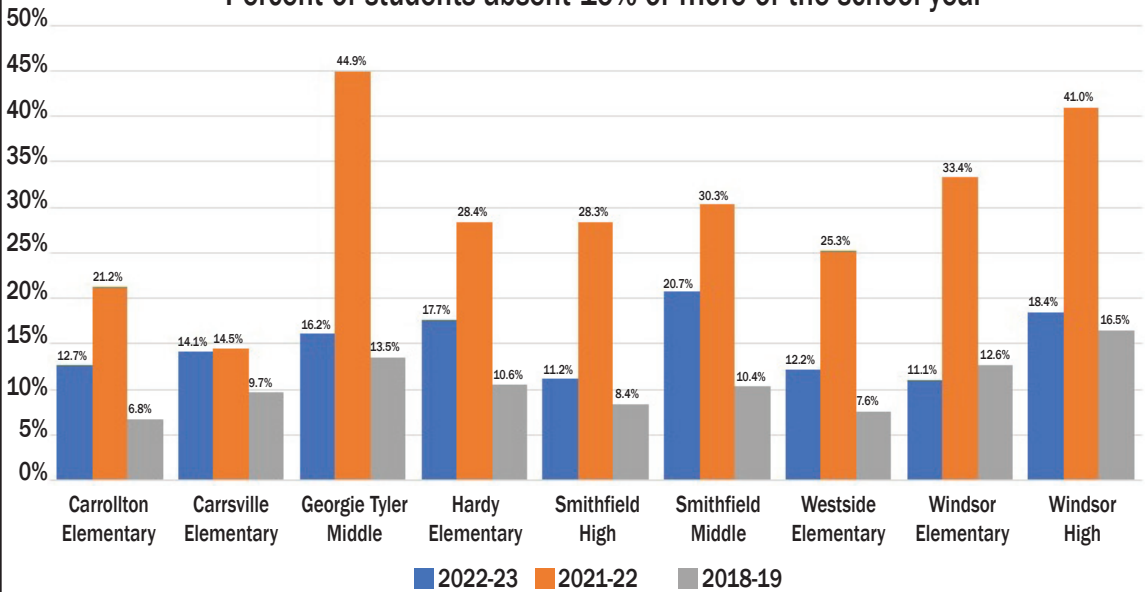


Percent of students absent 10% or more of the school year



# IW school attendance improving, but test scores stagnate

By Stephen Faleski  
Staff Writer

Isle of Wight County Schools saw improved attendance last school year over the prior one, but the division still hasn't returned to its pre-pandemic pass

rates on the state's Standards of Learning, or SOL, exams.

The Virginia Department of Education released the results of the 2022-23 statewide standardized tests on Sept. 7.

• See IWCS, p. 6

## IWCS Pass Rate

Reading	77.86%
Writing	70.44%
History	70.89%
Math	76.96%
Science	67.41%

# Surry improves on some standardized tests, lags on others

By Stephen Faleski  
Staff Writer

Learning loss from the monthslong shutdown of Virginia's schools during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic may indeed be driving continued

underperformance on the state's Standards of Learning, or SOL, exams, as Gov. Glenn Youngkin's administration contends in its "All In VA" remediation plan, but Surry County High

• See SCHS, p. 6

## SCS Pass Rate

Reading	76.06%
Writing	70.30%
History	67.47%
Math	70.45%
Science	69.23%

# IWCS

• Continued from p. 1

Divisionwide in Isle of Wight, 78% of students passed the reading test, reflecting no change from the 2021-22 school year. During the 2018-19 school year, the last before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Isle of Wight saw an 80% pass rate.

In writing, science and history, Isle of Wight's 2022-23 scores were slightly lower than the prior school year.

Isle of Wight saw a 70% pass rate on the writing test, down three percentage points from 2021-22 and eight from the 2018-19 school year.

Isle of Wight saw a 67% pass rate on the science test, down four points from 2021-22. The score reflects the sharpest departure from the 2018-19 school year, which had seen an 83% pass rate.

Isle of Wight's divisionwide history test saw a 71% pass rate, down one point from 2021-22. In 2018-19, the pass rate was 80%.

All of Isle of Wight's 2022-23 SOL pass rates were at or above the state average. State Superintendent Lisa Coons, in a Sept. 7 news release announcing Virginia's results, said "more than half" of third-through eighth-graders statewide "either failed or are at risk of failing their reading SOL exam," and "nearly two-thirds" had failed or were at risk of failing the math exam.

Gov. Glenn Youngkin,

in a news release announcing a remediation plan titled "All In VA," blamed public schools' continued underperformance compared to their pre-pandemic scores on the monthslong closure of Virginia's schools during the early days of COVID-19.

Some individual schools, however, have bucked the trend. Among them are Windsor High School, which exceeded its 2018-19 pass rate on the 2022-23 reading and math exams.

## How are tests scored?

In 2020, new reading tests measuring the 2017-adopted changes to English content standards were to be administered, though the state canceled its 2019-20 SOLs due to the pandemic.

That same year, the Virginia Board of Education adopted new "cut scores" for the reading exam based on the changes in test content. The term refers to the number of test questions students at each grade level must answer correctly to receive a passing score on the exam.

According to a record of the Board of Education's May 7, 2020, meeting, then-State Superintendent James Lane recommended the passing threshold for third, fourth and fifth grade be lowered from

62.5% on the old test to between 55-60% depending on grade level. The recommended change for sixth, seventh and eighth-grade was to drop the minimum passing score from 62.5% on the old test to 57.7% on the new one.

Coons contends the lowered thresholds "enabled students to pass that would not have otherwise received a passing score" had they taken the 2018-19 school year's SOL tests. Roughly 32% of third-through eighth-graders statewide who passed the 2022-23 reading exam fell into this "low proficient" bracket, Coons said.

Lane, now CEO of the Arlington-based teacher advocacy organization PDK International, did not immediately respond to The Smithfield Times' request for comments on Coons' assertion.

Isle of Wight's test results, published on the VDOE's school quality.virginia.gov website, do not include a breakdown of the divisionwide number or percentage of students deemed "low proficient."

Of the 78% who passed the reading test, 65% are listed as "proficient" and 13% are listed as "advanced."

The "advanced" label, as of the 2020 changes in cut scores, referred to third- and fourth-graders who answer at least 87.5% of reading test questions correctly and fifth-graders who answer 90% cor-

rectly. Sixth- through eighth-graders who correctly answer 86.6%, and high school students who answer 80.8% of questions correctly on end-of-course English exams are also deemed advanced.

## Racial disparity persists

Eighty-six percent of the county's white students passed the reading exam in 2018-19, compared to a 67% pass rate among Black students. For 2022-23, the pass rate among white students had fallen to 83% while the rate among Black students had fallen to 65%.

The scores, however, reflect a 6-point closing of the racial gap during the 2021-22 school year, which had seen an 84% pass rate among white students and a 60% pass rate among Black students.

In math, the racial disparity between pre-pandemic and 2022-23 scores is even more pronounced.

The number of white students who passed the math exam fell five percentage points, from 88% in 2018-19 to 83% this past school year. For Black students, the pre-pandemic 70% pass rate had fallen 18 points to 62% as of 2022-23.

## Chronic absenteeism improving

Chronic absenteeism,

# SCHS

• Continued from p. 1

School has for the second year in a row bucked the trend on one test.

Ninety percent of SCHS students passed the 2022-23 math SOL exam. The figure is one point lower than the 91% who passed the exam in 2021-22 but four points higher than the 86% who passed in 2018-19, the last school year prior to the start of the pandemic.

Surry County Public Schools' divisionwide pass rates, however, remain below their pre-pandemic levels.

The Virginia Department of Education released the results of the 2022-23 school year's standardized tests on Sept. 7.

Divisionwide, 76% of Surry students passed the reading test. The figure is three percentage points higher than the statewide pass rate and two points shy of the division's 78% 2018-19 pass rate.

Seventy percent of Surry students passed the writing test, up five points from the statewide average but six points below the division's rate from 2018-19.

The three subject areas showing the largest divisionwide gap between the 2022-23 results and Surry's pre-pandemic scores are math, history and science.

The 70% of Surry's students who passed the math exam and the 67% who passed the history test each reflect an 11 point drop from the 2018-19 pass rates for those tests.

Largely driving the divisionwide history score is Surry Elementary, which saw less than half of its student body pass the test during the past two school years compared to the 83% who had done so prior to the pandemic.

Surry Elementary saw 58% of its students pass the math exam, down 22 points from the 80% who'd passed in 2018-19, though the 2022-23 pass rate is nine points higher from the 49% who passed in 2021-22.

Luther Porter Jackson Middle School and SCHS each saw a gap of at least 10 percentage points between its 2022-23 science pass rate and the rate for

2018-19.

A nearly equal number of white and Black students passed the reading and writing exams. Surry had 685 students enrolled divisionwide during the 2022-23 school year, more than half of whom identify as Black or mixed-race.

Sixty-two percent of Black students passed the math exam, compared to a 75% pass rate for white students. The 12 point gap

is less than half what it was during the 2021-22 school year.

Black students' performance on the science exams also saw improvement, with 63% passing compared to 59% the prior year. The pass rate among white students, meanwhile, increased from 73% in 2021-22 to 75% in 2022-23

The only category in which racial test score disparities did not show

significant improvement was on the history exam. Last year, 57% of white students and 56% of Black students passed. This year, the white pass rate rose to 76% while the Black pass rate remained only one point higher, at 57%.

All of Surry County Public Schools' divisionwide test scores were above the statewide average for 2022-23.

defined as a student who is absent for 10% or more during a school year, is one of nine indicators Virginia uses when awarding or denying state accreditation to schools.

All nine of the county's public schools remain accredited despite 14.3% of Isle of Wight's students divisionwide being deemed chronically absent during the 2022-23 school year.

The figure is less than half the 29.7% of students deemed chronically absent

during the 2021-22 school year. During the 2018-19 school year, 10.2% of Isle of Wight's students were chronically absent.

All nine schools have improved attendance, particularly Georgie D. Tyler Middle School, which saw 16.2% of its student body chronically absent in 2022-23, down from a staggering 44.9% in 2021-22.

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## Legal Notice

NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC OF AN APPLICATION BY COLUMBIA GAS OF VIRGINIA, INC., FOR APPROVAL TO AMEND AND EXTEND ITS SAVE PLAN PURSUANT TO VIRGINIA CODE § 56-604, AND FOR APPROVAL TO IMPLEMENT A 2024 SAVE RIDER IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 20 OF ITS GENERAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS CASE NO. PUR-2023-00119

On August 15, 2023, Columbia Gas of Virginia, Inc. ("CVA" or "Company"), filed an application ("Application"), pursuant to Chapter 26 of Title 56 of the Code of Virginia, known as the Steps to Advance Virginia's Energy Plan (SAVE) Act ("SAVE Act"), for (1) approval to amend and extend its SAVE Plan pursuant to the SAVE Act; and (2) for approval to implement a SAVE Rider for calendar year 2024, inclusive of the costs associated with the Company's Advanced Leak Detection and Repair Program ("Advanced LDAR Program").

The Company requests to extend its SAVE Plan for three years (calendar years 2024 through 2026) ("Phase 5 SAVE Plan"). CVA proposes that during this three-year extended term, the Company would be authorized to spend up to \$69 million in 2024, \$67 million in 2025, and \$73 million in 2026 for a total of \$209 million. The Company requests authorization to exceed this investment by 10% on an annual basis and 10% on a cumulative basis, for a Phase 5 SAVE Plan maximum spend of \$229.9 million. CVA further requests authorization to include costs associated with its Advanced LDAR Program in its Phase 5 SAVE Plan. The Company also requests approval to implement its 2024 SAVE Rider, which is based on a \$69 million projected SAVE eligible capital program for 2024, deferred 2022 and projected 2024 costs associated with the Company's Advanced LDAR Program, and the true-up of the recovery of the actual SAVE cost of service for the calendar year 2022, to be effective with the first billing unit of January 2024 through the last billing unit of December 2024.

CVA has proposed a 2022 True-Up Factor credit of \$535,548 and a 2024 Projected Factor of \$12,419,565, for a total proposed SAVE revenue requirement of \$11,884,017. As proposed, the 2024 SAVE Rider would increase residential customers' bills by \$1.77 per month, for a total proposed monthly SAVE Rider rate of \$2.73.

Further details are set forth in the Company's Application and supporting exhibits, and interested persons are encouraged to review these documents.

TAKE NOTICE that the Commission may adopt rates that differ from those appearing in the Company's Application and supporting documents and may apportion revenues among customer classes and/or design rates in a manner differing from that shown in the Application and supporting documents.

The Commission entered an Order for Notice and Comment that, among other things, directed the Company to provide notice to the public and provided interested persons an opportunity to comment on the Company's Application.

To promote administrative efficiency and timely service of filings upon participants, the Commission has directed the electronic filing of testimony and pleadings, unless they contain confidential information, and required electronic service on parties to this proceeding. In accordance therewith, all pleadings, briefs, or other documents required to be served in this matter shall be submitted electronically to the extent authorized by 5 VAC 5-20-150, *Copies and format*, of the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure ("Rules of Practice"). Confidential and Extraordinarily Sensitive Information shall not be submitted electronically and should comply with 5 VAC 5-20-170, *Confidential information*, of the Rules of Practice. Any person seeking to hand deliver and physically file or submit any pleading or other document shall contact the Clerk's Office Document Control Center at (804) 371-9838 to arrange the delivery.

An electronic copy of the Company's Application may be obtained by submitting a written request to counsel for the Company: T. Borden Ellis, Assistant General Counsel, NiSource Corporate Services Company, 1809 Coyote Drive, Chester, Virginia 23836, [tbellis@nsource.com](mailto:tbellis@nsource.com).

On or before October 11, 2023, any interested person may submit comments on the Application by following the instructions found on the Commission's website: [sec.virginia.gov/casecomments/Submit-Public-Comments](http://sec.virginia.gov/casecomments/Submit-Public-Comments). Those unable, as a practical matter, to submit comments electronically may file such comments by U.S. mail to the Clerk of the State Corporation Commission c/o Document Control Center, P.O. Box 2118, Richmond, Virginia 23218-2118. All such comments shall refer to Case No. PUR-2023-00119.

On or before October 11, 2023, any person or entity wishing to participate as a respondent in this proceeding may do so by filing a notice of participation at [sec.virginia.gov/clk/efiling](http://sec.virginia.gov/clk/efiling). Those unable, as a practical matter, to file a notice of participation electronically may file such notice by U.S. mail to the Clerk of the Commission at the address listed above. Such notice of participation shall include the email addresses of such parties or their counsel. A copy thereof also must be sent to counsel for the Company. Pursuant to 5 VAC 5-20-80 B, *Participation as a respondent*, of the Commission's Rules of Practice, any notice of participation shall set forth: (i) a precise statement of the interest of the respondent; (ii) a statement of the specific action sought to the extent then known; and (iii) the factual and legal basis for the action. Any organization, corporation, or government body participating as a respondent must be represented by counsel as required by 5 VAC 5-20-30, *Counsel*, of the Rules of Practice. All filings shall refer to Case No. PUR-2023-00119.

On or before October 11, 2023, any interested person or entity may file with the Clerk of the Commission at [sec.virginia.gov/clk/efiling](http://sec.virginia.gov/clk/efiling), a request that the Commission convene a hearing on the Company's Application. Those unable, as a practical matter, to file a request for hearing electronically may file such request for hearing by U.S. mail to the Clerk of the Commission at the address listed above. Such request for hearing shall include the email address of the filer or its counsel, if available. A copy thereof also must be sent to counsel for the Company. Requests for hearing must include: (i) a precise statement of the filing party's interest in the proceeding; (ii) a statement of the specific action sought to the extent then known; (iii) a statement of the legal basis for such action; and (iv) a precise statement why a hearing should be conducted in this matter. All requests for a hearing shall refer to Case No. PUR-2023-00119.

Any documents filed in paper form with the Office of the Clerk of the Commission in this docket may use both sides of the paper. In all other respects, except as modified by the Commission's Order for Notice and Comment, all filings shall comply fully with the requirements of 5 VAC 5-20-150, *Copies and format*, of the Commission's Rules of Practice.

The Company's Application and other documents filed in this case, the Commission's Rules of Practice, and the Commission's Order for Notice and Comment may be viewed on the Commission's website at: [sec.virginia.gov/pages/Case-Information](http://sec.virginia.gov/pages/Case-Information).

COLUMBIA GAS OF VIRGINIA, INC.