**Agenda Item:**  **F (Revised)**

**Date:**  **July 27, 2023**

**Title:** **Final Review of Proposed Changes to Certain Testing Requirements for Writing**

**Presenter:**  **Mrs. Shelley Loving-Ryder, Assistant Superintendent of Student Assessment, Accountability & ESEA Programs**

**Dr. Sarah Susbury, Director of Student Assessment**

**Email:**  [**Sarah.Susbury@doe.virginia.gov**](mailto:Sarah.Susbury@doe.virginia.gov) **Phone: 804-225-2102**

**Purpose of Presentation:**

Action required by state or federal law or regulation.

**Executive Summary:**

Development of a New Integrated Reading and Writing Item Type   
Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) staff have developed a new item type to be administered as an additional component of the grades 5, 8, and end-of-course (EOC) Reading Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. Students are presented with a nonfiction passage based on history or science content that is accompanied by 6 questions connected to the passage in addition to a writing prompt based on the passage. The nonfiction passage provides context for students to use when responding to the prompt, or it may serve as a springboard for students who choose to incorporate personal experiences in their responses.

The intent of the new item type is twofold: (1) to reinforce the importance of students writing about what they have read to support the development of literacy skills and (2) to provide a measure of students’ writing skill without the burden of an additional test. The new items were field tested (tried out) with students in spring 2023.

Current Reading and Writing Standards of Learning (SOL) Tests:

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

Separate Writing SOL tests are administered in grade 8 and high school. Each test includes two components with each component completed on a separate day. The first component, in part, requires students to choose revisions and correct errors embedded in selections that are intended to model rough drafts of student writing. These test questions include multiple-choice and technology-enhanced items that measure standards grouped into reporting categories addressing related content and skills: “Research, plan, compose, and revise for a variety of purposes” and “Edit for correct use of language, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.” In the second component of the test, students are asked to write a short paper in response to an expository or persuasive prompt that provides a context for writing in the form of a question, an issue, or a hypothetical situation. Each student’s response to the writing prompt receives a separate score in each of two domains: (1) Composing/Written Expression and (2) Usage and Mechanics.

Because the state has continued to administer separate Reading and Writing SOL tests in grade 8 and high school, class schedules often reflect separate instruction for reading and writing to prepare students for the state assessments. Instead of embracing a comprehensive literacy approach in which students write about what they read, in some classrooms, writing instruction has become more focused on editing the writing of others with less emphasis on students composing their own writing.

From 1998 to 2014, a Writing SOL test was also administered in grade 5. However, legislation in the 2014 General Assembly eliminated several SOL tests, including the grade 5 Writing SOL test. As described in the excerpt from the Standards of Quality (SOQ; [Chapter 13.2](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title22.1/chapter13.2/) of Title 22.1 of the *Code of Virginia*) below, school divisions are required to administer local assessments in areas where the SOL tests were eliminated (e.g., Grade 3 History, Grade 3 Science, Grade 5 Writing, U.S. History to 1865, and U.S. History: 1865 to the Present).

[Standard 3 of the SOQ](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title22.1/chapter13.2/section22.1-253.13:3/) states, in part, the following:

The Standards of Learning assessments administered to students in grades three through eight shall not exceed (i) reading and mathematics in grades three and four; (ii) reading, mathematics, and science in grade five; (iii) reading and mathematics in grades six and seven; (iv) reading, writing, and mathematics in grade eight; (v) science after the student receives instruction in the grade six science, life science, and physical science Standards of Learning and before the student completes grade eight; and (vi) Virginia Studies and Civics and Economics once each at the grade levels deemed appropriate by each local school board. The reading and mathematics assessments administered to students in grades three through eight shall be through-year growth assessments.

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 (a) 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; (b) permit and encourage integrated assessments that include multiple subject areas; and (c) 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.

VDOE staff have conducted periodic “desk reviews” of a sample of these local alternative assessments, but there has been no statewide measure of writing proficiency at the elementary level since 2014. The grade 8 class in 2017-2018 was the last class to have taken the grade 5 Writing SOL test. In previous presentation about the new integrated reading and writing item type, Board members have asked for information regarding the pass rates on the grade 8 Writing SOL test since the elimination of the grade 5 SOL Writing test. Pass rates from 2014-2015 to 2021-2022 for the grade 8 SOL Writing test are provided below.

 Grade 8 Writing SOL Test Pass Rates

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **School Year** | **Pass Rate** |
| 2014-2015 | 71.49 % |
| 2015-2016 | 70.68 % |
| 2016-2017 | 73.29 % |
| 2017-2018 | 72.45 % |
| 2018-2019 | 70.13 % |
| 2020-2021 | 53.08 % |
| 2021-2022 | 56.63 % |

Requested Board Action

First, the Board is asked to eliminate the current grade 8 Writing SOL test beginning in spring 2024. With the concurrent implementation of the new integrated reading and writing items as part of the grade 8 Reading SOL test, a measure of student writing will continue to be available. However, the focus will be on students writing about what they have read rather than on completing items that require them to revise or edit the writing of others or to respond to prompts that are not connected to reading. It is hoped that the elimination of the grade 8 Writing SOL test will encourage a focus on students routinely writing about what they have read.

The Board could eliminate the grade 8 writing SOL test using its authority under [8VAC20-131-380](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter131/section380/)(F)(4):

The board may add new assessments or discontinue the use of existing assessments in the Virginia Assessment Program by providing adequate notice to local school boards. As specified in the Standards of Quality, the board may adopt special provisions related to the administration and use of any SOL tests as applied to school quality indicators for any period during which the Standards of Learning content or assessments in that area are being revised and phased in. Notice shall be provided to local school boards regarding the special provisions prior to statewide administration of such tests.

Second, the Board is asked to adopt the proposed *Guidelines for Local Alternative Assessments for 2023-2024 and Beyond (Guidelines)* provided in Attachment A. These new guidelines replace the *Guidelines for Local Alternative Assessments for 2021–2022 and Beyond.* The new guidelines recommend that school divisions use the integrated reading and writing assessment items administered as part of the Grade 5 Reading SOL test to meet the assessment requirements for Grade 5 Writing, as described in the Standard 3 of the SOQ (quoted above). School divisions that follow the recommendation to use the integrated reading and writing assessment items to meet the Grade 5 Writing requirements will not be required to develop and monitor a Balanced Assessment Plan for Grade 5 Writing. School divisions choose not to follow this recommendation will choose to administer local alternative assessments for Grade 5 Writing and will continue to be required to develop and monitor Balanced Assessment Plans for Grade 5 Writing,

It is noted that verified credit in writing is a requirement for graduation. As such, there is no request for flexibility to use the integrated reading and writing item type to fulfill the requirement at this time. While the integrated reading and writing item type will also be administered to all students participating in the EOC Reading SOL test, school divisions have several options at the high school level, in addition to the EOC Writing SOL test, that can be used for students to earn the required verified credit in writing (e.g., a collection of writing samples scored with a state-developed rubric, substitute tests approved by the Board for verifying credit).

**Action Requested:**

Final review: Action requested at this meeting.

**Superintendent’s Recommendation:**

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education approve the following actions:

* Elimination of the Grade 8 Writing SOL test in spring 2024, to coincide with implementation of the Grade 8 Integrated Reading and Writing test component as a required part of the Grade 8 Reading SOL test; and
* Adoption of the proposed *Guidelines* to recommend that the Grade 5 Integrated Reading and Writing test component serve as a measure of student writing and to allow school divisions to provide an additional local Grade 5 Writing alternative assessment.

**Rationale for Action**

Adoption of the actions at the current meeting will ensure adequate notification to school divisions as they prepare for the 2023–2024 school year.

**Previous Review or Action:**

**Date**: [June 15, 2023](https://www.doe.virginia.gov/state-board-data-funding/virginia-board-of-education/board-meetings-agendas-and-minutes/june-14-15-2023)

**Action**: [First and Final Review of Proposed Changes to Certain Testing Requirements for Writing](https://www.doe.virginia.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/45373/638219067291900000) (the Board did not vote on this item but accepted for first review)

**Date**: [March 16, 2022](https://www.doe.virginia.gov/data-policy-funding/virginia-board-of-education/board-meetings-agendas-and-minutes/march-16-17-2022)

**Work Session**: [Development of New Assessment Item Type for Integration of Reading and Writing](https://vdoe.prod.govaccess.org/home/showdocument?id=3446) and [New Assessment Item Type presentation](https://vdoe.prod.govaccess.org/home/showdocument?id=3444)

**Background Information and Statutory Authority:**

SOL assessments are required by the [Standard 3 of the SOQ](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title22.1/chapter13.2/section22.1-253.13:3/) requires SOL assessments:

The Standards of Learning assessments administered to students in grades three through eight shall not exceed (i) reading and mathematics in grades three and four; (ii) reading, mathematics, and science in grade five; (iii) reading and mathematics in grades six and seven; (iv) reading, writing, and mathematics in grade eight; (v) science after the student receives instruction in the grade six science, life science, and physical science Standards of Learning and before the student completes grade eight; and (vi) Virginia Studies and Civics and Economics once each at the grade levels deemed appropriate by each local school board. The reading and mathematics assessments administered to students in grades three through eight shall be through-year growth assessments.

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 (a) 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; (b) permit and encourage integrated assessments that include multiple subject areas; and (c) 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.

Board regulation [8VAC20-131-380](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter131/section380/)(F)(4) allows the board to add new assessments or discontinue the use of existing assessments with adequate notice to local school boards:

The board may add new assessments or discontinue the use of existing assessments in the Virginia Assessment Program by providing adequate notice to local school boards. As specified in the Standards of Quality, the board may adopt special provisions related to the administration and use of any SOL tests as applied to school quality indicators for any period during which the Standards of Learning content or assessments in that area are being revised and phased in. Notice shall be provided to local school boards regarding the special provisions prior to statewide administration of such tests.

Information about the integrated reading and writing item type was presented to the Board at its March 16, 2022, work session.

On August 12, 2022, [Superintendent’s Memo #177-22](file:///X:/DAR/Supts%20Memos/2022%20Supts%20Memos/177-22%20irw-field-test/177-22.pdf) announced the statewide stand-alone field test for this new integrated reading and writing item type, which occurred in spring 2023. As stated in this memo, all students scheduled to take the online Grades 5, 8, and EOC Reading SOL tests in spring 2023 were expected to participate in the online field test. During the field test, students were presented with a nonfiction passage to read, followed by four to six multiple-choice/technology-enhanced test items to answer about the passage. Students were also presented with a writing prompt, or an “invitation to write,” based on the same passage. Resources to support preparation for the field test were provided, including practice items on the [SOL Practice Items](https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/student-assessment/sol-practice-items-all-subjects) page and the [English, Reading, & Literacy: Assessment Resources](https://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching-learning-assessment/k-12-standards-instruction/english-reading-literacy/assessment-resources/local-performance-assessments-to-verify-credits-in-writing) page of the VDOE website.

**Stakeholder Engagement**

The Superintendent of Public Instruction has met with a variety of regional superintendent groups and received feedback through those meetings, as well as the regional State Superintendent Leadership Council meetings.

At the June 15, 2023, board meeting, department staff were asked to gather additional feedback from school division personnel, including teachers, prior to final review. VDOE staff requested feedback on the item through articles in the *Virginia Education Update Newsletter* on July 6 and July 13, 2023, and articles in the *Teacher Direct Newsletter* on July 12 and July 19, 2023.

Seventy-one individuals, as detailed below, emailed various feedback to the Office of Student Assessment.

Elementary School Teachers: 9

Middle School Teachers: 23

High School Teachers: 17

Middle School Principals: 4

Elementary School Principals: 2

English Language Arts

Supervisor/Coordinator: 9

Parents: 4

Forty-five individuals supported the proposal to eliminate the grade 8 Writing SOL test, while four individuals supported keeping the grade 8 Writing SOL test. Twenty-nine individuals supported the proposal to have school divisions able to use the integrated reading and writing assessment items administered as part of the grade 5 Reading SOL test to meet the local alternative assessment requirements for grade 5 Writing, while one individual indicated support to implement a grade 5 Writing SOL test.

In related feedback, twenty individuals, primarily high school teachers, strongly encouraged the Board to consider eliminating the end-of-course Writing SOL test given the implementation of the integrated reading and writing assessment items in the end-of-course Reading SOL test. Several teachers suggested that the reading test with the integrated reading and writing assessment items could be used as an option for earning verified credit instead of the end-of-course Writing SOL test. They commented positively about the integration of reading and writing in the reading assessment and expressed concerns that also maintaining the end-of-course Writing SOL test was an unnecessary testing burden to students.

**Implementation and Communication**

Upon adoption of the changes to the testing requirements for writing, school divisions will be immediately notified via Superintendent's Memorandum of the elimination of the grade 8 SOL Writing test from the Virginia Assessment Program. Additionally, school divisions will be notified of the Board’s approval of the *Guidelines*. The *Guidelines* will be posted on Town Hall for a 30-day public comment period in accordance with the Administrative Process Act.

**Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources:**

Costs associated with the changes to the testing requirements for writing will be covered by existing funds.