

Tobacco Policy in Virginia Higher Education Overview



Prepared by the Eliminate Tobacco Use Virginia Initiative

Updated May 2026

About the Eliminate Tobacco Use Virginia Initiative

The Eliminate Tobacco Use Virginia initiative seeks to end tobacco use among college and university students, staff and faculty in the Commonwealth of Virginia through collaboration and sharing of best practices in tobacco control. The initiative is made up of engaged partners across the Commonwealth of Virginia from public and private two- and four-year institutions, tobacco focused organizations, and the Virginia Department of Health Tobacco Control Program. The initiative is co-lead by faculty members from our National Cancer Institute recognized Comprehensive Cancer Centers; Roger Anderson, University of Virginia Comprehensive Cancer Center and Bernard Fuemmeler, Virginia Commonwealth University Comprehensive Cancer Center. The ETU Virginia initiative grew out of the National Eliminate Tobacco Use Initiative founded by the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center and the University of Texas System in 2015.

Tobacco Use Landscape in Virginia

In 2021, more than 12.44% of Virginians over the age of 18 were current smokers. As a state we continue to see a decline in our combustible smoking rates, however we do not see the same decline for other tobacco and nicotine alternative products, such as e-cigarettes.

Tobacco use is the single largest preventable cause of death in the United States, responsible for one of every five deaths. In Virginia, the cost of tobacco use is substantial. About 10,300 adults die each year from smoking, 1,600 non-smokers die each year due to second hand smoke, and 6,900 children have lost a parent to smoking related death. **Given current smoking levels, 152,000 children living today will ultimately die of smoking.**

Tobacco use is also the leading cause of cancer and leading cause of death from cancer. Tobacco use accounts for up to one third of all cancers, including 90 percent of all lung cancers, and increases the risk for many other types of cancer including colorectal, larynx, throat, bladder, pancreatic, liver, kidney, cervical, esophageal, and stomach.

Tobacco Control in Higher Education

Tobacco-free campus policies have been shown to reduce deadly secondhand smoke exposure, prevent use among college and university students, and help people who smoke end their dependence on tobacco.

The American College Health Association has acknowledged and supported the findings of the Surgeon General that tobacco exposure in any form, active or passive, is a significant health hazard. Nearly all adult cigarette smokers initiate tobacco use before age 26. However recent studies have shown a shift in age of initiation from adolescents to young adults (at age ≥ 18), highlighting the need for tobacco-free policies and comprehensive prevention and cessation programs at colleges and universities.

Higher education campuses are well positioned to promote health by raising awareness, standards, and best practices to advance tobacco prevention and cessation for their population of students, faculty, staff, visitors, and surrounding communities. Despite these findings, only 16.7% of all accredited colleges and universities have a 100% smoke-free or tobacco free protections in place. While there has been significant momentum toward adopting stronger tobacco-free policies in higher education institutions, there is still much work to be done.

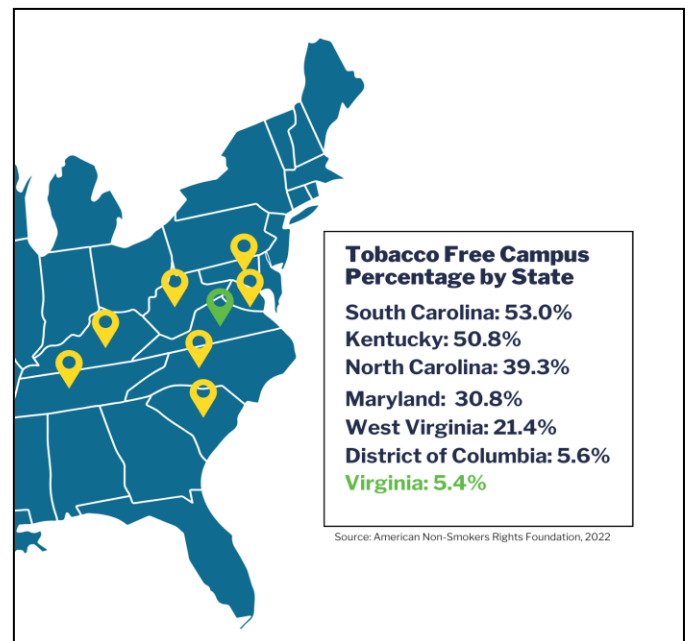
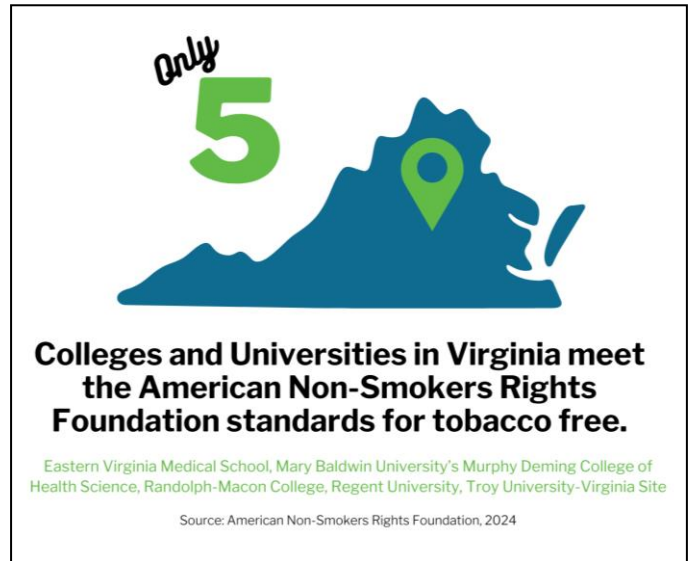
Evidence shows that 100% smoking and tobacco free campus policies can decrease initiation of tobacco use, reduce social acceptability of smoking, prevent exposure to secondhand smoke, and importantly, encourage smokers to quit. These comprehensive policies, which delineate that neither smoking nor non-combustible tobacco use is permitted anywhere on campus at any time, offer few exemptions which are limited to smoking or tobacco use in personal vehicles, traditional or ceremonial use by Native American tribal members, or smoking or tobacco use for research purposes in controlled laboratory settings. While many partial smoke-free and tobacco free policies exist on campuses nationwide, comprehensive policies without additional, arbitrary exceptions and exemptions are preferred for cancer prevention and control.

Tobacco Control Efforts in Virginia Higher Education

In Summer of 2021, Virginia’s Secretary of Education and Secretary of Health jointly wrote a letter to Public College and University Presidents encouraging them to review and strengthen the tobacco free policies at their institutions and live up to their vision of creating a safe and healthy environment for their students, faculty and staff. This was an important letter, as over the past decade, the previous attempts of many of our campuses to become tobacco free were ultimately stalled at the last moment by questions of authority.

With these questions resolved, Virginia institutions are now empowered to join the over **2,162 Colleges and Universities across the US that have already become 100% tobacco free**. Everyone deserves a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible—free from the harm that commercial tobacco can cause.

However, Virginia lags behind others states in our efforts. Only 5 colleges and universities (5.4% of our total colleges) are identified by the American Non-Smokers Rights Foundation as meeting the standards for being tobacco free. Other states bordering Virginia are seeing much more progress towards eliminating tobacco use within higher education, with some states having more than half of their colleges and universities tobacco free. **Virginia is ranked second to last in the United States for tobacco free higher education, just barely ahead of Wyoming.**





COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Office of the Governor

June 16, 2021

Public College and University Presidents,
Chancellor, University of Virginia's College at Wise,
Superintendent, Virginia Military Institute,
Chancellor, Virginia Community College System,

Comprehensive tobacco control programs that include smoke-free policies are critical to reducing rates of smoking initiation. We therefore commend your efforts to support the health and wellness of your students, faculty and staff through smoke free policies on your campuses. In furtherance of your efforts, the Secretary of Education and Health and Human Resources recently reviewed Executive Order 41 (2006) Banning Smoking in State Office and Vehicles and the related guidance document issued by the Department of General Services and the Secretary of Administration on January 1, 2007. Our review confirmed that Executive Order 41 and the related guidance document do NOT prohibit public institutions of higher education from banning smoking in all spaces deemed appropriate by the institution.

As such, we encourage you to review your current smoke-free policies and consider opportunities to strengthen them. Please feel free to reach out to the Tobacco Control Program at the Virginia Department of Health for assistance on smoke-free policy best practices. Jayne Flowers, Tobacco Control Program Manager, can be reached at jayne.flowers@vdh.virginia.gov for technical assistance.

Sincerely,

Atif Qarni

Dan Carey, MD

Handwritten signature of Atif M. Qarni in black ink.

Secretary of Education

Handwritten signature of Daniel Carey in black ink.

Secretary of Health and Human Resources

Higher Education Report Card Surveillance System

The Eliminate Tobacco Use (ETU) Virginia Initiative maintains a comprehensive report card system to assess and strengthen tobacco-related policies at accredited four-year public and private colleges and universities across the Commonwealth. Launched in 2022, these report cards are produced and distributed annually.

The report card serves as a tool for guiding stronger tobacco control policy. Each report card is sent to key institutional stakeholders, often including the president, chief of staff, director of human resources, vice president of student affairs, and director of student health and wellness. Institutions are asked to appoint a point of contact, review their report card, flag any discrepancies, and connect with ETU Virginia to explore opportunities for improvement. ETU Virginia partners with VDH's Tobacco Control Program, VCU Massey Comprehensive Cancer Center and UVA Comprehensive Cancer Center to provide tailored technical assistance to institutions working to strengthen their tobacco policies. Policy changes may only be submitted in the fall of each year, at which point scores are recalculated and updated report cards are issued.

To make progress visible statewide, ETU Virginia, UVA Comprehensive Cancer Center, and VDH's Tobacco Control Program jointly maintain a public-facing dashboard hosted on the [VDH Tobacco Control website](#). Launched in 2024 and updated annually, the dashboard provides a collective view of tobacco-free policy adoption across higher education institutions. Schools can use it as a baseline for comparison with peers across Virginia or as a marker of their own progress toward a tobacco-free campus.

Higher Education Tobacco Policy Surveillance Methodology

Development of Scoring Algorithm

- Model scoring algorithms from ANRF, Missouri, and Texas were collected and compared for best practices
- Relevant policy areas (i.e., communication, compliance, enforcement, and monitoring) were identified
- Reviewed policies from a test set of colleges/universities across Virginia, Missouri, Texas, California, and Kentucky
- Developed coding scheme based on policy areas and other models
- Tested coding scheme with test set
- Gathered more policies from colleges/universities
- Refined coding scheme and tested again (x 2)

Eligibility Requirements

Colleges and universities must be listed as Virginia Four-Year Public or Private Institutions with the State Council of Higher Education. Private institutions must be accredited, non-profit, and in-state. While accredited non-profit private institutions may qualify for exemptions, religious exemptions are not included.

Online Policy Search Terms

When searching for policies, use the following keywords: tobacco policy, smoke free policy, vape free policy, smoking policy, nicotine free policy.

Scoring

When an institution-wide ("official") policy exists, it serves as the sole source for scoring — no other documents may be submitted. If no official policy exists, up to two secondary sources may be used, such as faculty/staff or student handbooks, codes of conduct, fire and security policies, or housing policies. Institutions without a comprehensive policy are encouraged to develop one that covers all students, faculty, staff, and visitors.

Contact List

A contact list of key staff responsible for policy development and implementation is maintained for each institution. Contacts typically include representatives from human resources, student health and wellness, or the dean of students' office. Outreach is conducted by email and phone when policy clarification is needed.

Availability

All policy sources must be publicly available.

Scoring Overview

All policies are first reviewed and assigned a baseline letter grade (A–F) across five categories, ranging from least comprehensive (no policy) to fully comprehensive (100% Tobacco Free). Each letter grade has a corresponding numeric score, which may then be adjusted up or down based on additional or missing policy components. In some cases, a school may receive a baseline grade but a score below that grade's starting value.

All criteria must be clearly and explicitly stated within the policy document. Information not included in the policy, such as disciplinary levels or cessation resources, is not considered part of the policy and will not factor into the overall score.

Scoring Details

Scoring Color Code	
	Meets or exceeds the standard
	Satisfactory, but could be improved or incomplete information
	Not meeting the standard, needs improvement

Understanding and Interpreting Tobacco, Tobacco Products, and Smoking

Product Coverage

Policies are evaluated on whether they specifically identify the following products: cigarettes, cigars, e-cigarettes, smokeless tobacco and other tobacco products (OTP).

- **Vague language** (e.g., “tobacco, tobacco products, or smoking are prohibited”) result in an “incomplete” for each individual product. The “all tobacco/vague language” field will be marked “yes” to reflect that broad language was used. While this is a reasonable starting point, policies are encouraged to explicitly name each product covered.
- **Specific product language** results in a "yes" for each product mentioned and a "no" for any product not mentioned. For example, a policy that lists cigarettes, cigars, and OTP will receive "yes" for those products, but "no" for smokeless tobacco if it is not included.

Location-Based Restrictions

Policies are evaluated on where restrictions apply for smoking, e-cigarettes, and smokeless tobacco. Each product is labeled "**restricted**," "**some restrictions**," or "**not restricted**" based on the locations named in the policy.

- **Specific product language:** If a policy explicitly states that smoking and e-cigarettes are prohibited in buildings, campus grounds, and campus housing, those products are marked "restricted" for the listed locations. If smokeless tobacco is not mentioned, it is marked "not restricted."
- **Vague language:** When a policy uses broad terms, the following inferences apply — provided the language is used consistently throughout the entire policy:
 - "*Smoking*" is interpreted as referring to cigarettes and cigars; location restrictions are applied accordingly.
 - "*Tobacco*" is interpreted as including cigarettes, cigars, and smokeless tobacco; location restrictions are applied accordingly.

Grade Thresholds

100% Tobacco Free (Grade A) = 90 points

- All tobacco products
- Applies to students, faculty, and/or staff
- Applies to campus grounds and buildings

100% Smoke Free (Grade B) = 80 points

- Includes combustible tobacco products and e-cigarettes

- Applies to students, faculty, and/or staff
- Applies to campus grounds and building

No Smoking Indoors, with Outdoor Restrictions (Grade C) = 70 points

- Includes combustible tobacco products (and may include e-cigarettes)
- Applies to students, faculty, and/or staff
- Applies to campus grounds and buildings

No Smoking Indoors (Grade D) = 60 pts

- Includes combustible tobacco products (and may include e-cigarettes)
- Applies to students, faculty, and/or staff
- Applies to campus buildings

No Policy (Grade F) = 0 points

- No policy found for tobacco
- Or policy did not specify, or clearly indicate, who it applied to (i.e. students, faculty, staff, and visitors). Policy must be applicable to students and staff, at a minimum.

Points are adjusted for the following:

Designated Smoking Areas and Other Exemptions

Schools with designated smoking areas cannot receive above a C grade

- Policy allows for exemptions for theatrical performances (-2)
- Policy allows for other exemptions (outside of theatrical performance) (musical events, athletics, etc.) (-2)

Note: Points will not be deducted for exemptions related to research in a controlled environment or religious ceremonies.

Designated smoking areas are identified locations where smoking/tobacco use is permitted.

- **Yes:** The policy clearly states that designated smoking areas are allowed or identified.
- **No:** The policy is 100% Tobacco Free or clearly states that designated smoking areas are not permitted.
- **Incomplete:** The policy does not address whether designated smoking areas are allowed. No points are deducted for an "Inc."

Scope of Policy

- Policy does not include visitors (contractors/vendors/community) (-1)

Policy Communication

- Requires that the tobacco policy is adequately communicated (+2)
- Provides information on cessation resources (+1)
- Provides information on prevention resources (+1)
- Prohibits promotion of tobacco products (+1)
- Prohibits sales of tobacco products (+1)

Compliance

- Designates who is responsible for compliance (+2)
- No compliance measures for violations (-2)
- Includes only fines and/or disciplinary action for violations (-2)
- Comprehensive compliance measures (no points awarded) -- refers to a tiered system of compliance (e.g., warning issued, then education provided, then disciplinary actions)

Monitoring and Surveillance System

- Monitoring of prevalence of tobacco use on campus (+1)

Final grade is calculated by summing points across each category.

90+ (A), 80-89 (B), 70-79 (C), 60-69 (D), 0 (F)

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA



NO SMOKING INDOORS, WITH OUTDOOR RESTRICTIONS

Total Score: 70

Policy Source: [University Smoking Policy](#)

Products Covered	
Cigarettes/Cigars	Yes
E-Cigarettes/Vapes	Yes
Smokeless	No
Other Tobacco Products	No
All tobacco/vague language	No

Tobacco Location Restrictions		
	In Buildings (Including Housing)	Campus Grounds
Smoking	Restricted	Some Restrictions
E-Cigarettes/Vapes	Restricted	Some Restrictions
Smokeless	Not Restricted	Not Restricted

Scope of Policy	
Students	Yes
Faculty/Staff	Yes
Visitors	Yes

Designated Smoking Areas*	
Designated smoking areas allowed	Yes
*Institutions cannot receive above a C if designated smoking areas are allowed	

Exemptions	
Theatrical Performances	No
Other	No

Communication & Services	
Requires policy be communicated	No
Provides cessation resources	No
Provides prevention resources	No
Prohibits promotion of tobacco products	No
Prohibits sale of tobacco products	No

Compliance	
Designates who is responsible for compliance	Yes
Compliance measures are in place	Yes
Comprehensive compliance actions	No
Monitors tobacco use on campus	No

- | Areas of Excellence |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy applies to students, faculty, staff, and visitors. • Exceptions to the policy are not allowed. • Provides comprehensive list of prohibited tobacco products (excluding smokeless products) • Specifically states where there are tobacco restrictions (i.e., campus housing, campus owned/leased vehicles) • Designated person responsible for compliance measures • Compliance measures in place |

- | Areas of Improvement |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove designated smoking areas. • Expand outdoor restrictions from 25 ft. to all outdoor spaces. • Expand to include smokeless tobacco. • Clearly explain communication plan for policy • Include information on cessation resources and prevention services. • Prohibit the sale and promotion of tobacco products on campus. • Create and include comprehensive compliance plans (clear tiered system vs. disciplinary actions). |

Public Colleges and Universities

Report Card Scores and Grades: 2023, 2024, 25 (N=15)

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY	23 SCORE	23 GRADE	24 SCORE	24 GRADE	25 SCORE	25 GRADE	24-25 CHANGE
Christopher Newport University	68	D	68	D	68	D	=
College of William & Mary	69	D	69	D	68	D	=
George Mason University	70	C	70	C	70	C	=
James Madison University	75	C	77	C	77	C	=
Longwood University	71	C	71	C	71	C	=
Norfolk State University	76	C	76	C	76	C	=
Old Dominion University	74	C	74	C	74	C	=
Radford University	74	C	74	C	74	C	=
University of Mary Washington	73	C	73	C	73	C	=
University of Virginia	70	C	70	C	70	C	=
University of Virginia's College at Wise	68	D	68	D	67	D	↓
Virginia Commonwealth University	74	C	74	C	76	C	↑
Virginia Military Institute	74	C	78	C	78	C	=
Virginia Tech	69	D	69	C	69	C	=
Virginia State University	0	F	0	F	0	F	=

Private Colleges and Universities


Report Card Scores and Grades, 2023 and 2024 (N=33)

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY	23 SCORE	23 GRADE	24 SCORE	24 GRADE	25 SCORE	25 GRADE	24-25 CHANGE
Appalachian College of Pharmacy	INC	INC	INC	INC	88	B	↑
Appalachian School of Law	INC	INC	INC	INC	INC	INC	=
Averett University	0	F	0	F	0	F	=
Bluefield University	0	F	0	F	0	F	=
Bridgewater College	67	D	67	D	67	D	=
Centura College	INC	INC	INC	INC	INC	INC	=
Christendom College	0	F	0	F	0	F	=
Divine Mercy University	INC	INC	INC	INC	0	F	↑
Eastern Mennonite University	0	F	68	D	0	F	↓
ECPI University	INC	INC	INC	INC	INC	INC	=
Emory & Henry University	67	D	67	D	0	F	↓
Ferrum College	67	D	67	D	76	C	↑
George Washington University	71	C	71	C	71	C	=
Hampden-Sydney College	57	F	57	F	57	F	=
Hampton University	73	C	70	C	70	C	=
Hollins University	74	C	73	C	73	C	=
Liberty University	83	B	83	B	0	F	↓

Private Colleges and Universities

Report Card Scores and Grades: 2023, 2024, 2025 (N=33)

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY	23 SCORE	23 GRADE	24 SCORE	24 GRADE	25 SCORE	25 GRADE	24-25 CHANGE
Mary Baldwin University	67	D	67	D	67	D	=
Marymount University	74	C	74	C	74	C	=
Patrick Henry College	88	B	88	B	88	B	=
Randolph College	67	D	67	D	76	C	↑
Randolph Macon College	91	A	91	A	91	A	=
Regent University	97	A	97	A	97	A	=
Roanoke College	72	C	72	C	72	C	=
Shenandoah University	63	D	63	D	67	D	↑
Sweet Briar College	68	D	68	D	68	D	=
Union Presbyterian	70	C	INC	INC	INC	INC	=
University of Lynchburg	67	D	67	D	67	D	=
University of Richmond	70	C	70	C	70	D	=
Virginia Theological Seminary	68	D	INC	INC	INC	INC	=
Virginia Union University	92	A	92	A	A	92	=
Virginia Wesleyan University	73	C	75	C	75	C	=
Washington & Lee University	78	C	78	C	78	C	=

 Score Increased
  Score Decreased
  Score Stayed Consistent

2025 Policy Grades

All Colleges and Universities by Letter Grade (N=48)

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY	25 SCORE	25 GRADE
Regent University	97	A
Virginia Union University	92	A
Randolph Macon College	91	A
Appalachian College of Pharmacy	88	B
Patrick Henry College	88	B
Virginia Military Institute	78	C
Washington & Lee University	78	C
James Madison University	77	C
Ferrum College	76	C
Norfolk State University	76	C
Randolph College	76	C
Virginia Commonwealth University	76	C
Virginia Wesleyan University	75	C
Marymount University	74	C
Old Dominion University	74	C
Radford University	74	C

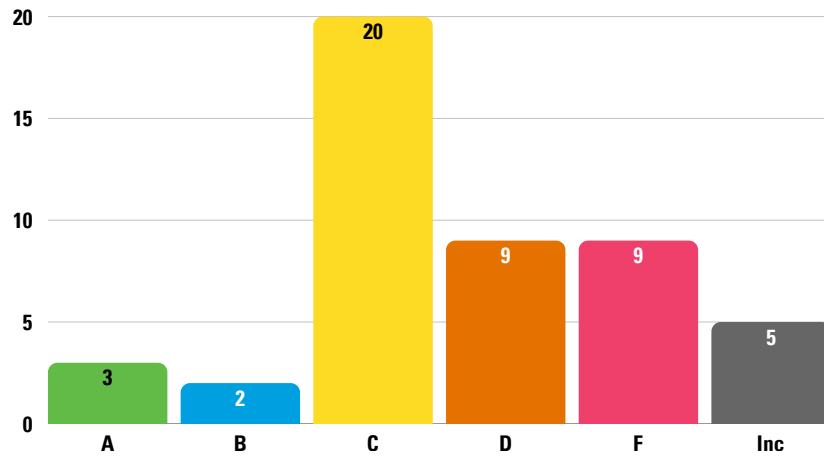
COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY	25 SCORE	25 GRADE
Hollins University	73	C
University of Mary Washington	73	C
Roanoke College	72	C
George Washington University	71	C
Longwood University	71	C
George Mason University	70	C
Hampton University	70	C
University of Richmond	70	C
University of Virginia	70	C
College of William & Mary	69	D
Virginia Tech	69	D
Christopher Newport University	68	D
Sweet Briar College	68	D
Bridgewater College	67	D
Mary Baldwin University	67	D
University of Lynchburg	67	D

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY	25 SCORE	25 GRADE
Shenandoah University	67	D
University of Virginia's College at Wise	67	D
Hampden-Sydney College	57	F
Averett University	0	F
Bluefield University	0	F
Christendom College	0	F
Devine Mercy University	0	F
Eastern Mennonite University	0	F
Emory & Henry University	0	F
Liberty University	0	F
Virginia State University	0	F
Appalachian School of Law	INC	INC
Centura College	INC	INC
ECPI University	INC	INC
Union Presbyterian Seminary	INC	INC
Virginia Theological Seminary	INC	INC

2025 Policy Grades

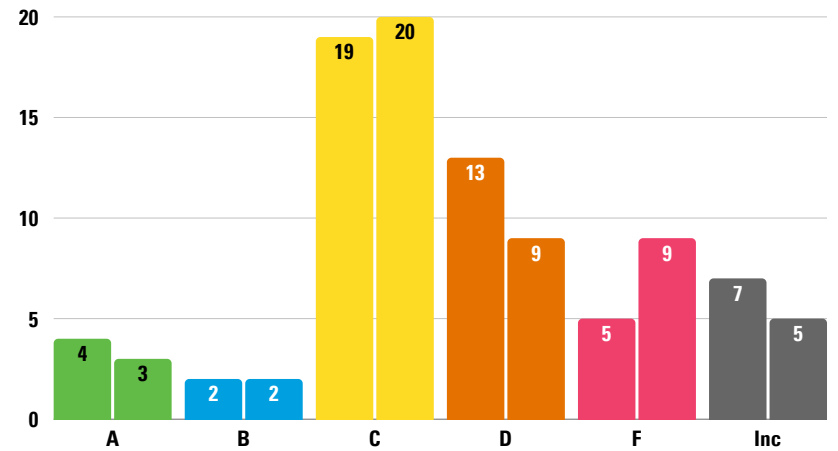
Private Colleges and Universities by Letter Grade (N=15)

2025 All Letter Grade Counts



2024 vs 2025 All Letter Grade Counts

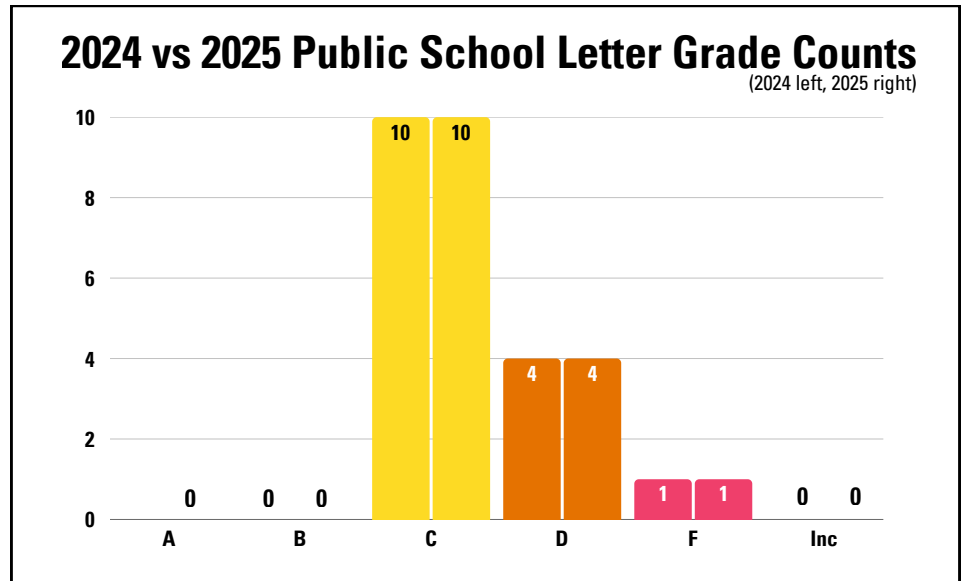
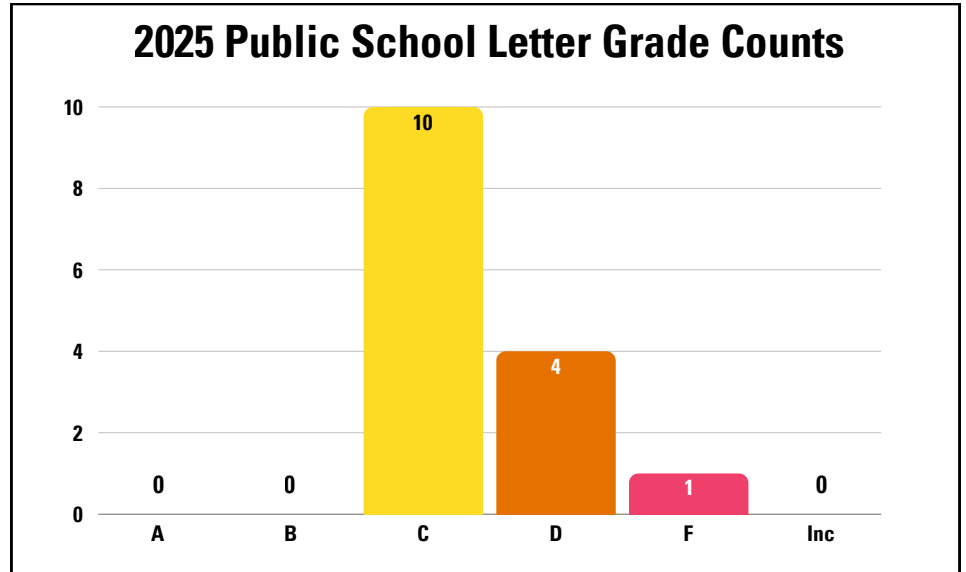
(2024 left, 2025 right)



2025 Policy Grades

Public Colleges and Universities by Letter Grade (N=15)

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY	25 SCORE	25 GRADE
Virginia Military Institute	78	C
James Madison University	77	C
Norfolk State University	76	C
Virginia Commonwealth University	76	C
Old Dominion University	74	C
Radford University	74	C
University of Mary Washington	73	C
Longwood University	71	C
George Mason University	70	C
University of Virginia	70	C
College of William & Mary	69	D
Virginia Tech	69	D
Christopher Newport University	68	D
University of Virginia's College at Wise	67	D
Virginia State University	0	F



2025 Policy Grades

Private Colleges and Universities by Letter Grade (N=33)

COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY	25 SCORE	25 GRADE	COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY	25 SCORE	25 GRADE
Regent University	97	A	Mary Baldwin University	67	D
Virginia Union University	92	A	Bridgewater College	67	D
Randolph Macon College	91	A	University of Lynchburg	67	D
Patrick Henry College	88	B	Shenandoah University	67	D
Appalachian College of Pharmacy	88	B	Hampden-Sydney College	57	F
Washington & Lee University	78	C	Averett University	0	F
Ferrum College	76	C	Bluefield University	0	F
Randolph College	76	C	Christendom College	0	F
Virginia Wesleyan University	75	C	Devine Mercy University	0	F
Marymount University	74	C	Liberty University	0	F
Hollins University	73	C	Eastern Mennonite University	0	F
Roanoke College	72	C	Emory & Henry University	0	F
George Washington University	71	C	Appalachian School of Law	INC	INC
Longwood University	71	C	Centura College	INC	INC
Hampton University	70	C	ECPI University	INC	INC
University of Richmond	70	C	Union Presbyterian Seminary	INC	INC
Sweet Briar College	68	D	Virginia Theological Seminary	INC	INC

