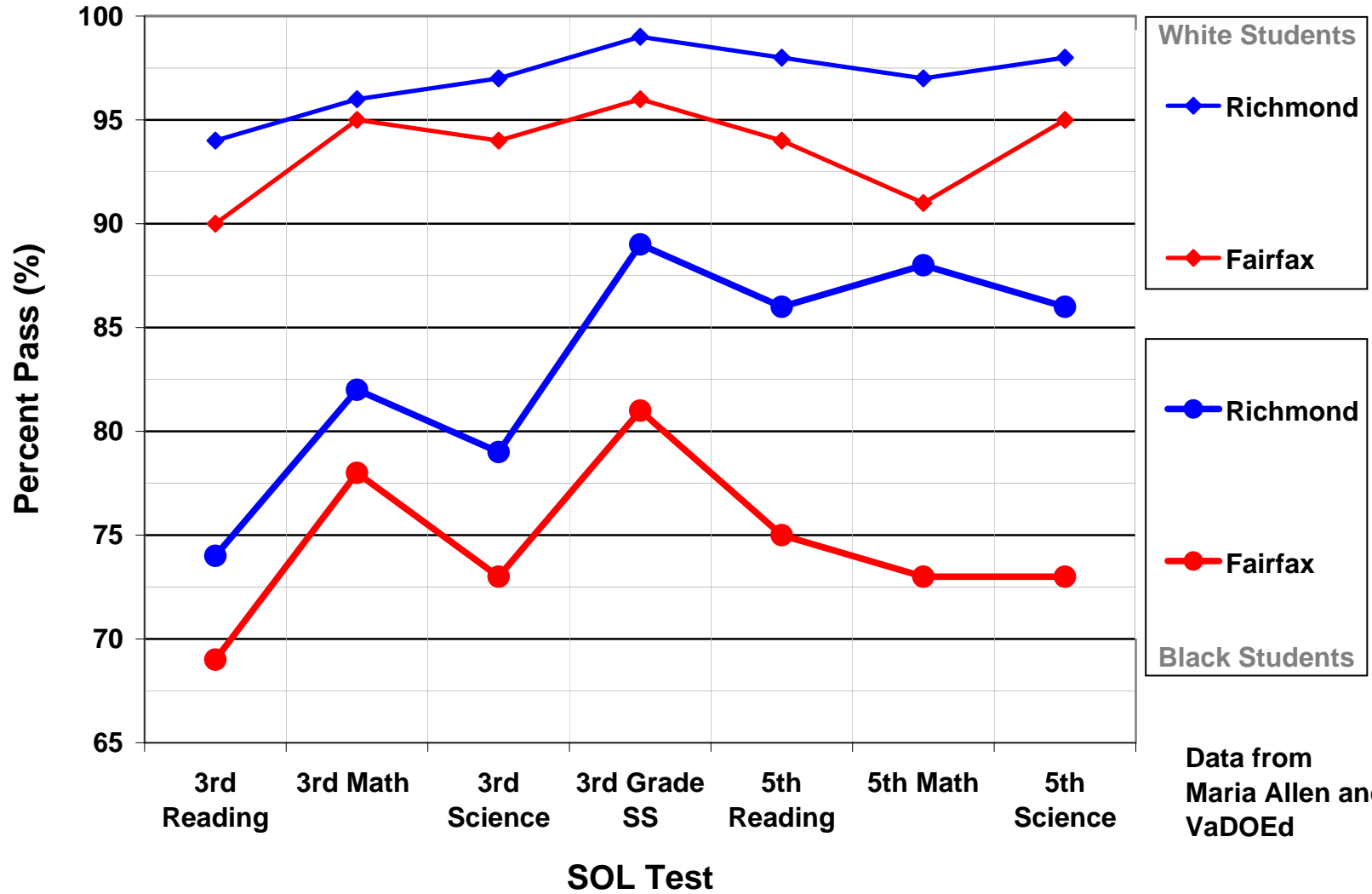


2007 Virginia SOL Tests -- Pass Rates White & Black Students -- Richmond vs. Fairfax



Why the Low Test Scores in Fairfax County Schools?

Statement to the Fairfax Co. School Board by Rick Nelson (rnelson696@aol.com)
January 26, 2010

Madam Chairman and Members of the Board,

I am a retired Fairfax County chemistry teacher. For 15 years, I served as the elected President of the Fairfax County Federation of Teachers.

I have spoken before the school board many times in past years as an advocate for structured math and reading programs. However, the school board voted against allowing schools the option of using structured programs such as Saxon Math and at 85% of Fairfax County schools, principals have chosen not to buy for teachers even a single class set of the allowed *Open Court* phonics books, knowing that the central office would view such a purchase as a bad career move.

That has been your program. What are the results?

The last year for which we have reliable SOL test results is 2007. In 2007, on the 5th grade SOL reading test, a test of reading comprehension, 87% of *all* students passed in the Fairfax County Public Schools, and 87% also passed in the city of Richmond public schools.

That's right. In reading, the most important subject, Fairfax scored the same as the city of Richmond.

Fairfax County has one of the nation's highest levels of family income and parental education. Less than 25% of our students are in the federal free and reduced price lunch program, versus 74% in Richmond public schools. But Fairfax tied Richmond.

It's not just reading. Seven SOL tests are given to students in 3rd and 5th grade. How is Fairfax County doing versus Richmond? The graph is on the **back**. Take a look at the disaggregated scores. In 2007,

- On all seven tests, Richmond white children did *better* than Fairfax white children, and Richmond black children did *better* than Fairfax black children.
- On 14 test comparisons out of 14, Richmond schools had a higher passing rate than the Fairfax County Public Schools.
- As you can see, in 5th grade, Richmond black students score almost as high in math as white students in Fairfax.

Growing up in high-poverty neighborhoods puts Richmond children at a severe disadvantage compared to children in Fairfax County. So why is Richmond doing so much better than Fairfax?

Eight years ago, Richmond adopted the type of reading and math programs recommended by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to help children avoid learning difficulties. In three years, in 3rd grade reading,

Richmond rose from the bottom 5% to the top 40% of the state.

In contrast, Fairfax County school administrators have refused to implement the science-based programs recommended by the NIH studies. Since 1999, nearly every school district in America has purchased science-based reading textbooks. In Fairfax, textbook adoption is supposed to be every six years, but the Fairfax school board has refused to adopt new K-3 reading books for 10 years.. As a result, Fairfax tied Richmond.

Since 2007, instead of buying books that help teachers teach reading, Fairfax has paid millions of dollars to substitute portfolio evaluations in place of SOL tests for low scoring students. As the Washington Post reported as a result at many schools, on these subjective evaluations, *all* of the "portfolio" students pass. Who are you trying to fool?

Among cognitive scientists, there is now a virtually unanimous consensus that, except for oral speech and vocabulary, in reading, math, and nearly everything else, students learn best with the type of highly structured instruction that has been rejected by the school board in Fairfax for the past 25 years.

On the high school SOL test in chemistry, Fairfax County students have scored *below* the state average for each of the past three years. The reason is a math curriculum that has very little math computation. As a result, in desirable but competitive college majors such as nursing and engineering, too many Fairfax children cannot compete.

According to the Superintendent's budget, the FCPS has nearly 2,000 teachers who teach in programs for children who "did not learn the first time." These programs cost Fairfax County over \$200 Million a year. The NIH studies show that by teaching students right the first time, the number of students who need this special assistance drops by over 50%. That's over \$100 Million a year we could save by teaching children efficiently and effectively.

When economic times get tough, voters become angry, especially when they see vivid proof that government is wasteful and ineffective. Do you think that can't happen here?

For the sake of the children, the school system, and Fairfax County government, you need to provide teachers with science-based curricula for the children in our schools.

Thank you.

Why Are Student Test Scores So LOW in Fairfax Schools?

Statement to the Board of Supervisors
April 3, 2006

Mr. Chairman and members of the Board,
My name is Rick Nelson. I am a retired teacher. For 15 years, I served as the elected President of the Fairfax County Federation of Teachers.

For over 10 years, Fairfax County teachers have been speaking before you and the school board, asking that the school system adopt the reforms in teaching reading recommended by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

But, no one has listened. Fairfax school leaders have chosen to continue fighting the reading wars. They are ideologically opposed to the phonics that is one part of the NIH reforms.

As a result, where are we?

Fairfax versus Richmond

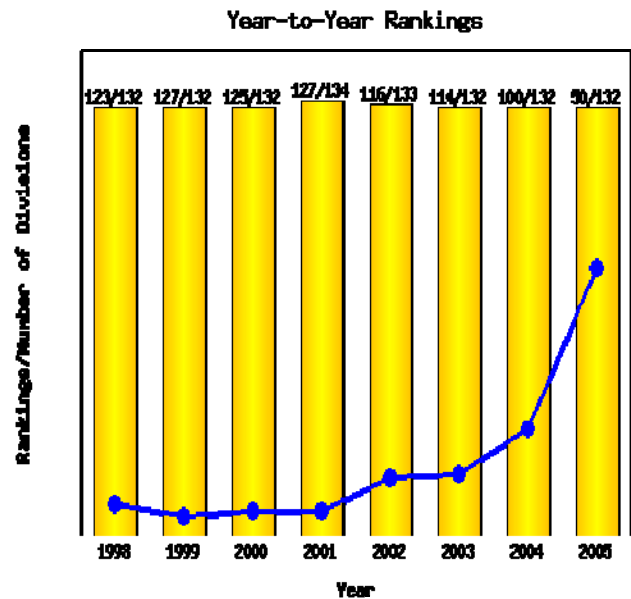
Compare Fairfax County to the city of Richmond. The Richmond Public Schools are 90% high-poverty and 90% African-American.

Starting in 2001, Richmond adopted the NIH reading reforms. Last spring, on the 3rd grade SOL tests in reading, 76% of children passed in Richmond, compared to 79% in Fairfax County.

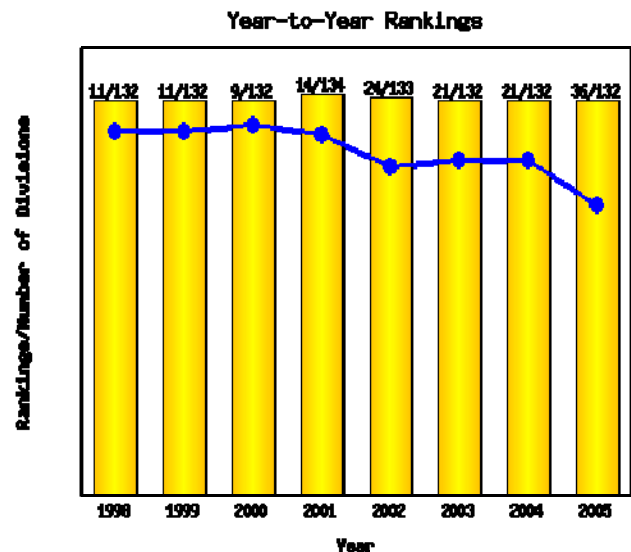
That's right. The reading scores for children in urban Richmond and wealthy Fairfax are almost the same.

As you can see in the graphs in my presentation, Richmond is going **up** dramatically, while Fairfax is going **down**. It is pretty clear that the next two years, reading scores in Richmond are going to pass those in Fairfax County.

Richmond City: 3rd Grade Reading



Fairfax County: 3rd Grade Reading



-- VA Dept. of Education data from *Psk12.com*

Eighteen months from now, in November 2007, I look forward to hearing you explain to voters why **their children** are scoring **lower in reading** than the children in urban, high-poverty Richmond.

School system officials know about the Richmond results. They know the results of the NIH studies about what works in teaching reading. They are refusing to **do** what works for ideological reasons. The result is abuse of thousands of Fairfax County children.

The Fairfax Ranking in Virginia

Compare wealthy Fairfax to the rest of Virginia.

In 3rd grade reading, Fairfax County schools rank 36th in Virginia out of 132 school districts. In reading, the most important subject, Fairfax County is not even in the top quarter of the state.

It's not just reading. In 2004, on the Algebra II SOL test, for **all** students, Fairfax schools ranked at about the state average: 57th in the state out of 132 districts. In Chemistry, the gateway to good technical jobs, FCPS ranked 85th – in the **bottom 40%** of the state. Good luck in college, kids.

The Financial Impact

This year, the school system is spending nearly \$200 Million a year on remediation -- over 12% of its budget -- and it is not working. Your **bond** money is building classrooms for the nearly 2,000 remediation teachers that you would not need if FCPS programs taught reading right the first time.

The school budget has a structural deficit, and there is not enough money to pay fair salaries to teachers, because we hire so many remediation teachers.

How strong is the school system's opposition to phonics? Seven FCPS schools were eligible for the new federal Reading First funding: over one million dollars per school over a five year grant period. But only one Fairfax school, Bucknell Elementary on Route 1, applied for this aid. After Bucknell won their federal grant to implement the NIH reforms, school system officials pulled Bucknell out of Reading First. This year, they sent back Bucknell's remaining one million dollars in approved federal funding.

Our state and federal delegations work hard to get us outside funding. **FCPS leaders sent it back.** Who is going to replace this federal aid, Mr. Chairman?

Of course, the biggest losers are, not the taxpayers, but the thousands of Fairfax County children who are not being taught to read.

When is this Board going to start asking questions? When are you going to do some oversight to help the children?

Thank you.

-- Additional Fairfax school data is available at www.GradesUp.Net\FairfaxSOL.pdf

Why are *Fairfax* minority test scores the *lowest* in the state?

The chart below compares 3rd and 5th grade **passing rates** on the spring of 2004 SOL tests for the ten Virginia school divisions with the largest African-American student populations.

Fairfax County test scores ranked **lowest** among the **10** districts on **7 out of 8** tests.

See for yourself! Below, **box** the **highest** and circle the **lowest** scores on each test.

-- Compiled by Maria Casby Allen, FCPS parent.

Scores can be **verified** on the Va. Dept. of Education website.

	School District and Black Student Enrollment →	Fairfax Co. 17,000	Norfolk 25,000	Richmond 22,000	Virginia Beach 21,000	Newport News 18,000	Henrico 16,000	Prince William 14,000	Chesterfield 13,000	Chesapeake 13,000	Hampton 13,000	VIRGINIA – Average
Black Students	Reading Grade 3	52 (% Passed)	56	62	61	55	71	62	63	58	54	56
Black Students	Math Grade 3	74	78	81	80	75	80	83	85	83	78	77
Black Students	Science Grade 3	67	72	81	74	75	84	80	82	78	72	73
Black Students	Social Studies Grade 3	75	79	84	83	82	91	86	87	85	84	79
Black Students	Reading Grade 5	74	79	79	78	72	76	78	85	76	78	74
Black Students	Math Grade 5	63	70	75	73	63	71	69	80	73	66	65
Black Students	Science Grade 5	68	73	83	78	74	74	76	82	74	73	71
Black Students	Social Studies Grade 5	76	77	89	85	85	84	82	87	80	79	79

2005 Elementary SOL Pass Rates for Black Students, By District:

	Subject Area	Norfolk	Richmond	Virginia Beach	Newport News	Fairfax	Henrico	Prince William	Chesterfield	Chesapeake	Hampton	VIRGINIA
3rd Grade Black Students	3rd English	71	74	71	65	59	75	69	74	69	63	67
	3rd Math	80	86	81	76	75	86	84	87	87	79	79
	3rd Science	82	84	80	79	74	88	85	86	86	78	79
	3rd SS	85	87	84	84	81	92	88	87	90	82	82
5th Grade Black Students	5th English	78	80	83	73	75	80	82	82	77	76	75
	5th Math	76	79	76	67	65	79	73	76	78	68	69
	5th Science	70	81	67	68	65	77	75	75	74	64	67
	5th SS	78	86	79	80	72	85	85	79	79	72	76

Page 1 shows the 2004, and this page the 2005, elementary SOL pass rates for black students in the 10 state districts with the largest African-American enrollments.

Does science-based reading close achievement gaps? It may be notable that:

- Richmond SOL scores rose dramatically after schools adopted science-based reading programs four years ago. Richmond's black students scored the highest pass rates in the state on 3 of the 4 5th grade SOL tests this year.
- Norfolk adopted science-based reading and other reforms, and this year won the coveted Broad Prize for Urban Education. Norfolk passing rates for black students in 3rd grade reading rose 15% in the past year.
- One state district was eligible for federal and state Reading First funding at seven Title I schools, but objected to the science-based reading component and withdrew all schools from the program and funding.

Among the state's 10 districts with the largest African-American enrollment, that district has had the lowest black student SOL passing rate on 6 out of 8 elementary SOL tests for both of the past two years.

-- Data compiled by Maria Casby Allen, Reston parent, from the VaDOE website, and distributed by Rick Nelson, Fairfax teacher (retired). Additional data is available at www.GradesUp.Net/FairfaxSOL.pdf

Chemistry and Algebra SOL Pass Rates – Fairfax County


In High School Chemistry, in the Spring 2004 SOL tests, Fairfax County ranked 85th out of 130 state school districts.






















Fairfax also scored 57th out of 130 state districts in Algebra II.




































The state data is below for Chemistry and Algebra II.




































This data was collected from the VaDOE website by Fairfax County parent Maria Casby Allen.




































* * * * *





Click on the  Icon for Graphical Results

Rank	Division	Chemistry Pass	Totals	Graphs
1	Charlotte	100.0	100.0	
2	Greensville	100.0	100.0	
3	Martinsville City	100.0	100.0	
4	Middlesex	100.0	100.0	
5	Rappahannock	100.0	100.0	
6	Scott	100.0	100.0	
7	West Point	100.0	100.0	
8	Poquoson City	99.4	99.4	
9	Radford City	98.3	98.3	
10	Henrico	97.3	97.3	
11	Colonial Heights City	97.1	97.1	
12	Rockbridge	96.5	96.5	
13	Botetourt	96.4	96.4	
14	Prince George	96.2	96.2	
15	New Kent	95.3	95.3	
16	King George	94.9	94.9	
17	Salem City	94.9	94.9	
18	Winchester City	94.9	94.9	
19	York	94.8	94.8	
20	Floyd	94.8	94.8	
21	Buena Vista City	94.7	94.7	

22	Halifax	94.1	94.1	
23	Giles	94.0	94.0	
24	Bristol City	93.3	93.3	
25	Covington City	93.3	93.3	
26	Wise	93.3	93.3	
27	Waynesboro City	93.1	93.1	
28	Chesapeake City	93.0	93.0	
29	Falls Church City	93.0	93.0	
30	Norfolk City	92.8	92.8	
31	Carroll	92.3	92.3	
32	Northumberland	92.3	92.3	
33	Frederick	92.3	92.3	
34	Prince Edward	92.2	92.2	
35	Alexandria City	91.8	91.8	
36	Franklin	91.7	91.7	
37	Powhatan	91.7	91.7	
38	Norton City	91.7	91.7	
39	King William	91.5	91.5	
40	Stafford	91.3	91.3	
41	Orange	91.3	91.3	
42	Richmond	91.3	91.3	
43	Washington	91.1	91.1	
44	Amherst	91.0	91.0	
45	Williamsburg-James	90.9	90.9	
46	Albemarle	90.8	90.8	
47	Roanoke	90.8	90.8	
48	Campbell	90.7	90.7	
49	Lynchburg City	90.5	90.5	
50	Dickenson	90.2	90.2	
51	Patrick	90.2	90.2	
52	Isle of Wight	90.2	90.2	
53	Southampton	89.8	89.8	
54	Rockingham	89.1	89.1	
55	Lunenburg	88.9	88.9	
56	Virginia Beach City	88.8	88.8	

57	Chesterfield	88.8	88.8	
58	Augusta	88.5	88.5	
59	Accomack	88.5	88.5	
60	Page	88.5	88.5	
61	Russell	88.3	88.3	
62	Galax City	88.2	88.2	
63	Grayson	88.2	88.2	
64	Loudoun	88.0	88.0	
65	Hanover	88.0	88.0	
66	Surry	87.8	87.8	
67	Henry	87.7	87.7	
68	Culpeper	87.7	87.7	
69	Harrisonburg City	87.3	87.3	
70	Tazewell	86.8	86.8	
71	Manassas City	86.8	86.8	
72	Bedford	86.7	86.7	
73	Mecklenburg	86.7	86.7	
74	Warren	86.2	86.2	
75	Hopewell City	85.9	85.9	
76	Louisa	85.9	85.9	
77	Caroline	85.4	85.4	
78	Prince William	85.3	85.3	
79	Fauquier	85.3	85.3	
80	Essex	85.0	85.0	
81	Newport News City	84.3	84.3	
82	Gloucester	84.1	84.1	
83	Montgomery	83.8	83.8	
84	Lee	83.7	83.7	
85	Fairfax	83.1	83.1	
86	Staunton City	83.0	83.0	
87	Smyth	83.0	83.0	
88	Lancaster	82.8	82.8	
89	Pittsylvania	82.7	82.7	
90	Spotsylvania	82.6	82.6	
91	Shenandoah	82.4	82.4	

92	Arlington	82.4	82.4	
93	Roanoke City	82.3	82.3	
94	Pulaski	81.7	81.7	
95	Appomattox	81.4	81.4	
96	Franklin City	81.3	81.3	
97	Hampton City	81.2	81.2	
98	Bland	81.0	81.0	
99	Amelia	80.7	80.7	
100	Goochland	80.7	80.7	
101	Greene	80.5	80.5	
102	Nottoway	80.0	80.0	
103	Dinwiddie	79.7	79.7	
104	Richmond City	79.0	79.0	
105	Fredericksburg City	78.0	78.0	
106	Madison	77.0	77.0	
107	Danville City	77.0	77.0	
108	Manassas Park City	76.5	76.5	
109	Wythe	75.9	75.9	
110	Mathews	75.6	75.6	
111	Buckingham	75.0	75.0	
112	Craig	75.0	75.0	
113	Fluvanna	72.7	72.7	
114	Clarke	70.5	70.5	
115	Charles City County	68.3	68.3	
116	Highland	66.7	66.7	
117	Northampton	66.7	66.7	
118	Westmoreland	66.7	66.7	
119	Nelson	64.2	64.2	
120	Suffolk City	62.0	62.0	
121	Charlottesville City	61.9	61.9	
122	Alleghany	61.3	61.3	
123	Portsmouth City	61.0	61.0	
124	Bath	58.5	58.5	
125	Brunswick	58.3	58.3	
126	Cumberland	52.4	52.4	

127	Sussex	50.0	50.0	
128	King and Queen	40.7	40.7	
129	Colonial Beach	36.4	36.4	
130	Petersburg City	27.6	27.6	

Fairfax High School

[Write an online review](#) for this Division

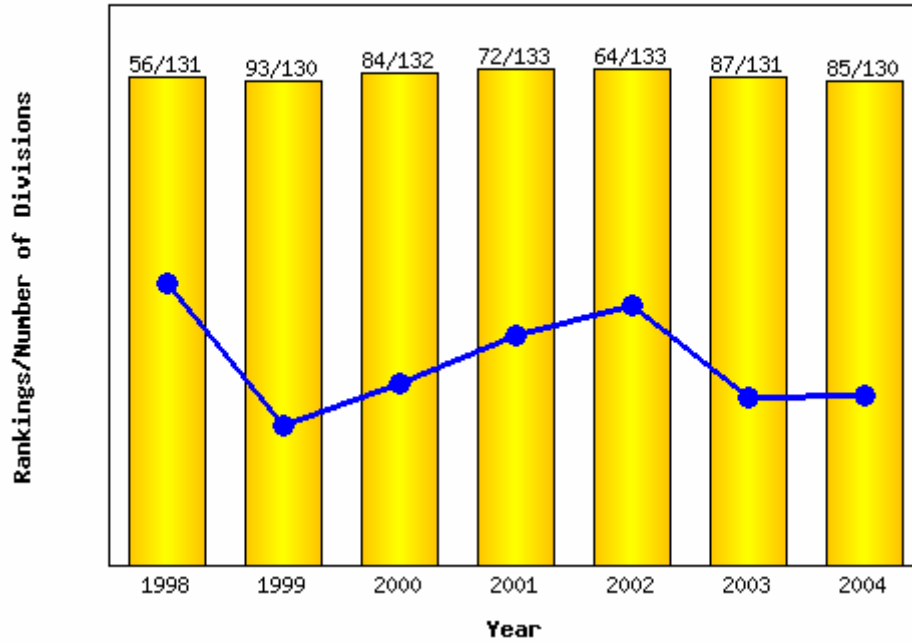
The graph below shows how
Fairfax ranks relative to the other **129 Divisions** in **Virginia**.
 The yellow bars indicate the number of divisions with scores in a particular range.
 The solid blue line indicates the score of **Fairfax**.
 The further to the RIGHT the blue line is the better the score.
 This graph is based on **2004** test results.
 (Other years: [1998](#) [1999](#) [2000](#) [2001](#) [2002](#) [2003](#) 2004)

The graph below shows Year-to-Year Rankings for **Fairfax**.
The yellow bars represent the total number of Divisions in **Virginia**.

The blue dots represent the ranking of **Fairfax**.
The higher the blue dots are the higher the rankings.

Chemistry Pass

Year-to-Year Rankings



The following chart shows Algebra II scores.

