



#227-22

Commonwealth of Virginia
Virginia Department of Education
Superintendent's Memo #227-22

DATE: September 23, 2022
TO: Division Superintendents
FROM: Jillian Balow, Superintendent of Public Instruction
SUBJECT: **Updates to Pathways for Middle and High School Science Coursework**
Virginia

Virginia Department of Education staff have received questions about how information contained in Superintendent's Memo #148-15, as revised on July 9, 2015, impacts transfer students. This memo updates information provided in Superintendent's Memo #148-15, as revised on July 9, 2015, and addresses the need for flexibility for transfer students.

The Virginia *Science Standards of Learning and Curriculum Framework* outline the science content and practices that are foundational for students as they build science conceptual understanding and utilize the Scientific and Engineering Practices. To allow students flexibility in choosing courses aligned to career and academic interests, some Virginia school divisions have developed new academic pathways in science to support student enrollment in high school laboratory science courses prior to entry in the ninth grade. In providing these opportunities, school divisions have constructed curricula that ensure accelerated preparation in the critical concepts and the Scientific and Engineering Practices defined in the middle grades science standards.

For all school divisions currently implementing or considering implementation of an accelerated academic pathway in middle grades science, the Virginia Department of Education provides the following guidance:

- Accelerated pathways must ensure that middle school students are provided instruction based on the three sets of middle grades science standards (Sixth Grade Science, Life Science, and Physical Science).
- Student instruction on the middle grades science standards may be completed on a schedule established by the school division, generally **three years or less**, depending on how the middle grades curriculum is sequenced *and* prior to the end of grade eight.
- In accordance with the federal requirements of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA), all Virginia students are to be assessed with the *Grade 8 Science Standards of Learning* assessment. This must occur at the **completion of instruction** on the middle grades science standards.
- A student earning a verified credit in middle school as a result of an accelerated pathway must take the *Biology Standards of Learning* assessment in grades 9-12 to meet federal accountability requirements as reflected in ESSA.

This guidance is based on the *Code of Virginia* and education regulations, including the following:

[8VAC20-131-30](#). Student achievement expectations.

A. Each student should learn the relevant grade level/course subject matter before promotion to the next grade...

B. ...Students who are accelerated shall take the test aligned with the highest grade level, following instruction in the content. No student shall take more than one test in any content area in each year, except in the case of expedited retakes as provided for in this section...

E. Each student in middle and secondary schools shall take all applicable end-of-course SOL tests following course instruction...Students shall not be required to take an end-of-course SOL test in an academic subject after they have earned the number of verified credits required for that academic content area for graduation, unless such test is necessary in order for the school to meet federal accountability requirements.

§ [22.1-253.13:1](#). Instructional programs supporting the Standards of Learning and other educational objectives.

B. ...School boards shall implement the *Standards of Learning* or objectives specifically designed for their school divisions that are equivalent to or exceed the Board's requirements. Students shall be expected to achieve the educational objectives established by the school division at appropriate age or grade levels. The curriculum adopted by the local school division shall be aligned to the *Standards of Learning*...

§ [22.1-253.13:3](#). Accreditation, others standards, assessments, and releases from state regulations.

C. ...The *Standards of Learning* assessments administered to students in grades three through eight shall not exceed (i) reading and mathematics in grades three and four; (ii) reading, mathematics, and science in grade five; (iii) reading and mathematics in grades six and seven; (iv) reading, writing, and mathematics in grade eight; (v) science after the student receives instruction in the grade six science, life science, and physical science *Standards of Learning* and before the student completes grade eight....

Pathways for Middle and High School Science Coursework and Transfer Students

When implementing middle grade pathways in science, divisions are to consider reasonable flexibility for transfer students. Existing or new middle grade pathways in science are to allow flexibility for transfer students so that these students may have equal opportunities to pursue higher level coursework in middle and high school, regardless of when they enter the pathway. For example, a transfer student should not be expected to “make up” a middle school science course offered by the receiving division at an earlier grade.

For more information

If you have questions regarding the middle grades science instructional program, please contact Anne Petersen, Science Coordinator, by email at Anne.Petersen@doe.virginia.gov or by telephone at (804) 225-2776.

JB/AMP