

Supporting Not Fully Accredited Schools in Virginia

When we zoom out and consistently see race, history of housing segregation, and poverty as overwhelming indicators of a school being designated as not fully accredited (often called “failing” by policymakers and media), then it becomes abundantly clear that policy choices over many years contributed to and sustain this trend. Virginia lawmakers must begin adequately resourcing these schools.

State policy choices created conditions at not fully accredited schools

- In the most recent accreditation year, 132 schools were “accredited with conditions,” meaning they were not fully accredited. These schools must work with the Virginia Department of Education on improvement plans described in a recent [state investigation](#) as “largely a compliance exercise.” Aside from limited advice, no additional resources or support is provided to these schools.
- Schools not fully accredited in the 2019-2020 school year received less state and local funding per student on average than fully accredited schools. Many [funding adequacy studies show](#) students facing more barriers and living in poverty generally need an additional funding supplement of 40-200% to have education outcomes comparable to students not living in poverty.
- In the most recent accreditation year, 54% of students in schools accredited with conditions were Black, despite only making up 22% of the student population statewide. Black students are the only overrepresented racial or ethnic group in schools that are accredited with conditions.
- When politicians use “failing schools” rhetoric in Virginia, they are mostly talking about [majority Black schools](#) in neighborhoods segregated and impoverished through state-sanctioned policy.
- Data from the Virginia Department of Education designates 70% of schools without full accreditation as “high-poverty,” compared to only 20% of fully accredited schools.
- Schools without full accreditation have a higher share of inexperienced teachers (5.2% vs 4.5%) and twice the teacher vacancy rates (October 2021) than fully accredited schools (4.6% vs 2.3%).

Prioritize evidenced-based investments to support not fully accredited schools

- While it might be convenient for lawmakers to imagine that schools with high-need students just require better advice or silver bullet reform efforts that don’t cost more money, decades of [research](#) has come to the [conclusion](#) that [money matters](#) for student outcomes.
- High impact investments to improve outcomes at not fully accredited schools include:
 - **Significantly scale the At-Risk Add On** to provide more aid to high-poverty schools.
 - **Fully lift the “support cap”** that limits state aid for critical school support positions.
 - **Invest in community school models** to break down student barriers to education.
 - **Fully fund the Virginia Board of Education’s revisions to the Standards of Quality.**
 - **Pay educators and staff competitive wages** to attract and retain high-quality workers.
 - **Provide Office of School Quality more resources** to support not fully accredited schools.