CHARLOTTESVILLE CITY SCHOOLS

Executive Summary: School Accountability and the Impact of House Bill 299

Prepared for Charlottesville City Council | November 2026

Overview

Charlottesville City Schools continues to make meaningful progress toward the goals of its 2023–2028 *Better Together* Strategic Plan. Recent results reflect improvements in academic achievement, student attendance, graduation outcomes, teacher retention, and school facilities.

Under Virginia's new School Performance and Support Framework, all eight Charlottesville City Schools earned overall scores above 80 points, and all eight schools are fully accredited. Seven of the eight schools improved their overall scores from the previous year.

While these accomplishments demonstrate important progress, the division remains focused on addressing achievement gaps and ensuring that all students have opportunities to succeed.

At the same time, the Charlottesville City School Board wishes to bring attention to significant implementation challenges associated with Virginia's House Bill 299 (HB 299), particularly the compressed SOL testing window for students in grades 7–12. The School Board seeks City Council's support in communicating these concerns to state legislators and advocating for greater flexibility in the law's implementation.

Highlights of Division Progress

Charlottesville City Schools continues to advance its strategic priorities:

- **Academic Achievement:** Mathematics proficiency reached approximately 70%, an increase of nearly 15 percentage points over five years. The 2026 on-time graduation rate reached 90%, and 99.4% of graduates reported having a postsecondary plan. Improving literacy remains a priority, with reading proficiency at 67%.
- **Student Well-Being:** Student social-emotional learning results improved from 83% to 86%, and chronic absenteeism declined across the division.
- **Staff Retention:** Teacher retention reached 92%, exceeding the division's 90% target.
- **School Facilities:** The division completed the modernization of Charlottesville Middle School, returned fifth-grade students to neighborhood elementary schools, and consolidated preschool programming at Walker.

Virginia's new accountability framework also provides a broader picture of school performance, considering student mastery, academic growth, readiness, and graduation outcomes.

Although all eight schools exceeded the state's overall 80-point benchmark, six schools were federally identified for Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) because one or more student groups performed below state-established thresholds. Five of these six schools improved their overall scores.

These results demonstrate that our schools are making meaningful gains while continuing to address achievement gaps and provide additional support where students need it most.

Legislative Concern: House Bill 299 and the Two-Week SOL Testing Window

One of the most significant challenges facing Charlottesville City Schools for the 2026–2027 school year is the implementation of Virginia's House Bill 299 (HB 299), which establishes new requirements for administering Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments in grades 7–12.

Under the legislation, initial SOL assessments generally must be administered no earlier than the final two weeks of the applicable course, semester, or school year, subject to specified exceptions.

While the intent is to preserve instructional time before testing, this compressed window creates substantial challenges for students, teachers, testing coordinators, and school administrators. The concern extends beyond scheduling initial assessments to ensuring sufficient time for remediation, expedited retakes, testing accommodations, and makeup assessments before the school year ends.

The Eighth-Grade Challenge: Testing, Remediation, and Retakes Beyond the School Year

The impact of HB 299 is particularly significant at the middle school level.

An eighth-grade student may be required to complete five SOL assessments within approximately ten school days. If that student does not initially demonstrate proficiency and qualifies for expedited retakes, the school must also provide remediation and coordinate additional testing opportunities.

For a student who qualifies to retake four or five assessments, this could mean nine or ten total testing sessions, in addition to the instructional time necessary for remediation.

While HB 299 allows retakes to occur outside the initial two-week testing window, this exception does not resolve the challenges created by requiring initial assessments so close to the end of the school year.

Because retakes must occur after initial testing, students who need additional opportunities may have to return to school after the regular school year has ended.

This would represent a significant departure from Charlottesville City Schools' established practices and create additional logistical, staffing, and financial challenges.

These challenges include:

- **Transportation:** The division would need to arrange transportation for students returning after the regular school year ends, creating additional costs and logistical demands.

- **Staffing and Compensation:** Teacher contracts end on the last day of school. Providing remediation and administering retakes after that date would require additional staffing arrangements and compensation.
- **Student and Family Participation:** Requiring students to return after the school year could create barriers related to summer schedules, family commitments, and transportation, potentially limiting participation.
- **Remediation and Instructional Support:** Students would still need meaningful opportunities for targeted instruction before retesting, requiring qualified staff and additional instructional time beyond the regular school calendar.
- **Testing Administration:** Schools would need to coordinate testing personnel, accommodations, technology, facilities, and required test-security procedures after normal school operations have concluded.

The exception for retakes does not eliminate the burden of the compressed testing window. Instead, it may shift that burden beyond the school year, creating additional demands on students, families, staff, and division resources.

This raises significant concerns about the feasibility and equity of implementation, particularly for students who need additional instructional support and opportunities to demonstrate proficiency.

Impact on Students, Staff, and School Operations

Beyond the challenges associated with retesting, the compressed assessment window creates additional concerns during the final weeks of school:

- **Student Stress and Testing Fatigue:** Students may be required to complete multiple high-stakes assessments within a short period, increasing fatigue and anxiety.
- **Limited Time for Remediation:** Students who qualify for expedited retakes need meaningful instructional support before testing again. The compressed schedule limits opportunities to address learning gaps before the school year ends.
- **Staffing and Scheduling Demands:** Teachers, testing coordinators, administrators, and support personnel must manage overlapping assessments, accommodations, makeup testing, and end-of-year responsibilities.
- **Disruption to School Operations:** Concentrating assessments into the final two weeks affects classroom schedules, student supervision, staffing assignments, and other end-of-year activities (field day, grade level ceremonies, graduation, etc.).
- **Equitable Opportunities for Student Success:** Students requiring accommodations, additional instructional support, or multiple retakes may face the greatest challenges within the limited timeframe.

The central concern is not simply whether schools can administer the assessments. It is whether students can receive the instruction, remediation, and testing opportunities they need to demonstrate proficiency without extending those responsibilities beyond the regular school year.

Requested Legislative Support

Charlottesville City Schools supports academic accountability and recognizes the importance of measuring student achievement. However, assessment requirements must also be practical to implement and responsive to the needs of students and educators.

The Charlottesville City School Board seeks City Council's support in advocating for legislative reconsideration of HB 299's testing-window requirements and greater flexibility for school divisions.

Specifically, the division encourages consideration of:

- **Greater flexibility in SOL testing schedules** to allow divisions to administer initial assessments within a reasonable window aligned with local instructional calendars.
- **Sufficient time for remediation and expedited retakes** so students have meaningful opportunities to receive additional instruction and demonstrate proficiency before the school year ends.
- **Consideration of the cumulative testing burden** on students required to complete multiple SOL assessments, particularly at the middle school level.
- **Recognition of staffing, transportation, and financial implications** associated with potentially extending remediation and retesting beyond the regular school year.
- **Input from local school divisions** to identify practical adjustments that preserve instructional time while supporting student success.

The division is not seeking to reduce academic expectations or accountability. Rather, it is asking for a testing structure that is realistic, equitable, and designed to give every student a meaningful opportunity to succeed.

Closing

Charlottesville City Schools has much to celebrate. Our schools are demonstrating measurable improvement, and our strategic plan continues to provide clear direction for the work ahead.

However, as Virginia implements new assessment requirements, it is essential that state policies support student learning without creating unintended barriers for students and educators.

We respectfully ask City Council to join the School Board in communicating these concerns to state legislators and advocating for greater flexibility in HB 299's testing-window requirements.

Our shared goal is to ensure that students have the time, instruction, and support they need to demonstrate what they know and achieve academic success.