

Guidelines for Local Alternative Assessments for 2014-2015
Developed in Response to 2014 Acts of Assembly
Approved by the Virginia Board of Education on September 18, 2014

Legislative Mandate: House Bill 930 and Senate Bill 306

Legislation in the 2014 General Assembly amended [§ 22.1-253.13:3.C](#) of the *Code of Virginia* to eliminate several Standards of Learning (SOL) tests:

- Grade 3 History,
- Grade 3 Science,
- Grade 5 Writing,
- United States History to 1865, and
- United States History: 1865 to the Present.

Specifically, the *Code* now states (emphasis added):

The Standards of Learning assessments administered to students in grades three through eight shall not exceed (a) reading and mathematics in grades three and four; (b) reading, mathematics, and science in grade five; (c) reading and mathematics in grades six and seven; (d) reading, writing, mathematics, and science in grade eight; and (e) Virginia Studies and Civics and Economics once each at the grade levels deemed appropriate by each local school board.

In addition to eliminating these SOL tests, the legislation also requires each local school board to annually certify that it has provided instruction and administered an alternative assessment, consistent with Virginia Board of Education guidelines, to students in grades three through eight in each SOL subject area in which the SOL assessment was eliminated. Specifically, the *Code* now states:

Each school board shall annually certify that it has provided instruction and administered an alternative assessment, consistent with Board guidelines, to students in grades three through eight in each Standards of Learning subject area in which a Standards of Learning assessment was not administered during the school year. Such guidelines shall (1) incorporate options for age-appropriate, authentic performance assessments and portfolios with rubrics and other methodologies designed to ensure that students are making adequate academic progress in the subject area and that the Standards of Learning content is being taught; (2) permit and encourage integrated assessments that include multiple subject areas; and (3) emphasize collaboration between teachers to administer and substantiate the assessments and the professional development of teachers to enable them to make the best use of alternative assessments.

Purpose of the Guidelines

In the past several years there has been increasing concern regarding the amount of testing in local school divisions and the time spent in test preparation activities. The intent of this legislation was to eliminate some of the tests used for accountability and to encourage the greater use of assessments that were designed to inform instruction. While the legislation does not mandate the type of local assessment that should be administered, the intent of these guidelines is

to encourage the use of assessments that may be used by teachers to improve their instruction. Such assessments provide information about what students have learned as well as the concepts and skills that they have not yet mastered.

These guidelines are intended to inform the implementation and sharing of high quality assessments, to help assess the need for ongoing professional development, and to provide the opportunity through a variety of approaches for students to be successful.

The use of local assessments and the expanded use of authentic assessments constitutes a new direction for the Commonwealth and the timeline dictated by the legislation is rapid. There is no expectation that the early years of these new assessments will be perfectly executed; rather, this should be viewed as an opportunity to engage in innovation that will provide new opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge of the curriculum.

These guidelines seek to ensure flexibility for local school divisions while simultaneously reassuring content teachers in later grades that the content upon which their own instruction is dependent has been taught, and that students come to them prepared to learn.

Revision of the Guidelines

The current version of the guidelines was developed with the understanding that the legislation's timeline provides school divisions with an immediate deadline to implement the local assessments. As such, the guidelines for the 2014-2015 year provide school divisions with considerable flexibility. The Board will review the guidelines after the 2014-2015 school year and will likely revise them based on the experiences of the first year of implementation.

Expectations for Inclusion of SOL in Alternative Assessments

For the 2014-2015 school year, school divisions should administer assessments that incorporate each strand or reporting category¹ for that content area and grade level (e.g., the Economics strand² for Grade 3 History/Social Science or the Civics and Economics Reporting Category for US History: 1865 to the Present). However, the assessments will not be expected to cover all of the content standards contained in that strand. The requirements for coverage of the content standards may be further clarified in subsequent years as experience in implementing the local assessments statewide is gained, but in no case will each alternative assessment be expected to assess all content standards any more than existing SOL exams assess all content standards.

Certification That Content Has Been Taught and Assessments Administered

Scores from the local assessments will not be reported to the Department of Education. Instead local school boards and division superintendents will certify through the annual Standards of Quality (SOQ) compliance assurance that local alternative assessments measuring the Standards of Learning (SOL) and adhering to the Board's guidelines have been administered. In addition, school divisions will be asked to prepare plans that describe how local assessments that are designed to inform instruction will be implemented in 2014-2015 as well as how their use will be expanded in 2015-2016 and beyond. For 2014-2015, school divisions should retain:

1) documentation that demonstrates that the assessments administered address each strand included in the SOL for that grade and subject, 2) copies of the assessments and 3) any ancillary materials such as rubrics or sample student responses used to train teachers. Each school division's plan should address whether these documents will be retained at the school division

central office or at individual schools. It is not expected that school divisions will retain each individual student assessment.

During the 2014-2015 school year Department staff seeks to gather information from school divisions, via site visits or “desk reviews” in which documents will be examined and school division staff interviewed either by webinar or by telephone. The purpose of the site visits or “desk reviews” will be to determine how local school divisions are verifying that the content is being taught, to determine the types of alternative assessments that are being administered, to identify exemplars of student assessment that may be shared with other school divisions, and to assist teachers, schools and school divisions in strengthening their own alternative assessments. The reviews will help Department staff to identify “best practices” for sharing and distribution to other Virginia school divisions. As part of the site visits or the interviews, some of the documents mentioned above may be reviewed.

Use of Authentic Performance Assessments

As background, performance assessments generally require students to perform a task or create a product that is typically scored using a rubric. Authentic performance assessments often include tasks that mirror those that might occur in a “real-life” situation. While the legislation provides for the use of authentic performance assessments and portfolios, the use of such assessments is not required.

Development or Selection of Assessments

The development and/or selection of the local assessments are left to the discretion of the school division. School divisions may use a combination of several different assessments for each grade and content area to meet the requirement of the legislation, or they may choose a specific test or assessment method. Assessments used should be designed to provide feedback to parents and teachers regarding the extent to which the student has demonstrated proficiency in the content included in the SOL covered.

Local school divisions may choose to administer the same assessments for particular grade levels and content areas to all students in the division. The use of division wide assessments ensures consistency across the division so that the local school board and superintendent can certify that the assessments required by this legislation have been administered. If school divisions choose to allow more flexibility at the school level in selecting the assessments, the school division should prepare a written plan detailing the evidence from each school that will be reviewed by the local school board and superintendent to certify that the requirements of the legislation have been met. Such evidence should include: 1) documentation that demonstrates that the assessments administered address each strand included in the SOL for that grade and subject, 2) copies of the assessments and 3) any ancillary materials such as rubrics or sample student responses used to train teachers. Each school division’s plan should address whether these documents will be retained at the school division central office or at individual schools.

Use of Integrated Assessments

The legislation encourages “integrated assessments that include multiple subject areas.” For example, a local assessment might address content from both grade 3 history and grade 3 science. If such assessments are used, the results should include information about the extent to which the student has demonstrated proficiency in the content of each specific set of SOL

covered.

Professional Development

The capacity of teachers to design and implement assessments that are intended to inform instruction is likely to vary widely across the Commonwealth. School divisions should evaluate the capacity and experience of their teachers in implementing such assessments and to use this information to design professional development. Professional development should encourage the collaboration of teachers within grades and across grades in implementing the assessments and in using their results in determining instructional needs. Professional development should also facilitate collaboration among teachers within a school, across schools within a division, across divisions, and across the state wherever possible. School divisions are encouraged to leverage the resources and established training opportunities available from professional organizations.

Associated Costs

School divisions are encouraged to maintain records of the costs associated with 1) the development and implementation of the local alternative assessments and 2) the professional development provided to educators to assist them in implementing this requirement. Information regarding costs will be collected by the Department of Education staff and shared with the Virginia Board of Education and the General Assembly.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

School divisions should be aware of the following requirement found in [Section 300.160 c \(1\) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#):

A State (or, in the case of a district-wide assessment, an LEA) must develop and implement alternate assessments and guidelines for the participation of children with disabilities in alternate assessments for those children who cannot participate in regular assessments, even with accommodations, as indicated in their respective IEPs, as provided in paragraph (a) of this section.

Use of Local Assessments in State Accreditation or Federal Accountability

The results of the local authentic assessments will not be used to designate state accreditation or federal accountability status.

¹School divisions should be aware that the Scientific Investigation, Reasoning, and Logic strand of the grade 3 Science SOL is not to be assessed separately from the content strands but rather included as a part of local alternative assessments for each content strand. This strand represents a set of systematic inquiry skills that defines what a student will be able to do when planning and conducting investigations within the physical, biological, and Earth sciences.

²The strands for history SOL are: 1) History, 2) Geography, 3) Economics, and 4) Civics