



3) best practices in test administration for the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. The division superintendent accepted the Department's offer of technical assistance.

**Summary of Major Elements:**

A summary of the technical assistance provided to Norfolk City Public Schools by the Division of Special Education and Student Services and the Division of Student Assessment and School Improvement will be provided. A copy of the report provided to Norfolk City Public Schools may be found in Attachment A.

**Superintendent's Recommendation:**

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education accept the report.

**Impact on Resources:**

Existing resources within the department will be used to cover the costs of additional technical assistance.

**Timetable for Further Review/Action:**

The Department of Education will continue to provide technical assistance regarding the appropriate implementation of the state assessment programs.

**Virginia Department of Education**  
**Report of Technical Assistance to Norfolk City Public Schools**  
**April 28, 2010**

## **I. BACKGROUND**

During the summer and fall of 2009, staff at the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) received reports of testing irregularities in a number of Norfolk City schools. Some of these reports were investigated by Norfolk City Public Schools (NPS) staff, and one state investigation was conducted at Lafayette-Winona Middle School by staff from the Virginia Department of Education's Division of Special Education and Student Services. As a result of testing concerns within the school division, the Superintendent of Public Instruction offered technical assistance in January 2010 to the NPS Superintendent in a) the use of the state-developed criteria in identifying students for participation in the Virginia Grade Level Alternative (VGLA), b) preparation of work samples for inclusion in the VGLA collections of evidence, and c) best practices in test administration for the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. The division superintendent accepted the Superintendent of Public Instruction's offer of technical assistance. This report details the efforts of the VDOE to date in providing technical assistance to NPS in adopting best practices in test administration for the SOL tests.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

In order to identify technical assistance needs, VDOE staff sought to understand current NPS policies and procedures related to the implementation of the state assessment program. VDOE staff reviewed copies of assessment training materials used by the Norfolk Division Director of Testing (DDOT) and/or the DDOT designee (DDOT2). In addition, a list of 6 schools (3 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, and 1 high school) was provided to the DDOT with a request that NPS staff arrange for interviews with, at minimum, the School Test Coordinator (STC), an SOL Test Examiner (Examiner), a general education teacher, a special education teacher, and the building principal. A team of VDOE staff traveled to Norfolk and interviewed a total of 32 individuals from the 6 schools on March 8 and 9, 2010. The interviews were conducted by pairs of VDOE staff and each lasted for approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Also on March 8 and 9, 2010, VDOE staff interviewed the Norfolk DDOT and DDOT2. These two interviews were conducted by 3 VDOE staff and each lasted approximately 90 minutes. In all interviews, VDOE staff asked questions to gain an awareness and understanding of the policies and procedures used in Norfolk before, during, and after the administration of SOL assessments.

### **III. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

To assist the school leadership in Norfolk, the VDOE compiled the set of findings and recommendations that follow. Findings and recommendations are organized in the following sections:

- Roles and responsibilities: SOL Test Examiner and Proctor
- Roles and responsibilities: School Test Coordinator (STC)
- Roles and responsibilities: Division Director of Testing (DDOT) and DDOT 2
- Test Administration: Assessing and Accounting for All Students
- Test Administration: Testing Irregularities

Additionally, other observations by VDOE and planned changes by NPS are described, as well as suggestions for areas where continued technical assistance from the VDOE may be beneficial to the school division.

#### **A.) Roles and Responsibilities: SOL Test Examiner and Test Proctor**

##### **A.1) Description of Current Procedures:**

In the interviews with Norfolk school and central office personnel, VDOE staff identified differences in the terminology used by NPS to describe the roles and responsibilities of staff assigned to administering SOL tests in elementary schools and potentially some middle schools as compared to that used by VDOE in its test administration documents. Two titles, SOL Test Examiner and SOL Test Proctor, were referenced by NPS staff who were interviewed, but for some schools the specific responsibilities assigned to those two titles did not align with what VDOE references throughout its SOL test administration documentation and guidelines.

The VDOE refers to the individual who is responsible in the classroom for the proper administration of SOL tests as an SOL Test Examiner (Examiner). The responsibilities of an Examiner are outlined in the *SOL Examiner's Manual* and include but are not limited to a) receiving necessary test materials from the STC on the day of testing, b) maintaining the security of the test materials, c) distributing the test materials to students, d) reading the SOL test administration directions to students as written in the *Examiner's Manuals*, d) monitoring the testing process in the classroom, e) responding appropriately to student questions during the test, f) reporting test irregularities to the STC, g) returning all test materials to the STC after testing, and h) certifying, by signature after testing, that all security procedures and test administration procedures were followed as required.

Currently in some schools at NPS, the classroom teacher is referred to as the Examiner; however, the only task the NPS Examiner completes during the test administration is to read the SOL test directions to the students. The NPS Examiner then

sits quietly in the classroom, and all remaining responsibilities as outlined in the previous paragraph become the responsibility of what these NPS schools referred to as the Test Proctor (Proctor). In comparison, the VDOE considers Proctors as staff who are available during the SOL test administration to assist the Examiner with supervising and monitoring the testing process. The *SOL Examiner's Manual*, for example, recommends having a Proctor present for every 25 to 30 additional students being tested in the classroom or SOL testing site.

## **A.2) VDOE Recommendations:**

To help avoid any confusion of roles and responsibilities and to facilitate the use of standardized testing procedures, VDOE recommends that NPS adopt the roles and responsibilities of an Examiner and a Proctor as defined by the VDOE and as used throughout all VDOE documentation (e.g., *SOL Test Implementation Manuals*, *SOL Examiner's Manuals*, *SOL Examiner's Checklists*, and various transmittal forms, affidavits, etc.). The Examiner and Proctor titles and the associated responsibilities should be communicated and implemented consistently during testing at the elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools in NPS.

## **B.) Roles and Responsibilities: School Test Coordinator (STC)**

### **B.1) Description of Current Procedures:**

At the school level, NPS uses the title of School Test Chair to represent the position that VDOE refers to as the School Test Coordinator (STC) throughout the SOL test administration documentation and guidelines. The difference in this case seems limited only to the title; the SOL testing responsibilities of an NPS School Test Chair closely mirror the responsibilities of what VDOE identifies as a School Test Coordinator.

The *SOL Test Implementation Manuals* and the *SOL Examiner's Manuals* each include references that describe the STC as being responsible for providing appropriate training to the school's Examiners and Proctors and for preparing the entire school staff for SOL test administrations. While in Norfolk, VDOE staff heard concerns about some school staff not attending training sessions for the SOL test administration. Some STCs offered multiple training sessions but still were unable to get the necessary staff to attend. Two days prior to SOL testing, one STC still had not received approval from the building principal to conduct SOL test administration training. VDOE was told that all school principals are directed to support their STCs, and although all the principals verbally commit to this, situations occur where the administrators do not follow through. In addition, VDOE was told of situations where school staff refused to cooperate with STCs. For example, school personnel knew if they refused to sign the state-required *School Division Personnel Test*

*Security Agreement* that they could use this, without issue, as their reason not to assist during SOL testing. As VDOE staff asked additional questions about these types of situations, it became clear that the level of support provided to STCs from building level administrators was not consistent in the schools throughout the division. In all schools, the support or lack of support for the work conducted by STCs originated from the building principal and was usually mirrored by assistant principals or principal designees in the school.

A related concern is the inconsistency among schools regarding the expectations and accountability for the STC position. VDOE learned that NPS STCs have full time job responsibilities, such as resource teachers or classroom teachers, and are paid a monetary stipend of \$300 to \$600 for their work related to the SOL testing program. The STC position may be held by an individual or shared between two people in the same school, and in some schools, the STC has many other assessment responsibilities such as completing the training, administration, scoring, and analysis of scores for the division quarterly assessments and the school's three week assessments. At the high school level in NPS, the Instructional Technology Resource Teacher (ITRT) fills the role of the STC. VDOE was told that ITRTs in the high schools are more able to blend the STC responsibilities into their daily work, but this is much more difficult for the STCs at the middle and elementary school levels. Concern was expressed about the possible elimination of the ITRT position due to budget constraints, and if this occurred, where the responsibilities for SOL testing would be absorbed.

VDOE learned the quality and timeliness of SOL test administration training provided by STCs varies significantly across the school division. Some STCs schedule multiple training opportunities in their schools well in advance of the SOL test administration. They prepare handouts and deliver presentations to staff to review important details and introduce any changes or new information about the upcoming SOL test administration. In other schools, STCs distribute the *SOL Examiner's Manual* and tell school staff they must read the material prior to the start of testing. Although the DDOT2 encourages and expects STCs to provide timely training with appropriate resources, the DDOT2 has to rely on the building principal to require that the activities occur.

The DDOT2 conducts regular monthly meetings for STCs where their attendance is expected. The meetings serve as training opportunities for the STCs where new and updated assessment information is presented and other relevant details are reviewed and reinforced. While some STCs appear to recognize the significance of attending the monthly meetings or sending a colleague to represent them if needed, other STCs will arrive late, leave early, or miss the meeting entirely. The DDOT2 has limited recourse to address this except for notifying the STC's principal and the DDOT. Based on information gathered in the interviews, the effectiveness of informing principals about their STCs lack of attendance varies. Neither the DDOT nor the DDOT2 has any authority over the STCs to

require their attendance, and there appears to be no mechanism in place within the division to require cooperation from the principals in ensuring that test procedures are followed within their schools.

## **B.2) VDOE Recommendations:**

VDOE recommends that a more standardized approach to school level training be implemented to ensure the proper information is included and adequately presented to school staff. Consistent expectations of what constitutes a school training session need to be established and clearly communicated to STCs and building principals to reduce the degree of variability in the training provided to school staffs prior to SOL test administrations.

School principals should be required to communicate with their STCs that attendance at each monthly STC meeting is expected. If the STC is unable to attend the full meeting, he or she should communicate with the principal and they should agree on an alternate to attend the meeting.

In addition, principals should communicate to school staff that a successful testing program is a shared responsibility of all staff members. Further, principals should support the STCs in ensuring the cooperation of other school staff with testing responsibilities.

## **C.) Roles and Responsibilities: Division Director of Testing (DDOT) and DDOT2**

### **C.1) Description of Current Procedures:**

At the division level, the DDOT and the DDOT2 are the persons responsible for the implementation of the SOL testing program. Norfolk's assignment of responsibilities to these positions aligns with what VDOE references throughout its SOL test administration documentation and guidelines. The DDOT2 maintains regular communication with STCs via email and phone and serves as the point of contact for the schools regarding the SOL assessment program. The DDOT2 provides ongoing training for STCs through regular monthly meetings and provides additional one-on-one training to NPS staff who are newly assigned to the STC role. During the interviews with VDOE staff, school principals and STCs consistently praised the DDOT2 for her level of support, the resources she provides, and her constant willingness to help.

The DDOT and DDOT2 serve as points of contact for the VDOE regarding the state assessment program, and the DDOT2 oversees the implementation of the state assessment program by STCs at 54 school locations and with varying levels of experience and knowledge. Given the number of STCs and the geographical distance between school locations, the DDOT2 is unable to make regular on-site visits and must rely on building principals to help supervise the STCs. Also, as previously noted, the DDOT2 has no

reporting authority over STCs and relies on school principals when issues occur related to the performance or accountability of individual STCs.

Although the DDOT and DDOT2 rely on the leadership and involvement of school principals to contribute to the successful implementation of the SOL assessment program in the schools, there seems to be little interaction or sharing of information between the two groups. In interviews with VDOE staff, school principals indicated they do not receive training specific to the SOL assessment program other than what their STCs provide to the examiners and proctors within their schools. Both elementary and secondary administrators indicated that SOL assessment information is rarely, if ever, provided even at their regular principal's meetings

The DDOT and DDOT2 indicated they do not have a regularly scheduled time to meet with or train any building administrators, and they have found it challenging to be added to the agenda for either the elementary or secondary principal's meetings. There is no consistent, reliable method available to the DDOT or DDOT2 to communicate assessment information directly to building administrators.

## **C.2) VDOE Recommendations:**

VDOE recognizes that a successful implementation of the SOL assessment program within a school division requires the support and cooperation of staff at all levels within the organization. Similar to the expectation that school administrators will support STCs at the school level, the division superintendent and other senior leadership in the school division must support the DDOT and DDOT2 in their work at the division level. VDOE recommends that the superintendent and senior leadership in the school division communicate and reinforce the expectation that successful implementation of the SOL assessment program is a shared effort throughout the division, but that ultimately, it is the responsibility of each school administrator with the support of the DDOT and DDOT2.

VDOE recommends that NPS implement a training plan for school and division level administrators where participation is mandatory and the DDOT and DDOT2 communicate and reinforce consistent testing policies, procedures, requirements, and best practices. The training and communication, regardless of the mode or format, must occur at multiple times throughout the school calendar to ensure relevant information is conveyed and reinforced at the appropriate time of year. Similar to how division and school level leaders are responsible for their instructional programs, they must also be responsible for the appropriate implementation of the assessment program in their organizations.

## **D.) Test Administration: Assessing and Accounting for All Students**

### **D.1) Description of Current Procedures:**

During the interviews with Norfolk school and central office personnel, VDOE staff asked questions to determine what methods NPS uses to ensure all students are properly tested according to state and federal requirements. Responses varied significantly by school. Some staff explained that attendance was taken differently on the day of testing and described what steps the staff would follow to contact the parents of absent students. In some cases, school resource officers would drive to pick up students who had missed their bus.

When students were absent on the day of testing, schools had various strategies in place for dealing with make-up test opportunities. It was not always clear how many times a student could or should be re-scheduled for a make-up test when the student was absent repeatedly. Some schools offered only one or two make-up days for tests, while other schools made repeated attempts to have students complete their make-up tests before the end of their school's test window.

VDOE staff also asked questions about how school staff ensures that the correct accommodations are provided to students with disabilities during SOL test administrations. Responses to these questions also varied by school. Some schools rely on the STC to develop lists from the Individualized Education Program (IEP) test pages. Others schools have the case managers or special education staff provide the information directly to the STC in forms of lists or spreadsheets or even copies of the IEP test pages.

When asked how their school ensured that all students were tested or appropriately accounted for, some staff required further explanation of the question. STCs understood that make-up sessions needed to be scheduled for students who were absent on the day of testing and they seemed aware that all students had to be tested and accounted for, but there seemed to be no knowledge of strategies or practices used to ensure all enrolled students had the correct number of completed tests or appropriately coded test records. It was unclear how the schools or the division verify the correct number and types of test records are submitted for processing and scoring.

## **D.2) VDOE Recommendations:**

VDOE recommends that NPS develop and implement methods to be used consistently in all schools to ensure that all students enrolled in NPS at the time of testing are accounted for properly. VDOE further recommends that the action of accounting for all students be completed by each school and a verification of the test records occur at the division level. Training and review of the SOL testing requirements should occur so school leaders and school staff clearly understand how to test and/or account for students in various instructional scenarios. This includes but is not limited to suspended students, recently arrived Limited English Proficient students, homebound students, and students participating in alternative education programs such as the Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) program.

As noted above, various methods were used in the schools to ensure special education students received the appropriate accommodations during testing. VDOE recommends these methods be reviewed for efficiency as it seemed, at least in some cases, multiple lists of the same information were being developed and maintained in the schools. Lists seemed to originate appropriately from student IEPs, but a more standardized method of verifying the test accommodations to be provided at the time of testing and then whether they were appropriately provided could potentially avoid duplication of effort and save time in some schools.

## **E.) Test Administration: Testing Irregularities**

### **E.1) Description of Current Procedures:**

All NPS staff who were interviewed were aware of the term testing irregularity. When asked what types of situations they considered testing irregularities, some staff conveyed the specific definition as stated in the *SOL Examiner's Manual*. A number of staff provided a general description of what they thought might be a testing irregularity, while others said they were unsure or just did not know.

In general, school staff indicated the STC would be their point of contact if they had concerns about an issue related to testing or if they were unsure of what to do. Norfolk STCs commonly handle initial reports of testing irregularities such as a student getting sick during testing. The STCs responded readily during their interviews with VDOE staff that they communicate with the DDOT2 when handling testing irregularities.

A few school staff asked questions about testing irregularities at the conclusion of their interview with VDOE staff. Questions asked of VDOE included: how does VDOE handle anonymous phone calls from people reporting testing irregularities and how would a teacher's license be revoked if the teacher were involved in a testing irregularity. STCs indicated in their interviews that the recent press coverage of alleged testing irregularities in Norfolk was prompting additional questions from the staff in their schools.

NPS staff indicated they report testing irregularities using VDOE's Test Irregularity Web-based Application System (TIWAS). During interviews with the DDOT and the DDOT2, VDOE staff asked about any criteria the division uses for reporting testing irregularities to the VDOE. The DDOT2 indicated that the school division usually learns of the more significant testing irregularities from VDOE based on information that has been reported by citizens or teachers directly to VDOE staff. For all other testing irregularities, the DDOT2 communicates with the DDOT to determine what can be resolved locally versus what must be reported to VDOE. The DDOT2 stated she prefers to report all testing irregularities to VDOE that require students to be retested. She commented that she relies on TIWAS when resolving testing irregularities because the responses returned from

VDOE staff indicate the steps that must be followed and which specific form numbers the STC should use when re-administering the test to the student.

In each of their interviews, the DDOT and DDOT2 indicated there was an increased awareness and concern over the number of testing irregularities reported to VDOE by NPS when compared to other school divisions, but did not specify the source of that concern. VDOE staff assured the DDOT and DDOT2 that NPS staff were not submitting testing irregularities unnecessarily, but if over reporting did become an issue, then VDOE staff would work to address that with the school division.

VDOE asked the DDOT if she or other senior leadership in the school division, including the superintendent, were aware of a Virginia Board of Education (VBOE) document called *Protocol for the State-Directed Investigations of Testing Irregularities*<sup>1</sup>. The DDOT could not recall the document and was unsure if others in the division had this information. VDOE staff explained that the VBOE's protocol clearly states that while some irregularities may be resolved locally by the DDOT, most are forwarded within 24 hours to the VDOE for review and guidance. According to the protocol, all situations that involve the retesting of students, compromised testing procedures or policies, or student test record exclusions must be reported to the VDOE.

The DDOT did acknowledge, however, that after the testing irregularities at Dreamkeepers Academy where the division did not notify the state that the situation involved more serious allegations than the submission of late answer documents, it was clear the division needed to establish a system for dealing with these types of scenarios. It was not specified who made the decision not to notify VDOE that this was actually a more serious testing irregularity that involved general and special education students not being tested as required. However, the DDOT said the reason VDOE was not contacted was because the division believed it had been handled appropriately.

VDOE staff clarified that the VBOE's testing irregularity protocol and the SOL test administration manuals also reference the minimum timeframes within which testing irregularities are to be reported to VDOE. Test Examiners are directed to report any testing irregularity to the designated STC immediately, and STCs are directed to report testing irregularities to the DDOT within 24 hours of their occurrence.

The Dreamkeepers Academy testing irregularity was first reported to VDOE in June 2009 and, as noted above, was described as a submission of late answer documents. During the interview with VDOE staff, the DDOT confirmed that NPS staff obtained new information about the irregularity after the initial report to VDOE. She stated the division conducted an inquiry and summarized its findings in an August 2009 NPS memo. VDOE was not made aware of the additional information regarding this testing irregularity until February 2010 when VDOE asked NPS for additional details following a series of phone

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents\\_memos/2008/inf118a.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents_memos/2008/inf118a.pdf)

calls VDOE had with former Dreamkeepers Academy staff alleging the more serious testing irregularities and concerns at the school.

## **E.2) VDOE Recommendations:**

VDOE recommends that NPS implement training, or expand an existing training, that will develop a minimum level of awareness among division level and school level NPS staff to include a) the definition of a testing irregularity, b) criteria for when a potential testing irregularity should be reported, and c) options available for reporting a potential irregularity. As noted above, the VBOE formally adopted a protocol for handling testing irregularities in spring 2008 (Informational Superintendent's Memo No. 118, May 9, 2008<sup>2</sup>). This document should be provided to school and division level administrators as baseline information about reporting and handling testing irregularities. NPS division leaders must set the expectation and communicate that the VBOE protocol shall be applied consistently to any alleged testing irregularities. This must include a) consistent application of the criteria established for the types of testing irregularities to be reported to the VDOE, b) adhering to the timeline presented for reporting testing irregularities (within 24 hours), and c) conducting investigations in an expeditious manner.

The VDOE recommends and strongly encourages the NPS DDOT and DDOT2, as well as other NPS division leaders, to increase the level of communication with VDOE's Division of Student Assessment and School Improvement and to utilize the resources and support available. Open communication and requests for guidance and input from VDOE, particularly when dealing with egregious, impactful testing irregularities, should be viewed as an opportunity for the school division rather than an obligation. VDOE leaders in the Division of Student Assessment and School Improvement are available during standard business hours, but also are available to DDOT and DDOT2 contacts in all school divisions when needed during evening and weekend hours to address urgent issues and provide support.

VDOE recommends that NPS develop a process for examining testing irregularities after the irregularities have been closed (as mutually agreed upon by VDOE and NPS leadership). This process should be implemented as a means to inform NPS leaders about topics such as a) why the testing irregularity occurred, b) how the testing irregularity was reported (e. g., anonymous call to the division, state, etc, and from a teacher, parent, community member, etc.), c) why that reporting method may have been used, and d) if the testing irregularity suggests any trends that may indicate policy or procedural issues that need to be addressed by the school division. One possible option would be to convene a group of trusted NPS stakeholders to periodically and confidentially review reported testing irregularities with the goal of answering the questions above.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents\\_memos/2008/inf118.html](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents_memos/2008/inf118.html)

VDOE strongly encourages Norfolk to review and evaluate processes currently in place to ensure that communications from VDOE to the division are distributed to the appropriate NPS division level and school level leaders. This includes but is not limited to VDOE communications such as Superintendent's Memos (formal weekly memos from Virginia's Superintendent of Public Instruction to each school division superintendent) and Testing Memos (formal periodic memos from Virginia's Assistant Superintendent of Student Assessment and School Improvement to each DDOT). A significant communication that received insufficient attention was the communication announcing the VBOE's adoption of the *Protocol for the State-Directed Investigations of Testing Irregularities*. This action by the VBOE was communicated to all Virginia school divisions by Superintendent's Memo (No. 118, May 9, 2008) and then repeated to all DDOTs by Testing Memo (No. 753, January 13, 2009).

VDOE recommends that Norfolk review any testing irregularities that were resolved locally within the last three years, such as the spring 2009 Dreamkeepers Academy testing irregularity, to determine whether any student test records that were inaccurately coded were identified and whether the associated changes were submitted to VDOE for correction. VDOE's process, the Post-Authorization to Proceed (Post-ATP) Record Change Request, is available to school divisions to request changes to test records that previously were declared final and accurate by the school division. This process is documented on the VDOE Web site<sup>3</sup> and requires a memo from the division superintendent requesting the specific changes.

#### **IV. OTHER TOPICS AND OBSERVATIONS**

During the timeframe of June 2009 through February 2010, VDOE staff received a number of phone calls from anonymous callers and identified callers regarding alleged testing irregularities at various NPS schools. While the allegations addressed different scenarios at different locations, most callers also expressed similar concerns about potential retribution for reporting details of SOL testing issues. VDOE staff received reports of individuals feeling intimidated by school administrators and being subjected to comments about their professionalism and integrity. Some individuals reported experiencing these issues, while others expressed fear and anticipation that they would occur. NPS staff who believed they were aware of SOL testing irregularities but were not confident in telling their building principal or STC were unsure of where they could safely share the information in a beneficial manner. Some mentioned it was only through reading the newspaper coverage that they realized contacting the VDOE's Division of Student Assessment and School Improvement was an option for reporting their concerns.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/test\\_administration/authorization\\_proceed/post\\_atp\\_record\\_change\\_form.xls](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/test_administration/authorization_proceed/post_atp_record_change_form.xls)

VDOE staff received reports that, during the March 2010 administration of the SOL writing test, the principal of Oakwood Elementary School visited classrooms and expected students and teachers to participate in prayer with her prior to testing. According to various reports, individual students and one or more classroom teachers were told by the principal to stand and hold hands and were expected to contribute to the prayer. In addition, VDOE received reports that the principal had her pastor attend a faculty meeting on the first day of the pre-service week to lead a prayer session with the teachers. Teachers were to hold hands and pray together. Finally, it was reported that on Friday mornings before school, the principal's pastor holds a Bible study at the school. E-mails and fliers encouraging teachers to participate to attend were distributed in the school by the principal or with the support of the principal. Some students have also been invited and attended the Bible study.

The following excerpt from *the Guidelines Concerning Religious Activity in the Public Schools*<sup>4</sup> adopted by the Virginia Board of Education on June 22, 1995, addresses the roles of teachers in religious expression within the schools:

As a general matter, neither the Free Exercise nor Free Speech clauses provide teachers an unqualified right to engage in religious expression with students at school. Because teachers play a central role in setting values for our children, they must also bear responsibility for their actions which impermissibly create a danger of establishing religion in the public schools, including misapprehension by pupils that the public schools sponsor the teacher's viewpoint. Teachers should not lead students in devotional activities during class or school-sponsored activity, or encourage students to participate with the teacher in religious activity before or after school.

As VDOE staff interviewed NPS teachers and staff as part of the technical assistance process, it seemed that some staff responded to questions about SOL testing procedures in a rather standardized manner. When asked about specific testing procedures used, some NPS staff responded to multiple questions with an answer such as, "However it is documented in the testing manual is how we did it," or "I don't remember, but if that's what the manual says, then that's what we did." VDOE staff also learned that NPS staff from one school, in advance of their interview, were provided with a set of potential questions that VDOE may ask. Appropriate responses to the potential questions were included, as well.

The NPS staff members responsible for maintaining and supplying student demographic data for the SOL test administrations were not interviewed by VDOE staff. VDOE recognizes, however, the importance of providing timely and accurate student

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/guidance/support/religious\\_activity.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/guidance/support/religious_activity.pdf)

records. In at least 3 scenarios in the last few years of SOL test administrations, Norfolk has experienced problems with a large number of their student records being coded incorrectly. The amount of time and effort required of VDOE and contractor staff to correct the data errors has been significant in each case. While the cause of these various instances may not be the same, the reoccurrence of the problem suggests that NPS staff should consider their processes and their steps to ensure data quality throughout their student assessment and demographic data.

#### **IV. SPRING 2010 CHANGES IN SOL PROCEDURES IMPLEMENTED BY NORFOLK**

Based on communications received from the Norfolk DDOT, the following changes have been implemented or will be implemented by NPS beginning with the spring 2010 administration.

##### Central Office Special Education Staff Responsibilities:

- Increase monitoring of IEPs, with specific emphasis on the IEP testing page.
- Provide reports of incomplete IEP information and other concerns to the executive directors in the central office who supervise the schools where these issues exist.
- Review three data systems (Encore, Starbase, Data-Warehouse) to cross reference participation of special education students in the various assessments (VAAP, VGLA, VSEP, SOL).

##### Central Office Testing Staff Responsibilities:

- Develop a standardized power point presentation for School Test Coordinators to use at their schools for training.
- Require school staff to complete “sign in” sheets verifying their participation in training.
- Prepare a summary of testing irregularities by test administration as well as a final report for the superintendent and school board.
- Develop an additional Web page entitled “Testing Resource Center” that addresses state testing requirements.
- Require STCs to submit a class or school roster of students with answer documents submitted to the central office. Secure materials and answer documents will not be accepted without a roster of students. (This was in place for SOL Writing and will remain in place for Non-Writing paper/pencil tests).
- Require increased monitoring of student attendance by principal and school level staff.

- Implement a separate phone line for anonymous callers to report sensitive issues and concerns.
- Implement mandatory meetings for STCs for February, March, and April.
- Schedule test sessions for elementary schools for the first week of the testing window to allow more time for make-up sessions for students missing tests.
- Expand the use of online-SOL testing.
- Implement superintendent-mandated district "stand-down" SOL-testing training for all school principals and administrators on March 30.

## **V. OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONTINUED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE**

An important component of VDOE's efforts to understand the testing policies and procedures currently in place in NPS was to identify areas in which school division staff could benefit from ongoing technical assistance from the Department. As noted in Section B. Roles and Responsibilities: School Test Coordinator (STC), there is currently considerable variability in the training provided by STCs to Test Examiners and Proctors. According to communications received from the DDOT, NPS plans to prepare standardized training documents that will be used by all STCs in training school staff. VDOE recommends that NPS submit these training documents to VDOE for review and feedback prior to conducting the training sessions. Further, VDOE recommends that training materials used by the DDOT and DDOT2 to train STCs be submitted for review and feedback by VDOE during the same time period. It should be noted that the NPS DDOT submitted the presentation used for training administrators during the "Testing Stand Down" mandated by the superintendent to VDOE for review and comment. In addition to providing assistance in standardizing training, VDOE believes that NPS testing staff would benefit from additional training and guidance in determining when to inform VDOE of a testing irregularity, conducting local investigations, preparing reports detailing the results of the investigation, and developing corrective action plans.