



National Council for the  
Social Studies

**VIRGINIA**  
SOCIAL STUDIES  
LEADERS CONSORTIUM

AMERICAN  
HISTORICAL  
ASSOCIATION



December 10, 2025

Members of the Virginia Board of Education  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Virginia Department of Education  
P.O. Box 2120  
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Superintendent Gullickson, President Creasey, and Members of the Board,

This letter represents a joint statement of the undersigned organizations. We write to call for an immediate pause on proposed amendments to Virginia's ESSA Consolidated State Plan related to History and Social Science. Sweeping changes to accountability and assessment must not be rushed forward without transparent public review and meaningful professional consultation. To ensure that any action reflects both the will of Virginia's voters and the long-term interests of students, the Virginia Board of Education should allow adequate time for a deliberate and inclusive process, in partnership with the incoming administration and educational experts and stakeholders across the Commonwealth.

We support meaningful commonwealth-based accountability in History and Social Science. However, the current proposal does not represent a path forward aligned with state law or informed by professional expertise. It has advanced prematurely, without meaningful consultation with content experts, school leaders, or the educators responsible for implementing Virginia's assessment system. As a result, key stakeholders have been insufficiently involved in the process, leading to the oversight of critical issues and disregarding Virginia's nationally recognized innovations in History and Social Science assessment.

Virginia has made remarkable progress in developing and scaling an inquiry-based performance assessment system grounded in the C3 Framework. This work, which is nationally recognized, has embedded civic reasoning, historical thinking, and evidence-based argumentation into an ongoing assessment process integrated throughout the school year.<sup>1</sup> Developed in partnership with the Virginia Department of Education and local school divisions, this system directly supports the intent of House Bill 1957 by preserving local flexibility through permissive local alternative assessment (PLAA) options at all grade levels. This approach is not novel. States such as Kansas have already incorporated classroom-based performance assessments into their state accountability systems.<sup>2</sup> On December 4, the Kansas State Department of Education presented at the National Social Studies Leaders Association meeting in Washington, D.C. to

<sup>1</sup> Dickenson, B., Swan, K., & Swan, G. (2024). *Teaching to a Better Test: Using the Inquiry Design Model to Reframe State-Mandated Assessment in Social Studies*. Social Education, 88(4), 247–252.

<sup>2</sup> Kansas State Department of Education History, Government and Social Studies

highlight the success of their model to a national audience. Virginia can continue to lead the way alongside states like Kansas, and we must not undermine this work through rushed and questionable policy changes.

The proposed amendment appears to conflict with the intent and provisions of House Bill 1957. State law explicitly affirms the authority of school divisions to use permissive local alternative assessments (PLAAs), including inquiry-based performance assessments, in lieu of SOL tests in History and Social Science at all grade levels. This reflects the will of the General Assembly and establishes a clear legal framework for how assessment in our discipline should evolve. Any amendment to Virginia's federal plan must align with this statute, and adherence to state law must supersede any preference for a particular accountability mechanism.

We therefore respectfully urge the Board and the Department of Education to halt further action on this proposal and to commit to a transparent, inclusive process that honors state law, protects Virginia's leadership in inquiry-based performance assessment, and remains firmly rooted in the best interests of all Virginia students.

Respectfully,

Virginia Social Studies Leaders Consortium (VSSLC)

Virginia Council for Social Studies (VCSS)

National Council for Social Studies (NCSS)

American Historical Association (AHA)