



VIRGINIA BOARD OF EDUCATION

Title: Development of New Assessment Item Type for Integration of Reading and Writing

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Summary of the Topic:

This report provides information about the development of a new assessment item type that supports the integration of reading and writing. Restructuring the existing Reading Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments at grade 5, grade 8, and end-of-course to add a new component that includes this new item type will support student attainment of grade-level proficiency in reading and directly support the integrated approach to reading and writing instruction encouraged by the State Literacy Plan.

Timetable for Follow-up or Next Steps:

This report is intended to provide information to the Board. Further action regarding the potential use of the current Grade 5, Grade 8, and End-of-Course Reading SOL tests with the addition of the new passage-based writing prompt items may be required by the Board at a later date.

New Assessment Item Type

This report and accompanying presentation provide information about the development of a new kind of assessment item for the grades 5, 8, and End-of-Course (EOC) Standards of Learning (SOL) Reading tests. The new item type requires students to write about what they have read and is intended to support student attainment of grade-level proficiency in reading through best practices in literacy instruction and assessment.

A Focus on Comprehensive Literacy Instruction

In response to a decline in Virginia's scores on the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and a dip in Reading Standards of Learning (SOL) test pass rates in the same year, Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) staff developed and launched a State Literacy Plan aimed at improving literacy outcomes for all students. At VDOE's 2019 Literacy Summit, various presenters recommended that students be exposed regularly to grade-level texts and that they write about what they read. VDOE's Comprehensive Literacy Webinar Series has been provided to support this recommendation, offering educators timely, research-based, and instructionally sound sessions. The theme of integrating reading and writing instruction and the reading/writing connection is apparent in these offerings. By contrast, the existing configuration of separate Reading and Writing SOL tests does not support this integrated approach.

Current Design of Standards of Learning Assessments for Reading and Writing

As background, the current Reading SOL assessments for grades 3-8 are computer adaptive tests (CAT) and consist of multiple-choice and technology-enhanced test items. The online EOC Reading SOL test administered to high school students and used to meet graduation requirements is a traditional, non-adaptive test. It too consists of multiple-choice and technology-enhanced test items.

Separate Writing SOL tests are administered in grade 8 and high school. Each test includes two components with each component completed on a separate day. The first component, in part, requires students to choose revisions and correct errors embedded in selections that are intended to model rough drafts of student writing. These test questions include multiple-choice and technology-enhanced items that measure standards grouped into reporting categories addressing related content and skills: *Research, plan, compose, and revise for a variety of purposes* and *Edit for correct use*

of language, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. In the second component, students are asked to write a short paper in response to an expository or persuasive prompt that provides a context for writing in the form of a question, an issue, or a hypothetical situation. Each student's response to the writing prompt receives a separate score in each of two domains: 1) Composing/Written Expression and 2) Usage and Mechanics.

Because the state has continued to administer separate Reading and Writing SOL tests, class schedules often reflect separate instruction for reading and writing in order to prepare students for the state assessments. Instead of embracing a comprehensive literacy approach, in many classrooms writing instruction may consist of responding to on-demand prompts rather than writing about what one is reading as well as editing others' work rather than revising one's own writing. Writing instruction has become more focused on editing, with less emphasis on students composing authentic work, which is essential to a rigorous, comprehensive English curriculum.

Following the decline in NAEP scores and Reading SOL test pass rates in 2019, staff from the Offices of Student Assessment and Humanities conducted joint interviews with educators in schools that maintained or increased pass rates in reading. These interviews were designed to provide teachers and other school division staff the opportunity to provide ideas about effective comprehensive literacy instruction that could be shared with staff in other divisions. Participants commonly reported an integration of reading and writing strands, making time for writing instruction, and protecting that instructional time. They reported that writing lessons were connected to what students were reading in class and that students were given opportunities to apply knowledge from lessons by writing about what they were reading. The school divisions also encouraged all teachers to be teachers of reading and writing and to allow for practical, relevant reading and writing across content areas. Interview results suggest a connection between students' success and improvement in reading when reading and writing instruction are integrated.

Development of Integrated Reading and Writing Assessment Item Type

One of the ways that the SOL tests might reinforce the importance of integrating reading and writing to build literacy skills is through the addition of test items that ask students to write about what they have read to the current Reading SOL tests. For example, students might be presented with a nonfiction passage based on history or science content. This passage would be accompanied by 3-6 questions connected to the passage, typical of the current Reading SOL tests, in addition to a writing prompt based

on the passage. The nonfiction passage would provide context for students to use when responding to the prompt, or it could serve as a springboard for students who choose to incorporate personal experiences in their response. The prompt would be considered “an invitation to write,” where students compose authentic work in response to or inspired by a text, mirroring how English teachers have been encouraged to incorporate writing in their classrooms across the Commonwealth.

The inclusion of prompts based on passages that reflect history or science content would also support the importance of nonfiction reading as part of English instruction and reinforce the importance of incorporating writing across the curriculum. This is consistent with the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment Framework adopted by the National Assessment Governing Board at its quarterly meeting on August 5, 2021.

“The new Reading Framework updates the previous version to align with the NAEP Reading Assessment’s transition to a digital platform in 2017 and adds only a few new features, many of which already exist on state reading assessments. For example, the 2026 Framework will report results separately for reading texts in literature, social studies, and science rather than just literary and informational texts.”

This new assessment item type is being developed as an additional component of the Reading SOL tests at grades 5, 8, and EOC. Its intent is twofold: 1) to reinforce the importance of students writing about what they read and 2) to provide a measure of students’ writing skill without the burden of an additional test. While there is no longer an SOL writing test administered at grade 5, a separate Grade 5 Writing SOL test was administered from 1998 to 2014. During its 2014 session, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation eliminating this test. Based on this legislation, school divisions are now required to administer a local assessment of writing at grade 5 in lieu of the Writing SOL test. The new test component that integrates reading and writing assessment for grade 5 could be provided as an option that school divisions could choose to administer in lieu of local alternative assessments required by the 2014 General Assembly action.

Desk reviews for local alternative assessments conducted in 2019 indicate that developing and scoring local writing assessments for grade 5 strain resources regardless of the size of a school division. Based on the desk review results, it is thought that a number of school divisions would take advantage of the option of administering the additional component to the Grade 5 Reading test that would include the passage-based prompt. As a further incentive, school divisions that exercise this

option would no longer be required to develop and monitor a Balanced Assessment Plan for Grade 5 Writing.

Use of the Integrated Reading and Writing Component

The new item type would constitute a separate, additional component of the grades 5, 8 and EOC Reading SOL tests and would be administered in a separate test session, likely on a different day. Students would continue to receive a performance level (e.g., Pass/Proficient, Pass/Advanced, etc.) for the currently administered Reading component of the assessment, and that performance level would still be used to meet federal accountability requirements. Additionally, students would receive a separate, overall score to reflect performance on the integrated reading and writing component of the assessment, and students would receive a rubric score for their response to the passage-based prompt.

Timeline and Expectations for Implementation

Summer 2022	Item Review by Teacher Committees
Fall 2022	Practice sample questions of new assessment item type provided to school divisions
Spring 2023	Field Testing of new item type
Spring 2024	Full Implementation of additional Reading test component at grades 5, 8, and EOC, to include the integrated reading and writing item type

The Offices of Student Assessment and Humanities will collaborate to provide support to school divisions as they prepare for the implementation of this new item type. Webinars will be offered during the 2022-2023 school year for Division Directors of Testing and division-level English Language Arts instruction leaders to introduce the new item type, to share information about implementation and resources, and to determine what additional support materials are needed. Resources developed, including a recorded presentation for teachers, will be provided on the VDOE website. Additional webinars will be provided during the 2023-2024 school year to further support school divisions prior to full implementation in spring 2024.

Item Type Example at End-of-Course

Context: The following example was developed by VDOE staff as a way of illustrating the concept for the new item type. It is based on an article from the Encyclopedia Virginia website ([Richmond Bread Riot Article - Encyclopedia Virginia](#)). Passages developed and field tested for the new item type would be grade-level appropriate in length, content, and vocabulary as determined by a committee of Virginia educators.

Bread Riot, Richmond

Background

Richmond's population had swelled to more than 100,000 by the midpoint of the war. Overcrowding, high rents, and exorbitant costs for basic necessities increasingly affected all classes in the capital, but the burden fell especially hard on the working class—their wages could not keep pace with the inflationary spiral. The [winter of 1863](#) was quite harsh in Richmond. Locals reported more than twenty measurable snow falls, with some storms dropping more than a foot of snow on the capital. Warmer temperatures turned the roads into quagmires that made the transport of food and fuel into the city virtually impossible.

In desperation, a group of women—workers in Confederate ordnance establishments and the wives of the Tredegar Iron Works laborers—met on April 1, 1863, at the Belvidere Hill Baptist Church located in the Oregon Hill neighborhood of the city. Led by Mary Jackson and Minerva Meredith, the women resolved to gather at Capitol Square the next day to seek a meeting with Virginia governor John L. Letcher to discuss their plight.

The Riot

The women gathered at the equestrian statue of [George Washington](#) and made their way to the governor's mansion. Denied a meeting with Letcher, some of the women returned to the statue. Accounts of what happened next vary; some say Letcher did, in fact, meet with the women at the Washington monument. Dissatisfied with his response, the women marched out of Capitol Square and headed toward Ninth Street and in the

direction of the city's business district. As the women walked, they attracted hundreds—some accounts say thousands—of followers.

Curious onlookers, such as Confederate War Department clerk J. B. Jones, asked some in the group what they were doing. Several eyewitnesses reported seeing a gaunt woman raise a skeleton of an arm and scream, "We celebrate our right to live! We are starving!" Others heard a chant of "Bread or blood!" The mob then began attacking government warehouses, grocery stores, and various mercantile establishments, seizing food, clothing, and wagons, as well as jewelry and other luxury goods. Some merchants resisted the rioters while others watched helplessly as the looters seized bacon, ham, flour, and shoes.

Mayor Joseph Mayo quickly arrived at Mayo Street (the street was not named for the mayor), where he literally read the Riot Act to the mob; he was ignored. Letcher appeared shortly thereafter, as did Confederate president [Jefferson Davis](#). Again, accounts of who summoned the City Battalion and who threatened the mob with violence differ. [Varina Davis](#) wrote in her memoir of her husband that he pleaded with the rioters to disperse and then threatened to have an artillery unit open fire on the mob. Others assert it was Letcher who ordered city forces to fire on the group if it did not disperse in five minutes.

Tense moments passed, but the crowd did scatter. Local officials carried through with their threat to post cannon on key thoroughfares. That factor served to discourage another group that gathered on April 3, 1863. Fears of further disturbances led the commander of the Department of Richmond to order troops to augment forces under the provost marshal.

Aftermath

The atmosphere in the capital remained jittery as the City Council met that afternoon. Although the riot was over in two hours, it had shocked locals. Many believed that the rioters did not "suffer real want," while others accused outside agitators of causing the fracas. Confederate secretary of war James A. Seddon implored the local press not to publish accounts of the disturbance for fear it would fuel Union propaganda and undermine morale at home. To some extent Seddon succeeded, but Union prisoners

of war in Richmond reported what they saw and the *New York Times* ran a front-page article about the bread riot on April 8, 1863.

More than sixty men and women were arrested and tried in connection with the riot. Fines and prison terms were meted out, apparently in a rather capricious way. Those who appeared at their trials better dressed and perhaps more contrite received lesser punishments than others who were obviously members of the working class or the ringleaders of the mob.

The city fathers of Richmond also moved in the aftermath of the riot to insure there was no further breakdown of public order. The city had a long tradition of poor relief and the City Council resolved to expand its efforts in that area. Richmond's lawmakers were quick to distinguish between the "worthy poor," those who did not participate in the riot, and the "unworthy poor," those who did. Soon the city would operate special markets where the "meritorious poor" could obtain provisions and fuel at significantly reduced prices.

The bread riot in Richmond was not an isolated affair. People in the Confederate capital would read about similar revolts in Atlanta, Augusta, Columbus, and Macon, Georgia; in Salisbury and High Point, North Carolina; and in Mobile, Alabama. Local officials in those cities tackled the problem of poor relief in much the same way. But the stark reality was that people could not afford to buy food because prices in 1863 were almost ten times higher than they were in 1861. As one scholar has noted, a nation of farmers was, indeed, going hungry.

The situation would only grow worse as the Confederate transportation network broke down and as Union armies occupied more and more of the Confederacy's arable land. The bread riots of 1863 underscored how desperate the situation had become on the home front. They also highlighted the slow but steady demoralization that profoundly affected the Confederate cause.

Passage-Based Prompt: *Current technology allows people to share information immediately to a large audience, but this has not always been possible. Because the*

Richmond Bread Riot occurred in 1863, the events were shared primarily person to person, reported first by participants or witnesses and then repeated by those they told. Analyze the importance of firsthand accounts as it relates to the content of this article, an event from your knowledge or experience, or both. Explain any limitations or problems with relying on eyewitness information to develop a picture of actual events.