

K12 ACADEMICS — STATE EDUCATION SERIES



Virginia Education Guide

A complete profile — schools, testing, graduation, accountability, school choice, teacher certification & financial aid, each in depth.



Find Your Community

2026 EDITION

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Everything about school in Virginia.

This guide profiles **Virginia's** education system in seven parts, each a two-page deep dive with the key facts, plain-English explanations, and a link to the full, regularly-updated guide online. From K12 Academics, the world's largest education resource, online since 2004.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Education Overview · State Testing · Graduation Requirements · Accountability & Report Cards · School Choice · Teacher Certification · Financial Aid

SEARCH 200+ DIRECTORIES

K-12 Schools · Colleges & Universities · Vendors · Summer Programs · International Programs · Performers

Education Overview

EDUCATION IN VIRGINIA

Virginia educates roughly 1.25 million public K–12 students across about 132 school divisions (Virginia's term for districts, organized by county and city), overseen by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and the Board of Education. Virginia's public schools rank among the strongest in the nation. Virginia's choice landscape is...

WHO MUST ATTEND SCHOOL

- ✓ **Start age** — 5 (by September 30)
- ✓ **End of compulsory age** — 18
- ✓ **Divisions** — ~132 school divisions (county/city)
- ✓ **Satisfying it** — Public, private, or home instruction

PRE-K IN VIRGINIA

Virginia does not offer a universal pre-K program. Its state-funded Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) provides free preschool for eligible (largely at-risk and income-qualified) 3- and 4-year-olds, delivered through school divisions and — via Mixed Delivery — community-based providers, alongside Head Start . Access is targeted rather...



AT A GLANCE

Compulsory	Ages 5–18
Divisions	~132
Testing	SOL
Diploma	Standard / Advanced
Choice	Tax-credit

DIVISIONS & CHARTERS

Virginia's largest school divisions are among the biggest in the country: Fairfax County Public Schools (one of the nation's largest), Prince William , Loudoun , Virginia Beach , Chesterfield , and Chesapeake . Distinctively, Virginia has a very weak charter-school law : charters must be approved by local school boards (which rarely...

PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN VIRGINIA

- ✓ **Independent schools** — Nonprofit, board-governed, tuition-funded college-prep schools (such as St. Christopher's, St. Catherine's, Collegiate, Episcopal High School, and...
- ✓ **Catholic & parochial schools** — Diocese of Arlington and Diocese of Richmond systems, and other church-affiliated schools
- ✓ **Other religious schools** — Christian, Quaker (Friends), and more
- ✓ **Specialty schools** — Montessori, Waldorf, and schools for specific learning needs

READ VIRGINIA'S FULL EDUCATION OVERVIEW GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



State Testing

WHAT YOUR STATE TESTS

Virginia's tests are the Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments — in grades 3–8 and as End-of-Course (EOC) tests in high school, run by the Virginia Department of Education. Passing certain EOC SOLs earns "verified credits," which — along with standard course credits — are required for a Virginia diploma.

WHICH TESTS, WHICH GRADES

- ✓ **SOL grades 3–8** — Reading and Mathematics each year; Science and History/Social Science at designated grades
- ✓ **End-of-Course SOLs** — Reading, Writing, Mathematics (e.g., Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II), Science (e.g., Biology), and History (e.g., World/U.S. History) tied to courses
- ✓ **VAAP** — Virginia Alternate Assessment Program for eligible students; WIDA ACCESS for multilingual learners

FORMAT & SUBJECTS

SOL tests are online, mostly multiple-choice with some technology-enhanced and short-paper components (writing). EOC SOLs are subject end-of-course tests.

IS PASSING REQUIRED TO GRADUATE?

Yes — via verified credits. To earn a Standard or Advanced Studies Diploma, students need a set number of standard credits (course completion) and verified credits (earned by passing the matching EOC SOL). Students can also earn verified credits through approved substitute tests (such as certain AP, IB, or industry-credential exams) or...

AT A GLANCE

Tests	Standards of Learning (SOL)
Grades 3–8	Reading, Math + Sci/History
High school	End-of-Course SOLs
Grad requirement?	Yes — verified credits
Format	Online
Standards	VA Standards of Learning

HOW IT'S SCORED

SOL tests report a scaled score with Pass/Proficient and Pass/Advanced levels (and Fail). Passing an EOC SOL is what earns a verified credit toward graduation.

TESTING WINDOWS

Grades 3–8 SOLs are given in a spring window ; EOC SOLs run in fall, spring, and summer windows as students finish courses. Exact dates are set by the state and district.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Released SOL tests** — VDOE publishes released tests and practice items — the best format practice
- ✓ **Course-aligned review** — EOC SOLs test the specific course
- ✓ **Know verified credits** — Understand which EOC SOLs you need to pass, and the substitute-test options

READ VIRGINIA'S FULL STATE TESTING GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Graduation Requirements

AT A GLANCE

Virginia offers two main diplomas — the Standard Diploma (22 standard units) and the Advanced Studies Diploma (26). Virginia still requires "verified credits", meaning students must pass certain Standards of Learning (SOL) end-of-course tests (or approved substitutes).

CREDIT & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The Standard Diploma requires 22 standard units : 4 English, 3 math, 3 lab science, 3 history/social science, 2 health/PE, 2 world language/fine arts/CTE, 1 economics/personal finance, and electives. The Advanced Studies Diploma (26) adds more math, science, and world language. Districts may add requirements.

TESTING TO GRADUATE

Yes — students must earn "verified credits" by passing the required SOL end-of-course tests (or state-approved substitute tests, such as certain AP/IB/industry credentials). This makes Virginia one of the states that still tie graduation to test results.

DIPLOMA TYPES & HONORS

Beyond the two diplomas, Virginia awards diploma seals (advanced math/science/CTE, Seal of Biliteracy, Governor's Seal, and more) for additional achievement.



AT A GLANCE

Diplomas	Standard (22) & Advanced (26)
Exit exam?	Yes — verified credits via SOL
Also	Virtual course, CPR, career ed
Seals	Multiple diploma seals
Confirm with	Your district

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

SOL substitute tests (AP, IB, Cambridge, and certain industry credentials) give students alternative ways to earn verified credits.

OTHER REQUIREMENTS

Virginia also requires economics and personal finance , a virtual course , CPR/AED training , and career-and-technical or advanced coursework. Confirm with your district.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How many credits does Virginia require?** — The state sets a minimum, but your district may require more — confirm locally.
- ✓ **Does Virginia require a test to graduate?** — Yes — you must earn verified credits by passing SOL end-of-course tests (or approved substitutes).
- ✓ **Are there different diploma types?** — Yes — plus honors designations and seals; see the diplomas section.
- ✓ **What if my student is behind on credits?** — Talk to the counselor about credit recovery and alternative pathways.
- ✓ **Where do I confirm the exact requirements?** — Your school counselor, district, and the state department of education.

READ VIRGINIA'S FULL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Accountability & Report Cards

AT A GLANCE

Virginia rates schools through a school accreditation system (based on performance indicators) and publishes School Quality Profiles — rather than a letter grade or star rating.

HOW THIS STATE RATES SCHOOLS

Virginia assigns an accreditation status (such as Accredited or Accredited with Conditions) based on performance indicators : test achievement, growth, achievement gaps, graduation/dropout, English-learner progress, and chronic absenteeism. The School Quality Profiles show the underlying data.

WHAT GETS MEASURED

- ✓ **Academic achievement** — How students score on state tests (proficiency in reading/ELA and math)
- ✓ **Academic growth / progress** — How much students improve year to year — not just where they land
- ✓ **Graduation rate** — For high schools (the 4-year cohort rate)
- ✓ **English-learner progress** — How English learners are progressing toward proficiency
- ✓ **School quality / student success** — An extra indicator — often attendance/chronic absenteeism, college/career readiness, or similar

FINDING & READING THE REPORT CARD

Look up any school's accreditation status and data on the School Quality Profiles (schoolquality.virginia.gov) .
Read the indicators — especially growth and gaps — alongside the status.

AT A GLANCE

Format	School accreditation
Statuses	Accredited / Accredited with Con...
Also	School Quality Profiles
Tool	VDOE School Quality Profiles
Look up at	schoolquality.virginia.gov

HOW FAMILIES SHOULD USE RATINGS

- ✓ **Read it in context** — A school's score reflects its students' circumstances too, not only its quality
- ✓ **Look at growth, not just scores** — Growth shows how much a school moves students — often more telling than raw proficiency
- ✓ **Check the trend** — Is the school improving over time?
- ✓ **Look past the summary** — Dig into the underlying data (subgroups, attendance, readiness)
- ✓ **Then visit** — Data raises questions; a visit answers them (see our guide on evaluating a school)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How does Virginia rate schools?** — Virginia uses a school accreditation status (e.g., Accredited / Accredited with Conditions) plus School Quality Profiles.
- ✓ **What do the ratings measure?** — Test scores, growth, graduation rate, English-learner progress, and a school-quality indicator.
- ✓ **Where do I look up my school?** — On the state's official report-card portal (see below).
- ✓ **Should I choose a school by its rating alone?** — No — use it as a starting point, weigh growth and context, and visit.
- ✓ **What are CSI and TSI?** — Federal labels for schools flagged for Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Improvement.

READ VIRGINIA'S FULL ACCOUNTABILITY & REPORT CARDS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



School Choice

AT A GLANCE

Virginia has a tax-credit scholarship program — the Education Improvement Scholarships Tax Credits (EISTC) program — which helps lower-income students attend private schools, funded by donations for which donors receive tax credits. Virginia also offers public choice.

THIS STATE'S CHOICE PROGRAMS

The EISTC program lets scholarship foundations award private-school scholarships to income-eligible students, using donations that earn donors a state tax credit. It is income-limited (not universal). Virginia does not currently have a broad ESA or voucher.

ELIGIBILITY

Scholarships are for income-eligible students (generally below set income thresholds, with higher limits for students with disabilities). Confirm current income limits.

APPLYING

Apply through an approved scholarship foundation participating in the EISTC program. Confirm the list and requirements with the Virginia Department of Education.



AT A GLANCE

Program	Education Improvement Scholarshi...
Type	Tax-credit scholarship (income-l...
For	Lower-income students
Plus	Public charters & open enrollmen...
Confirm with	A scholarship foundation

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE, TOO

- ✓ **Open enrollment / transfers** — Attend a public school outside your zone, where allowed (see our finding-your-school guide)
- ✓ **Charter schools** — Tuition-free public schools of choice (where available)
- ✓ **Magnet schools** — Tuition-free public schools with a specialized focus
- ✓ **Homeschooling** — Legal in all 50 states (rules vary)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **Does Virginia have a private-school-choice program?** — Yes (limited) — Virginia has the Education Improvement Scholarships Tax Credit for income-eligible students.
- ✓ **What's the difference between an ESA and a voucher?** — A voucher pays a private school directly; an ESA is a flexible parent-managed account for many approved expenses.
- ✓ **What is a tax-credit scholarship?** — Donors get a tax credit for giving to organizations that fund private-school scholarships.
- ✓ **Is there public school choice too?** — Yes — open enrollment, charters, and magnets (plus homeschooling).
- ✓ **Where do I confirm the details?** — On the official state program site (see below).

READ VIRGINIA'S FULL SCHOOL CHOICE GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com



Teacher Certification

HOW LICENSURE WORKS HERE

Virginia issues licenses through the Virginia Department of Education . You complete an approved program, pass the required tests, and earn an Initial (Provisional/Collegiate) license leading to renewable licensure. Virginia uses Praxis plus its own VCLA and RVE .

WHICH TESTS THIS STATE USES

- ✓ **Praxis Subject Assessments** — Content test(s) for your endorsement area
- ✓ **VCLA** — Virginia Communication and Literacy Assessment — reading and writing skills
- ✓ **RVE** — Reading for Virginia Educators — required for elementary, reading, and special-education candidates
- ✓ **Note** — Some requirements can be met via qualifying scores/coursework — confirm current options

WHAT YOU NEED TO GET LICENSED

- ✓ **A bachelor's degree** — From an accredited college or university
- ✓ **A state-approved teacher-preparation program** — Completed at a college or through an approved alternative route
- ✓ **Student teaching / clinical practice** — Supervised classroom experience
- ✓ **Pass the required exams** — See the exams section above
- ✓ **A background check** — Fingerprint-based criminal background check
- ✓ **Apply to the state** — Submit your application and documents to the licensing agency

AT A GLANCE

Agency	Virginia Department of Education
Content	Praxis Subject Assessments
Communication/literacy	VCLA
Reading (elementary/SPED)	RVE

OTHER PATHS INTO TEACHING

Most states offer alternative routes for career-changers and those with a degree in another field. In Virginia, these typically let you start teaching while completing licensure requirements — through district or university alternative-certification programs, residencies, or emergency/provisional permits. Requirements (and the exams) are...

RECIPROCITY & OUT-OF-STATE LICENSES

- ✓ **Interstate agreements** — Most states participate in the NASDTEC Interstate Agreement, which eases (but doesn't guarantee) recognition of an out-of-state license
- ✓ **You may still owe exams** — States often require you to meet their own testing (or coursework) requirements, sometimes within a grace period
- ✓ **Check both states** — Confirm the specific steps with Virginias agency and your current state

READ VIRGINIA'S FULL TEACHER CERTIFICATION GUIDE
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Financial Aid

THE STATE AID PICTURE

Virginia's state aid is coordinated by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) , with need-based grants at public colleges and a tuition-assistance grant for private ones — plus the G3 program for high-demand career fields.

NEED-BASED STATE GRANTS

- ✓ **Virginia Guaranteed Assistance Program (VGAP)** — A need- and merit-based grant for Virginia residents at public colleges who meet GPA requirements.
- ✓ **Commonwealth Award** — A need-based grant for Virginia residents at public colleges.
- ✓ **Virginia Tuition Assistance Grant (VTAG)** — A grant for Virginia residents attending eligible private, nonprofit Virginia colleges (not need-based).

PROMISE & FREE-COLLEGE PROGRAMS

Get Skilled, Get a Job, Get Ahead (G3) provides tuition assistance (and, for low-income students, financial support) for community-college programs in high-demand fields like health care, IT, public safety, and skilled trades.

COLLEGE SAVINGS (529 PLAN)

Virginia's Virginia529 (Invest529) is a leading tax-advantaged college-savings plan.

DEADLINES & TIMING

State deadlines are typically much earlier than the federal FAFSA deadline , and some aid is first-come, first-served until funds run out. File the FAFSA as soon as it opens (in the fall) and confirm the state's specific priority date.

AT A GLANCE

Need + merit	Virginia Guaranteed Assistance P...
Need-based	Commonwealth Award
Private colleges	Virginia Tuition Assistance Gran...
High-demand fields	G3 Program
529 plan	Virginia529
Agency	SCHEV

APPLYING & THE STATE AGENCY

- ✓ **File the FAFSA early** — It's the trigger for state grants and many scholarships
- ✓ **Register with SCHEV** — Create the state agency's student account to track and claim awards
- ✓ **Confirm your details** — Verify residency, GPA, and enrollment as required
- ✓ **Meet any extra requirements** — Some programs need a separate form, GPA, or service commitment
- ✓ **Reapply every year** — State aid is awarded annually

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ✓ **How do I get Virginia state aid?** — File the FAFSA (and any state form) by the deadline; SCHEV administers the programs.
- ✓ **Is it need-based or merit?** — Both — Virginia offers need-based grants and merit scholarships.
- ✓ **Are the deadlines earlier than federal?** — Usually yes — file early, as some aid is first-come.
- ✓ **Can I use it out of state?** — Most Virginia aid is for in-state schools; check each program.
- ✓ **Does this list private scholarships?** — No — this guide covers official state programs only.

READ VIRGINIA'S FULL FINANCIAL AID GUIDE
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