

# COMMENTARY

Kathleen Smith, August 28, 2025

## What do the proposed cut scores mean for administrators?

Today, the Board of Education received the proposed proficiency cut scores for SOL assessments for 2025-2026 for first review.

- <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/64817/638914040809670000>

Given that the proposed cut scores for reading and mathematics are at least 30 points higher and up to 79 points higher than the 400 in place now, it is apparent that much consideration should be given to how this will affect the news about this year's pass rates provided by Governor Youngkin earlier this week (from 400 to 430-479 in reading and mathematics including end of course assessments).

- <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/news-releases/2025/august/name-1057351-en.html>

Dr. Matt Hurt, executive director of the Comprehensive Improvement Program (CIP) serving over 50+ school divisions, provided this summary chart comparing the current SOL pass rate as compared to the proposed SOL pass rate of all schools in the CIP Network.

Test	Current Pass	Current Pass Adv	Proposed Pass	Proposed Pass Adv	Pass Diff	Pass Adv Diff
EOC Reading	84.19%	21.22%	34.05%	5.89%	-50.13%	-15.33%
Algebra I	83.68%	9.39%	35.73%	5.20%	-47.95%	-4.19%
Geometry	77.80%	8.61%	32.07%	6.58%	-45.73%	-2.03%
Gr 6 Reading	71.09%	9.49%	34.73%	5.55%	-36.36%	-3.94%
Gr 7 Reading	71.21%	8.49%	35.16%	5.47%	-36.05%	-3.03%
Gr 8 Reading	70.89%	9.10%	35.95%	5.26%	-34.94%	-3.85%
Gr 4 Reading	72.31%	11.57%	37.75%	7.59%	-34.56%	-3.98%
Gr 5 Reading	69.73%	7.92%	35.39%	5.72%	-34.33%	-2.19%
Gr 4 Math	72.07%	10.43%	38.49%	6.10%	-33.58%	-4.33%
Gr 5 Math	70.68%	10.82%	38.39%	8.20%	-32.29%	-2.62%
Algebra II	87.87%	12.88%	55.66%	12.07%	-32.21%	-0.81%
Gr 3 Math	73.10%	9.29%	41.28%	4.10%	-31.83%	-5.19%
Gr 3 Reading	67.06%	8.35%	35.34%	7.92%	-31.72%	-0.43%
Gr 6 Math	65.68%	7.24%	37.53%	5.99%	-28.15%	-1.25%
Gr 7 Math	62.85%	6.62%	37.13%	5.22%	-25.72%	-1.40%
Gr 8 Math	61.54%	3.67%	36.77%	3.18%	-24.76%	-0.49%

As someone who has been around since the Standards of Learning were initiated, here is my take:

1. For the first time in a long time, high school 11th grade EOC Reading assessments may need a very careful analysis between what *is* taught and what will be tested.
2. Do the same kind of calculation for your school that Dr. Hurt has done above. Share with your faculty.
3. Look at your school improvement strategies. If all of your strategies appear to be about graduation rate and attendance, make serious adjustments so that more time is spent on improving instruction. Keep the main thing, the main thing.
4. Review lesson plans often for alignment to blueprints. If your staff draws a blank when you mention the “blueprints”, you are in trouble. Discuss the blueprints and the level of **fidelity/rigor** needed to reach the new cut score. Each 9 weeks designate a core content reading and math staff person to monitor lesson plans for WHAT IS TAUGHT, and WHAT WILL BE TESTED.
5. If you find reviewing lesson plans too time consuming, then I suggest this: Teachers only test what they taught. Their classroom assessments are better indicators than lesson plans of the taught curriculum. Assign a content staff member in mathematics and reading to review all six- week, nine- week, semester, and unit tests to ensure they meet alignment to the blueprint and rigor of the SOL.
6. Keep in mind that the performance by question on the SOL assessments from last year is not always a good indicator of what will be tested at the highest level of rigor this year. Don't use faulty data.
7. Remind staff to not accept mediocrity in expectations.
8. Also, if too many need remediating, reteach instead.

This is not about friendly strategies to bolster student opinion of the school. It is about hardcore instructional work in the months ahead with careful attention to what will be tested and what IS taught. Pay attention to monitoring instruction. Teachers need to go back to the basics and teach, assess, modify, reteach, assess, modify....

Teachers need to move from "we hope we will be accredited and we hope we are doing well" to CALCULATED plans to assess the reality of what is being taught!

As an anecdote: Usually this time of year, I anticipate SOL data. This year, I almost forgot it was that time of year. Then I read the Governor's good news and reviewed the Board of Education Agenda. Next year this time, we will all be in shock.

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