

# Revisions to the Virginia Standards of Learning Summative Assessments of Proficiency

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Recommendations from the HB 585 Work Group Convened by the Secretary of Education and Superintendent of Public Instruction



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

State annual assessments are used to measure how well the public education system teaches students to master a state’s academic standards in each subject area. Virginia Standards of Learning assessments are intricately linked to and reflective of the academic standards, as the assessments measure the mastery of the Standards of Learning. Yes, Virginia’s students are trailing behind the rest of the country, and low standards and weak assessments are masking the truth about student performance.<sup>1</sup>

House Bill 585 (HB 585) charged the Secretary of Education and the Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction to “convene and consult a work group consisting of representatives of the Virginia Department of Education and other appropriate stakeholders to revise the Virginia Standards of Learning summative assessments of proficiency that require students to demonstrate that they possess the skills, knowledge, and content necessary for success and to develop a plan for implementation of such revised assessments.”

In March of 2023, the Secretary of Education and the Virginia Department of Education convened the work group comprised of teachers, Board of Education members, leaders, parents, and state level experts to review the current assessment system, analyze national reports on leading innovative state assessments, participate in discussions with national and state assessment leaders in innovative assessment design, and compare Virginia’s rigor of standards and annual assessment framework to high performing states. The work group convened over the course of five months with the outcome resulting in the below recommendations for the future of Virginia’s assessment system.

The HB 585 Work Group’s tasks are part of a larger statewide focus to restructure and strengthen Virginia’s Framework for Excellence in Education. Virginia is committed to raising learning expectations for all children in the Commonwealth. Virginia’s best-in-class Framework for Excellence in Education will create alignment across three components: standards, assessments, and accountability. Virginia has a clear plan to ensure these three components are aligned and first grounded in rigorous academic standards.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.education.virginia.gov/media/governorviriniagov/secretary-of-education/pdf/Our-Commitment-to-Virginians.pdf>

<b>Standards</b>	<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Accountability</b>
<p><b>Standards Redesign April 2023</b></p> <p>Comprehensive review of Standards of Learning (SOL) begins to increase rigor. (Revised and rigorous beginning with History Social Science Standards approved by the Board)</p>	<p><b>HB 585 Assessment Workgroup Convenes March 2023</b></p> <p>A working group convened to develop recommendations for a new, rigorous SOL assessment system.</p>	<p><b>Board Kick-offs New Accountability System Development September 2023</b></p> <p>The Board started the process for creating a clear and action-oriented accountability system.</p>
<p><b>Mathematics Standards of Learning (SOL) Approved August 2023</b></p> <p>Revised and rigorous Mathematics SOL are approved by the Board.</p>	<p><b>Assessment Recommendations Released September 2023</b></p> <p>HB 585 Work Group provided recommendations on the design of a new assessment system.</p>	<p><b>Public Comment and Stakeholder Engagement Begins October 2023</b></p> <p>The public will begin to participate in stakeholder engagement activities to inform the first draft of the accountability system.</p>
<p><b>NAEP Crosswalk of 2023 Math SOL November 2023</b></p> <p>Virginia’s Math SOL will be compared to the NAEP<sup>2</sup> Framework and will benchmark future proficiency definitions for new assessments based on this crosswalk.</p>	<p><b>Assessment Procurement Process Launched December 2023</b></p> <p>The process for developing a new assessment request for proposals (RFP) will be launched.</p>	<p><b>New Accountability System Development January 2024</b></p> <p>The Board will use public feedback to develop the first draft of the accountability system.</p>
<p><b>English Language Arts (ELA) SOL Approved March 2024</b></p> <p>Revised and rigorous ELA SOL will be approved by the Board.</p>	<p><b>New Assessment Redesign Begins for All Content Areas Spring 2024</b></p> <p>A new, rigorous assessment system will be under design and development</p>	<p><b>New Accountability System Approved July 2024</b></p> <p>The Board will approve the design of a new, clear accountability system.</p>
<p><b>NAEP Crosswalk of 2023 ELA SOL May 2024</b></p> <p>Virginia’s ELA SOL will be compared to the NAEP Framework and will benchmark future proficiency definitions for new assessments based on this crosswalk.</p>	<p><b>New Assessment System Launched Spring 2025</b></p> <p>The new assessment will be tested in the field.</p>	<p><b>Data Collection for the New Accountability System Begins August 2024</b></p> <p>Data collection for the new accountability system will begin for the 2024 -2025 school year.</p>
<p><b>Science Standards of Learning Approved by Board January 2025</b></p> <p>Revised and rigorous Science SOL will be approved by the Board.</p>	<p><b>New Achievement Levels and Cut Scores Summer 2025</b></p> <p>Rigorous cut scores will be drafted for the new assessments.</p>	<p><b>New Accountability System Results Released September 2025</b></p> <p>Results from the new accountability system will be released.</p>

The 585 Work Group focused on the assessment components of the overarching Virginia’s Framework for Excellence in Education including strong and rigorous standards, a re-designed “best-in-class” assessment system, and how the results can be used more effectively in reporting requirements such as Virginia’s accountability system.

The Work Group’s recommendations are organized around five opportunity areas to improve the assessment system.

<sup>2</sup> NAEP is a national assessment that sets the benchmark for what students should know and the progress of the nation’s students.



## Opportunity 1: Clearer and More Rigorous Standards

Current State	Future State	Recommendations
<p>Virginia’s standards are outdated, lack clarity and rigor, and often do not align with what students need to prepare for success in college and career, resulting in assessments that fail to reflect gaps in student learning. At the same time, NAEP indicates that Virginia’s proficiency levels do not match mastery expectations across the country and as a result, students’ performance levels do not show comparable student mastery to peers in other states.</p>	<p>Teachers are expected to teach the Standards of Learning and students are expected to master the Standards of Learning. These standards reflect deep content understanding in a broad range of subjects and prepare students for college and career. These standards lay the foundation for the entire Framework for Excellence in Education.</p> <p>State assessments measure the concepts within the Standards of Learning. The proficiency and student growth measures on these assessments reflects true readiness for the next grade and success beyond high school graduation.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1a. Review, clarify, and revise Virginia’s Standards of Learning</li> <li>1b. Update state assessments to reflect revised Standards of Learning</li> <li>1c. Ensure cut scores—meaning how many correct answers it takes to demonstrate proficiency—and growth measures signal true proficiency through a transparent, valid standard-setting process and align to nationally recognized assessments</li> </ol>

## Opportunity 2: More Rigorous Assessment Items

Current State	Future State	Recommendations
<p>Students have limited opportunities to demonstrate critical thinking through rigorous item types (e.g., writing, constructed response). Assessments are not aligned to high-quality classroom instruction and real-world application.</p>	<p>With rigorous standards as the foundation, standards-aligned assessment items can reinforce strong instructional practices.</p> <p>Strong assessment items allow students to engage with complex ideas, support their thinking with evidence, produce informed judgements, and demonstrate critical thinking and understanding through various item types including written responses.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2a. Assessments should go beyond selected response questions.</li> <li>2b. Maintain rigorous critical thinking expectations while ensuring accessibility for all students.</li> </ol>

### Opportunity 3: More Timely, Clear, and Actionable Reporting

Current State	Future State	Recommendations
<p>Assessment reports, though detailed, are not user-friendly. Teachers and families do not have access to clear, actionable information. Teachers are not fully equipped to use results to inform instruction and to support individual students. Families are not supported to understand and act on their student’s assessment results to support continuous improvement.</p>	<p>Parents, teachers, and school leaders understand—and take action—on students’ assessment results. The state provides score reports targeted to specific user groups to provide a clear picture of how students are doing, what students need and how parents and teachers can help their student(s) master grade-level standards.</p> <p>The assessment system provides information that can directly communicate growth and achievement so that stakeholders can see how students are moving towards mastery and achieving mastery. Additional transparency on student and school performance is accomplished through a revised accountability system that clearly reports school performance and progress based on the new assessment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>3a. Prioritize timely data for teachers and families.</li><li>3b. Set assessment windows that maximize learning time.</li><li>3c. Differentiate reports by audience.</li><li>3d. Support educators through training on using state assessment results to inform instruction.</li></ul>

## Opportunity 4: Improved System Coherence

Current State	Future State	Recommendations
<p>School divisions are adding their own assessments on top of the summative and growth assessments required by the state. Students and teachers must navigate a web of assessments signaling different – and sometimes conflicting – expectations for student learning, which results in duplicative and time-consuming testing.</p>	<p>Students and educators experience a coherent and streamlined system – meaning all assessments signal clear expectations for students at all proficiency levels and inform strong instructional practices.</p> <p>The assessment system includes actionable achievement and growth data that provides school leaders and educators with useful information on how students are progressing and feeds into a clear accountability system.</p>	<p>4a. Ensure the assessment system measures proficiency and student growth.</p> <p>4b. Support divisions in administering high-quality, rigorous interim assessments.</p> <p>4c. Measure student learning before third grade in both literacy and numeracy.</p> <p>4d. Provide school division support in developing coherent, aligned, assessment calendars to ensure assessment data is actionable.</p>

## Opportunity 5: Innovative Assessment Design

Current State	Future State	Recommendations
<p>Virginia’s assessment system has fallen behind those of leading states. State assessments have changed minimally even with significant evolution in technology, instructional content and materials, and best practices in instruction.</p>	<p>State policies and practices promote innovative competency-based assessment design, making Virginia a national leader. Assessments of student mastery happen as standards are taught and allow students to demonstrate mastery and accelerate at a personalized pace.</p>	<p>5a. Plan for future innovation.</p>

Additionally, the HB 585 Future of Assessment Work Group recommends the following actions:

- The Work Group recommends that Virginia’s General Assembly review and revise legislation on educational assessments in Virginia to ensure alignment with these recommendations and to sufficiently approve funding for a new assessment system.
- The Work Group recommends that the Virginia State Board of Education use these recommendations as they advise the Virginia Department of Education on assessment matters and finalize the proficiency levels for the new assessment system.
- The Work Group recommends that the Virginia Department of Education use these recommendations as they move forward with procuring new assessments to ensure the new assessment system is rigorous and effectively measures student mastery.

This report highlights the invaluable work, insights, and recommendations of the Work Group to realize the future state of Virginia’s assessment system.

## LETTER TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Delegate Schuyler VanValkenburg  
Delegate House District 72  
900 East Main Street  
Pocahontas Building  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Delegate David Bulova  
Delegate House District 37  
P.O. Box 106  
Fairfax Station, Virginia 22039

Delegate Carrie Coyner  
Delegate House District 62  
9910 Wagners Way  
P.O. Box 58  
Chesterfield, Virginia 23832

Dear Delegate VanValkenburg, Delegate Bulova, and Delegate Coyner:

We are pleased to submit the following recommendations to the General Assembly in an effort to revise and implement new, rigorous statewide assessments. House Bill 585 required the development of a Work Group to recommend revisions surrounding Virginia’s Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments and to develop a plan for implementation that considers the following: 1) Best practices and innovations in summative assessments of proficiency; 2) Alternative approaches to current and new assessment items; 3) Assessment items that include open-ended questions, long-form writing, and other tasks; 4) A plan for pilot implementation of such assessment items prior to the 2027–2028 school year; 5) The development of a bank of vetted sample assessment items; 6) Recommended legislative and regulatory changes and funding necessary to implement approaches considered by the Work Group; and 7) A proposed timeline for implementation.

Since Day One, the Youngkin Administration has been focused on restoring excellence in education. The HB 585 Work Group’s tasks are part of a larger statewide focus to raise learning expectations and ensure a best-in-class education for all Virginians.

In the May 2022 report, “*Our Commitment to Virginians*”, this Administration highlighted data that demonstrated the significant gaps in achievement of Virginia’s students and how decisions made at the state level exacerbated student achievement gaps. Specifically, when state leaders lowered expectations, achievement across all student populations declined. We then announced a plan to restore high expectations and excellence for all students and schools. We have focused on a clear plan to ensure standards, assessments, and accountability are aligned, rigorous, and build transparency in Virginia’s educational system. We are putting all Virginians on a path toward success by:

- Raising the rigor of History, Math, English, and Science standards;
- Redefining proficiency to provide true indicators of performance;
- Instituting a transparent and actionable accountability system;

- Rethinking Virginia’s assessment system; and
- Ensuring that educators, parents, students, the public and policymakers have access to actionable data that can be used to improve student outcomes.

The analysis and recommendations included in this report underscore the need for this aligned plan and highlight the voices of teachers, principals, parents, Board of Education members, and state experts who all call for a stronger assessment system. Specifically, the recommendations say Virginia needs clearer and more rigorous Standards of Learning; more rigorous assessment items; more timely, clear, and actionable reporting; improved system coherence; and innovative assessment design. We are committed to increasing expectations so that Virginia’s education system is the strongest in the nation and ensures every student is prepared for post-secondary opportunities and long-term success in life.

This plan must be a partnership between the Administration, Virginia State Board of Education, and the General Assembly to make the changes and improvements we know are necessary to get Virginia back on track.

We look forward to working with stakeholders, the business community, higher education leaders, parents and families, the State Board of Education, and the General Assembly to ensure we increase academic excellence and opportunity for all Virginians. We are committed to collaborating with you in this important work.

Please contact Secretary Aimee Rogstad Guidera or Superintendent Lisa Coons if you have any questions or if you need additional information regarding the recommendations in this report.

Sincerely,



Aimee Rogstad Guidera  
Secretary of Education



Lisa Coons, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Public Instruction

## OVERVIEW OF HB 585 REPORT

State assessment systems are powerful tools to evaluate and communicate academic progress, provide clear feedback for educators to support students in where they are and where they need to go, and to ensure learning outcomes are transparent and actionable. However, Virginia’s assessments are falling short of this ambition; Virginia’s students are trailing behind the rest of the country, and low definitions of proficiency and weak assessments are masking the truth about student performance. To address this, Virginia’s Framework for Excellence in Education will create alignment and rigor across three components: standards, assessments, and accountability. This work must first be grounded in rigorous academic standards, and then Virginia’s assessments must evolve to ensure Virginia has clear information that students are on the path to be well prepared for success in college and career opportunities. In order for this to happen, the Commonwealth must continue its efforts to revamp subject area Standards of Learning to be best-in-class, high-quality, and rigorous, reset proficiency definitions to be benchmarked to the best in the nations, and develop a multifaceted assessment system that clearly and accurately assesses teaching and learning.

House Bill 585 (HB 585), patroned by Delegates Schuyler VanValkenburg, David Bulova, Carrie Coyner, and Glenn Davis required the Secretary of Education and the Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction to “convene and consult a work group consisting of representatives of the Department of Education and other appropriate stakeholders to revise the Virginia Standards of Learning summative assessments of proficiency that require students to demonstrate that they possess the skills, knowledge, and content necessary for success and to develop a plan for implementation of such revised assessments.” The HB 585 Work Group on the Future of Assessment (Work Group), which included leaders from across Virginia and experts in assessment (see members in Appendix A), convened five times between March and September 2023 around this charge.

The foundation for the Work Group’s recommendations begins with the Virginia Department of Education’s (VDOE) 2022 report “*Our Commitment to Virginians.*”<sup>3</sup> As articulated in that report, Virginia’s reputation and overall high-average performance masks widening students achievement gaps in the Commonwealth’s schools and a recent slip in comparison with other states on a range of academic achievement measures. Further, in 2019 and 2020, the State Board of Education under the prior Administration voted to lower the proficiency cut scores—meaning how many correct answers it takes to demonstrate proficiency—on the state assessment, leaving parents and educators unaware of true academic preparedness and unable to act responsively to student needs. Virginia’s performance on both national and state assessments are trending in the wrong direction. Even with lower standards and cut scores, students are still falling behind. Additional details from this report are included in Appendix B.

Over the course of five months, the Work Group reviewed background information on Virginia’s current assessment system (summarized in Appendix C); digested expert reports on state assessments (see the list of reading materials on page 32); participated in discussions with national assessment leaders and states leading in innovative assessment design (see the list of presenters on page 32); and compared specific standards and test items from Virginia compared to other model states (see examples in Appendix D). Using this information, the Work Group identified challenges across all facets of Virginia’s current assessment system, envisioned the ideal future state, and generated recommendations.

This report includes the key action steps to put Virginia on the right path toward educational excellence. The shifts proposed in this report seek to address the challenges within the assessment system for positive change at every level, with the ultimate aim of providing every student in Virginia the opportunity and supports they need to succeed.

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3 <https://www.education.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/secretary-of-education/pdf/Our-Commitment-to-Virginians.pdf>

## Detailed Overview on HB 585

An act directing the Secretary of Education and Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction to convene a work group to revise the Virginia Standards of Learning summative assessments of proficiency and to develop a plan for implementation of such revised assessments.

[H 585]

Approved April 27, 2022

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

§ 1. That the Secretary of Education and the Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction shall convene and consult a work group consisting of representatives of the Department of Education and other appropriate stakeholders to revise the Virginia Standards of Learning summative assessments of proficiency that require students to demonstrate that they possess the skills, knowledge, and content necessary for success and to develop a plan for implementation of such revised assessments.

§ 2. In developing such revised assessments and plan, the work group shall consider

- i) Best practices and innovations in summative assessments of proficiency from across the nation;
- ii) Alternative approaches to current and new assessment items, including subject areas and methods of grading such items;
- iii) Assessment items that include open-ended questions, long-form writing, and other tasks, with student responses scored by the Department according to statewide scoring rubrics;
- iv) Plan for pilot implementation of such assessment items prior to the 2027–2028 school year as necessary to determine the validity of such items;
- v) The process for the development of a bank of vetted sample assessment items that include a comprehensive representation of knowledge and skills being assessed;
- vi) The legislative and regulatory changes and funding necessary to implement alternative approaches considered by the work group; and
- vii) A proposed timeline for implementation of such new assessments, giving consideration to implementation prior to the 2027–2028 school year.

Nothing in this act shall prohibit the work group from looking at all forms of assessment. Such work group shall not be responsible for implementation of such revised assessment items unless there is further action from the General Assembly.

§ 3. That the Department of Education shall submit its initial plan for implementation of revised Virginia Standards of Learning summative assessments of proficiency developed pursuant to § 2 of this act to the Chairmen of the House Committee on Education, the Senate Committee on Education and Health, the House Committee on Appropriations, and the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations no later than November 1, 2023, and shall provide updates on the implementation of such plan no later than November 1 of each year thereafter through 2027.



## ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through background research, meetings, group discussion, and independent feedback, the HB 585 Future of Assessment Work Group developed recommendations for the future of Virginia's assessment system. The following sections outline the process of the Work Group to develop each of these recommendations and present the group's final recommendations. Each section below includes the following:

- **Opportunity Areas:** The Work Group identified key challenges within Virginia's current assessment system. The recommendations are organized around the five opportunity areas defined by the Work Group:
  - Opportunity 1: Clearer and More Rigorous Standards
  - Opportunity 2: More Rigorous Assessments
  - Opportunity 3: More Timely, Clear, and Actionable Reporting
  - Opportunity 4: Improved System Coherence
  - Opportunity 5: Innovative Assessment Design
- **Current State and Future State:** The Work Group summarized where Virginia is today and what an ideal future assessment system would look like for students, families, and educators.
- **Background and Context:** Each section below includes a summary of the background and context Work Group members used to form recommendations. The information reflects content from Work Group Meetings 1-3, as well as pre-reading and other materials explored by the Work Group members.
- **Recommendations:** Aligned to each opportunity area, each section below calls for specific recommendations and changes to consider for the future of Virginia's assessment system. These recommendations will support the Virginia Department of Education as they implement the Framework for Excellence in Education by providing clear steps towards the creation of rigorous Standards of Learning and assessments that will feed a new accountability system.

Additionally, the HB 585 Future of Assessment Work Group recommends the following actions:

- The Work Group recommends that Virginia's General Assembly review and revise legislation on educational assessments in Virginia to ensure alignment with these recommendations and to sufficiently approve funding for a new assessment system.
- The Work Group recommends that the Virginia State Board of Education use these recommendations as they advise the Virginia Department of Education on assessment matters and finalize the proficiency levels for the new assessment system.
- The Work Group recommends that the Virginia Department of Education use these recommendations as they move forward with procuring new assessments to ensure the new assessment system is rigorous and effectively measures student mastery.



## Opportunity 1: Clearer and More Rigorous Standards

Clear and rigorous standards are essential to improving Virginia’s assessment system. Strong standards lay the foundation for the entire K-12 system, and Virginia’s current Standards of Learning do not align with what students need to prepare for college and career. In Meeting 3, Work Group members explored Standards of Learning (SOL) in Virginia and compared them to other state standards. **The Work Group identified challenges within the current state of Virginia’s Standards of Learning, and what the future state could look like if these challenges were addressed.**

Figure 1: Current and Future State for Clearer and More Rigorous Standards in Virginia

Current State	Future State
<p>Virginia’s standards are outdated, lack clarity and rigor, and often do not align with what students need to prepare for success in college and career, resulting in assessments that fail to reflect gaps in student learning. At the same time, NAEP indicates that Virginia’s proficiency levels do not match mastery expectations across the country and as a result, students’ performance levels in Virginia do not show comparable mastery to peers in other states.</p>	<p>Teachers are expected to teach the Standards of Learning and students are expected to master the Standards of Learning. The Standards of Learning demonstrate deep content understanding in a broad range of subjects and prepare students for college and career. These standards lay the foundation for the entire Framework for Excellence in Education.</p> <p>State assessments measure the concepts within Standards of Learning. The proficiency and student growth measures on these assessments reflects true readiness for the next grade and success beyond high school graduation.</p>

### Background and Context

In the early 1990s, Virginia became a national leader by defining high expectations for students and launching the SOL tests, driving many years ranking among the top states in the country, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (known as the Nation’s Report Card). In recent years, however, Virginia has fallen behind the rest of the country by lowering proficiency definitions and failing to uphold high expectations for students.

Leslie Muldoon, Executive Director of the National Assessment Governing Board, presented to the Work Group on the latest NAEP results. NAEP is a national assessment that sets the benchmark for what students should know and the progress of the nation’s students.<sup>4</sup> It is the only assessment that allows for valid comparison across states using a representative sample. The three NAEP student achievement levels, defined below, highlight clearly and transparently what kids know and can do.

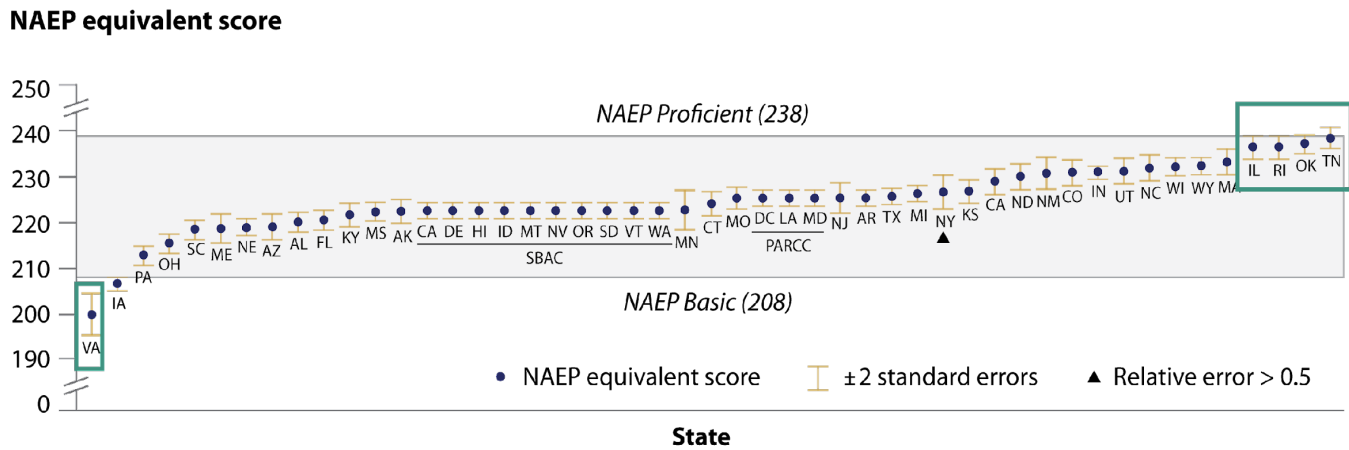
- **NAEP Basic:** Partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for performance at the NAEP Proficient level.
- **NAEP Proficient:** Demonstrated competency over challenging material, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real world situations, and analytical skills. NAEP Proficient does not signify being on grade level.
- **NAEP Advanced:** Superior performance beyond NAEP Proficient.

Since 2003, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has compared each state’s standard for proficient performance in reading and mathematics at grades 4 and 8 by mapping the state standards onto common scales from NAEP. In the most recent mapping study in 2019, Virginia’s definition for proficiency was among the lowest in the nation. As shown in the table below, Virginia had the lowest equivalent score in

<sup>4</sup> NAEP provides proficiency ratings, with proficiency defined as demonstrated competency over challenging material, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter.

Reading, placing the state’s proficiency bar at a level below *NAEP Basic*. During the presentation, the Work Group members reflected on Virginia’s rankings and the disconnect between the current state assessment system, communication, and NAEP’s expectations for students. See Appendix B for mapping study results for additional grades and subjects.

Figure 2: Virginia Proficiency Compared to NAEP, Grade 4 Reading<sup>5</sup>



The Work Group also identified that Virginia’s academic Standards of Learning are at the heart of the challenge. In Meeting 3, the Work Group dug into examples of Virginia Standards of Learning and compared them with examples from other states. These comparisons revealed to the group that weak learning standards translate into weak assessment items: without robust learning standards, the depth and rigor of assessment items also fall short. For example, the Work Group explored a Grade 3 Math standard in Virginia and compared to Massachusetts. This is illustrated in the table below. While both standards focus on mastering fractions:

- The Massachusetts standards require students to develop and demonstrate a deep understanding of the content.
- In comparison, Virginia’s standards test for specific skills rather than understanding.
- Additionally, Massachusetts standards provide teachers and students with more clarity regarding the skills and understanding needed to master the standard.

Figure 3: Example of Virginia and Massachusetts Grade 3 Math Standards

VA: 3.2 <sup>6</sup>	MA: 3.NF
Students <b>name and write</b> fractions and mixed numbers represented by a model; <b>represent</b> fractions and mixed numbers with models and symbols; and <b>compare</b> fractions having like and unlike denominators.	Students <b>develop an understanding</b> of fractions, beginning with unit fractions. Students <b>view</b> fractions in general as being built out of unit fractions, and they <b>use</b> fractions along with visual fraction models to represent parts of a whole. Students <b>understand</b> that the size of a fractional part is relative to the size of the whole. For example, $\frac{1}{2}$ of the paint in a small bucket could be less paint than $\frac{1}{3}$ of the paint in a larger bucket, but $\frac{1}{3}$ of a ribbon is longer than $\frac{1}{5}$ of the same ribbon because when the ribbon is divided into 3 equal parts, the parts are longer than when the ribbon is divided into 5 equal parts. Students are able to <b>use</b> fractions to represent numbers equal to, less than, and greater than one. They <b>solve problems</b> that involve comparing fractions by using visual fraction models and strategies based on noticing equal numerators or denominators.

Appendix D includes additional examples of Virginia Standards of Learning compared to other states.

5 2019 Report on State Proficiency Standards: Mapping State Proficiency Standards Onto the NAEP; Scales: Results From the 2019 NAEP Reading and Mathematics Assessments, Taslima Rahman, PhD, NCES, July 2021

6 Virginia’s [curriculum frameworks](#) serve as companion documents to the standards and further define the content knowledge, skills, and understandings that are measured by the standards.

*“[It’s] hard to improve if schools are meeting the minimum expectations no matter what; we do need to have higher expectations.” — Work Group Member*

*“Teachers... are very much driven by the standards. Having clear expectations of those standards... influences the teaching in the classroom. If the standards are more rigorous, the test is more rigorous, then the teaching will have to follow suit.” — Work Group Member*

Nationally, states like Massachusetts and Tennessee have set high expectations aligned with the rigorous expectations signaled by NAEP, and students rose to the challenge. For example, Massachusetts, through the transformational Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993, increased state funding, improved teacher evaluation, revised state standards, and built a broad coalition of support across party lines, among other reforms. As a result, Massachusetts was the first state to score “first” in all four tested grades and subjects on NAEP and remain at that level across multiple administrations of the test. They also narrowed the gap in achievement between Black and white students on NAEP and increased SAT scores for thirteen consecutive years. In another example, the state-level reforms in Tennessee also demonstrate how developing assessments based on rigorous standards lead to higher student expectations and improved learning outcomes. Tennessee increased academic standards and overhauled state assessments, and subsequently saw significant improvement in their students’ NAEP scores and overall proficiency. Tennessee’s gains over the last decade lead the nation for math. Work Group members agreed that raising the bar for academic standards, proficiency, and student expectations would yield positive outcomes for Virginia’s students and the overall assessment system.

### **Recommendations from the Work Group for Clearer and More Rigorous Standards**

*To ensure Virginia’s standards are clear and rigorous, Work Group members made the following recommendations:*

**1a. Review, clarify, and revise Virginia’s Standards of Learning.** Virginia started to revise its Standards of Learning over the next four years. The new standards should be clear and rigorous, and reflect both depth and breadth in math, ELA, history/social science, and science within and across grade levels. Standards should be sequenced in a coherent order, be explicit about expectations for mastery, and require students to demonstrate critical thinking. Virginia should include concrete examples of how students will demonstrate mastery, including incorporating the information currently reflected in curriculum frameworks, and seek input from business and higher education, in addition to K-12 educators and families.

Virginia has a clear plan to revise all Standards of Learning as referenced in the chart below. As recommended by the Work Group, the mathematics and History and Social Science Standards of Learning represent new, clear, and rigorous recommendations of the working group.

Figure 4: Timeline for Virginia Standards Adoption

<b>Content</b>	<b>Status of Board Action</b>
History and Social Science	April 2023, approved
Mathematics	August 2023, approved
Computer Science	January 2024
English Language Arts	March 2024
Science	January 2025

**1b. Update state assessments to reflect revised Standards of Learning.** State assessments must reflect revised standards to support and reinforce classroom instruction and measure student growth.

**1c. Ensure cut scores—meaning how many correct answers it takes to demonstrate proficiency—and growth measures signal true proficiency through a transparent, valid standard-setting process and reflect the rigor of nationally recognized assessments.** Virginia has started the work to develop new, revised Standards of Learning that are grounded in raising student expectations. As new assessments are developed, proficiency cut scores should align with the rigorous expectations set by the revised Standards of Learning, setting clear expectations for student achievement and growth on all statewide assessments. Virginia’s definition for proficiency must reflect rigorous expectations for students aligned to real-world expectations and best-in-the-nation expectations.

For this work, Virginia must ensure a routine and transparent process for developing performance level descriptors, setting performance standards, and establishing growth targets. Virginia should also do a crosswalk between NAEP and their standards to ensure that the assessment blueprints hold the same rigorous expectations as national assessments. Information on NAEP and Virginia’s performance are included in Appendix B as an example.

## Opportunity 2: More Rigorous Assessment Items

Rigorous items are essential to a high-quality assessment system. In Meetings 2 and 3, Work Group members learned from national leaders in state assessments and compared Virginia’s assessment items to those from other states. Currently, Virginia students have limited opportunities to demonstrate critical thinking through rigorous item types such as those that require writing or open-ended questions. As a result, Virginia assessments are not aligned to the knowledge and skills students will need to be successful in each subsequent grade and, ultimately, beyond graduation. **Based on this investigation, the Work Group identified an ideal future state for Virginia assessment items.**

Figure 5: Current and Future State for More Rigorous Assessment Items in Virginia

Current State	Future State
Students have limited opportunities to demonstrate critical thinking through rigorous item types (e.g., writing, constructed response). Assessments are not aligned to high-quality classroom instruction and real-world application.	With rigorous standards as the foundation, standards-aligned assessment items can reinforce strong instructional practices.  Strong assessment items allow students to engage with complex ideas, support their thinking with evidence, produce informed judgements, and demonstrate critical thinking and understanding through various item types including written responses.

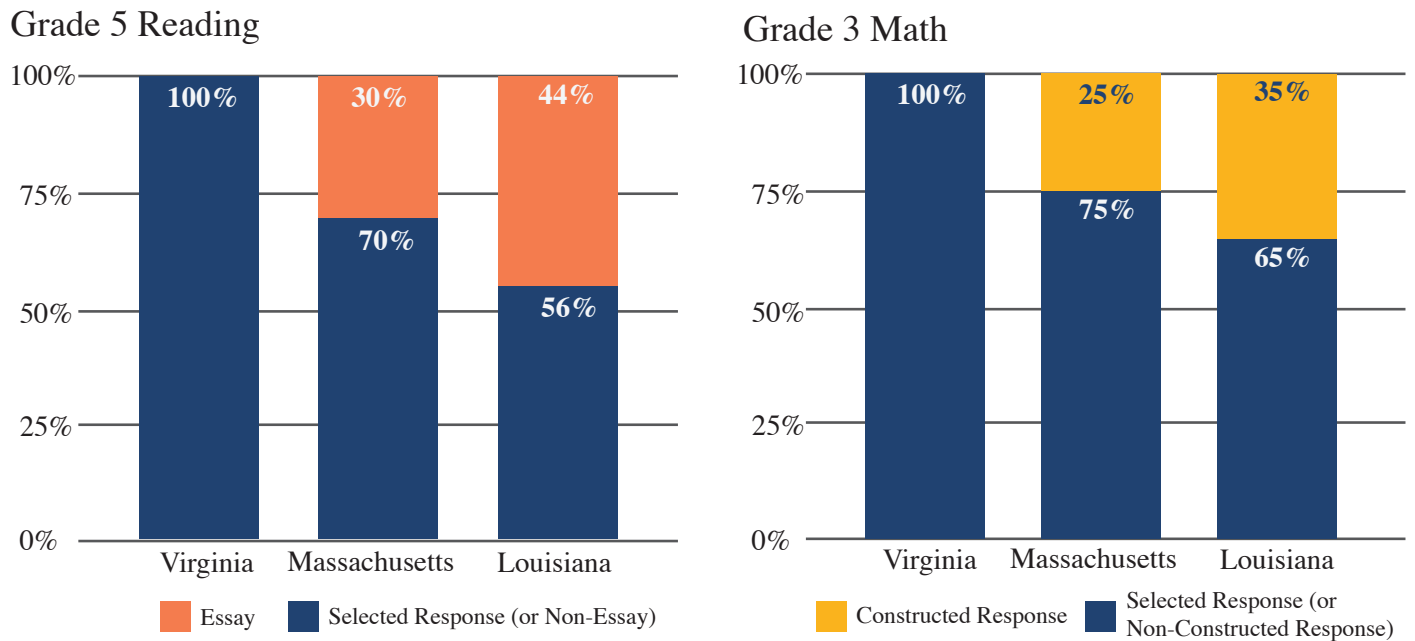
## Background and Context

The Work Group reviewed Virginia’s assessment blueprints and saw that students currently have limited opportunities to demonstrate critical thinking through rigorous item types. As the Work Group learned in Meetings 1, 2, and 3, Virginia’s assessments are almost entirely selected response questions, which require students to choose from a list of possible answers rather than writing their own.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> A new item type is being field tested in Spring 2023 as part of the SOL Reading assessment for grade 5, grade 8, and high school end-of-course that will require students to read a nonfiction passage based on science or history content, answer several multiple-choice items, and respond to a prompt.

In comparison, the Work Group explored other examples of state assessments that are made up of a mix of item types, including a large proportion of items requiring a written essay for Reading or constructed response for Math. Work Group members appreciated that constructed response questions are open-ended, requiring the student to construct and develop their own answer without the help of other suggestions or choices. These types of questions better reflect effective classroom instruction, allowing students to engage with complex ideas, support their thinking with evidence, produce independent thoughts, and demonstrate understanding through writing. The graphs below depict the distribution of assessment item types in Virginia compared to those in Massachusetts and Louisiana.

Figure 6. Examples of Test Blueprints in Virginia, Massachusetts, and Louisiana<sup>8</sup>



Work Group members also looked at specific examples of assessment items from Virginia’s SOL tests compared to other state’s assessments. The previous section included an example of a Virginia Grade 3 Math standard compared to a similar standard in Massachusetts. The chart below includes the same Grade 3 Math Standards and an associated assessment item from both states, which the Work Group reviewed in Meeting 3. Comparing these test items illustrated for the Work Group how the quality and rigor of standards are reflected in the quality and rigor of the state test. Virginia students answer a simple multiple choice question, while students in Massachusetts are required to demonstrate conceptual understanding through a multi-step constructed response question. As Work Group members explored assessment items, they emphasized that rigorous instruction is supported by rigorous standards and rigorous assessments reinforcing those standards.


*“Assessments should match the rigor of the standard. If we want teachers to instruct in a manner that engages students in higher cognitive level experiences then the summative assessment must assess on these higher levels. In practice, assessment drives instruction.”*  
 — Work Group Member

<sup>8</sup> Massachusetts Assessment Blueprint: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/tdd/math.html?section=testdesign>; Louisiana Assessment Blueprint: [https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/assessment-guidance/leap-2025-assessment-guide-for-grade-3-math.pdf?sfvrsn=f0f8891f\\_40](https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/assessment-guidance/leap-2025-assessment-guide-for-grade-3-math.pdf?sfvrsn=f0f8891f_40)

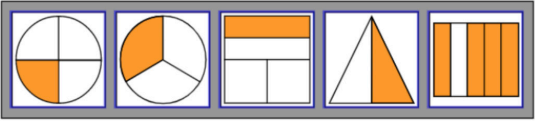



Figure 7: Virginia and Massachusetts Grade 3 Math Standards and Assessment Items

VA: 3.2	MA: 3.NF
<p>Students <b>name and write</b> fractions and mixed numbers represented by a model; <b>represent</b> fractions and mixed numbers with models and symbols; and <b>compare</b> fractions having like and unlike denominators.</p>	<p>Students <b>develop an understanding</b> of fractions, beginning with unit fractions. Students <b>view</b> fractions in general as being built out of unit fractions, and they <b>use</b> fractions along with visual fraction models to represent parts of a whole. Students <b>understand</b> that the size of a fractional part is relative to the size of the whole. For example, <math>\frac{1}{2}</math> of the paint in a small bucket could be less paint than <math>\frac{1}{3}</math> of the paint in a larger bucket, but <math>\frac{1}{3}</math> of a ribbon is longer than <math>\frac{1}{5}</math> of the same ribbon because when the ribbon is divided into 3 equal parts, the parts are longer than when the ribbon is divided into 5 equal parts. Students are able to <b>use</b> fractions to represent numbers equal to, less than, and greater than one. They <b>solve problems</b> that involve comparing fractions by using visual fraction models and strategies based on noticing equal numerators or denominators.</p>

 **Virginia - Selected Response**

Directions: Select the correct answers.  
Choose the two models that each appear to be exactly  $\frac{1}{4}$  shaded.



 **Massachusetts - Constructed Response**

**This question has three parts.**  
Kevin is cutting oranges and apples into smaller pieces.

**Part A**  
Kevin cuts each orange into fourths. He has already cut **12** fourths.

How many oranges has Kevin cut so far?  
Show or explain how you got your answer.

Enter your answer and your work or explanation in the space provided.

Source: [Virginia SOL Test Practice Items, Grade 3 Math, Item #7 of 33](#); [Massachusetts 2022 MCAS Computer-Based Practice Test, Session 2, Grade 3 Math, Item #8](#).

Figure 8: Virginia and Massachusetts Assessment Item Comparison

	Virginia	Massachusetts
Standards	Focused on specific, isolated skills that do not require conceptual understanding.	Require students to demonstrate conceptual understanding of fractions through visual models and demonstrate the ability to solve problems involving comparing fractions.
Assessment Items	Students answer one question, selecting from a list of possible answers.	Students construct a three-part, open-ended response illustrating their logic. Students must visualize the actions in the story problem and relate these actions to mathematical operations.

	Virginia	Massachusetts
Implications for Instruction	Teachers may focus on procedural understanding only and do so using only multiple choice or technology enhanced problems. They are not required to prioritize opportunities for students to demonstrate conceptual understanding, use fraction models, or explain their thought processes.	Teachers can prepare their students by ensuring students have a conceptual understanding of how fractions work and how to apply them in real life. Additionally, students must have opportunities to build procedural understanding.

While this is just one example, the Work Group explored multiple standards and test items to compare Virginia with Massachusetts. For additional examples, see Appendix D.

*Work Group Members noted that:*

- *Aligning assessments with the higher-order thinking activities found in classroom instruction can better reflect and support students' intellectual growth.*
- *Using a constructed response format provides insight into the student's thought process to help drive instruction (if provided in a timely manner) and prepares students for real world situations.*

In addition to more rigorous standards and tests, states like Louisiana and Massachusetts are leading the country in rigorous assessment practices, providing students with more meaningful and impactful learning opportunities. The Work Group had the opportunity to learn from leaders in these states, as well as from Texas. All three of these states are implementing forward-thinking assessments.

- Louisiana, which has led the country in adoption of high-quality instructional materials, allows students to demonstrate their learning through curriculum-anchored performance tasks without the barriers of unfamiliar text.<sup>9</sup>
- Both Louisiana and Texas allow students multiple opportunities to show content mastery and growth throughout the year.
- Massachusetts is engaging students with interactive science assessments where students engage in real-world problems.

Work Group members heard from these states because their assessment systems represent best practices and what is possible for state assessments nationally. Louisiana, Massachusetts, and Texas all built their innovations on a foundation of high expectations for students, and all three states' assessments include a variety of rigorous item types. These assessment innovations can inform the future of Virginia's assessment system. The chart below highlights key components of these state assessments.

Figure 9: Examples of State Assessment Innovations

State	Innovation Highlights	Implementation Status
Louisiana	<p>Louisiana’s Innovative Assessment includes several brief assessments throughout the year to measure students’ abilities to understand and build knowledge from their reading and express that knowledge and understanding in writing.</p> <p>These assessments reflect and are sequenced with knowledge-rich classroom instruction to provide a true integration of high-quality instruction, high-quality instructional materials, and assessment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Approved by the U.S. Department of Education under the Innovative Assessment Demonstration Authority (IADA)<sup>10</sup></li> <li>● Pilot for select districts and grades began in 2018 and is expanding to additional districts in the state</li> <li>● Expansion into additional districts and grades is ongoing</li> </ul>
Massachusetts	<p>Massachusetts’s summative assessment system, MCAS, is rooted in rigorous standards that set a high bar for students and teachers.</p> <p>Massachusetts’s new Innovative Science Assessments use real-world scenarios and simulations to put assessment items into context. The test focuses on fewer standards aligned to the curriculum and instruction and assesses deeper learning and focuses on the real life practice of science.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Approved under IADA</li> <li>● Assessments in development and field testing began in 2021</li> </ul>
Texas	<p>Texas recently completed a redesign of its State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) assessments, which are closely aligned to the curriculum requirements and standards (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS). This redesign:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Incorporates writing into all reading and language arts assessments,</li> <li>● Prioritizes cross-curricular content,</li> <li>● Adds new non-multiple-choice questions that are more like questions teachers ask in class, and</li> <li>● Moves to online assessments that provide a full suite of robust accommodations for students with specific learning needs.</li> </ul> <p>Texas is also piloting a through-course assessment, which is also aligned to TEKS. Students will take the test three times during a school year and performance on the through-year test will aim to produce a final score based on whether the students showed that they achieved proficiency for grade-level material, similar to the traditional end-of-year assessments.</p> <p>Both the pilot and these innovations are intended to ensure that statewide interim and summative testing not only measures but also enhances student learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Redesigned STAAR was implemented in Spring 2023</li> <li>● Bill passed in 2019 requiring through-course assessment pilot</li> <li>● Through-course assessment was piloted in districts starting in the 2022-23 school year</li> </ul>

Lastly, high quality assessments are accessible to all students. Work Group members read a summary of a report on assessment accessibility by the National Center on Educational Opportunity (NCEO) authored

<sup>10</sup> IADA is a demonstration authority under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that allows states to establish, operate, and evaluate an innovative assessment system.



by one of the Work Group’s national experts, Sheryl Lazarus.<sup>11</sup> They discussed opportunities for Virginia to leverage research and technology to improve accessibility for all students taking SOL tests and the VGA. For example, the NCEO report provides a checklist of universal features, designated features, and accommodations that can be used during item development to help increase access for students including students with disabilities and English learners. NCEO also indicated accessibility features and accommodations— including text-to-speech, read aloud, translations into other languages, and word prediction— that enable students who need them to access the assessment. The Commonwealth should establish which accessibility features and accommodations maintain the validity of Virginia’s assessments. Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities will continue to participate in the alternate assessment.

## **Recommendations from the Work Group for More Rigorous Assessment Items**

*To make Virginia’s assessment items more rigorous, Work Group members made the following recommendations:*

**2a. Assessments should go beyond selected response questions.** Development of more rigorous and clear standards will necessitate more rigorous assessment items. Virginia’s assessments should provide various open-ended formats for students to respond to questions, including:

- Requiring writing on assessments, where appropriate and in alignment with the Standards of Learning;
- Ensuring that constructed response questions align with the standards required for that grade; and
- Maximizing the value of every assessment item by including questions that provide the maximum information on a student’s gaps in understanding without adding length to the assessments.
  - *For example: In leading states, an item assesses a student’s mastery of a specific standard, where each incorrect answer signals a specific conceptual misunderstanding within that standard or on a related/previous standard. Incorrect answers across multiple items can be pooled to create a picture of the likely gap in a student’s learning.*

**2b. Maintain rigor while ensuring accessibility for all students.** While students with significant cognitive disabilities will continue to participate in the alternate assessment, all other students will participate in the state’s summative and interim assessments. Virginia should ensure any new assessments continue to follow best practices in accessibility for students, including the continued use of a universal design approach. Through this process, Virginia should maintain rigor while ensuring accessibility to rigorous state assessments for all students.<sup>12</sup>

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11 <https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOReport431.pdf>

12 <https://nceo.info/Assessments/aa-aas/accessibility-and-accommodations>

### Opportunity 3: More Timely, Clear, and Actionable Reporting

Work Group members emphasized the need for clear, actionable reporting on student achievement and growth. Starting in Meeting 1, the Work Group explored Virginia’s current assessment reporting practices, noting that the distribution of student assessment reports currently varies by division and school, and most assessment reports are not user-friendly. Best practices from national experts like Learning Heroes and EdNavigator suggest families should be able to understand and act on their student’s results, and teachers need training to leverage assessment results to inform instruction and support individual student learning to improve achievement. **Based on this information, the Work Group identified challenges in the current state and the ideal future state.**

Figure 10: Current and Future State for More Timely, Clear, and Actionable Reporting in Virginia

Current State	Future State
Assessment reports, though detailed, are not user-friendly. Teachers and families do not have access to clear, actionable information. Teachers are not fully equipped to use results to inform instruction and to support individual students. Families are not supported to understand and act on their student’s assessment results to support continuous improvement.	Parents, teachers, and school leaders understand—and take action—on students’ assessment results. The state provides score reports targeted to specific user groups to provide a clear picture of how students are doing, what students need, and how parents and teachers can help their student(s) master grade-level standards.  The assessment provides information that can directly communicate growth and achievement so that stakeholders can see how students are moving towards and achieving mastery. Additional transparency on student and school performance is accomplished through a revised accountability system that clearly reports school performance and progress based on the new assessment.

#### Background and Context

As discussed in several Work Group meetings, Virginia’s assessment reports are very detailed but not necessarily actionable for families and educators. Both the SOL test and VGA score reports fail to provide actionable data. Actionable data allows families, teachers, and school leaders to understand where their students are relative to grade-level standards, know how much progress their student has made, and be equipped with clear next steps for how to support their students.

*“Parents are just flummoxed by the reports they get, particularly on the through-year assessments.” - Work Group Member*

Currently, Virginia provides Student Detail by Question (SDBQ) reports to families and educators to capture each student’s results on the SOL tests. Notably, most SOL test results are available to divisions within 24 hours of student participation; however, divisions often do not provide school leaders, teachers, and families access to these results. In addition to information on the student’s overall performance on the assessment, the SDBQ report includes a description of each of the test items the student was administered as well as the level of difficulty of the item (low, medium, or high) and whether the student answered the item correctly or not. The reports do not include information about the meaning behind the scores and levels and lack information about what to do next. Additionally, educators in the Work Group shared that they do not always have ready access to score reports. Work Group members highlighted that this limits the teacher’s ability to shift instruction in the classroom, and families have a hard time understanding the impact to their child’s long term success and how to best support their student. An example SDBQ report is shown below.



plans to collect best practices from the pilot to assist and train all school divisions across the state to use personalized learning plans through effective communication and collaboration with parents.<sup>15</sup>

Work Group members agreed that educators, parents, and students all benefit from clear and actionable reporting of assessment results, and that teachers, in particular, benefit from reporting that directly connects assessment results to the standards. For example, as the Work Group learned in Meeting 2, Texas releases test questions from its state assessment, called STAAR, annually on its website, including how each item assesses a particular standard.<sup>16</sup> In comparison, Virginia does not regularly release test questions nor connect released items to specific standards. Texas also provides parents with a student report card and access to each test question on their online parent portal and allows families to see which questions their student missed before the student retakes the assessment.<sup>17</sup>

Leading national organizations Learning Heroes and EdNavigator recommend best practices for parent-facing reporting, which Work Group members referenced as a framework for evaluating Virginia’s reporting for families.<sup>18,19</sup> An example of a parent-facing report developed by Learning Heroes in conjunction with Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) is included in Appendix E. The following table highlights how Virginia’s current family assessment report fares against these best practices. While VVAAS and Bridging the Gap are promising initiatives, Virginia’s current SDBQ reports fall short on five of the six categories. A check indicates Virginia currently meets the best practice and an X indicates Virginia does not.

Figure 12: Evaluation of Virginia’s Student Detail by Question (SDBQ) Reports based on Learning Heroes and EdNavigators Best Practices for Assessment Reporting to Families

Virginia SDBQ Status	Learning Heroes and EdNavigators Best Practices for Assessment Reporting to Families
✗	<b>Written for a Specific Audience:</b> Focuses on what matters most for the intended audience. For example, reports for parents and guardians include clear information on a student’s performance—and how to encourage learning and growth.
✗	<b>Designed to Level Set:</b> Provides framing that explains the goals of the report, what the assessment is, and why students take it. Includes definitions of technical terms like “achievement” and “growth.”
✓	<b>Easy to Navigate:</b> Student results are broken down by subject and relevant categories. Charts and graphs are used to illustrate trends and comparisons.
✗	<b>Clearly Connected to Achievement:</b> For interim assessments in particular, illustrates whether a student is on track to perform well on end-of-year summative assessments so they can get a clear sense of how well a student is moving toward achieving bigger goals, like being ready for college.
✗	<b>Actionable:</b> Includes a list of questions and suggestions to support student growth.
✗	<b>Accessible:</b> Allows easy access to the report through availability to view on the computer, mobile device, or through a printed version. The reports should also be provided in multiple languages, as needed.

15 <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/instructional-resources-support/bridging-the-gap>

16 <https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/testing/staar/staar-released-test-questions>

17 [https://www.texasassessment.gov/-/media/project/client-portals/texas/pdf/report-cards/staar/english/ets\\_texas\\_sample\\_src\\_grade5\\_2021\\_english.pdf](https://www.texasassessment.gov/-/media/project/client-portals/texas/pdf/report-cards/staar/english/ets_texas_sample_src_grade5_2021_english.pdf)

18 <https://www.nwea.org/blog/2019/sharing-assessment-data-with-parents-just-got-simpler/>

19 <https://medium.com/ednavigator/clearing-up-the-muddle-ad8d329d042a>

*“Although assessment reports are comprehensive, their complexity can hinder comprehension. It is essential for educators and families to have access to clear, actionable insights derived from student test results... teachers should receive targeted training to effectively utilize assessment data.” - Work Group Member*

## **Recommendations from the Work Group for More Timely, Clear, and Actionable Reporting**

*To make assessment reporting more timely, clear, and actionable, the Work Group members made the following recommendations:*

**3a. Prioritize timely data for teachers and families.** This year, the Virginia General Assembly proposed a parent portal ([House Bill 1629](#)) that would provide students and families with access to results from the summative assessments and interim assessments within 45 days of a state assessment window closing. A work group is currently developing recommendations for the General Assembly on criteria and components of a parent data portal. Interim assessments are most actionable when their results are available as close to administration as possible. Virginia should also ensure timely, actionable data for educators overall by ensuring that educators can easily access both their prior year and incoming students’ results.

The assessment system should provide information that can directly inform instructional planning and individualized supports for student growth, removing the guesswork so teachers know what to do next. This should include regular (i.e., annual) releases of sample test items reflecting the current assessment and connecting items to standards. The assessment system should also feed into an accountability system that provides the school leaders and educators, as well as the public, with clear information on how schools are supporting student learning through achievement and growth measures.

**3b. Set assessment windows that maximize learning time.** Assessments are most actionable when their delivery maximizes learning time. Interim assessments should align to a suggested pacing guide to ensure educators can align and integrate the assessments with instruction. Virginia should prioritize learning time by implementing summative assessments near the end of the school year and eliminating unnecessary retesting.

**3c. Differentiate reports by audience.** Virginia should intentionally design score reports for specific user groups, including students, families, teachers, school leaders. To increase their usability, score reports should include suggested actions and link to resources for each report user to support their student. Reports should include division and state comparisons where and when appropriate. Suggested actions and linked resources must connect back to the curricula, though this will depend on local curricular choices. Examples of sample parent reports can be found in Appendix E.

**3d. Support educators through training on using state assessment results to inform instruction.**

Educators need comprehensive training to deepen their understanding of assessment results and how to translate them into action. Training should include tools and strategies to effectively partner with families, ensuring the unique needs of each student are met.

*“Providing parents with access to a portal where they can view their child’s assessment results and suggested topics to discuss with teachers during parent-teacher conferences. Returning assessment results to educators within a week or two of the test, while still trying to maintain a balance with scoring open-ended/constructed response questions.” - Work Group Member*



## Opportunity 4: Improved System Coherence

Virginia students and teachers navigate a web of assessments signaling different – and sometimes conflicting – expectations. Students take multiple assessments, including the SOL tests and VGA required by the state, as well as other assessments required by divisions or schools. Throughout the five meetings, Work Group members gained consensus around a common goal for the assessment system; students and educators deserve a coherent system of assessments that minimizes test time and maximizes instructional opportunities. **In order to create a more coherent system of assessments, the Work Group identified the current state of system coherence and a future state for a stronger, more aligned system of assessments as outlined in the chart below.**

Figure 13. Current and Future State for Improved System Coherence in Virginia

Current State	Future State
School divisions are adding their own assessments on top of the summative and interim assessments required by the state. Students and teachers must navigate a web of assessments signaling different – and sometimes conflicting – expectations for student learning, which results in duplicative and time consuming testing.	Students and educators experience a coherent and streamlined system - meaning all assessments signal clear expectations for students at all proficiency levels and inform strong instructional practices.  The assessment system includes actionable achievement and growth data that provides school leaders and educators with useful information on how students are progressing and feeds into a clear accountability system.

*“[I] hope we could build an assessment program that is better reflective of students’ performance where they are, where we expect them to go” — Work Group Member*

### Background and Context

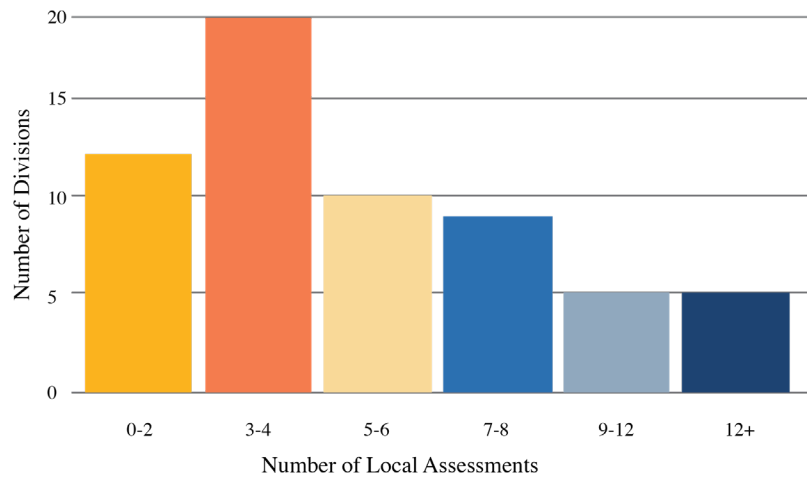
Virginia currently administers two state-wide assessments, the SOL test and the VGA. Divisions and schools also administer additional assessments. A survey of divisions in Virginia showed divisions use a range of locally-created and vendor-supplied assessments. The survey highlighted that state-required assessments comprise only a fraction of the assessments students take in Virginia.

*“I think we can do better with the growth assessments...There are so few questions it is hard to determine what a student or group of students may need in the way of support...Then the data could be used to remediate.” — Work Group Member*

Findings shown in the graph on the next page indicate most divisions (70%) are implementing assessments selected by the division, in addition to the SOL and VGA. Almost half of those divisions (29 of 58) administer five or more local assessments. Educators noted that local assessments provide actionable information on student learning that they don’t get from state assessments.

Work Group members emphasized the VGA does not meet the needs of their teachers, resulting in an unnecessary burden for educators and overtesting for students. VGA’s fall and winter tests are made up of items from the SOL tests and, in the most recent iteration, assess all standards. This means students are assessed on standards that have not yet been taught. Additionally, the VGA score reports include only an overall score and no indication of how the student is doing compared to their peers.

Figure 14. Number of Local Assessments in Virginia by Division



### Recommendations from the Work Group for Improved System Coherence

*To improve coherence across Virginia’s assessment system, the Work Group identified the following recommendations:*

**4a. Ensure the assessment system measures proficiency and student growth.** Virginia should develop an assessment system that provides educators and school leaders with the actionable data they need to understand how students are progressing from one year to the next. The assessment system should signal clear and rigorous benchmarks for student proficiency at all grade levels, especially 4th and 8th grade where NAEP has set a strong national expectation for student proficiency. The assessment should also inform strong instructional practices for students at all proficiency levels, including students who have not yet reached proficiency and those performing at the highest achievement levels.

**4b. Support divisions in administering high-quality, rigorous interim assessments.** The VGA currently measures all standards in each test administration in order to measure growth throughout the year. Interim assessments are intended to provide teachers, schools, and families with information on student progress and best inform instruction when aligned to curriculum and pacing guides. Divisions should have access to interim assessments that are aligned to the Standards of Learning to ensure actionable, relevant information that supports instruction.

**4c. Measure student learning before third grade in both literacy and numeracy.** Virginia’s SOL tests begin in third grade and continue through eighth grade and high school. Virginia also implements the PALS literacy screener (“VALLSS” beginning in 2024-25) beginning in kindergarten. Virginia should ensure students are also assessed in numeracy beginning in kindergarten to provide educators earlier, actionable information on student learning and to improve coherence across the assessment system, providing checkpoints from K-3 to 4-8 to high school.

**4d. Provide school division support in developing coherent, aligned, assessment calendars to ensure assessment data is actionable.** Virginia should support the development of aligned assessment calendars, ensuring educators in making informed decisions about classroom instruction based on timely and meaningful data.

## Opportunity 5: Innovative Assessment Design

Virginia must align its assessment system with best practices and rigorous expectations for students. Virginia has an opportunity to lead the nation, investing in innovative assessments that put student learning first. Work Group members learned from states implementing innovative assessments in Meeting 2. In Meeting 4, they brainstormed what they would want to see in Virginia’s assessment system if they could wave a magic wand. **The chart below illustrates the current and ideal future state for innovative assessment design as imagined by the Work Group.**

Figure 15: Current and Future State for Innovative Assessment Design in Virginia

Current State	Future State
Virginia’s assessment system has fallen behind those of leading states. State assessments have changed minimally even with significant evolution in technology, instructional content and materials, and best practices in instruction.	State policies and practices promote innovative competency-based assessment design, making Virginia a national leader. Assessments of student mastery of content and skills happen as standards are taught and allow students to demonstrate mastery and accelerate at a personalized pace.

### Background and Context

As noted in “*Our Commitment to Virginians*,” despite the early 2000s decision to transition from paper-and-pencil multiple choice tests to online assessments intended to require students to apply content knowledge, Virginia’s assessments have not continued to develop or adapt with the times and new technology.

The Work Group read research on comprehensive state assessment systems emphasizing that classroom, curriculum, and instruction should be aligned, and that state assessments are a key lever for influencing classroom instruction.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, through the Work Group’s exploration of innovative assessments in Massachusetts, Louisiana, and Texas, as well as their individual experiences, members identified key opportunities to consider evolving Virginia’s assessments.

*“Massachusetts has done a good job of designing simulations that require students to utilize higher level thinking. This would have a positive impact on the instruction in Virginia.” — Work Group Member*

### Recommendations from the Work Group for Innovative Assessment Design

***In order to further Virginia’s innovative assessment design, the Work Group made the following recommendations:***

**5a. Plan for future innovation.** Virginia must first align its assessment system with best practices and rigorous expectations for students. Going forward, Virginia has an opportunity to lead the nation, investing in an innovative assessment system that puts student learning and mastery first.

Some of the ideas explored by the Work Group include assessments that:

- Evaluate student mastery and competency through an integrated approach allowing students to demonstrate mastery and jump ahead in content;
- Include performance tasks or project-based assessments as part of an assessment system that allows multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate what they know;
- Are interactive, engaging, and reflective of real-world scenarios, including being interdisciplinary;



- Use technology, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), to improve test accessibility, allow for faster scoring of constructed response questions, and lower costs for high quality assessments;
- Use a high-stakes final, in lieu of a state standardized test, for students that is a proportion of their course grade;
- Leverage best practice accommodations and accessibility features, and continue to evolve the state’s alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities;
- Connect directly to classroom instruction and curriculum; and,
- Minimize testing time and disruption with tests that happen throughout the year as part of the learning process.

In addition to any innovative statewide changes, individual school divisions may also decide to pursue these opportunities for innovation. Some innovations may require Virginia to seek a federal waiver, similar to the recent actions of both Montana and Missouri.<sup>21 22</sup>

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21 <https://www.k12dive.com/news/montana-federal-waiver-standardized-summative-assessment-through-year-assessment-accountability/690644/>

22 <https://missouriindependent.com/2023/08/16/missouri-education-board-approves-innovation-waivers-for-districts-to-opt-out-of-state-tests/>

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The Work Group emphasized throughout its meetings the importance of a timely transition process that provides sufficient input from and support for educators, families, and students. As noted in the Framework for Excellence in Education, strong alignment across rigorous standards, assessment, and accountability leads to high expectations for students. The transition first must be grounded in rigorous standards before a high-quality assessment or accountability systems are created. This section outlines key considerations in the transition process, including the timeline, budget, and legislative or regulatory considerations for creating the Framework for Excellence in Education.

### Transition Timeline Considerations

HB 585 calls for Virginia to pilot and implement any new assessments prior to the 2027-2028 school year. In order to transition to revised standards and an aligned assessment system on that timeline, Virginia will follow the process summarized below.

1. The Virginia Board of Education will adopt new clear and rigorous standards over the next four years, as part of the required standards review process that takes place on a seven-year cycle. As noted earlier in the report, the table below illustrates the planned timeline for Virginia to adopt new standards.

Figure 16. Timeline for Virginia Standards Adoption

Content	State of Board Action
History and Social Science	April 2023, approved
Mathematics	August 2023, approved
Computer Science	January 2024
English Language Arts	March 2024
Science	January 2025

2. The VDOE will seek an assessment vendor or vendors to design, pilot, and administer aligned, rigorous assessments aligned to the recommendations in this report. The vendor(s) will build a comprehensive bank of assessment items, representative of the full range of knowledge of skills to be assessed. Educators need the opportunity to see the standards, implement the standards, and assess the standards.
3. All new assessments can be fully operational in the year following the Board's adoption of new standards to ensure alignment between standards and the test. This will require full support and resources for educators to transition to the new expectations and time to transition, including all standards and related materials made available prior to the school year in which they will be assessed.

### Funding Considerations

Work Groups members noted that a new assessment will require additional funding to design, build, and implement, including providing support for educators, families, and students in the transition. A 2016 report indicated that Virginia ranks among the lowest per-pupil spending on their main grade 3-8 state assessment contracts in the nation, allocating only \$18 per-pupil - significantly below the national average of \$27 per-pupil.<sup>23</sup> Other assessment systems, such as the multi-state consortia Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), cost closer to

23 [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/11\\_assessment\\_chingos\\_final\\_new.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/11_assessment_chingos_final_new.pdf)

\$25 per student to implement new assessment systems.<sup>24 25</sup>

One of the biggest drivers in cost when transitioning to a new assessment is developing new items. For example, New Jersey spent about \$22.8 million in the first year for the development and administration of the PARCC assessment, nearly all being spent on the development of the assessment.<sup>26</sup> In another example, Tennessee spent over \$37.6 million in 2018-2019 on the development and administration of their assessment, \$9 million of which was spent under the ETS contract for developing test items and test forms.<sup>27</sup>

In comparison, Virginia has allocated \$25.3 million in its most recent state appropriation to support the costs of contracts for test development, administration, scoring, and reporting as well as other program-related costs of the Standards of Learning testing program in the 2023-2024 school year approximately.<sup>28</sup> This represents approximately 1% of Virginia's total K-12 education spending. Virginia may need an additional appropriation in order to create a robust bank of rigorous and accessible items, transparently release those items on a regular basis so teachers know what is on the assessment, and deliver comprehensive, actionable, and timely results with sufficient transition support for educators. Virginia should also seek an assessment vendor that has a bank of rigorous and high-quality test items to leverage, lowering the overall cost when designing a new assessment.

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24 [https://www.nj.com/education/2015/03/parcc\\_exams\\_following\\_the\\_money\\_behind\\_njs\\_costlie.html#:~:text=The%20state's%20education%20department%20originally,to%20%2427%20million%20this%20year.](https://www.nj.com/education/2015/03/parcc_exams_following_the_money_behind_njs_costlie.html#:~:text=The%20state's%20education%20department%20originally,to%20%2427%20million%20this%20year.)

25 <https://www.mukilteoschools.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=524&dataid=2309&FileName=Smarter-Balanced-FAQs-12-1-14.pdf>

26 <https://www.njspotlightnews.org/2015/03/15-03-09-doing-the-math-parcc-tests-will-cost-state-10-percent-more-than-before/>

27 <https://comptroller.tn.gov/content/dam/cot/orea/advanced-search/2020/TNReadyBrief.pdf>

28 Virginia also received \$8,290,321 in 2022 in federal funds as part of federal State Assessment Formula Grants.

## Legislative and Regulatory Considerations

To fully realize the vision articulated in this report, Virginia will require changes to current statute and policy. The specific laws summarized below, if unchanged, will prevent full implementation of the recommendations in this report and the Work Group’s vision for the future of Virginia’s assessment system. The General Assembly should revise or strike the laws in the chart below.

Figure 17. Legislative Considerations

Statute/ Policy	Summary	Considerations
<p>Statute: §§ 22.1-253.13:3</p> <p>Regulation: 8VAC20-131-110<sup>29</sup> &amp; 8VAC20-131-30<sup>30</sup></p>	<p>Statute 22.1-253.13:3 states that students in grades 3 through 8 should receive recovery credit if the student performs below grade level on an SOL assessment in English reading or mathematics, receives remediation, and subsequently retakes and performs at or above grade level on such an assessment, including any such student who subsequently retakes such an assessment on an expedited basis.</p> <p>Regulations 8VAC20-131-110 and 8VAC20-131-30 name which students are eligible for expedited retesting. Aligned to the law and policy, guidance from the VDOE provides the following criteria to determine the eligibility of a student for an expedited retake of SOL tests. Students must have a passing grade in the class associated with the test and meet one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Student failed the test by a narrow margin as defined by a scaled score of 375-399; or</li> <li>● Failed the test with a scaled score below 375; and <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Had a documented extenuating circumstance<sup>31</sup> that prevented him/her from performing at the expected level; and/or</li> <li>○ There was a significant discrepancy between the student’s SOL test score and his/her typical academic performance<sup>32</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Additionally, students’ scores resulting from expedited retakes are considered in calculating school accreditation/ accountability determinations.</p>	<p>As a result of the laws, regulations, and related guidance from the VDOE on expedited retesting, students spend more time than necessary taking and retaking tests. Retesting requirements also limit Virginia’s flexibility around testing windows and requires results to be available prior to the end of the school year. This limits the state’s ability to include open-ended test items that may take somewhat longer to accurately score.</p> <p>Recommendations in this report regarding timely reporting support reconsidering expedited retesting requirements and timelines for tests that are not used for graduation. Students who need to pass a test for graduation and previously failed by a small margin should have the opportunity to retake the test immediately without having to wait for the next test administration. In other circumstances, Virginia should seek to minimize unnecessary retesting, allowing retesting to happen over the summer or not at all.</p>
<p>Statute: § 22.1-253.13:3.</p>	<p>Requires the implementation of a “through-year growth assessment” for Math and Reading in grades 3 through 8 using computer-adaptive technology. Under this legislation, the through-year growth assessment system shall include at least one beginning-of-year, one mid-year, and one end-of-year assessment in order to provide individual student growth scores over the course of the school year. Furthermore, the total time for all such assessments shall not exceed 150% of the time scheduled for a single end-of-year proficiency assessment.<sup>33</sup></p>	<p>The Virginia Growth Assessment (VGA) was developed in response to this law. However, the current design of the VGA fails to align to this report’s recommendations for a coherent system of assessments.</p>

*Additional legislation related to the recommendations is included in Appendix G.*

29 <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter131/section110/>

30 <https://www.staffordschools.net/cms/lib/VA01818723/Centricity/Domain/4377/soa-guidance-document.pdf>

31 An extenuating circumstance is defined as an unusual and uncontrollable event that negatively impacted a student’s test performance.

32 Evidence that the SOL test score is significantly lower than expected based on the student’s typical level of achievement may be used to justify retesting.

33 <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/22.1-253.13:3/>

Additionally, student achievement and growth, as measured on state assessments, make up a key component of the state's accountability system to evaluate school quality. As standards and assessments are revised, Virginia will need to revisit its state accountability system as defined in law and policy.

### **Implementation Recommendations**

The HB 585 Future of Assessment Work Group recommends the following actions:

- The Work Group recommends that Virginia's General Assembly review and revise legislation on educational assessments in Virginia to ensure alignment with these recommendations and to sufficiently approve funding for a new assessment system.
- The Work Group recommends that the Virginia State Board of Education use these recommendations as they advise the Virginia Department of Education on assessment matters and finalize the proficiency levels for the new assessment system.
- The Work Group recommends that the Virginia Department of Education use these recommendations as they move forward with procuring new assessments to ensure the new assessment system is rigorous and effectively measures student mastery.

## WORK GROUP MEETINGS

The Work Group met a total of five times over several months to examine data and trends around student performance in Virginia, identify challenges within Virginia’s assessment system and ultimately make recommendations. The table below summarizes the Work Group meetings. All meetings were conducted virtually except for meeting 4.

Figure 18: Work Group Meeting Series Overview

Meeting	Summary
<a href="#"><u>Meeting 1</u></a> March 30, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reviewed the purpose of the Work Group and Virginia’s goals for the future of the state assessment system</li> <li>● Discussed Virginia’s current assessment system, with a presentation by Shelley Loving-Ryder, Assistant Superintendent for the Department of Student Assessment, Accountability, and ESEA Programs, Department of Education</li> <li>● Began to define challenges with the current assessment system</li> </ul>
<a href="#"><u>Meeting 2</u></a> April 27, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Refined the draft challenges named in Meeting 1</li> <li>● Reviewed the national landscape and The Nation’s Report Card and key considerations for Virginia with Leslie Muldoon, Executive Director of the National Assessment Governing Board that administers NAEP</li> <li>● Discussed alternative and innovative approaches to assessment items with leading experts from Louisiana (<a href="#"><u>Louisiana Believes</u></a>), Massachusetts (<a href="#"><u>Massachusetts Innovative Science Assessment</u></a>), and Texas (<a href="#"><u>EdFirst Case Study</u></a> and <a href="#"><u>STAAR Redesign</u></a>)               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Dana Talley: Chief Academic Officer, Lincoln Parish Schools. Formerly Louisiana Department of Education</li> <li>○ Iris Tian: Associate Commissioner, Texas Education Agency</li> <li>○ Rob Curtin: Chief Officer for Data, Assessment, and Accountability, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<a href="#"><u>Meeting 3</u></a> May 25, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Revisited Guiding Principles with Superintendent Lisa Coons</li> <li>● Examined test items and standards from Virginia’s assessments and compared them to items from other state assessments</li> <li>● Considered examples of open-ended questions, long-form writing, and other tasks</li> <li>● Reviewed system coherence through the results of a division assessment survey, showing that most divisions administer other tests in addition to state-mandated assessments</li> </ul>
<a href="#"><u>Meeting 4</u></a> July 27, 2023 (In-person)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reviewed and built consensus around draft recommendations for the future of Virginia assessments, reflecting on the content and feedback shared in previous meetings</li> <li>● Reflected on best practices for accessible assessments and overall effectiveness of assessments for students with disabilities</li> <li>● Brainstormed additional opportunities for innovation</li> </ul>
<b>Meeting 5</b> September 8, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Finalized recommendations for Virginia’s assessment system</li> <li>● Discussed a plan for implementation by 2027-28 and other implementation considerations, including the legislative and regulatory changes</li> </ul>

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A. Work Group Members

Name	Title
Aimee Guidera	Virginia Secretary of Education
Lisa Coons	Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction
Jenna Alexander	President, Virginia Parent Teacher Association
Rebekah Amato	Teacher, Clover Hill High School in Chesterfield (Region I)
Kristen Amundson	Former Executive Director of NASBE (2013-2019); Former member Virginia House of Delegates; Former member of Fairfax County School Board.
Wendy Chandler	Division Director of Testing, Augusta County Schools (Region V)
Grace Creasey	State Board of Education Member; Executive Director, Virginia Council for Private Education
Karen Dickenson	Principal, St. Paul Elementary, Wise County Schools (Region VII)
Matt Hurt	Director, Comprehensive Instructional Program (CIP)
Tracy Lagatta	Division Director of Testing, Virginia Beach City Schools (Region II)
Sheryl Lazarus	Director, National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO)
Amy McClure	Southern Regional Chair, VSBA
Amber Northern	State Board of Education Member; VP for Research, Fordham Institute
Susan Patrick	Former President & CEO, Aurora Institute/VALIN National Partner
Alan Seibert	State Board of Education Member; Former Salem City Schools Superintendent; Constituent Services and Government Relations Officer of Roanoke City Public Schools
James Soltis	Assistant Superintendent, Salem City Schools (Region VI)
Kristy Somerville-Midgett	Superintendent, Brunswick County Public Schools; VASS Representative (Region VIII)
Thomas Taylor	Superintendent, Stafford County Public Schools (Region III)
Mychael Willon	Vice Chair, SEEAC (Parent Representative)



## Appendix B. Virginia’s Honesty Gap: Background on Proficiency Rates and Standards

In May 2022, the VDOE released a report titled “*Our Commitment to Virginians*,” highlighting the Commonwealth’s performance on statewide and national education measures. This Appendix provides a summary of key findings from the report.

### Results Declining Faster than National Trends

Virginia’s public schools have been long regarded as among the best in the nation. The Commonwealth includes schools and divisions with national reputations for excellence. Historically, students in the Commonwealth consistently outperformed their counterparts in national assessments, including on the Nation’s Report Card, or the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and the SAT and ACT college admissions tests.<sup>34, 35</sup> However, this has been changing in recent years. Virginia’s reputation and high-average performance masks the widening achievement gaps among students and a recent slip in comparison with other states on a range of academic achievement measures.

Scores over the past five years on NAEP illustrate a downward trend after 20 years of high marks for Virginia’s students. On the most recent NAEP release in 2022, the first release since the COVID-19 pandemic began, Virginia’s results showed a sharp decline in performance—even sharper than the rest of the nation.<sup>36</sup> For example:

- Grade 4 performance declined 2 times more than the national average in Math and 3 times more in Reading;
- Grade 8 Reading fell below 1998 performance levels;
- Grade 8 Math nearly fell to 2000 performance levels; and
- Results for Virginia’s Black, Hispanic, and students eligible for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) showed no improvement in any grade or subject since 2000, with gaps in performance widening for some of these subgroups.<sup>37</sup>

The graphs below illustrate the decline in Grade 4 Reading and Math achievement in Virginia compared to the national average, according to NAEP.

Figure 1. Virginia Achievement on NAEP Grade 4 Reading Compared with National Average

AVERAGE SCORES FOR STATE/JURISDICTION AND THE NATION (PUBLIC)

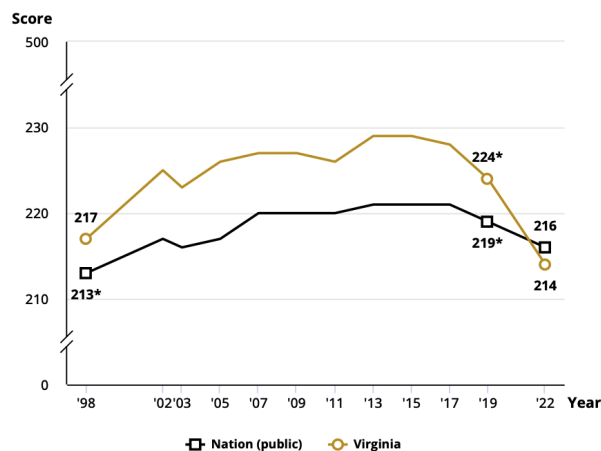
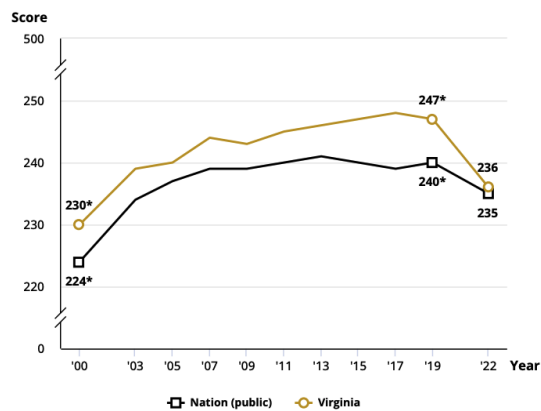


Figure 2: Virginia Achievement on NAEP Grade 4 Math Compared with National Average

AVERAGE SCORES FOR STATE/JURISDICTION AND THE NATION (PUBLIC)



\* Significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) from 2022. Significance tests were performed using unrounded numbers.

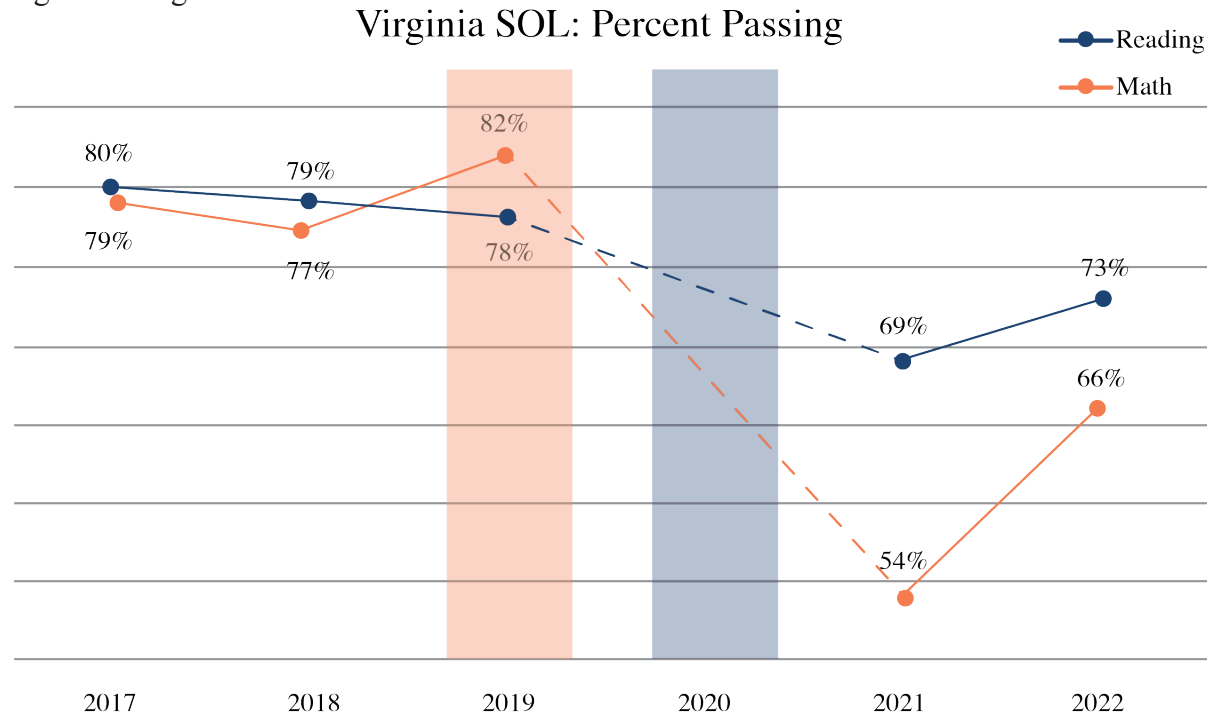
34 <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subject/publications/stt2022/pdf/2023011VA8.pdf>  
 35 <https://www.education.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/secretary-of-education/pdf/Our-Commitment-to-Virginians.pdf>  
 36 <https://watershed-advisors.com/resources/naep-2022-analysis/>  
 37 [https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/dashboards/achievement\\_gaps.aspx](https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/dashboards/achievement_gaps.aspx)



## Learning Loss Exacerbated by the Pandemic

Virginia’s achievement results signal a downward trend across grades and subjects—a decline that began before the pandemic and was only exacerbated by pandemic-related school closures. In addition to the downward trend in NAEP results, student performance has also declined on the state’s Standards of Learning (SOL) tests since 2017. Following the pandemic, scores declined on average 5 percentage points in Reading and 16 percentage points in Math from 2019 to 2022. For example, 61% of third graders demonstrated proficiency on SOL Reading tests in 2021, compared with 71% before the pandemic. These declines were even wider for Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students.<sup>38</sup> Furthering this challenge, Virginia’s State Board lowered the standard for proficiency on the Math and Reading SOL tests in 2019 and 2020, respectively. These trends are illustrated in the graph below.

Figure 3: Virginia Grade 3-8 SOL Achievement Over Time



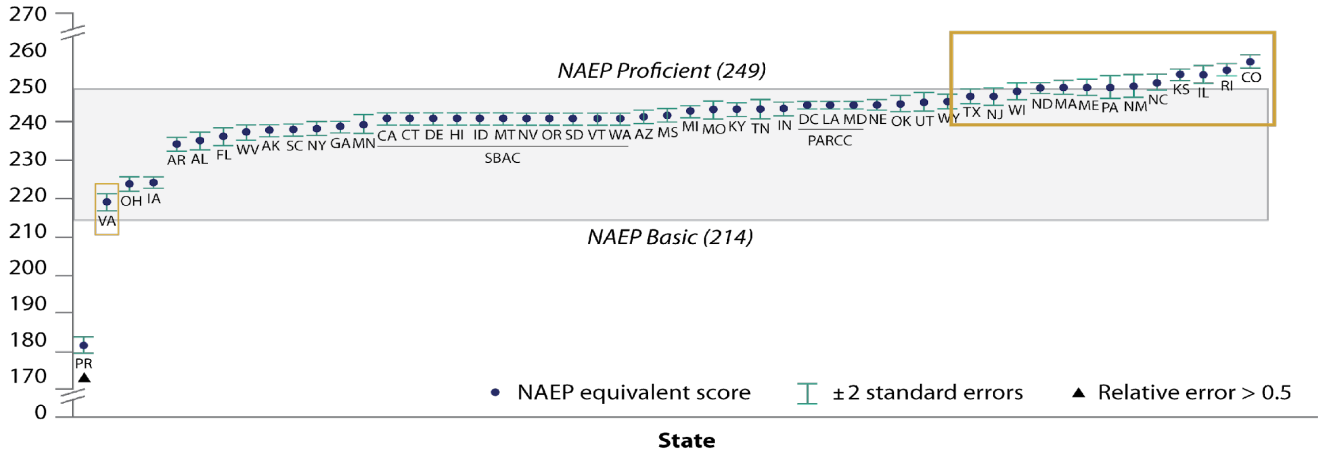
\*Board lowers SOL cut scores in math

\*\* Board lowers SOL cut scores in Reading

## The Honesty Gap: Weak Proficiency Definitions Mask the Truth about Student Performance

The alarming assessment results from NAEP and declining SOL pass rates are further exacerbated by Virginia’s low expectations for “proficiency” on state assessments. Since 2003, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has compared each state’s standard for proficient performance in reading and mathematics at grades 4 and 8 by mapping the state standards onto common scales from NAEP. In the most recent mapping study in 2019, Virginia’s definition for proficiency in Reading was among the lowest in the nation.<sup>39</sup> Virginia had the second **lowest** equivalent score in Math after Puerto Rico, putting the state’s proficiency bar at NAEP Basic.

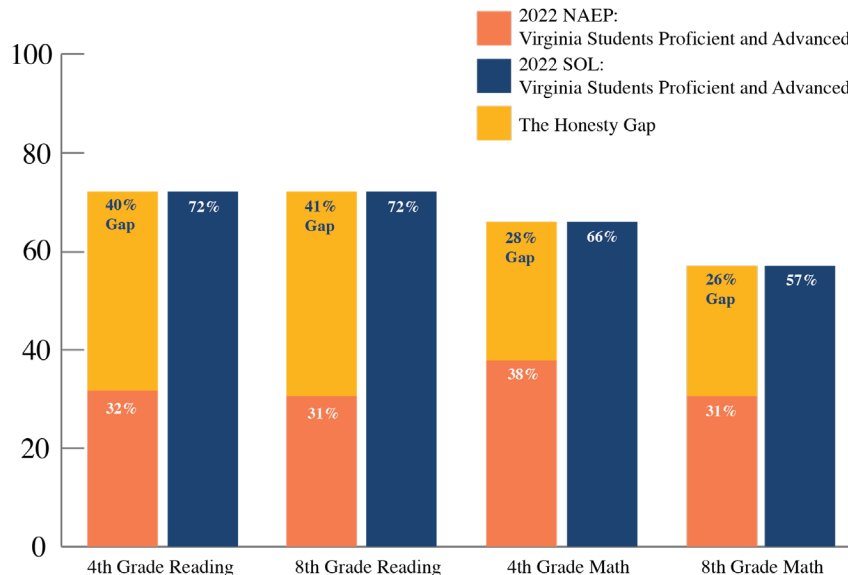
NAEP equivalent score



Source: 2019 Report on State Proficiency Standards: Mapping State Proficiency Standards Onto the NAEP Scales: Results From the 2019 NAEP Reading and Mathematics Assessments, Taslima Rahman, PhD, NCES, July 2021

This discrepancy is known as the “Honesty Gap,” which refers to the difference between what state assessments show, and how Virginia students fare on a national assessment.

According to the 2022 NAEP results, only 32% and 31% of Grade 4 students tested scored proficient or above in Reading and Math, respectively. However, the Grade 4 SOL tests indicated 72% of students scoring proficient or above in Reading and 66% in Math in the same year. The chart below depicts this Honesty Gap between NAEP and SOL test results.



## Appendix C. Background on Virginia’s Current Assessment System

The HB 585 Future of Assessment Work Group established an understanding of Virginia’s current assessment system during its first meeting. This Appendix provides a summary of each of these assessments, including which students take each test and for what purpose.

Virginia’s current statewide assessment system includes:

1. A summative assessment called the Standards of Learning (SOL) test;
2. A summative assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities called the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP);
3. Fall and winter assessments called the Virginia Growth Assessment (VGA);
4. A K-2 literacy screener called the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS), soon to be the Virginia Assessment of Language and Literacy Screening System (VALLSS); and
5. An assessment of English language proficiency for English Learners called Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Learners (ACCESS).

The table below summarizes key information about each of these assessments.

Table C.1: Current Virginia Statewide Assessments

	Type	Standards	Students	Administration	Test Content
<b>SOL Tests</b>	Summative	Standards of Learning (SOL)	All students	Spring	Grade-level ***
<b>VAAP</b>	Summative	Virginia Essentialized Standards of Learning (VESOL)	Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities (<1% total pop.)	Spring	Grade-level
<b>ACCESS for ELs</b>	Summative	WIDA language development (ELD) standards for K-12	English learners	Spring	English proficiency
<b>VGA*</b>	Interim	Standards of Learning (SOL)	All students	Fall, Winter	Above grade-level Grade-level Below grade-level
<b>PALS**</b>	Screener	Literacy Fundamentals	All students	Fall	Reading Comprehension

\* The VGA includes shorter, computer-adaptive tests using existing SOL test items.

\*\* PALS will become the Virginia Assessment of Language and Literacy Screening System, or “VALLSS,” beginning in 2024-25.

\*\*\* SOL tests use grade-level content to determine proficiency, but may also include above/below grade-level items to determine student growth.

## Standards of Learning (SOL) Tests

The Standards of Learning (SOL) tests assess students in Math and Reading in grades 3 through 8, as well as Writing, Science, and History in grades 5, 7, and 8. The Grade 5 Science test covers standards across Grades 4 and 5, while the Grade 8 Science test covers content from Grade 6 Science, Life Science, and Physical Science. Additionally, end-of-course SOL tests assess students in core academic high school subjects. SOL tests align to the content standards adopted by the Virginia Board of Education and reflect the minimum expectations for what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade or course. Additional details on scoring and yearly assessments are included in Appendix F.

A complete list of SOL tests by both grade and subject is shown in the chart below. SOL test results are used to identify schools for state support and intervention, as required under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), and to inform a school's state accreditation rating. **Blue bold text** in the chart below indicates that the assessment is required by ESSA. At the student level, SOL tests are required to fulfill high school graduation requirements.

Table C.2: SOL Tests by Grade and Subject

	Math	Reading	Writing	Science	History & Social Studies	Total SOL Tests
<b>Grades 3-8</b>	<b>All Grades</b>	<b>All Grades</b>	Grade 8	<b>Grade 5</b> <b>Grade 8</b>	Grade 4 or 5 (Virginia Studies) Grade 7 or 8 (Civics & Economics)	Grade 3: 2 Grade 4: 2-3 Grade 5: 3-4 Grade 6: 2 Grade 7: 2-3 Grade 8: 4-5
<b>High School End-of-Course<sup>40</sup> (EOCs)</b>	<b>Algebra I</b> <b>Geometry</b> <b>Algebra II</b>	<b>Reading</b>	Writing	Earth Science <b>Biology</b> Chemistry	World Geography Virginia & US History World History to 1500 World History 1500 to Present	Grades 9-12: Minimum 5

Grades 3 through 8 reading and math SOL tests are scored according to four proficiency levels, while all other SOL tests are scored according to three proficiency levels.

Table C.3. SOL Proficiency Levels

Proficiency Levels	Assessment
<b>Four Levels</b> Pass/Advanced Pass/Proficient Fail/Basic Fail/Below Basic	Reading, Grades 3-8  Math, Grades 3-8
<b>Three Levels</b> Pass/Advanced Pass/Proficient Fail/Does Not Meet	Science History Writing EOCs

<sup>40</sup> Five verified credits (1 per content area) are required for graduation. A verified credit is earned by passing the course and the SOL test.

## **Virginia Growth Assessment (VGA)**

Virginia’s current assessment system also includes the Virginia Growth Assessment (VGA). The VGA is a “through-year” assessment, as required by §22.1-253.13:3<sup>41</sup>. The VGA is used to measure student growth in Reading and Math from the beginning to the end of the school year for students in grades 3 through 8. This assessment is a shorter, computer-adaptive test using existing test items from the Reading and Math SOL tests and is administered in both the fall and winter. Like the SOL tests, the VGA also aligns to the content standards adopted by the Virginia Board of Education.

## **Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP)**

Approximately 99% of students across Virginia, including English Learners (EL) and most students with disabilities, take the SOL tests and the VGA. Approximately 1% of students in Virginia, encompassing those students with identified significant cognitive disabilities, take the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP) assessments instead of the SOL tests and the VGA.<sup>42,43</sup> The VAAP evaluates the performance of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in grades 3-8 and high school. Beginning in the 2021-2022 school year, the portfolio-based VAAP was replaced with a new multiple-choice assessment in the content areas of reading, mathematics, and science that was administered to students in online and paper formats.

The new VAAP is based on academic content standards derived from the Standards of Learning (SOL) in reading, mathematics, and science that have been adjusted in depth, breadth, and complexity. These content standards are referred to as the Virginia Essentialized Standards of Learning (VESOL).

## **Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Learners (ACCESS)**

As required in Section 1111 (b) (7) of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), school divisions must annually assess the English language proficiency of all English learner (EL) students in grades K-12. The Virginia Board of Education selected the WIDA Consortium’s Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS) test in 2007 as the state-approved English language proficiency assessment. ACCESS is administered annually to EL students to monitor progress in acquiring English proficiency. ACCESS assesses social and instructional English used within the school context as well as academic English associated with language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies across the domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. States are also required to provide an alternate English language proficiency assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities. These assessments are in addition to the SOL tests and the VGA for EL students only.

## **Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (PALS)**

Phonological Awareness Literacy Screener (“PALS”) literacy screener system (renamed the Virginia Assessment of Language and Literacy Screening System, or “VALLSS,” beginning in 2024-25) is used to help identify students in kindergarten through grade 2 at risk of reading difficulties. These assessments measure individual students’ knowledge of literacy fundamentals and may be used to provide teachers with information to guide their teaching.

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41 <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title22.1/chapter13.2/section22.1-253.13:3/>

42 <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/student-assessment/virginia-sol-assessment-program/virginia-alternate-assessment-program-vaap>

43 VAAP is designed by the University of Oregon and is an alternate assessment used in Virginia as well as other states.

## Appendix D.1. Additional Sample Test Items for Virginia, Louisiana, and Massachusetts

### Grade 8 Reading

**VA:** [8.5d](#)

**Explain the use of symbols and figurative language. (page 31)**

**LA:** [RL.8.4](#)

**Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts. (page 1)**



<<Passage 1>>

## Hummingbirds

1 Hummingbirds are one of nature’s most amazing creatures. Native only to the Western Hemisphere, these small birds are known for their deft flying abilities. They have a unique ability to hover in midair by rapidly flapping their wings as much as 80 times per second. In fact, hummingbirds are named for the distinct humming sound created by this rapid wing beat. Hummingbirds are the only birds that can actually fly backwards, and they can move quickly and easily in almost any direction. Therefore, if you’ve seen a petite bird appearing to dart and hover from one spot to the next, you were most likely watching a hummingbird.

2 Hummingbirds use their unique ability to hover in place while feeding on flower nectar. They sip their sweet meals by reaching inside the flower with their narrow bills and split tongues. They also eat hundreds of insects each day. In fact, their flying style requires so much energy that hummingbirds must consume enough food to nearly equal their body weight each day!

3 Hummingbirds make delightful and beneficial visitors to any garden. They help pollinate plants and flowers much as bees do. Attracting these fascinating creatures is easy. Simply set up a hummingbird feeder in early spring, and keep it filled with a syrupy mixture. Before long, your garden will be “humming” with activity.

4 Hummingbirds are migratory and will leave in late fall when the weather gets too cold. Keep the feeder up two to three weeks after the last hummingbird is spotted. It might serve as a helpful feeding spot for passing hummingbirds migrating south. Don’t worry about delaying their migration, because hummers know when it’s time to leave, even if that means passing up a free lunch!

<<Passage 2>>

## Among the Leaves

*Barbara Evans Stanush*

1

1

You found it, high amid thick branches  
upright on a twig, plastered with lichen  
blending with the live oak.

You spied it, bright-eyed daughter,

5

keen to find another life  
among the hard leaves. You climbed

to watch a hummer feeding nestlings;  
their tiny beaks gaped red. The mother  
did not scare. The nest bulged with growing.

10

You called me to the mystery—

,

so slight

I lost the nest each time my stare wavered.

You balanced on the ladder, took a photograph.

2

Opening a box chock full of unclaimed views,

I gaze at live oak leaves. In black

15

and white, a puzzle

until you, long grown and distant, recall

the hummingbird, remind me of the nest.

The littlest nest crafted by a mother

who fused spider webs and moss into a bowl

20

of softest down and laid two pulsing ovals,

warmed them, brooded them to flight.

Moments

hidden in the live oak

large among the leaves.

1 lichen – a type of moss that grows on trees.

*“Among the Leaves” by Barbara Evan Stanush, from Stone Garden, copyright © 1992 by Barbara Evans Stanush. Used by permission of the author.*



<<Question>>

Both the poem and the article address the theme of —

- A. enjoying nature
- B. studying the weather
- C. developing a hobby
- D. holding on to memories

*Source: Virginia SOL Test Practice Items.  
Grade 8 Reading. Item #6.*

Louisiana (Item Type: Multiple Choice - Two-Part)

<<Passage 1: See above for “Tortilla Sun”>>

<<Passage 2: Confetti Girl>>

Refer to the passage from the novel *Confetti Girl* and the passage from the novel *Tortilla Sun*. Then answer the questions.

### **from *Confetti Girl***

by Diana López

- 1 Mom always had after-school projects waiting for me. “Can you help decorate cookies?” she’d say. Or, “Go outside and pick some flowers.” Or, “Fix my nails, please.” She loved to paint them, but since she wasn’t coordinated with her left hand, her right-hand nails looked like a preschooler’s coloring page.
- 2 I guess these projects were chores, but they were fun, too. Now when I come home, I’ve got to sweep, fold towels, or scrub the bathroom sink. Dad helps, but sometimes he makes a big mess.
- 3 Like today. He’s got flour, potato skins, and crumpled napkins on the counter. The pot boils over with brown scum. And I don’t want to talk to him because I’m still mad about the volleyball game, but I have to know what he’s up to.
- 4 “What are you doing, Dad?”
- 5 “Making dinner. Thought I’d give you a break.”

- 6 Except for game nights, dinner's my responsibility. I cook while Dad cleans— that's our rule. And even though I don't cook as well as Mom did, Dad never complains.
- 7 "What are you going to make?" I ask.
- 8 "*Carne guisada* and *papas fritas*."
- 9 "You need a recipe for that?"
- 10 "Are you kidding? I need a recipe for peanut butter sandwiches."
- 11 How mad can a girl be at a man who makes fun of himself and wears a green frog apron that says KISS THE COOK and tube socks over his hands for potholders?
- 12 We clear space on the table. Dinner's served. The beef's tough and the *papas* are mushy, but who cares? I pretend it's delicious because my dad lets me blabber about the Halloween carnival. He laughs out loud when I describe Vanessa's potato baby and Ms. Cantu's creative *cascarones*,<sup>1</sup> so I don't complain when I notice he served ranch-style beans straight from the can instead of heating them up first.
- 13 Everything's great until he asks about my English class.
- 14 "Any new vocabulary words?" he wants to know.
- 15 "I guess. Maybe. Super . . . super . . . super something. Can't remember."
- 16 "Was it *supersede*?" he asks. "*Supercilious? Superfluous?*"
- 17 "I don't remember, Dad. It could have been *super-duper* or *super-loop* for all I care."
- 18 He gets sarcasm from his students all the time so he's good at ignoring it.
- 19 "Remember that *super* is a prefix that means 'above and beyond,'" he says. "So no matter what the word is, you can get its meaning if you take it apart."
- 20 "Okay, Dad. I get it. So did I tell you we're having a book sale for our next fundraiser?"



21 "What else are you doing in English?" he asks. "Reading any novels?"

22 I sigh, bored, but he doesn't get the hint. He just waits for my answer. "Yes," I finally say. "I don't remember the title, but it's got a rabbit on the cover."

23 "Is it *Watership Down*? It's got to be *Watership Down*."

24 "Yes, that's it. But I left it in my locker. I guess I can't do my homework."

25 "Nonsense. I've got a copy somewhere. Let me look."

26 He leaves the table to scan the bookshelves, and all of the sudden, I *care* about the tough beef, the mushy potatoes, and the cold beans. Why should I eat when my own father has abandoned his food? Nothing's more important than his books and vocabulary words. He might say I matter, but when he goes on a scavenger hunt for a book, I realize that I really don't.

27 I take my plate to the kitchen, grab my half-finished soda, and head to my room. When I walk past him, he's kneeling to search the lower shelves. He's got a paper towel and wipes it lovingly over the titles as if polishing a sports car. He doesn't hear my angry, stomping footsteps. I catch the last part of his sentence.

28 ". . . a classic epic journey," he says as if he were in class with a bunch of students. I can't stand it. I just can't stand it. I'd rather have Vanessa's crazy mom.

29 Later, just as I write *I love Luís* for the three-hundredth time, my dad peeks through my bedroom door.

30 "Found my copy of *Watership Down*," he says, handing me a paperback whose spine's been taped a dozen times. "How far do you have to read tonight?"

31 "The first four chapters," I say.

32 "That's a lot. You better get busy."

33 "Sure, Dad. I'll start reading right away."

34 But I don't. As soon as he leaves, I put the book on my nightstand and use it as a coaster. The condensation from my soda makes a big, wet circle on the cover.

---

<sup>1</sup>cascarones—hollow eggs filled with confetti or toys

From CONFETTI GIRL by Diana López. Copyright © 2009 by Diana López. By permission of Little, Brown, and Company.

<<Question>> (ItemType: Multiple Choice - Two-Part)

**Part A**

The passage from *Confetti Girl* begins with the narrator's memories of her mother (paragraph 1). The passage from *Tortilla Sun* ends with Izzy's thoughts about the baseball that belonged to her father (paragraph 46). How do these paragraphs contribute to an understanding of both narrators?

- a The paragraphs reveal that the narrators have little reason to feel upset about their present situations.
- b The paragraphs suggest the efforts the narrators will go to so that they may please their parents.
- c The paragraphs emphasize the fact that the narrators may not be reporting events truthfully.
- d The paragraphs highlight the narrators' strong desire to regain a sense of closeness.

**Part B**

What additional similarity between the narrators builds on the same idea?

- a They both have trouble connecting with their remaining parent.
- b They both have an active and rich imaginary life.
- c They both feel as if there is no point in making friends.
- d They both have parents who value education above all else.

Source: Louisiana 2022 Practice Test. Grade 8 ELA. Session 1. Item #5.

\*Note: This question aligns to Louisiana's standards RL 8.3, RL 8.5, and RL 8.1.



## Appendix D.2. Additional Standards and Sample Test Items for Virginia, Louisiana, and Massachusetts

### Grade 5 Reading

#### VA: 5.5

Students will **read and demonstrate comprehension** of fictional texts, literary nonfiction, and poetry. Students will **draw conclusions** and **make inferences** with support from the text.

#### MA: RL 5.1 - 5.3

Students will **determine a theme** of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including **how** characters respond to challenges or **how** the speaker in a poem reflects on a topic. For example, students explore the theme “Heroism demands courage and taking risks” in traditional stories such as *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood* by Howard Pyle and modern novels such as *Bud, Not Buddy* by Christopher Paul Curtis. Students will **compare and contrast** two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact). Finally, students will **quote or paraphrase a text accurately** when explaining what the text states explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

### **Born in the Desert**

1 Rahim Makeba stood at the front of the classroom holding his notes. His classmates looked at him curiously, waiting for him to begin. Rahim had never given a speech before, and his lips felt as if they were glued together. His palms were damp and his heart was pounding.

2 Ms. Blum set out a paper cup of water. “You may take a little drink before you start, if you would like. The class is looking forward to learning about Botswana.”

3 She smiled, and Rahim relaxed a little. He whispered a “thank you” for the water. After carefully taking a sip, he began.

4 “Good afternoon. As many of you know, I came to live in America a month ago. I am from the Republic of Botswana, which is on the continent of Africa. I was born in a town at the edge of the Kalahari Desert. My papa and two of my cousins worked for the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. Everyone in our family likes animals. When I was little, I used to sit under the Camel Thorn tree in our village and wait for small animals and birds to visit. Sometimes Papa and I would drive out into the bush country to see the larger animals. If we were lucky, a Kalahari lion would cross our path.” Rahim paused to pick up the photographs he had brought.

5 A boy named Brian raised his hand. Ms. Blum called on him, and he asked, “How can people live in a desert? Isn’t it too hot? How can trees grow in a desert?”

6 Rahim had carefully planned and practiced his speech at home and was not expecting to be interrupted. He was not sure how to answer the questions. For a moment, he wished he were back in Botswana, where people knew that the desert was beautiful and thriving with life. He rubbed his hands on his jeans and stared at the floor.

7 Then, he remembered the photographs he had brought. He knew they would help answer Brian’s questions. He began distributing his photographs showing the landscape and some of the animals. As he passed one to a girl seated behind Brian, she smiled at him and raised her hand.

8 Ms. Blum said, “Yes, Julie?”

9 “There are many living things in the desert,” she said. “I know, because I was born in a desert too.”

10 All the students turned to look at her. Rahim looked at her in surprise.

11 “I was born in Arizona,” she went on, “in the Sonoran Desert. All kinds of animals live there—jackrabbits and coyotes and big cats, too, such as cougars.” She glanced at Rahim and added, “They’re probably not as big as the Kalahari lions, but they’re huge compared with housecats.”

12 “Thank you, Julie. That information is very helpful,” Ms. Blum said. “Now let’s give Rahim some time to explain his pictures, and then we can have more discussion.”

13 With a grateful look at Ms. Blum and Julie, Rahim continued his speech.

14 “Many famous animals live in the Kalahari Desert,” he said as he finished handing out the rest

of the pictures. “The Kalahari lion is the star of a movie, and the zebra is easily recognized. There are giraffes, aardvarks, hyenas, and wild dogs, as well as many other animals. My favorite is the meerkats. As you can see in the photographs, meerkats have pointy faces. They look like little bandits wearing masks. In fact, the masks look similar to those that raccoons have.”

15 At the end of Rahim’s speech, everyone applauded. Many classmates raised their hands, inspired by his speech to ask him more questions about Botswana and the Kalahari Desert. This time, Rahim was grinning confidently ready to answer all their questions.

1 Camel Thorn tree – a common tree that grows in dry areas of southern Africa.

<<Question>>

In “Born in the Desert,” the reader can tell that Rahim first becomes nervous when he —

- A. feels his palms become damp
- B. wishes his classmates understood him
- C. spends a long time writing his speech
- D. forgets what to say next

Source: Virginia SOL Test Practice Items.  
Grade 5 Reading. Item #22 of 27.

Massachusetts (Item Type: Essay)

<<Passage: See below for “My Favorite Words from Lewis and Clark and Me: A Dog’s Tale”>>

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark led one of the first journeys to explore the wilderness west of the Mississippi River. Seaman was a dog who traveled with them. Read the passage, which includes a story from Seaman’s point of view and additional information about his life. Then answer the questions that follow.

### **My Favorite Words**

*from Lewis and Clark and Me: A Dog’s Tale*

*by Laurie Myers*

1 I’ve seen dogs with good men. And dogs with men who are just plain mean. Most dogs hope for a man they can understand. It’s great when you know what you’re supposed to do. Lewis knew



exactly what I could do, and he let me do it. In fact, it got so that Lewis didn't have to tell me what he wanted me to do. I knew.

2 Lewis would shoot an antelope, or some animal, and I'd wait. We'd watch it fall. . . . That's when I'd retrieve the prey. Lewis didn't have to say a word. I knew what to do and when to do it.

3 Some men talk all the time, even when they're not telling you what to do. Not Lewis. Lewis and I would walk to the top of a mountain and just stand there, him looking out over the view, and me with my nose high in the air. We didn't say a word. We didn't have to.

4 For Lewis and me, it was more than just understanding each other. We suited each other perfectly. Only a few dogs are lucky enough to have a man who suits them like that. I've thought about that, why Lewis and I were so well suited. I'm not sure I know exactly.

5 Lewis was a great man. I know that. The men knew it, too. They would do anything for Lewis. They loved him, especially Clark. I think Clark loved Lewis about as much as I did. I never heard Lewis or Clark say a harsh word to each other. And it was more than just getting along. They fit together, too. Of course that was different. They were both men. Dog and man can fit together like no others do. Lewis and I had that fit. By the end of our journey, we were as close as an animal and its hide.

6 How did we get that close? I think the wilderness had something to do with it. Lewis and I would have been close anywhere, but the wilderness brought out the best in both of us. We were made for that territory.

7 I was made for it in every way: my size, my fur, my paws, my instincts. I love running, hunting, swimming, and retrieving. I was happiest when I was doing those things.

8 Lewis was happiest in the wilderness, too. Sometimes I think Lewis preferred the wilderness to people. He would spend hours looking at plants, examining animal specimens, and measuring the sky. He and I spent a lot of time hiking and exploring. We loved the stimulation of the wilderness. It was perfect for both of us.

9 No dog could have a more perfect life than I had. My dreams let me relive it over and over. They fill me with what I saw and what I did. I dream of . . .

10 Bears prowling around at night, keeping me awake.

11 Lewis and I, overlooking the Pacific Ocean, smelling the salt air.

12 Prickly pear cactus needles stuck in my paws, and Lewis tenderly pulling them out one by one.



13 And that triumphal return to St. Louis. Men, women, and children running to the docks to meet us. Dogs barking. Horses in an uproar. People shouting and cheering.

14 I look at Lewis. He looks at me. He's smiling. He places his hand on my head. I push my head further into his hand. Then he says my favorite words.

15 "Good job, Seaman."

. . . my dog was of the newfoundland breed very active strong and docile . . .

**Meriwether Lewis**

**September 11, 1803**

### **Historical Background**

16 Where Meriwether Lewis purchased Seaman is a mystery. Newfoundlands were popular along the East Coast, so two likely places are Washington, D.C., where Lewis lived and worked as Thomas Jefferson's secretary, and Philadelphia, where he went to prepare for the expedition. Another possibility is Pittsburgh, where Lewis actually began the journey. Seaman is first mentioned in Lewis's journal on September 11, 1803, as they sailed on the Ohio River from Pittsburgh to St. Louis.

17 For years writers called Lewis's dog Scannon. This was not questioned until 1984, when Donald Jackson, a great Lewis and Clark scholar, was doing research about the rivers, streams, and creeks that Lewis and Clark had named. Every name had a meaning, but Jackson could not figure out "Seaman's Creek" in Montana. He went back to the original drawings and writings and discovered that in Scannon, the c was actually an e and the nn was an m, thus "Scannon" was actually Seaman. Seaman's Creek, now called Monture Creek, still exists in Montana.

18 The last time Seaman is mentioned in a journal is July 15, 1806, in Montana when Lewis wrote:

. . . the musketoes continue to infest us in such manner that we can scarcely exist; . . . my dog even howls with the torture he experiences from them, . . .

19 The expedition arrived back in St. Louis two months later, September 23, 1806. Although most scholars believed Seaman completed the journey (his death or loss would surely have been mentioned in one of the many journals), no one knew for certain until recently, when another Lewis and Clark scholar, Jim Holmberg, discovered a book written in 1814, which listed epitaphs and inscriptions. The book lists an inscription on a dog collar (most likely destroyed in a fire) in a museum in Virginia. The inscription reads:

**The greatest traveller of my species. My name is SEAMAN, the dog of captain Meriwether Lewis, whom I accompanied to the Pacifick ocean through the interior of the continent of North America.**

Lewis and Clark and Me: A Dog's Tale by Laurie Myers. Illustrated by Michael Dooling. Text copyright © 2002 by Laurie Myers. Illustrations copyright © 2002 by Michael Dooling. Reprinted by permission of Henry Holt Books for Young Readers.




<<Question>>

For this question, you will write an essay based on the passage(s). Your writing should:

- Present and develop a central idea.
- Provide evidence and/or details from the passage(s).
- Use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Based on the passage, write an essay that explains why Lewis and Seaman's relationship was special. Be sure to use information from the passage to develop your essay.

*In the box below, the total space provided is equal to about one page.*

**B** *I* U     2500

Source: Massachusetts 2021 Computer-Based Test Released Items.  
Grade 5 ELA. Item #12.

\*Note: This question aligns to Massachusetts' standards RL 5.1, RL 5.2, RL 5.3, W 5.2, and W 5.4.



## Appendix D.3. Additional Sample Test Items for Virginia, Louisiana, and Massachusetts

### Grade 5 Math

**VA: 5.16**

The student, **given a practical problem**, will **represent data** in line plots and stem-and-leaf plots; **interpret data** represented in line plots and stem-and-leaf plots; and **compare data** represented in a line plot with the same data represented in a stem-and-leaf plot.

**MA: 5.MD**

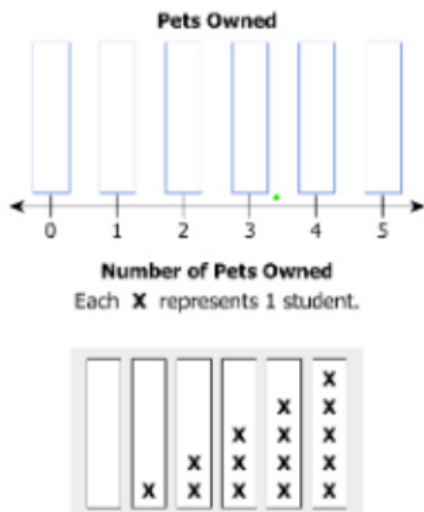
Students convert among different-sized measurement units within a given measurement system allowing for efficient and accurate problem solving with **multi-step real-world problems** as they progress in their **understanding** of scientific concepts and calculations. Students will **make a line plot** (dot plot) to display a data set of measurements in fractions of a unit, and **use operations on fractions** for this grade to **solve problems** involving information presented in line plot (dot plot). For example, given different measurements of liquid in identical beakers, find the amount of liquid each beaker would contain if the total amount in all the beakers were redistributed equally.

### Virginia - Technology Enhanced

Directions: Drag the answers to the correct boxes. Each answer may be used more than one time. Every box must have an answer. Alyssa made this list to show the number of pets 10 students own.

1, 0, 5, 1, 4, 1, 2, 0, 4, 1

Create a line plot to show these data.



### Massachusetts - Technology Enhanced

The numbers of hours that seven students spent reading are listed in this box.

$1\frac{5}{6}, 1\frac{1}{2}, 1\frac{1}{3}, 1\frac{5}{6}, 1\frac{1}{3}, 1\frac{5}{6}, 1\frac{2}{3}$

Complete the line plot to show the number of hours each student spent reading.

Drag and drop the X into a box above the number line as many times as needed.



## Appendix E. Parent-Facing Assessment Reports

The following three documents are parent-facing reports for statewide assessments. The following document was created as a sample family report for the MAP Growth Assessment aligned to the best practices in Figure 12.<sup>44</sup>

FALL 2019

### Sample Family Report

#### What is this report?

A summary of how your child is performing academically, as measured by the most recent MAP® Growth™ test.

#### What is MAP Growth?

A test that adapts to your child's responses to measure your child's skill level.

#### Why is my child taking MAP Growth?

MAP Growth scores help teachers check student performance by measuring achievement and growth. Teachers use results to tailor classroom lessons and set goals for students.

#### What do achievement and growth mean?

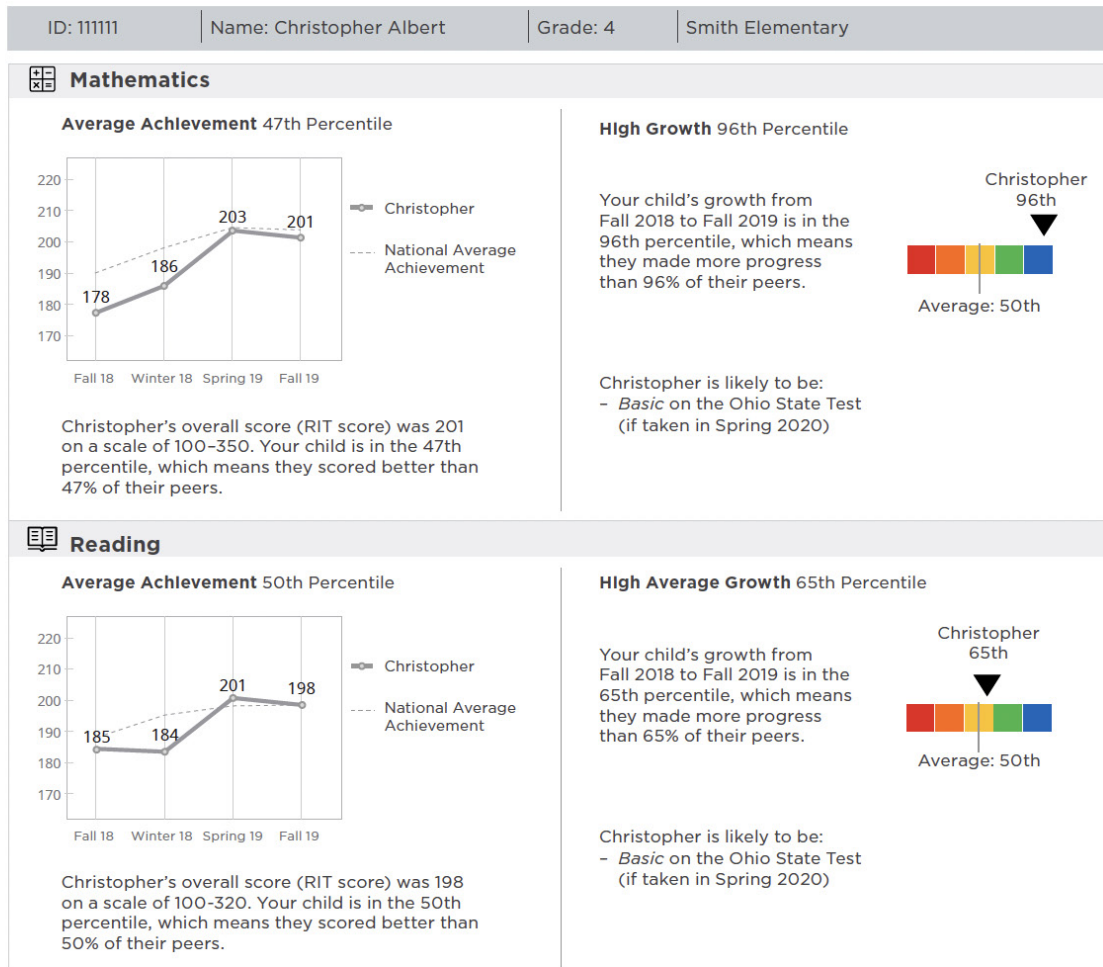
**Achievement:** How well your child has learned skills in a subject compared to similar students nationwide.\*

**Growth:** A measure of your child's personal progress over the year.

#### What is a RIT score?

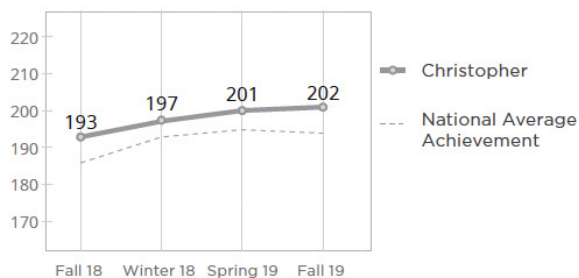
The overall score for a subject based on a Rasch unit (RIT) scale that indicates how your child performed in a subject.

\*Similar students: Kids with the same starting RIT score, same number of weeks of instruction, and in the same grade.



map GROWTH

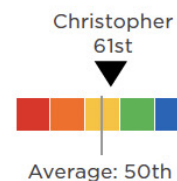
**High Average Achievement 75th Percentile**



Christopher's overall score (RIT score) was 202 on a scale of 100-350. Your child is in the 75th percentile, which means they scored better than 75% of their peers.

**High Average Growth 61st Percentile**

Your child's growth from Fall 2018 to Fall 2019 is in the 61st percentile, which means they made more progress than 61% of their peers.



**How can I use this information to help my child?**

Talk to your child's teacher. Here are some questions you can ask:

- + What types of strategies are the teachers using that I may be able to reinforce at home?
- + Does my child need extra help in any specific areas?
- + How can I help my child's academic growth at home?
- + How do you measure my child's learning in your classroom?
- + When will my child's progress be measured again, and when can I get an update on my child's academic growth? How is my child doing in comparison to grade-level expectations?
- + What will my child be working on to continue growing or grow towards a mastery of grade-level standards?

**Where can I get more information?**

Check out [NWEA.org/FamilyToolkit](https://www.nwea.org/FamilyToolkit) for more information on MAP Growth, how it works, what it measures, and FAQs.

For sample tests in all subjects, visit [Warmup.NWEA.org](https://www.warmup.nwea.org).



NWEA® is a not-for-profit organization that supports students and educators worldwide by providing assessment solutions, insightful reports, professional learning offerings, and research services. Visit [NWEA.org](https://www.nwea.org) to find out how NWEA can partner with you to help all kids learn.

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AUG19 | KAP3946 | MAPXX\_MKTG10146

The following document is an example parent-report for statewide assessment results on Texas' STAAR assessment.<sup>45</sup>

## RESOURCES TAILORED FOR JONATHAN

### Reading

Strategies to improve your child's grade 5 reading understanding

- Understanding/Analysis Across Genres**
  - If your child is struggling or bored with a book, let them put it down. Forcing your child to stick with a difficult or dull book that's intended for pleasure will reinforce the idea that reading is a chore. Help your child find a book that is more accessible and enjoyable to them.
- Understanding/Analysis of Literary Texts**
  - Encourage your child to read a book series. Reading a book series makes it easier for your child to understand what's going on in the book, and this increases their feelings of competence. As their comprehension and fluency grows, so does their reading confidence.
- Understanding/Analysis of Informational Texts**
  - Model skimming or scanning a piece of informational text. Have your child scan an article to get the overall idea. Discuss when skimming or scanning might be necessary as opposed to reading every page.
  - Show your child how to make notes about key facts and figures to comprehend when you are reading non-fiction text.
- Writing: Composition, Revision and Editing**
  - Make a Venn Diagram using hoops hooks to discuss how ideas can be different in some ways and similar in others. Use note cards to brainstorm within the Venn Diagram before your child writes a brief composition on a compare and contrast topic of interest to them.

### Mathematics

Strategies to improve your child's grade 5 math understanding

- Numerical Representations and Relationships**
  - Gather a set of objects. Have your child arrange them in different numbers of rows and columns and identify whether the number of objects is prime or composite (prime numbers can only be put in one row or one column without a remainder) and identify the number of rows, columns, and objects each time. Repeat using different numbers of objects.
  - Have your child order numbers that they see in everyday life.
- Computations and Algebraic Relationships**
  - When cooking, ask your child how much of each ingredient is needed if you were to double the recipe, cut it in half, or cut it in thirds.
  - Before you get the bill or checkout at a restaurant or store, have your child estimate the total cost of your purchases. Compare against the actual total to see how close the estimation was.
- Geometry and Measurement**
  - Have your child find the area of each room in your home using a tape measure.
  - Have your child determine how tall each member of your family is in centimeters/meters or inches/feet.
- Data Analysis and Personal Financial Literacy**
  - Give your child a predetermined amount of money. Ask what the best purchasing decision is and why. For example, say we have \$20 to feed five people for dinner. What can we buy that will feed all of us?
  - Have your child create a graph that shows the distance traveled to school each week. Then ask them to determine the distance traveled in one month, one year, three years, etc.

Use the Find a Book tool on [TexasAssessment.gov](https://www.texasassessment.gov) to find appropriate reading material for JONATHAN.

## Confidential 2021 STAAR Report Card for:

# JONATHAN HERNANDEZ-JONES

**FIRSTNAME'S PERFORMANCE AT A GLANCE**

**Reading**

**Did Not Meet**  
Grade Level  
Test Date: April 2021

**Mathematics**

**Masters**  
Grade Level  
Test Date: April 2021

**Science**

**Meets**  
Grade Level  
Test Date: May 2021

Go to [TexasAssessment.gov](https://www.texasassessment.gov) and log in to learn more.

**JONATHAN'S UNIQUE ACCESS CODE**

999999

### From the Commissioner

Tests are a part of life. Our kids will take tests to get a driver's license, to get into college, and even to get certain jobs. As a parent of four myself, I know that no one test can tell me everything about my children. But the STAAR tests have been designed to provide useful information about how much our children have learned academically and how well prepared they are for what comes next.

Mike Morath, Commissioner of Education

### What the Results Mean

This report shows how well your child did on the STAAR. There are four levels of performance.

- MASTERS GRADE LEVEL**  
Mastery of the course knowledge and skills is shown — student is on track for college and career readiness.
- MEETS GRADE LEVEL**  
Strong knowledge of course content — student is prepared to progress to the next grade.
- APPROACHES GRADE LEVEL**  
Some knowledge of course content but may be missing critical elements — student needs additional support in the coming year.
- DID NOT MEET GRADE LEVEL**  
No basic understanding of course expectations is shown — student may need significant support in the coming year.

**Maximize Time During Parent Teacher Conferences**

**Sample Questions to Ask the Teacher:**

- What do you see as my child's strengths?
- What does my child seem to be the most interested in at school?
- Does my child get along well with their classmates?
- What is the most important thing that I can be doing to prepare my child for middle school?
- Is my child giving his/her best effort?
- What could my child be doing that he/she is not already doing?
- What do you think are the biggest challenges for my child, and how can I help him/her with those challenges?

## Performance: 5th Grade

JONATHAN HERNANDEZ-JONES ENROLLED GRADE: 5

Student ID: \*\*\*\*9999 Local Student ID: 99999 District: 999-999 DISTRICT NAME

**Reading** Test Date: April 2021

**! DID NOT MEET GRADE LEVEL**

Your child scored the same or better than 25% of all grade 5 students in Texas.

SCORE 1400

Did Not Meet Grade Level (772-1400) Approaches Grade Level (1461-1981) Meets Grade Level (1982-1700) Masters Grade Level (1701-2127)

**Mathematics** Test Date: April 2021

**MASTERS GRADE LEVEL** ★

Your child scored the same or better than 95% of all grade 5 students in Texas.

SCORE 2052

Did Not Meet Grade Level (864-1499) Approaches Grade Level (1950-1624) Meets Grade Level (1625-1723) Masters Grade Level (1724-2052)

**Science** Test Date: May 2021

**MEETS GRADE LEVEL**

Your child scored the same or better than 77% of all grade 5 students in Texas.

SCORE 4202

Did Not Meet Grade Level (1174-3548) Approaches Grade Level (3550-3999) Meets Grade Level (4000-4401) Masters Grade Level (4402-5066)

**Knowledge and Skills Categories for Reading**

- Understanding/Analysis Across Genres: 2 Correct of 8 Total
- Understanding/Analysis of Literary Texts: 6 Correct of 16 Total
- Understanding/Analysis of Informational Texts: 4 Correct of 14 Total

**Knowledge and Skills Categories for Mathematics**

- Numerical Representations and Relationships: 6 Correct of 9 Total
- Computations and Algebraic Relationships: 17 Correct of 17 Total
- Geometry and Measurement: 9 Correct of 9 Total
- Data Analysis and Personal Financial Literacy: 4 Correct of 4 Total

**999999**
Want to see the questions JONATHAN answered incorrectly? Use this code to log in. [TexasAssessment.gov](https://www.texasassessment.gov)

## Progress: From Previous Years

ONATHAN HERNANDEZ-JONES

Campus: 999 CAMPUS NAME Class Group: GROUP NAME Report Date: JUNE 2021 Date of Testing: MAY 2021

Due to COVID-19, progress was calculated using spring 2019 and spring 2021 assessment results. Considering your child's instructional and learning conditions from 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, you can use this information as one of the many tools to gauge your child's academic performance across these two years.

**Reading**

Limited Progress

Lexile Measure: 700L

Learn more about Lexile Measures and how they can be used to help your child succeed at [TexasAssessment.gov](https://www.texasassessment.gov).

**Mathematics**

Accelerated Progress

Quantile Measure: 1755Q

Learn more about Quantile Measures and how they can be used to help your child succeed at [TexasAssessment.gov](https://www.texasassessment.gov).

**Limited Progress**

Your child has shown less than expected academic improvement from last year to this year.

**Expected Progress**

Your child has shown expected academic improvement from last year to this year.

**Accelerated Progress**

Your child has shown more than expected academic improvement from last year to this year.

**999999**
Want to help support JONATHAN'S progress? Use this code to log in. [TexasAssessment.gov](https://www.texasassessment.gov)



This is an example of a guide from the District of Columbia that guides families through the important takeaways from the student PARCC assessment report and resources to help individual students improve.<sup>46</sup>

## BREAKING DOWN THE SCORE REPORT:FRONT

This guide will walk you through the most important takeaways you can learn from your child's score report. It also provides you with helpful resources to help your child improve their performance in the coming year.

**Mathematics**

**Scott Testtaker**      **Grade 7 Math Assessment Results**  
Anywhere Middle School      District of Columbia Public Schools

**About This Assessment**      **How Can You Use This Report?**

1. This report will help you answer questions about the development of Scott's skills:

- How did Scott score?
- What are Scott's strengths and areas for improvement in this subject?
- How did Scott's score compare to that of other students?

**How Did Scott Perform on This Math Assessment?**

2. This section shows your student's overall score on the assessment. This overall score determines which performance level student is in.

**Performance Level**      **Students who score in Level 4**

**Level 4**      **met expectations**  
**Score**      **for Grade 7 Math learning standards.**  
**760**

760

Level 1      Level 2      Level 3      Level 4      Level 5  
650      700      725      750      786      850

**Want to know more?**

Turn to the next page to learn about how Scott performed on key areas of the assessment and how Scott's results compare to those of other students.

\*Levels 4 & 5 indicate being on track for the next grade level course and on track to leave high school college and career ready

### 1) Description of Assessment

At the top of the report is a brief description of the assessment. At the bottom of the paragraph is contact information should you have any questions about this report.

### 2) How did your child perform overall?

Your child's score falls into one of five performance levels. The performance levels identify if your child has met the expectations for the grade level. A score in Level 4 or 5 means your child has met or exceeded expectations in the subject. It also means they are on track for the next grade level. Students scoring below a Level 4 may still be developing grade-level skills and knowledge.

# BREAKING DOWN THE SCORE REPORT: BACK

## 3) How well did your child learn specific knowledge and skills?

Students receive more detailed information in several components about their strengths and where they might need additional support. This section shows whether your child performed about the same as students who met or exceeded expectations, approached expectations, or partially met expectations for each key part of the assessment.

### Grade 7 Math Details

**How Did Scott Perform On Key Areas of the Assessment?**

Students who performed at Level 4 overall on this assessment met learning expectations and are likely prepared for the next grade or course. This shows if your child performed about the same as students who met or exceeded expectations, approached expectations, or did not yet meet or meet expectations for each key part of the assessment.

Major Content	Additional & Supporting Content	Expressing Mathematical Reasoning	Modeling & Application
Proportions, operations with rational numbers, algebra	Circumference, area, volume, statistics, probability	Justify solutions and analyze/correct others' reasoning	Represent and solve problems using symbols and tools
Meets or Exceeds ✓	Meets or Exceeds ✓	Nearly Meets ●	Nearly Meets ●

✓ Meets or Exceeds Expectations   ● Nearly Meets Expectations   ● Below Expectations

**How Did Scott's Performance Compare?**

Scott scored better than 71% of students in Anywhere Middle who took the Grade 7 Math test.

Scott scored better than 66% of students in District of Columbia Public Schools who took the Grade 7 Math test.

Scott scored better than 75% of students in DC who took the Grade 7 Math test.

Comparison Group	Percentage
Anywhere Middle	71%
District of Columbia Public Schools	66%
DC	75%

**Performance Level**  
Level 4

**What Is Next?**

Bring this report to your next conference with your student's teacher. You can ask Scott's teachers:

- What is Scott learning in math this year?
- How is Scott doing?
- How can I use this information to work with Scott this year?
- What resources should I use to support Scott?

**Where Can You Find More Information?**

- How Scott's school and other schools scored:  
Visit [www.OSSE.dc.gov/parcc](http://www.OSSE.dc.gov/parcc), or call OSSE at (202) 719-6500
- How the test is designed and what it measures:  
Visit [www.OSSE.dc.gov/parcc](http://www.OSSE.dc.gov/parcc), or call OSSE at (202) 719-6500
- How families, educators, and schools use these reports:  
Visit [www.OSSE.dc.gov/parcc](http://www.OSSE.dc.gov/parcc), or call OSSE at (202) 719-6500

## 4) How did your child perform compared to other students?

This report shows how your child's performance relates to their peers at the school level, the local education agency level, and within the District.

## 5) What's next?

The information in the score report is designed to both measure student performance and provide guidance for skill building. This section provides a few questions you can ask your child's teacher about their performance. It also shares where you can find more information.



## Appendix F. Additional Legislation and Regulation Related to Virginia Assessments

Statute or Regulation	Summary
<a href="#">8VAC20-131-51</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires that students earn “verified credits” to be eligible for a standard of advanced studies diploma. One of the ways in which a student can earn a verified credit is to earn a passing score on the end-of-course SOL test that corresponds to the course in which the student earned a standard credit.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">§ 22.1-253.13:3</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With such funds as are available for this purpose, the Board shall prescribe assessment methods to determine the level of achievement of the Standards of Learning objectives by all students.</li> <li>• These assessments shall evaluate knowledge, application of knowledge, critical thinking, and skills related to the Standards of Learning being assessed.</li> <li>• The SOL tests administered to students in grades three through eight shall not exceed               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Reading and Math in grades three and four</li> <li>II. Reading, Math, and science in grade five</li> <li>III. Reading and Math in grades six and seven</li> <li>IV. Reading, writing, and Math in grade eight</li> <li>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; and</li> <li>VI. Virginia Studies and Civics and Economics once each at the grade levels deemed appropriate by each local school board.</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Reading and Math assessments administered to students in grades three through eight shall be through-year growth assessments.</li> </ul>



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