

## THE EPOCH TIMES



Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin delivers remarks after releasing education report findings in the Patrick Henry Building in Richmond, Va., on May 19, 2022. (Courtesy of Christian Martinez, Office of Governor Glenn Youngkin)

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**EDUCATION & FAMILY NEWS**

# Virginia Governor Vows to Address Sliding Education Performance and Lower Standards

By [Terri Wu](#) | May 19, 2022 Updated: May 19, 2022

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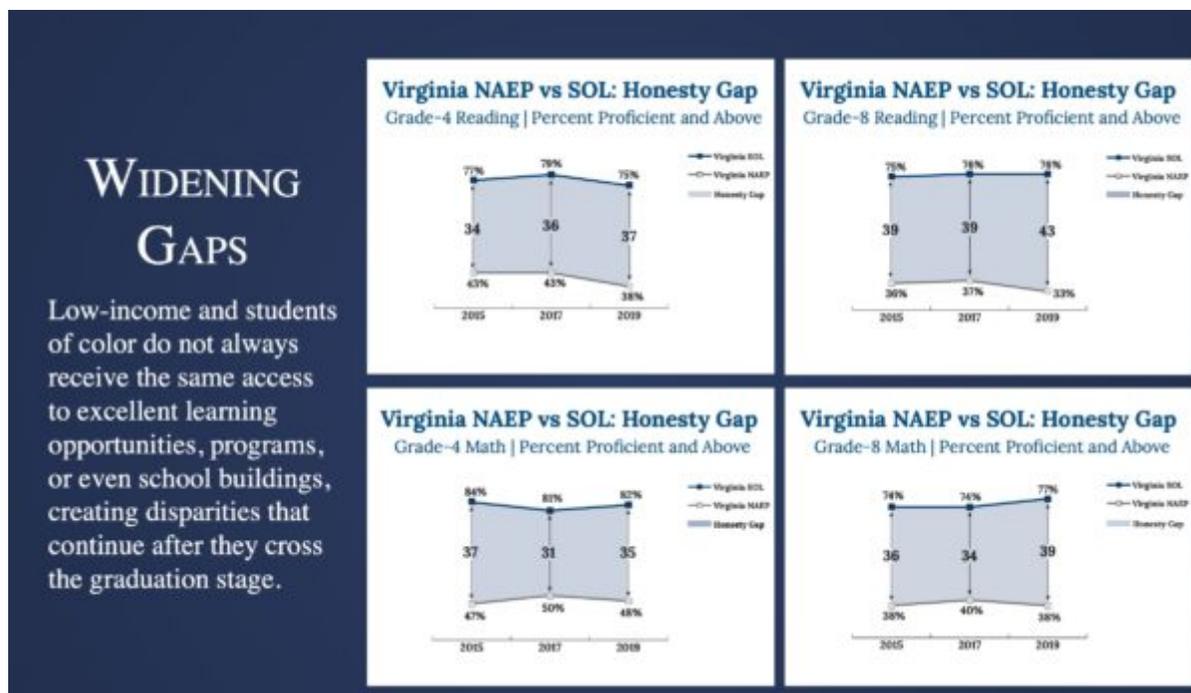
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FAIRFAX COUNTY, Va.—Virginia Gov. [Glenn Youngkin](#) vowed to raise standards and performance in the state’s K-12 public schools after a new report highlighted declining academic achievement over fallen standards. He also pledged to improve transparency in education performance reporting and empower parents for student academic excellence.

According to the [new report](#) by the state’s Department of Education, Virginia public school students’ performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as “the nation’s report card,” decreased between 2017 and 2019.

During the same time, however, these students’ test results with the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) either remained flat or slightly increased due to lower standards. Under the previous administration, the Virginia Board of Education reduced its SOL proficiency standards in math in 2019 and reading in 2020.

As a result, Virginia’s “honesty gap”—a performance gap between the state and national level—has widened by 1 to 5 percent on math and reading tests for 4th and 8th grade students. Specifically, with 33 percent testing proficient and above in 8th grade reading, the results were [below the national public level](#) in 2019. Yet by the state’s standards, 76 percent of all Virginia 8th graders mastered proficiency in reading. The gap was 43 percent.



Virginia’s “honesty gap”—a performance gap between the state and national level—has widened by 1 to 5 percent on math and reading tests for 4th and 8th grade students. (Presentation deck of Jillian Balow, Virginia superintendent of public instruction)

Virginia students’ performance on Advanced Placement (AP) exams also fell from third in the nation in 2014 to ninth in 2021.

“Decisions made at the state level created confusion in Virginia education and downplayed troubling trends,” wrote Jillian Balow, Virginia superintendent of public instruction, in the report. “It is noteworthy that the rhetorical emphasis on equity coincided with the widened gaps in student achievement.”

In Youngkin’s press statement, Balow added that the new report was “not an indictment of our teachers, principals, and other school leaders” whose decision-making “inevitably reflected priorities and policy choices determined at the state level.”

Elicia Brand, president of Army of Parents, a parent advocacy group based in Loudoun County, said the report findings were “devastating” yet “far from surprising.”

“When the focus on core academics is replaced with social justice and identity curricula, when meritocracy and accountability are revoked and replaced with retesting, inflated grades, and no assignment deadlines, when reading literature and learning grammar, spelling, and comprehension is replaced with sexually explicit graphic novels and movies played during English class periods, when identity politics are combined with a concerted effort to slow down advanced learners instead of educating all children to the best of their abilities; the learning and achievement gaps will widen and no student will be rewarded with life-long positive outcomes,” she told The Epoch Times in a written statement.

Brand has three children in middle school in Loudoun County. She said the [Loudoun County Public Schools](#)’ superintendent and school board had “doubled down on defying Governor Youngkin’s [executive] orders by injecting tenets of CRT [critical race theory] and identity politics into our schools.”

She questioned whether Youngkin’s latest commitment to restoring excellence in education would be ignored again and called for “enumerated consequences for non-compliance.” Loudoun County Public Schools has not immediately returned Epoch Times’ inquiry for comments.

Critical race theory is a quasi-Marxist framework that views society and its institutions through the lens of race and argues that America is systematically racist. It breaks down the population into oppressors and those oppressed based on skin color. Educators and mainstream media have said that CRT is a college-level course that is not taught in K-12 schools. However, parents disagree and say that “equity”—equal outcome versus equal access to opportunities—is a euphemism for CRT.

According to Youngkin’s press statement, the new education report builds upon his [Executive Order One](#) issued on his first day in office. The executive order aims to “end the use of inherently divisive concepts, including Critical Race Theory, and raise academic standards.”

“Every single student deserves an education that does not teach or practice discrimination,” Youngkin said at an event earlier Thursday announcing the findings of the new education report. “We shouldn’t be teaching our students to be judgmental. We need to be teaching Virginia students how to think, not what to think.”

The report also identified a trend that Virginia parents are taking their children out of public schools. Nearly 60,000 school-age children were homeschooled during the 2020–2021 school year, a 56 percent year-over-year increase. Although public schools reopened with in-person learning in the fall of 2021, about 56,000 homeschooled students didn’t return.