

Virginia ESL Supervisor's Association

Good afternoon Madame Chair, Dr. Wright, and committee members. My name is Megan Moore, and I am the Director of ESOL for Manassas City Schools as well as the president of the Virginia ESL Supervisor's Association. VESA appreciates the opportunity to speak to the accountability committee on the Standards of Accreditation and advocate for changes our organization would like to see for our English language learners.

VESA fully supports the continued use of the SOA adjustment for ELLs. Research has clearly shown that it takes at least five to seven years to develop cognitive academic language proficiency and even longer for students who arrive with poor literacy in their own language and limited or interrupted schooling. Currently, as you know, Virginia allows for an eleven semester SOA adjustment for divisions. VESA would like to recommend a 13 semester SOA adjustment. A 13 semester adjustment takes into account the research on the length of time it takes to become proficient in a language, and may be more appropriate for SOLs where there is no alternative assessment for ELLs.

VESA feels the new growth indicators are too new to be considered as part of accreditation. We may need several years of data to see trends and how to best interpret the data as it applies to all students and English Language Learners. We would also like to request that DOE compile and share data on how LEAs of varying sizes enroll ELLs in classes with an EOC SOL by the English language proficiency level. For example, do some divisions only enroll ELLs in EOC classes who are a level 4 or higher while other divisions enroll level 2 or 3 students in EOC classes? This may lead to the need to consider different accreditation criteria for divisions based on size and/or how ELLs are served at the secondary level.

VESA would also encourage the committee to give ELLs the option of obtaining verified credit through locally verified credits for Reading, Writing, Math, Science and History. This has been allowable in History and Science up to this year, but on March 30, 2013, was changed to allow only students with disabilities to obtain a Standard Diploma with locally verified credits in reading, writing, and mathematics.

ELL students must:

- Pass the course
- Obtain a 375 – 399 on the SOL test and have had 2 attempts at the test
- Complete a local choice option (ex. Workbook packet, etc.)

Divisions have many ELLs who enroll in high school with courses but have few to no transferable credits from their home country. These students must pass SOL tests to earn a standard diploma. This can be an overwhelming and frustrating experience for the students and their parents. Students attempt the English EOC or other assessments for verified credits multiple times with accommodations, and do not score a 400 or better. These tests become barriers for our students to obtain a standard diploma. This is not about dumbing down the standards, but rather about leveling the playing field.

VESA would like to continue the requirement that a school based committee shall convene and make determinations regarding the participation level of LEP students in the Virginia assessment program. Participation decisions should not be left to one or two staff members to decide.

Currently, the regulations establishing standards for accrediting public schools in Virginia state that in kindergarten through eighth grade,

limited English proficient students may be granted a one-time exemption from SOL testing in the areas of writing, science, and history and social science. This section needs to be updated to reflect the current participation requirements in the Virginia assessment program, such as the one time exemption on the grade 3-8 reading SOL for students in their first year of enrollment in a US school.

In summary, VESA is suggesting the following –

1. SOA adjustment from 11 to 13 semesters;
2. Study/consider different accreditation criteria for divisions based on size and/or how ELLs are served at the secondary level in classes with EOC assessments;
3. ELLs obtain verified credit through locally verified credits for Reading, Writing, Math, Science and History to count towards a standard diploma;
4. Continue school based committee to determinations regarding the participation level of LEP students in the Virginia assessment program; and
5. Update one-time exemption rules to reflect current participation requirements.

Again, VESA thanks you for this opportunity to offer suggestions on the Regulations for Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia that may affect the ELL population in Virginia.