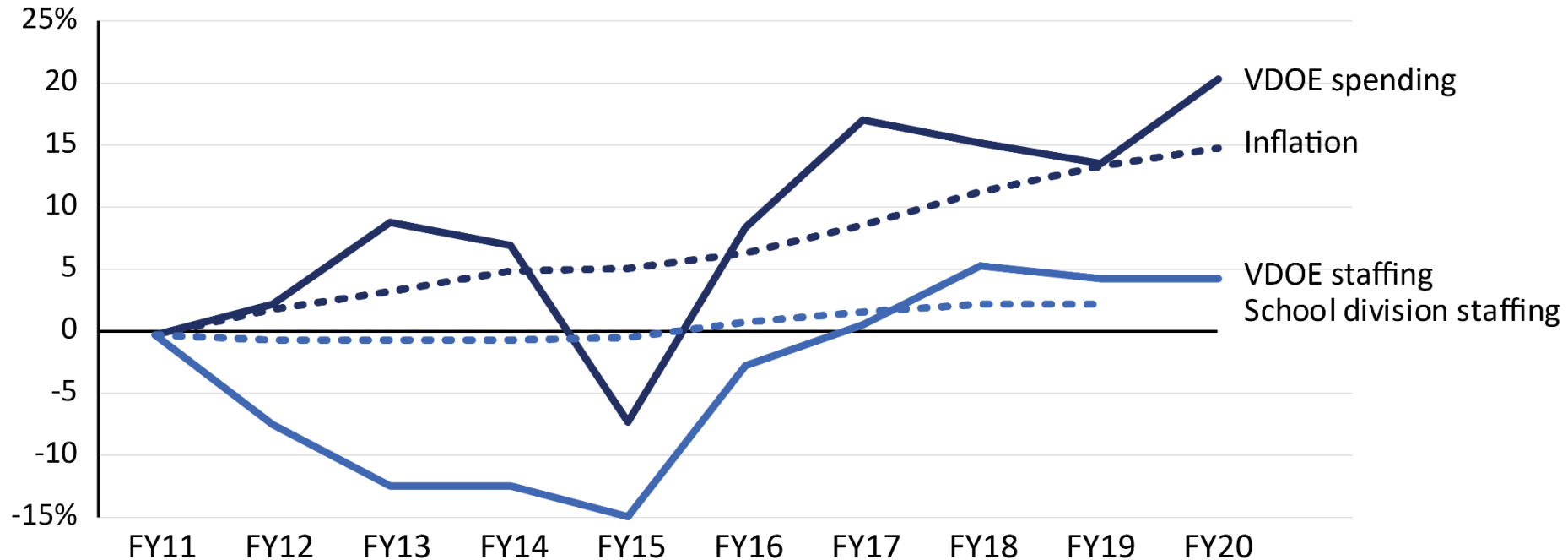
VDOE central office spends about \$72M, and the agency employs 350 staff (FY20)

- VDOE spent \$72.3M on central office operations in FY20*
 - Largest areas are instructional services (\$23M) and special education (\$11M)
- 58% of spending is state general funds; most of remainder is federal
- Most staff are in one of two main divisions:
 - budget, finance, and operations (99)
 - school quality, instruction, and performance (218)

*excluding \$30.1M in spending for contractual payments to Pearson to conduct standardized testing

VDOE spending and staffing have grown comparably to inflation and school division staffing

Percent change in spending/staffing



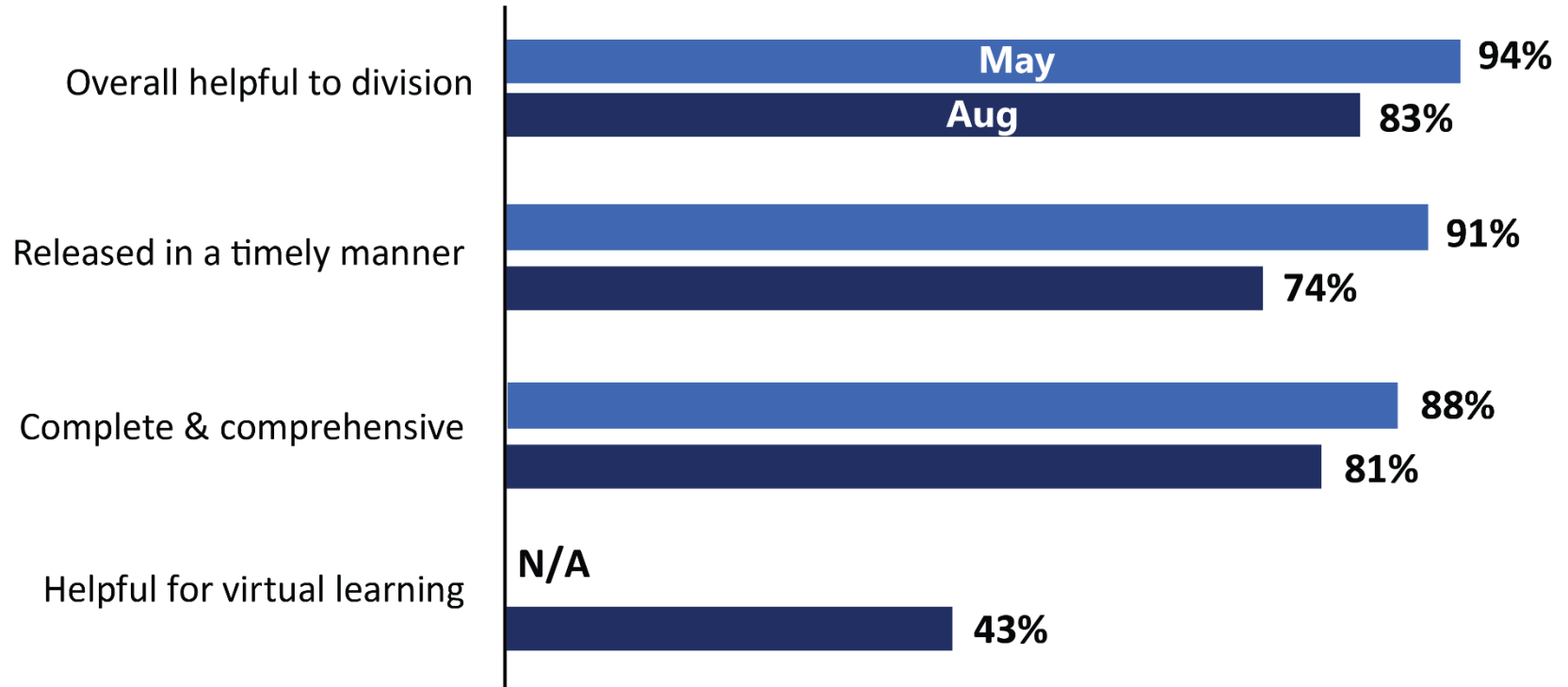
Represents percent change from FY11.

VDOE is playing a key role in providing guidance to school divisions regarding COVID-19

- Coordinated with governor's office, Virginia Department of Health, and various task forces
- Posted on website 130 Q&A on closing and 134 Q&A on reopening
- Released a 131-page guidance document to help divisions decide among options to reopen virtually, in-person, or through a hybrid approach
- Made virtual learning content more widely available

School divisions reported VDOE's pandemic guidance was useful but less so for virtual learning

Guidance during pandemic was ...



SOURCE: JLARC survey of school divisions, May and August 2020. May 2020 survey did not include a question about virtual learning. N/A: not applicable

During the summer, VDOE expanded Virtual Virginia for use in the 2020–21 academic year

- Expanded course offerings to include *all* core K–12 courses
- Expanded access for *all* teachers to Virtual Virginia platform, materials, and content
- Divisions still navigating challenges, such as network infrastructure, teacher proficiency, and adult support at home for younger students

Virtual Virginia is the state's online digital learning environment.

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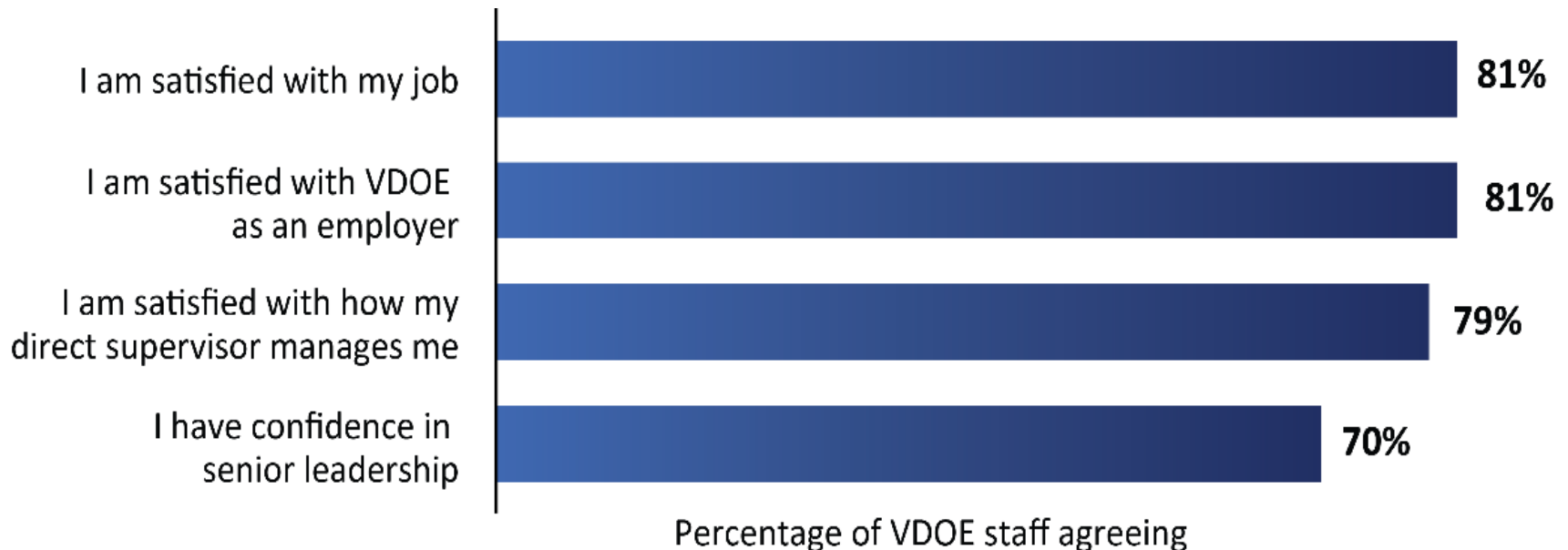
VDOE school improvement & other support activities

Board of Education

Finding

Staff are generally satisfied with the agency, but several staffing issues should be monitored closely.

VDOE staff are generally satisfied with their job, the agency, and leadership



Though staff turnover is currently low, several indicators suggest it could become a problem

- Staff turnover is currently low (10% annually)
- More than one-third of staff
 - said they recently considered leaving the agency; most citing workload and salary concerns*
 - will be eligible for retirement within five years (statewide average is 24%)
- COVID-19 response and early childhood transition
- Despite workload concerns, VDOE does not track staff hours worked beyond a 40-hour work week

*Based on staff experiences prior to COVID-19 pandemic

Agency staffing is relatively diverse, but agency leadership lacks minority representation

- 38% of VDOE's employees are racial minorities, slightly more than state agency average (36%)
- VDOE staff expressed concern that lack of diversity in senior leadership could hinder understanding challenges facing minority student populations
- VDOE leadership point to successful efforts to recruit diverse staff at the level below senior leadership; can help to ensure a more diverse applicant pool for future leadership position openings

Senior leadership defined as all superintendent level positions and direct reports to the superintendent of public instruction (13 total positions).

Recommendations

VDOE should collect data on the total hours worked by salaried employees and use that data to assess and monitor staff workload.

VDOE should develop a plan to establish a more racially diverse applicant pool for future openings of senior leadership positions.

Finding

VDOE has largely addressed problems with its budget and finance operations, but is still working to improve IT security.

Finance and budget operations have improved substantially

- APA reported 16 negative findings about VDOE finance and budget operations between FY16 to FY18
 - VDOE overpaid school divisions by \$76 million in FY16, which later had to be returned
- VDOE has taken steps to address problems cited by APA
 - created a new assistant superintendent of budget and finance position, hiring experienced school division staff
 - developed new standard operating procedures
 - APA staff indicate changes have led to major improvements

VDOE is addressing challenges with IT security

- APA has cited VDOE for numerous IT security concerns in recent years
 - has not incurred any known, major IT security breaches
- VDOE is in the process of addressing these concerns, but work remains
 - hired a new chief information security officer in 2019
 - developing new procedures and policies

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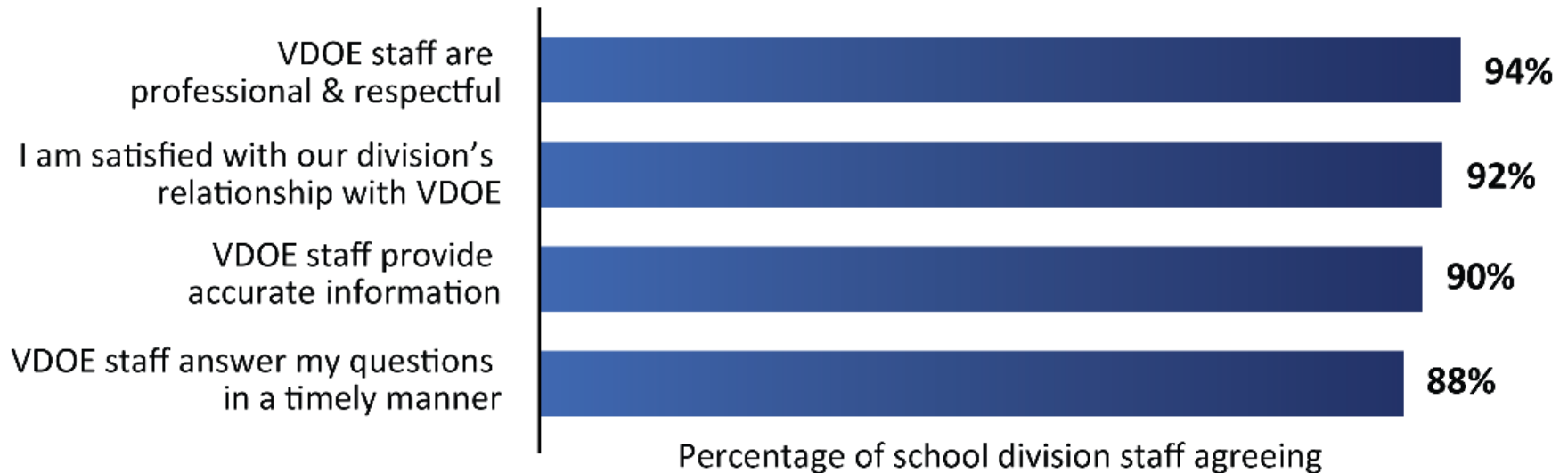
VDOE school improvement & other support activities

Board of Education

Finding

School divisions and other stakeholders have positive view of VDOE and note recent improvement.

School divisions have positive view of VDOE staff



Divisions, other state agencies, and board members note recent improvement at VDOE

- Two-thirds of school divisions reported their relationship with VDOE has improved
- State agencies that coordinate with VDOE generally reported effective coordination across 48 programs; has recently improved in many cases
- Board members reported improvements in their relationships with VDOE staff

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VDOE is responsible for supervising school division compliance with requirements

- A primary role of VDOE is the supervision of the locally administered public education system; specified in the state constitution
- VDOE oversees school divisions' compliance with at least 41 federal and state requirements
 - Federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
 - State Standards of Quality
- Effective supervision is critical for ensuring that Virginia's school divisions are adequately meeting federal and state requirements

Finding

VDOE meets some, but not all, criteria for effective supervision of school division compliance with standards.

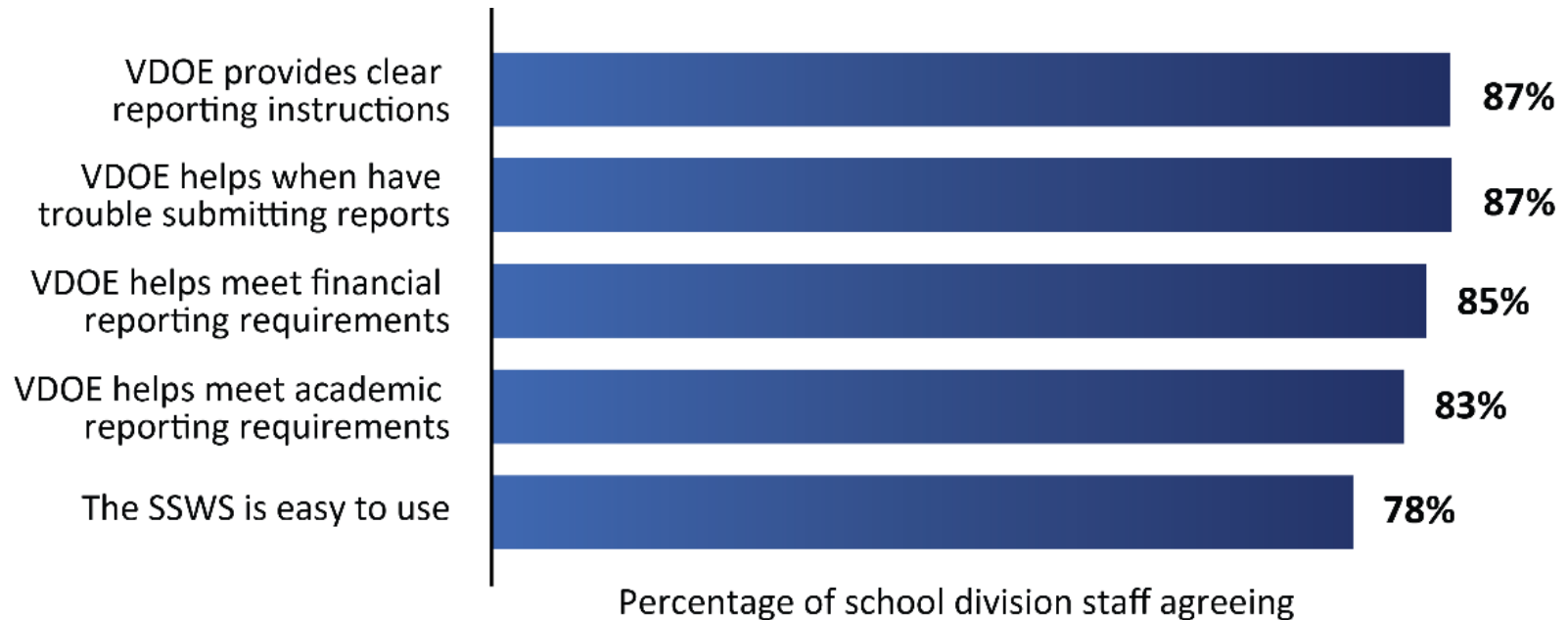
VDOE efficiently collects information for all standards, but could do more to verify, monitor, and analyze

Criteria for effective supervision of school division compliance	Extent met by VDOE
Collect & report division compliance with <u>all</u> standards	●
Collect information about compliance in an <u>efficient</u> manner	●
Provide <u>guidance & assistance</u> to help maintain compliance	●
<u>Independently verify</u> that divisions are in compliance	◐
Require <u>corrective actions</u> when needed and <u>monitor progress</u>	◐
Collect <u>adequate information</u> to determine compliance	◐
<u>Analyze</u> information to identify trends and issues needing attention	◐

VDOE efficiently collects data and information required for state and federal compliance

- VDOE collects and generally reports information from divisions to fulfill all 41 federal and state requirements
- For most requirements, agency uses efficient web application that syncs with school division databases
- School divisions indicated that VDOE staff provide effective support when helping to submit information
- VDOE leadership assists divisions with compliance when divisions proactively reach out for help

VDOE provides effective guidance to help divisions maintain and report compliance



SSWS – Single Sign-On Web System is a web application used to collect data from school divisions.

VDOE relies on self certification by divisions to determine compliance with state standards

- VDOE does not conduct verification on many state standards; primarily relies on divisions to self-certify compliance
 - Standards of Quality (staffing ratios, instructional practices)
 - Facilities standards
- VDOE *does* independently verify compliance with many federal requirements

Self-certification is efficient but may not give full insight into non-compliance

- VDOE's reliance on self-certification
 - is technically consistent with law
 - has been a longstanding practice
 - requires fewer resources
- May not allow the agency or board to be fully aware of non-compliance (e.g., incorrect compliance submissions from school divisions)

VDOE does not always monitor whether adequate corrective actions are taken by school divisions

- VDOE requires school divisions to submit corrective action plans when not in compliance with requirements
- VDOE typically monitors progress of corrective action for federal, but not state, requirements
- Lack of uniform and comprehensive monitoring of corrective actions hinders ability to ensure schools and divisions are effectively returning to compliance

More comprehensive VDOE supervision could be beneficial for a subset of key standards

- Comprehensive supervisory approach would be a substantial change in longstanding VDOE practice
- Using more comprehensive supervisory approach for at least some key standards seems reasonable
 - substantial amount of funding the state provides
 - extent and complexity of standards divisions must comply with
 - importance of compliance to ensure each child is receiving quality education

Recommendation

General Assembly should direct VDOE to implement a pilot program to more comprehensively supervise school division compliance with a subset of key state standards.

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Finding

School divisions are generally satisfied with support and technical assistance provided by VDOE.

Most divisions agree VDOE provides effective support and technical assistance

Technical assistance - Instruction



Technical assistance - Operations



Percentage of school division staff rating support as moderately or highly effective

Finding

VDOE's school improvement program operated by the Office of School Quality (OSQ) has had limited effectiveness and has been under-resourced.

VDOE is in the process of changing the model used to work with schools and divisions needing improvement.

Participating divisions and OSQ staff cited concerns about the school improvement model

- Only half of divisions working with OSQ agreed that assistance from the office was effective
 - “The process was just jumping through hoops. It has not been helpful.”
- OSQ staff also cited problems with the school improvement model
 - Support was “*not* differentiated to support specific needs of schools and divisions,” and it “may not be the right kind of assistance.”
- OSQ staff were dissatisfied with their role

VDOE is changing its school improvement model

- Adapting school improvement model to feature more tailored coaching and assistance based on specific school circumstances
- Piloted new model with schools in 4 divisions in February 2020; had to stop because of the pandemic
- VDOE plans to use the pilot results to inform how the program will be improved

Finding

Effectively strengthening school improvement program will require careful transition planning and additional staffing.

Implementation of new school improvement model will require effective planning

- VDOE should develop and make public a plan for how it will
 - guide its transition from the prior to the new model
 - estimate how many additional OSQ staff are needed to be fully effective in supporting the schools in the improvement program
 - identify additional challenges to school improvement, such as the impact of COVID-19 on student achievement

More individualized and tailored support under new model will require additional staffing

- OSQ's limited staffing was cited by agency and school divisions as a reason for ineffectiveness
 - 262 schools to 12 OSQ staff (22 to 1 ratio)
 - new state accreditation system targets additional areas for improvement, further increasing workload
- At current levels, OSQ staff only have ~2 weeks per school, per year to provide individualized support
 - learn about unique challenges
 - provide support and identify strategies to use
 - observe the implementation of selected strategies
 - monitor progress and provide feedback

Virginia provides fewer state staff to work with low-performing schools than many neighboring states

VIRGINIA



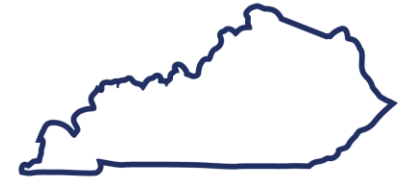
School improvement staff: 12
Schools: 262
1 staff per 22 schools

NORTH CAROLINA



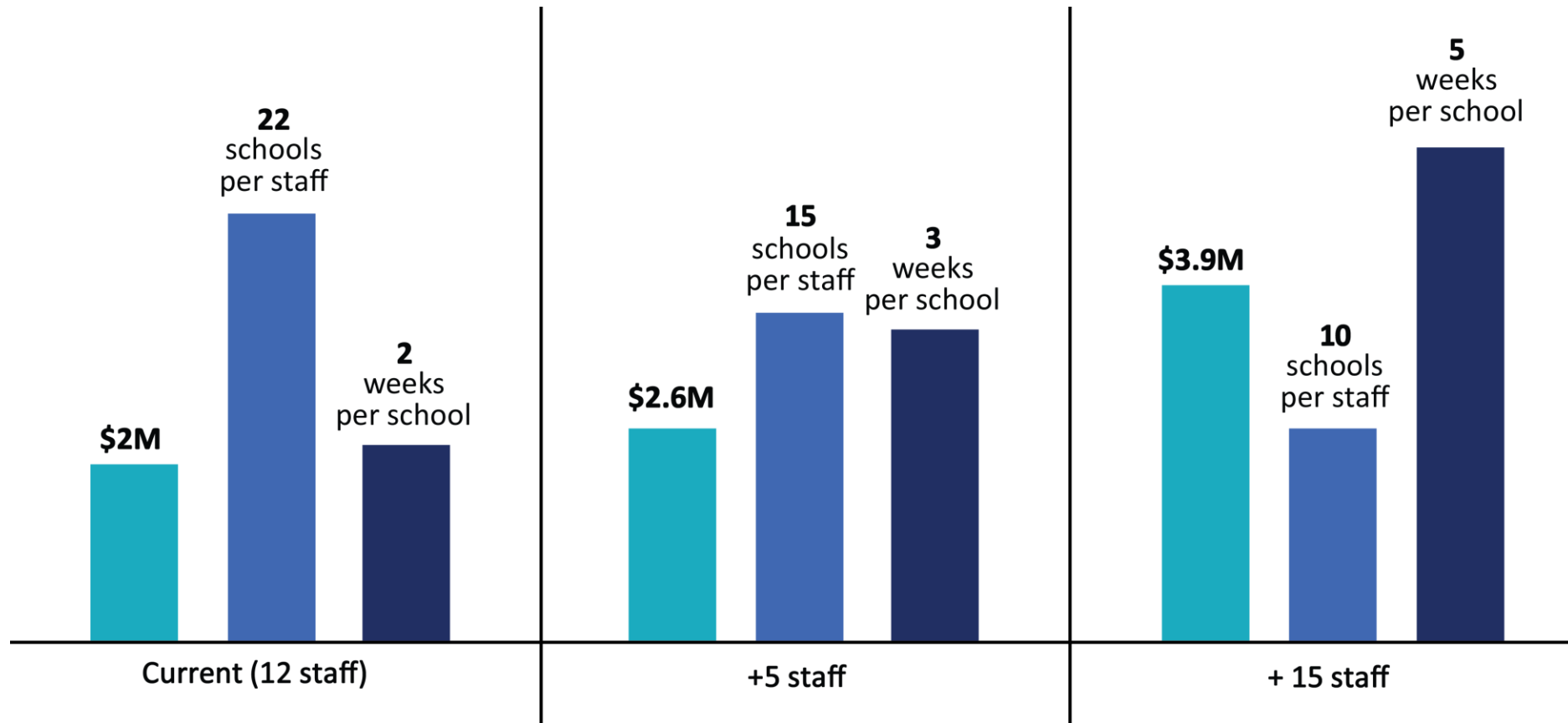
School improvement staff: 32
Schools: 250
1 staff per 8 schools

KENTUCKY



School improvement staff: 73
Schools: 58
1 or more staff per school

Even modest increases in OSQ staffing would result in substantially more time devoted per school



Finding

VDOE could be directed to consistently implement an effective school improvement program to ensure that low-performing schools are receiving effective support over the long term.

Code of Virginia should require VDOE to operate an effective school improvement program

- Clear statutory direction could ensure VDOE is responsible for
 - developing and implementing an effective school improvement program
 - performing ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of the program
 - reporting on program effectiveness
- The school improvement program has not always been an agency priority; clear direction would ensure that VDOE consistently maintains it as a priority in the future

State may need added authority to hold divisions accountable for improving, in certain circumstances

- Final decisions on instructional, personnel, and operational matters still rest with the local school board
- Greater state authority could help ensure that school divisions are fully addressing chronic low performance, in certain circumstances (e.g., pervasive underperformance, ineffective local efforts)
- 2014 JLARC report on low-performing schools recommended changes to Code and Virginia constitution to give state more authority to override certain local decisions about low-performing schools

Recommendations

VDOE should develop and implement a plan to guide its transition to a new school improvement model and estimate the additional staffing required to effectively implement the new model.

The General Assembly should appropriate additional funding for new staff positions in the Office of School Quality.

The General Assembly should amend the Code of Virginia to require VDOE to develop, implement, and evaluate an effective school improvement program.

Finding

State role in helping divisions recruit and retain teachers is fragmented and under-resourced.

Virginia has an ongoing teacher shortage

- 1% of teaching positions unfilled and 7% of teachers provisionally licensed (2018–19)
 - unfilled positions and provisional licensure are more pervasive in some divisions

Unfilled positions	Provisionally licensed teachers
Bland – 15%	Petersburg – 36%
Brunswick – 8%	Greensville – 32%
Franklin County – 6%	Northampton – 29%

- results in larger class sizes or reliance on teachers that lack at least some of the qualifications required to be fully licensed

School divisions and board indicate need for greater teacher recruitment and retention

- Teacher recruitment and retention was one of the most common areas in which school divisions desired more support and assistance from VDOE
- Only half of school divisions reported that VDOE's current efforts are effective
- Teacher recruitment and retention is one of the top priorities identified by the board in its current comprehensive plan

Data collection and reporting does not fully convey teacher recruitment and retention needs

- Current data collection and reporting focuses on statewide aggregate shortages, which does not offer full insight into
 - shortages in small divisions, geographic regions, and subject areas
 - the *proportion* of vacant positions
- Teacher exit questionnaire is not widely administered

State's teacher mentorship program is not targeted and has minimal guidance

- Teacher mentorship program for first-year teachers
 - has minimal and outdated guidance
 - distributes funding based on the number of new teachers, is not targeted to school divisions with greatest retention problems (\$1M annually)

Top 3: teacher retention problems	Top 3: newly hired teachers
Bland	Fairfax County
Brunswick	Stafford
Franklin County	Chesterfield

VDOE should strengthen teacher recruitment and retention efforts

- Office of Teacher Education includes just 3 staff*
- Other states provide more assistance to divisions
 - Kentucky has state-managed initiative to attract new teachers and provide resources and training (7 staff)
 - North Carolina has staff to support new teacher programs (8 staff) & to research teacher workforce policy (3 staff)
- ~3 additional VDOE staff could increase teaching recruitment efforts, create statewide application process, add support for existing programs, & better analyze data

*office director, administrative assistant, and special education coordinator

Recommendations

VDOE should improve state efforts to help divisions recruit and retain teachers by

- (i) conducting more useful data collection and analysis pertaining to teacher recruitment and retention and
- (ii) more effectively administering the teacher mentorship program.

Policy options

VDOE could give the Office of Teacher Education a stronger role in helping school divisions recruit and retain teachers.

The General Assembly could appropriate additional funding for three additional staff in the Office of Teacher Education.

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Board of Education

Findings

The Board of Education has a productive relationship with VDOE staff.

Additional requirements could help ensure board members have necessary expertise and regional representation.

Board of Education is engaged and has good relationship with VDOE

- Board members are highly engaged in their work
- Board and VDOE staff have a generally productive and well-managed relationship
 - VDOE staff provide sufficient support to the board
 - Board satisfied with senior leadership and director of board relations

Current board members have wide range of useful expertise and experience

- Only Code requirement is that two board members have experience in private industry
- No requirements related to educational or other areas of expertise
 - Board of Education also serves as the state's career and technical education board (CTE)
 - VDOE and board will become responsible for early childhood programs beginning in FY22

Board is not required to have regional representation

- Current board membership represents just half of the state's eight superintendent regions
- Half of board membership is from a single region



Policy options

The General Assembly could require the membership of the Board of Education to:

- 1) include expertise in (i) local government, (ii) career and technical education, and (iii) early childhood development
- 2) represent at least 5 of the state's 8 superintendent regions.

Key findings

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