

Final Report of the  
**Virginia Commission on**  
*African American*  
**History Education in the Commonwealth**

*August 2020*



*As we reckon with the painful legacy of Virginia’s racist past, and acknowledge that it continues to shape our present, we can and must continue to act to improve the future. We must work to tell our full and true story.*

*It is our job—all of us that make up this diverse society—to ensure that when the next generation looks back—a generation that is hopefully more inclusive than we have been—they see a more accurate narrative, one that tells the truth, and includes everyone.*

**Governor Ralph S. Northam  
Old Point Comfort, August 24th, 2019  
Commemoration of the First African Landing**

## **I. Executive Summary**

On August 24th, 2019 at Old Point Comfort, the site where the first enslaved Africans arrived on Virginia shores 400 years earlier, Governor Ralph Northam signed [Executive Order Thirty Nine](#) and announced the establishment of the *Virginia African American History Education Commission*. The Governor charged the Commission with thoroughly examining the Commonwealth’s K-12 curricula, professional development practices, and instructional supports to make recommendations for improving the way African American history is taught in Virginia schools. Governor Northam appointed a diverse, talented, and vibrant group of individuals to serve on this Commission including educators, historians, museum curators, school board members, faith leaders, school administrators, and citizens across the Commonwealth.

Executive Order Thirty Nine tasked the Commission with issuing a report no later than September 1, 2020, with recommendations including but not limited to:

1. Technical edits to and recommendations for enriched standards related to African American history;
2. Broader considerations for the full history and social studies standards review process; and
3. Necessary professional development and instructional supports for teachers to ensure culturally competent instruction

In this final report, the Commission offers extensive recommendations to ensure that content in Virginia schools is accurate, inclusive, and relatable, and to equip educators with the skills necessary to teach in a culturally responsive manner. When implemented, the Commission’s recommendations will enable all Virginia students to develop a comprehensive understanding of the African American voices that contribute to Virginia’s story.

### **Standards Recommendations**

Even though Virginia led the nation in developing high quality content standards more than 25 years ago, the standards were tainted with a master narrative that marginalized or erased the presence of non-Europeans from the American landscape. These historical silences skew our perspective of the past, erasing people of color, and supplanting them with false narratives that ignore the diverse cultural underpinnings in American society.

While revised regularly by historians and experts, Virginia’s History and Social Studies Standards of Learning continue to be incomplete with regards to incorporating African American history into the larger narrative. Therefore, the Commission was tasked with making recommendations to ensure that the standards are more inclusive of African American history and provide opportunities for students to engage the content deeply, drawing connections to its relevance in our contemporary communities. The Standards Subcommittee therefore recommends the following:

- The State Superintendent for Public Instruction should approve technical edits to the Curriculum Framework for the following courses: Virginia Studies, United States History I and II, and Virginia and United States History. Any edits that fall outside the purview of technical adjustments should be considered during the regular standards review process by the Board of Education. All recommended edits can be found in Appendix D.
- The Board of Education ought to revise its standards review process and practice to be more inclusive of diverse perspectives. An updated review process chart can be found in Appendix E.
- The Board of Education should consider including 10 key concepts in its history and social studies standards to ensure that African American history is not taught separately, but is truly a cohesive part of the teaching of all history.
- The Board of Education ought to approve the teaching of history as a requirement at all levels in K-12 to ensure that all of Virginia's citizens are educated about the history of Virginia and the nation.

### **Professional Development Recommendations**

Additionally, the Commission recognized that change in the delivery of content will only be successful if teachers and school leaders are appropriately supported and equipped to do so. The professional development subcommittee developed six key recommendations to ensure Virginia educators achieve proficiency in culturally relevant teaching and gain appropriate foundational knowledge in African American history. Their recommendations are to:

- Revise Virginia's Teacher Evaluation Regulations and Virginia's Uniform Performance standards for School Leaders to include cultural proficiency efficacy.
- Require every Virginia educator to certify that they have enrolled in Cultural Competency Professional Development by 2022.
- Allocate funding and personnel resources to develop and implement comprehensive professional development in the areas of cultural competency and African American History content for Virginia educators.
- Mandate certification (Continuing Education Units) in African American History for all holders of education licenses issued by the Virginia Department of Education (this includes initial licensure and renewals).
- Amend requirements for licensure endorsements in History/Social Science to require evidence of course study in African American History.
- Require a credit in African American History as a new requirement for graduation in Virginia. *The new elective course in African American History developed by VDOE and WHRO could be used to fulfill this requirement.*

### **Conclusion**

The timing of the report reinforces the urgent and critical need we have as a society to better understand African American history and the ways in which our racial history continues to influence policies and systems today. The Commission wrote this final report in the midst of a global pandemic that disproportionately impacts communities of color. They worked against the backdrop of protests and outrage at the murder of George Floyd and too many other Black Americans in the name of law and order.

Understanding history imbues citizens with a deep and complex knowledge about their community and their nation. An effort to change the way citizens of Virginia are educated about history, with a special emphasis on incorporating African American history into the larger narrative, has never been more important. The Commission shares a strong sense of urgency for policymakers to act and implement the recommendations necessary to achieve a vision for a more just and inclusive Virginia.