# Superintendent’s Memo #307-20

[](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/index.shtml)  
**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA   
Department of Education**

DATE: November 20, 2020

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction

## SUBJECT: *Emergency Guidelines for the Use of Local Alternative Assessments in Lieu of the Virginia Studies, Civics and Economics, and Grade 8 Writing Standards of Learning Tests for the 2020-2021 School Year*

In response to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with Governor Northam’s Executive Order Fifty-One (EO51) issued on March 12, 2020, and Chapter 1283 of the 2020 Acts of Assembly (part of the Appropriation Act), as signed by Governor Northam on April 27, 2020, the Superintendent of Public Instruction pursued a state-level waiver allowing school divisions the flexibility to choose to administer local alternative assessments in lieu of administering the required Virginia Studies, Civics and Economics, and Grade 8 Writing Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in the 2020-2021 school year.

For school divisions opting to exercise this waiver, the waiver does not relieve the divisions of the requirements in [§ 22.1-253.13:3.C](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title22.1/chapter13.2/section22.1-253.13:3/) of the Code of Virginia by which each local school board is to certify annually that it provided instruction and administered an alternative assessment, consistent with Virginia Board of Education guidelines, to students in grades three through eight in each SOL subject area in which the SOL assessment was not administered. Specifically, the Code states:

*Each school board shall annually certify that it has provided instruction and administered an alternative assessment, consistent with Board guidelines, to students in grades three through eight in each Standards of Learning subject area in which a Standards of Learning assessment was not administered during the school year. Such guidelines shall (1) incorporate options for age-appropriate, authentic performance assessments and portfolios with rubrics and other methodologies designed to ensure that students are making adequate academic progress in the subject area and that the Standards of Learning content is being taught; (2) permit and encourage integrated assessments that include multiple subject areas; and (3) emphasize collaboration between teachers to administer and substantiate the assessments and the professional development of teachers to enable them to make the best use of alternative assessments.*

Therefore, for the 2020-2021 year, school divisions that choose not to administer the Virginia Studies, Civics and Economics, and Grade 8 Writing SOL tests must administer local alternative assessments consistent with these emergency guidelines. For school divisions not opting to exercise the flexibility of the state-level waiver, the SOL tests will continue to be available for administration.

The [*Emergency Guidelines for the Use of Local Alternative Assessments in Lieu of the Virginia Studies, Civics and Economics, and Grade 8 Writing Standards of Learning Tests for the 2020-2021 School Year*](https://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/local_assessments/emergency-guidelines-local-alt-assessments-in-lieu-of-va-studies-civics-economics-g8-writing-sol-tests-20-21.docx)detail the requirements of the flexibility provided by the state-level waiver that allows school divisions to choose to administer local alternative assessments in lieu of the required administration of the Virginia Studies, Civics and Economics, and Grade 8 Writing SOL tests in the 2020-2021 school year. The requirements for these assessments are similar to those included in the *Guidelines for Local Alternative Assessments for 2018-2019 through 2019-2020.*

School divisions exercising this waiver will be required to report on the outcomes of the local alternative assessments administered in lieu of these SOL tests in the periodic reports required by the Board of Education, per [Superintendent’s Memo #230-20](https://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents_memos/2020/230-20.docx). Additional information regarding this reporting will be forthcoming.

Questions about these guidelines should be addressed to the student assessment staff at [student\_assessment@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:student_assessment@doe.virginia.gov) or by phone at (804) 225-2102. Questions related to instruction for Grade 8 Writing should be addressed to Jill Nogueras, English Coordinator, at [jill.nogueras@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:jill.nogueras@doe.virginia.gov) or by phone at (804) 225-2227. Questions related to instruction for Virginia Studies and Civics and Economics should be addressed to Christonya Brown, History and Social Science Education Coordinator, at [christonya.brown@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:christonya.brown@doe.virginia.gov) or by phone at (804) 225-2893.

JFL/SLR/as