



October 2012

Annual Measurable Objectives for Raising Achievement in Virginia’s Low-Performing Schools

Virginia, under No Child Left Behind Act flexibility waivers granted by the US Department of Education, has established annual measurable objectives (AMOs) for reducing proficiency gaps between low-performing and high-performing schools. These objectives in reading and mathematics replace the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets schools were previously required to meet under the federal education law.

The AMOs represent the percentage of students within each subgroup that must pass Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in reading and mathematics in order to make acceptable progress over six years. While the AMOs represent yearly goals for low performing schools, all schools must meet these objectives.

Starting points for the 2012-2013 accountability year are based on the actual pass rates of student subgroups in low-performing schools on the 2010-2011 SOL reading assessments and on the rigorous 2011-2012 mathematics SOL tests.

Reading Annual Measurable Objectives for Lowest-Performing Schools

Accountability Year	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Assessment Year	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
All Students	85	Reading AMOs for accountability years 2013-2014 through 2017-2018 will be determined based on subgroup pass rates on revised Reading SOL tests administered during 2012-2013.				
Proficiency Gap Group 1	76					
Proficiency Gap Group 2 (Black Students)	76					
Proficiency Gap Group 3 (Hispanic Students)	80					
Students with Disabilities	59					
LEP Students	76					
Economically Disadvantaged Students	76					
White Students	90					
Asian Students	92					

Mathematics Annual Measurable Objectives for Lowest-Performing Schools

Accountability Year	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018
Assessment Year	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
All Students	61	64	66	68	70	73
Proficiency Gap Group 1	47	52	57	63	68	73
Proficiency Gap Group 2 (Black Students)	45	51	56	62	67	
Proficiency Gap Group 3 (Hispanic Students)	52	56	60	65	69	
Students with Disabilities	33	46	53	59	66	
LEP Students	39	46	53	59	66	
Economically Disadvantaged Students	47	52	57	63	68	
White Students	68	69	70	71	72	
Asian Students	82	Continuous progress				

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The revised AMOs for mathematics proposed for assessment years 2012-2013 through 2016-2017 culminate with all students and student subgroups achieving pass rates of at least 73 percent in the subject. The benchmarks set ambitious but achievable goals that require greater rates of annual progress for subgroups that are further behind.

The Board of Education will establish AMOs in reading for accountability years 2012-2013 and beyond once results from the new, more challenging reading SOL tests are available. Students will take these tests for the first time during 2012-2013.

Does the Board of Education have lower expectations for some students based on race, ethnicity or other factors?

No. All students, regardless of race, ethnicity or family income must correctly answer the same number of items to earn a passing score on SOL tests in English, mathematics, science and history/social science. Likewise, all students must meet the same set of requirements to earn an Advanced Studies, Standard or other Board of Education-approved diploma.

Does the Board of Education have lower expectations for some schools based on demographic characteristics?

No. The Board of Education's minimum expectations for learning and achievement are expressed by the requirements schools must meet to earn state accreditation.

These expectations for achievement, which are found in the Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia, do not vary depending on the demographic characteristics of the school.

The same achievement levels on SOL tests in English, mathematics, science and history/social science are required for a school to earn a rating of Fully Accredited regardless of the race or ethnicity of the children attending the school.

What is the purpose of the Annual Measurable Objectives?

The AMOs provide a means for identifying schools most in need of intervention to raise the achievement of low-performing students. Schools with student subgroups not meeting AMOs must develop and implement state-approved improvement plans to raise the achievement of these students.

The AMOs are based on actual subgroup SOL pass rates in reading and mathematics in Virginia's lowest-performing schools. They provide these schools with yearly objectives that, if met, will result in students in these schools — within six years — halving the gaps that now separate them from their peers in the state's highest-performing schools.

In addition, the state uses the AMOs to designate certain low-performing Title I schools as priority and focus schools. These schools must implement specific state-approved and state-monitored interventions to create dramatic improvements in student achievement.

- Priority schools must engage a state-approved turnaround partner to help implement a school-improvement model meeting state and federal requirements.
- Focus schools must employ a state-approved coach to help the division develop, implement and monitor intervention strategies to improve the performance of students at risk of not meeting achievement standards or dropping out of school.

While all schools must meet the AMOs, the objectives are not intended as minimum benchmarks for acceptable improvement for student subgroups in higher-performing schools.

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Why are students divided into subgroups?

Virginia reports SOL pass rates and other achievement data for student subgroups to ensure that the instructional needs of students who historically have had difficulty meeting state standards are not hidden by high overall achievement in a school or division.

In addition, federal education law requires states to hold schools and divisions accountable for closing achievement gaps between historically low-performing student subgroups and higher-achieving students. States carry out the law by reporting disaggregated test results and establishing goals for each subgroup.

The AMOs are based on the actual performance of students in each subgroup in the lowest-achieving schools on SOL reading tests in 2010-2011 and on the rigorous new SOL mathematics tests in 2011-2012. In setting the AMOs, the Board of Education followed a methodology prescribed by the law.

Under Virginia's flexibility waiver, separate AMOs have been set for previously reported student subgroups and for new Proficiency Gap Groups comprising students who historically have had difficulty meeting the commonwealth's achievement standards:

- Proficiency Gap Group 1 – Students with disabilities, limited-English proficient (LEP) students and economically disadvantaged students, regardless of race and ethnicity
- Proficiency Gap Group 2 – African-American students, not of Hispanic origin, including those also counted in Proficiency Gap Group 1
- Proficiency Gap Group 3 – Hispanic students, of one or more races, including those also counted in Proficiency Gap Group 1

Why are the AMOs for reading higher than the AMOs for math?

The AMOs for mathematics are based on the performance of students on the new mathematics SOL tests. These challenging new tests were first taken by students in 2011-2012. Pass rates on the new mathematics SOL tests were much lower than those on the old tests, and as a result, the AMOs in mathematics are lower than those for reading.

Because results from new and more rigorous SOL reading tests won't be available until after students take these tests during the 2012-2013 school year, the Board of Education based the current reading AMOs on test results from 2010-2011. Once results from the new, more challenging reading tests are available, the board will establish new AMOs for reading.

Why are the AMOs for some student subgroups lower than those for other subgroups?

The AMOs vary from subgroup to subgroup because the students in different subgroups performed at different levels on the 2011-2012 mathematics SOL tests and the 2010-2011 SOL reading tests.

The Board of Education used the actual pass rates of students in the lowest-achieving schools as starting points in setting annual reading and mathematics objectives for each subgroup. Each annual measurable objective provides a goal for improvement for students in these schools based on the current performance of students in the subgroup.

While all schools must meet these annual objectives for raising achievement, the AMOs are designed for the specific purpose of improving learning and outcomes for students in Virginia's lowest-performing schools.