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Frequently Asked Questions about SOL Testing

How many SOL tests do students take?

Students in grades 3-12 will take between 2-4 Standards of Learning (SOL) tests a year, depending on their grade level and the secondary courses taken during the year. Local "benchmark" assessments many students take during the year — usually at nine- or seven-week intervals — in preparation for the SOLs are not provided or mandated by the state.

How is SOL testing changing?

In 2015, the department introduced a computer adaptive Grade-6 Mathematics SOL test. The computer adaptive format provides each student with an assessment customized to his or her ability level. Computer adaptive testing will expand during 2015-2016 to include the grade-7 and grade-8 mathematics tests.

Almost all SOL tests are now taken online. Online tests in science, mathematics, reading and writing include interactive non-multiple choice items that require students to apply what they have learned. Only students with a documented, disability-related need take pencil-and-paper tests.

In addition, elementary and middle school students who fail SOL tests by narrow margins or because of extenuating circumstances now may be retested before the end of the year — provided that school divisions first secure parental permission. The retake policy does not apply to the Grade-8 Writing SOL test.

Has Virginia reduced the number of SOL tests?

In 2014, Virginia eliminated the following five elementary and middle school SOL tests: Grade-3 Science, Grade-3 Social Studies, U.S. History to 1865, U.S. History 1865-Present and Grade-5 Writing. The elimination of these tests reduced the total number of SOL assessments from 34 to 29. The Board of Education and the advisory SOL Innovation Committee are studying further steps to reduce the burden of testing while maintaining accountability.

Are Virginia teachers involved in the creation of SOL tests?

Yes. All items on SOL tests have been reviewed at least twice by committees of Virginia classroom teachers. Only items approved by these teachers as fair and aligned with the commonwealth's subject and course content standards appear on SOL tests.

What is the purpose of SOL testing?

SOL results inform parents and communities about whether students — as individuals and collectively — are meeting the commonwealth's expectations for achievement in English, mathematics, science and history. SOL tests allow the state Board of Education to identify schools that need assistance and support. The assessments also provide an objective means for measuring achievement gaps between student subgroups and for determining the progress of schools, divisions and the state toward closing these gaps.

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