

# The Education Landscape in Virginia

The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities serves as Virginia's Developmental Disabilities Council. In this capacity the Board advises the Governor, the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, federal and state legislators, and other constituent groups on issues important to people with disabilities in the Commonwealth. The following summarizes the Board's most recent assessment of education services and outcomes and is intended to serve as a guide for policymakers who are interested in improving the education and employment outlook for Virginians with disabilities. To see the Board's full assessment, please visit <https://vaboard.org/assessment.htm#2017>

## Leading by Values

The Board's work in this area is driven by its vision, values, and the following core beliefs and principles:



### Inherent Dignity

All people possess inherent dignity, regardless of gender, race, religion, national origin, or disability status.



### Presumed Capacity

All people should be presumed capable on engaging in meaningful, gainful employment and self-direction; and all people deserve opportunities to demonstrate their abilities, to prove themselves in the labor force, and to achieve economic self-sufficiency.



### Self-Determination

People with disabilities are experts in their own needs and desires, and they must be included in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.



### Integration

People with disabilities have a civil right to receive services and supports in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs and desires, consistent with the Supreme Court's Olmstead decision. Fully integrated employment should always be the first option considered for people with disabilities.



### Diversity

Diversity is a core value. All people, including people with disabilities, should be valued for contributing to the diversity of the workforce of the Commonwealth.



### Freedom from Abuse & Neglect

People with disabilities must be protected from abuse and neglect in all settings where services and supports are provided.



### Fiscal Responsibility

Fiscally responsible policies are beneficial for the Commonwealth and they are beneficial for people with disabilities.

“It is important to set the bar higher than mere presence in a regular education classroom. The Commonwealth's strategy going forward should focus on the broader concept of inclusion, in addition to mere presence as measured by least restrictive environment data. This will require the development of a common understanding of what “inclusion” means, a mechanism for measuring inclusion in classrooms, and a strategy for increasing its use.”

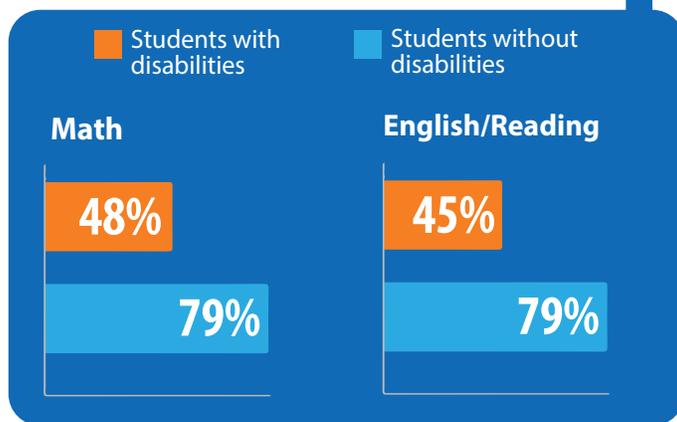


## Key Education Outcomes

1

### Academic Proficiency

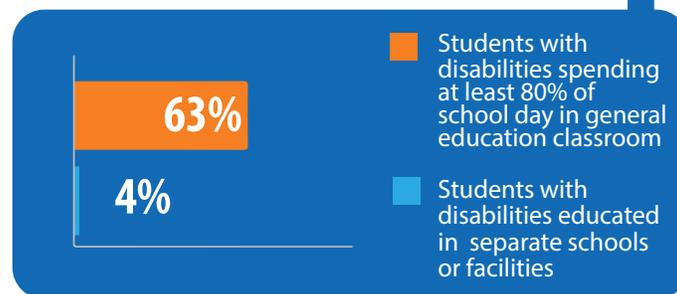
Fewer than half of students with disabilities achieved academic proficiency in the 2014-15 school year.



2

### Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

More school-age students with disabilities are spending more of their day in general education classrooms in Virginia today than 10 years ago; but a greater number are also segregated in separate facilities today than 10 years ago.



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“ Virginia’s educational outcomes for students with disabilities have improved in some respects. The proficiency rates of students with disabilities in the Commonwealth, as measured on standard assessments have been slowly, but measurably, improving in recent years. Many students with disabilities are also spending more of their school day in general education classrooms. ”

## Recommendations to Improve

These recommendations, if implemented, have the potential to meaningfully improve the extent to which students with disabilities are served in regular education classrooms and achieve success in postsecondary educations and beyond. These recommendations are grouped into five main approaches:



Improve rates at which students with disabilities receive educational services in general education classrooms in their neighborhood schools and receive meaningfully inclusive educational experiences throughout the Commonwealth, especially in districts identified as including students with disabilities in regular education classrooms at exceptionally low rates.



Decrease the use of overly harsh discipline and harmful behavioral interventions in the Commonwealth and minimize the disparate impact that these practices have on students with disabilities.



Ensure that students with disabilities and their parents receive clear and accurate information about the future impact of educational decisions.



Increase the number of students with disabilities who have access to employment-related education and real-world experiential employment opportunities, both during and immediately after high school.



Increase postsecondary educational opportunities for students with disabilities, including students with significant developmental and other disabilities.

3

### Disproportionate Disciplinary Tactics

The overuse of harsh disciplinary tactics and referrals to the criminal justice system by Virginia’s public schools disproportionately affects students with disabilities and students of color in the Commonwealth. Virginia refers students to law enforcement at higher rates than any other state in the United States. (According to a 2015 Report by the Center for Public Integrity)

Students with disabilities

All students

Virginia

National Average

33 students

11 students

16 students

6 students

4

### High School Graduation Rate

Only about half of students with disabilities graduated with a regular high school diploma in 2015.

53%

Students with disabilities

85%

Students without disabilities

5

### Postsecondary Success

Only 73%, or fewer than three quarters of students with disabilities are entering higher education, entering some other education or training program, or obtaining competitive employment within one year of graduating high school.



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