

Recommendations and Policy Options: Operations and Performance of the Department of Education

JLARC staff typically make recommendations to address findings during reviews. Staff also sometimes propose policy options rather than recommendations. The three most common reasons staff propose policy options rather than recommendations are: (1) the action proposed is a policy judgment best made by the General Assembly or other elected officials, (2) the evidence indicates that addressing a report finding is not necessarily required, but doing so could be beneficial, or (3) there are multiple ways in which a report finding could be addressed, and there is insufficient evidence of a single best way to address the finding.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Virginia Department of Education should collect data on the total hours worked by salaried employees and use that data to assess and monitor staff workload. (Chapter 2)

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Virginia Department of Education's Office of Human Capital should develop a plan to establish a more racially diverse applicant pool, including qualified minority candidates who are employees of the department, for future openings of senior leadership positions. (Chapter 2)

RECOMMENDATION 3

The General Assembly may wish to consider including language in the Appropriation Act directing the Virginia Department of Education to implement a pilot program to more comprehensively supervise school division compliance with a subset of key standards by requiring (i) the submission of more comprehensive compliance information, (ii) selective independent verification of compliance, (iii) monitoring of corrective action implementation, and (iv) analysis of compliance trends and issues. The department should conduct the pilot program during the 2021–2022 school year and submit a report on the results to the Board of Education and House Education and Appropriations committees and Senate Education and Health and Finance and Appropriations committees by November 30, 2022. (Chapter 3)

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Virginia Department of Education should periodically review its website to ensure the content is current, relevant, accessible, and intuitively organized. (Chapter 3)

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Virginia Department of Education should compile and provide school divisions with a list of support resources and relevant staff contacts and maintain a calendar of professional development opportunities and webinars. (Chapter 3)

RECOMMENDATION 6

The Virginia Department of Education should identify any information it collects from school divisions that other divisions may find useful, and that is not already shared, and make that information available to all divisions. (Chapter 3)

RECOMMENDATION 7

The Virginia Department of Education should take steps to prioritize, synthesize, and organize the informational resources it emails to schools and divisions. (Chapter 3)

RECOMMENDATION 8

The Virginia Department of Education 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 plan should be presented to the Board of Education and transmitted to the House Education and Appropriations committees and Senate Education and Health and Finance and Appropriations committees, no later than June 30, 2021. (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 9

The General Assembly may wish to consider appropriating additional funding for new staff positions in the Virginia Department of Education's Office of School Quality to strengthen its work with school divisions in the school improvement program. (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 10

The General Assembly may wish to consider amending § 22.1-23 of the Code of Virginia to direct the superintendent of public instruction to (i) develop and implement an effective school improvement program, (ii) identify measures to evaluate the effectiveness of the services the Office of School Quality provides to school divisions, (iii) evaluate and make changes as needed to ensure effectiveness, and (iv) annually report to the Board of Education. (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 11

The Board of Education should direct school divisions to annually report the number of filled teaching positions, by endorsement area and subject area when possible. (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 12

The Virginia Department of Education should calculate teacher vacancy rates by division, region, and endorsement area, and make these vacancy rates publicly available on its website. (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 13

The Virginia Department of Education should develop and implement a methodology to allocate teacher mentorship funds to school divisions with the largest teacher shortages. (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 14

The Virginia Department of Education should (i) review the evaluations of teacher mentorship programs submitted by school divisions to identify effective teacher mentorship practices and (ii) use that review and best practices on teacher mentorship to update guidance on how to implement effective teacher mentorship programs. (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 15

The General Assembly may wish to consider amending § 22.1-305.2 of the Code of Virginia to direct the Advisory Board on Teacher Education and Licensure to advise the Board of Education on policies related to helping school divisions more effectively recruit and retain licensed teachers. (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 16

The Virginia Department of Education should set specific goals for how long it will take to process each type of license application or renewal and use processing times measured by its automated licensing system to determine whether it is meeting its processing timeliness goals. (Chapter 4)

RECOMMENDATION 17

The Virginia Department of Education should determine the total number and allocation of administrative staff and licensing specialists necessary in the Office of Licensure after the process automation is fully implemented. (Chapter 4)

Policy Options to Consider

POLICY OPTION 1

The General Assembly could appropriate additional funding for up to two new staff positions to design and implement a pilot program for more comprehensive supervision of a subset of key state education standards. (Chapter 3)

POLICY OPTION 2

The Board of Education could direct the Virginia Department of Education to implement the teacher exit questionnaire statewide annually from FY21 to FY25. The new questionnaire should be designed to better inform VDOE's understanding of teachers' reasons for leaving the teaching profession. (Chapter 4)

POLICY OPTION 3

The Virginia Department of Education could give the Office of Teacher Education a stronger role in helping school divisions with the most substantial challenges recruiting and retaining teachers, which could include (i) conducting more useful data collection and analysis of teacher recruitment and retention challenges, (ii) more effectively administering teacher mentorship and incentive programs, and (iii) identifying and implementing strategies to encourage more individuals to enter into and remain in the teaching profession. (Chapter 4)

POLICY OPTION 4

The General Assembly could appropriate additional funding for three new staff positions in the Office of Teacher Education to strengthen its role in helping school divisions with the most substantial teacher recruitment and retention challenges. (Chapter 4)

POLICY OPTION 5

The General Assembly could amend § 22.1-9 of the Code of Virginia to require that the Board of Education include (i) one member with expertise or experience in local government leadership or policymaking, (ii) one member with expertise or experience in career and technical education, and (iii) one member with expertise or experience in early childhood education. (Chapter 5)

POLICY OPTION 6

The General Assembly could amend § 22.1-9 of the Code of Virginia to require the Board of Education to include members that represent at least five of the state's eight superintendent regions. (Chapter 5)
