

**Emergency Guidelines for the Use of Local Alternative Assessments in Lieu of
the Virginia Studies, Civics and Economics, and Grade 8 Writing Standards of Learning
Tests for the 2020-2021 School Year**

November 19, 2020

Context

In response to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with Governor Northam’s Executive Order Fifty-One (EO51) issued on March 12, 2020, and Chapter 1283 of the 2020 Acts of Assembly (part of the Appropriation Act), as signed by Governor Northam on April 27, 2020, the Superintendent of Public Instruction pursued a state-level waiver allowing school divisions the flexibility to choose to administer local alternative assessments in lieu of administering the required Virginia Studies, Civics and Economics, and Grade 8 Writing Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in the 2020-2021 school year.

For school divisions opting to exercise this waiver, the waiver does not relieve the divisions of the requirements in [§ 22.1-253.13:3.C](#) of the Code of Virginia by which each local school board is to certify annually that it 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 not administered. Specifically, the Code 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.

Therefore, for the 2020-2021 year, school divisions that choose not to administer the Virginia Studies, Civics and Economics, and Grade 8 Writing SOL tests must administer local alternative assessments consistent with these emergency guidelines. For school divisions not opting to exercise the flexibility of the state-level waiver, the SOL tests will continue to be available for administration.

Additionally, school divisions exercising this waiver will be required to report on the outcomes of the local alternative assessments administered in lieu of these SOL tests in the periodic reports required by the Board of Education, per [Superintendent’s Memo #230-20](#).

Purpose of the Emergency Guidelines

The *Emergency Guidelines for the Use of Local Alternative Assessments in Lieu of the Virginia Studies, Civics and Economics, and Grade 8 Writing Standards of Learning Tests for the 2020-2021 School Year* detail the requirements of the flexibility provided by the state-level waiver that allows school divisions to choose to administer local alternative assessments in lieu of the required administration of the Virginia Studies, Civics and Economics, and Grade 8 Writing SOL tests in the 2020-2021 school year. The requirements for these assessments are similar to those included in the [Guidelines for Local Alternative Assessments for 2018-2019 through 2019-2020](#). Those guidelines address the local alternative assessments administered in the five content areas where SOL tests were eliminated by action of the General Assembly in 2014 (i.e., Grade 3 History, Grade 3 Science, Grade 5 Writing, United States History to 1865, and United States History: 1865 to the Present).

General Expectations for Local Alternative Assessments

Local alternative assessments administered in place of the SOL assessments for Virginia Studies, Civics and Economics, and Grade 8 Writing should cover the content and skills included in the Standards of Learning for the course. Assessments should be designed to provide feedback to students, parents, and teachers regarding the extent to which the student has demonstrated proficiency in the content and skills included in the SOL covered.

School divisions are encouraged to use a variety of assessment types, including performance tasks and/or performance assessments. The [Virginia Quality Criteria Tool for Performance Assessments](#) should be used to evaluate locally developed performance assessments and necessary revisions should be implemented to ensure that students have access to quality tasks and assessments.

Using the state-developed rubrics to score student samples provides consistent expectations for student achievement. School divisions are expected to use these rubrics when evaluating student responses to performance assessments and performance tasks. Additional information regarding the state-developed rubrics is provided in the content-specific sections that follow.

Content-Specific Information for Local Alternative Assessments

Virginia Studies and Civics and Economics

Local alternative assessments administered in Virginia Studies and Civics and Economics in place of the SOL tests for these subjects should measure the content and skills described in the 2015 *History and Social Science Standards of Learning*. When scoring these local alternative assessments, school divisions should choose the [history and social science common rubric](#) that best suits the needs of their students, as these common rubrics are not grade or course specific. Once the rubric is identified, the Core Expectations in the selected rubric should be used in scoring all student work samples, and the Task Specific domains should be selected based on the specific task or assessment administered. School divisions are encouraged to use a variety of

assessments to ensure content and skill coverage as it is not possible nor appropriate to address all content within one task or assessment.

Grade 8 Writing

Local alternative assessments administered for Grade 8 Writing in place of the Grade 8 Writing SOL test should measure the content and skills represented in the 2010 *English Standards of Learning*. When scoring these local alternative assessments, school divisions should utilize the Grade 8 Writing rubric available in the [Grade 8 Writing SOL test blueprint](#) as well as sample student responses and scoring materials available in the [Understand Scoring](#) application. The released writing prompts and checklist for writers are among [additional resources](#) to consider when planning for the local alternative assessment. School divisions are encouraged to use a variety of tasks and assessments in writing to ensure all parts of the writing process are addressed.

Reporting of Local Alternative Assessment Results

School divisions choosing to administer local alternative assessments in lieu of the Virginia Studies, Civics and Economics, and Grade 8 Writing SOL tests will be required to report on the outcomes of the local alternative assessments administered in lieu of the SOL tests in the periodic reports required by the Board of Education, per [Superintendent's Memo #230-20](#). Additional details regarding this reporting will be forthcoming.

Use of Local Assessments in State Accreditation or Federal Accountability

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