

Virginia Board of Education Agenda Item



Agenda Item: G

Date: June 26, 2014

Title	Report from the Assessment and Accountability Roundtable on Guidelines for Local Assessments in Response to House Bill 930/Senate Bill 306		
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Purpose of Presentation:

For information only. No action required.

Previous Review or Action:

No previous review or action.

Action Requested:

No action requested.

Alignment with Board of Education Goals: Please indicate (X) all that apply:

X	Goal 1: Accountability for Student Learning
	Goal 2: Rigorous Standards to Promote College and Career Readiness
	Goal 3: Expanded Opportunities to Learn
	Goal 4: Nurturing Young Learners
	Goal 5: Highly Qualified and Effective Educators
	Goal 6: Sound Policies for Student Success
	Goal 7: Safe and Secure Schools
	Other Priority or Initiative. Specify:

Background Information and Statutory Authority:

Goal One: This report will provide input in the development of guidelines for local authentic assessments.

House Bill 930 and Senate Bill 306 passed the 2014 General Assembly and signed by the Governor amended § 22.1-253.13:3 of the *Code of Virginia*. The legislation provides that:

“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.”

Summary of Important Issues:

The Assessment and Accountability Roundtable consists of representatives from the following organizations:

- Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
- Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals
- Virginia Association of School Superintendents
- Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals
- Virginia Education Association
- Virginia Parent-Teacher Association
- Virginia School Boards Association

At the Board of Education meeting on May 21, 2014, some questions were presented to the Board for consideration as it develops guidelines for local assessments. The questions included:

1. How will school divisions certify that local assessments measure the Standards of Learning (SOL)?
2. Must the local assessments include all SOL for that subject?
3. Must local assessments include “authentic performance assessments” or may they include primarily multiple-choice or technology-enhanced items?
4. What is the definition of “authentic performance assessments”?
5. Must the same assessment be used across a division or may decisions about assessments be made at the school level?
6. Must local assessments provide a summative measure of student achievement or will interim assessments administered throughout the year be sufficient?
7. Will the guidelines allow for group work? If so, will there be guidance as to how the contribution of individual students will be captured?
8. If performance tasks are used, will students be permitted to attempt the same task again if they are unsuccessful on the first attempt? Will it be permissible to use the same tasks from year to year or will it be necessary to develop new tasks?
9. If integrated assessments are used, will the requirements be different?
10. What professional development must be provided to teachers?
11. What support will be provided to small school divisions?
12. How will “adequate academic progress” be defined?
13. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that alternate assessments be provided for students who are unable to participate in the regular division assessment. How will school divisions ensure that this requirement is addressed?

The Assessment and Accountability Roundtable’s response to these questions is attached.

Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources:

N/A

Timetable for Further Review/Action:

Guidelines regarding local assessments will likely come to the Board of Education for first review at the July 24, 2014, meeting.

Superintendent's Recommendation:

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education accept the report from the Assessment and Accountability Roundtable.

Assessment/Accountability Roundtable's Responses to Department of Education Questions Related to Interpretation of House Bill 930/Senate Bill 306

Introduction

The Assessment and Accountability Roundtable welcomes the opportunity to provide responses to the questions posed in Dr. Loving-Ryder's May 2014 presentation. The Roundtable speaks on behalf of educators and parents from across the Commonwealth, and these responses represent the consensus positions of our group.

We are not only keenly interested in policy related to Virginia's assessment and accountability system, but we hope to be a valued resource to the Board and Department of Education as these policies are shaped and implemented. We represent practitioners who not only work with students and teachers every day, but who also understand the research and literature related to assessment of student learning.

Our responses to Dr. Loving-Ryder's questions are based on two core principles that we see as foundational to House Bill 930(SB306). The first is increased local flexibility. Passion for the content, student engagement, and higher-level thinking can neither be legislated nor required by policy. These occur when teachers think and innovate within their daily work. By providing for authentic and performance assessment options, HB930/SB306 opens the door for this innovation to be supported and encouraged. In order to align policy with this principle, we believe that the Board's guidelines should delegate as much control over assessment practices as possible to school divisions.

The second principle is attention to quality and alignment. While local flexibility is essential, we must not give up the consistency and coherence provided by the SOL. At the end of the last century, the implementation of the Standards in all classrooms was an important step forward for the Commonwealth's schools. The assurance that students will receive instruction on a "guaranteed and viable curriculum" (Marzano, 2000) is well known to positively impact student learning. This is an area in which we must not take a step backward. However, we assert that it is indeed possible to increase local flexibility while maintaining alignment of instruction and assessments to the Standards.

We have reviewed the language of House Bill 930/SB306. Our interpretation of some of its key passages follows:

1. Guidelines shall "*incorporate options for age-appropriate, authentic performance assessments and portfolios with rubrics and other methodologies....*"

We interpret this to mean that authentic assessment, portfolios, and other methodologies are intended to be options that school divisions may choose as ways to assess student learning of SOL content and skills.

2. Guidelines shall incorporate "*...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*".

We interpret this to mean that as alternate forms of assessment are designed, tested, administered, and interpreted; attention must be given to quality and alignment. Alignment refers to the degree to which the assessment is a valid measure of the learning goals in the SOL. Quality includes not only this validity but also the reliability with which the students' work can be evaluated.

3. Guidelines should “*permit and encourage integrated assessments that include multiple subject areas.*”

We interpret this to mean that a single assessment that incorporates SOL from multiple subject areas can serve as evidence of achievement across those subject areas.

4. Guidelines should “*substantiate the assessments and the professional development of teachers to enable them to make the best use of alternative assessments.*”

We interpret this to mean that while local flexibility is important, so is a planned set of opportunities whereby teachers may learn about assessment design, participate in calibration and critique of existing assessment tasks, and improve the quality and alignment of alternative assessments for their classrooms.

Responses to Questions

1. How will school divisions certify that local assessments measure the SOL?

The *Guidelines for Uniform Performance Standards and Evaluation Criteria for Superintendents* (adopted by the Virginia Board of Education, January 2000) specify that it is each Division Superintendent’s responsibility to “monitor coordination of instructional programs with state and local standards.” The instructional program in each school division includes the choice, implementation and administration of assessments, whether they are alternative forms or SOL-type tests. Therefore, we assert that a certification from each Superintendent stating that, in areas where SOL tests have been eliminated, student learning is being assessed using aligned, quality assessment tools is sufficient.

While some have opined that requiring only a certification could lead to an inclination for some school divisions to misrepresent actual practice, we reject that assumption. Superintendents currently certify the validity of a number of reports and results and are accountable not only to the state but also to local school boards and parents. The existing accountability system that includes excessive reporting and relies on punitive measures to drive improvement has possibly fostered this supposition. As Virginia’s accountability system evolves, we hope it will move further from a “test-and-punish” model towards a “support-and-improve” one. The Board’s formulation of these initial guidelines provides an opportunity to take a step in that direction.

Should the Board determine that more detailed reporting than we have recommended is essential, the Roundtable may be able to assist by recommending reporting models that are minimally cumbersome yet meet the Board’s expectation. One option worth exploring is a process for reviewing and auditing a sample of assessments and student products.

2. Must the local assessments include all SOL for that subject?

When assessment is conducted by taking a “snapshot” of student learning at one selected time, as with a traditional high-stakes SOL test, it is necessary to sample the content. Some existing SOL tests require excessive time for some students to complete, and still the questions cannot cover all of the skills and content taught during the year. Allowing the certification of multiple classroom assessments given at various times during the year makes it possible to require that those assessments include a significant proportion and perhaps all of the SOL for that subject.

3. Must local assessments include “authentic performance assessments” or may they include

primarily multiple-choice or technology-enhanced items?

Our interpretation of House Bill 930/SB306 is that the choice of assessment types, including whether to use authentic performance assessments, multiple-choice or other selected response formats, or technology-enhanced items, is an option at the local level.

4. What is the definition of “authentic performance assessments”?

A performance assessment is a type of assessment in which students demonstrate the use of their acquired knowledge and skill. Performance assessments are used primarily to determine what students can and cannot *do*, in contrast to what they do or do not *know*. A performance assessment may include a written component, but often focuses primarily on the student’s demonstration of a specified task. Performance assessments are typically scored using rubrics, which explicitly describe levels of performance and designate which levels meet standards.

An authentic assessment is one in which students perform a real-world task. The more authentic the assessment is, the more closely it approximates the way a similar task would be done in a setting outside the classroom (a workplace or community, for example). Authentic assessments are by definition performance-oriented, but some performance assessments are more or less authentic than others.

5. Must the same assessment be used across a division or may decisions about assessments be made at the school level?

We recommend that this decision be made at the local level. Many divisions engage teachers in collaborative development of common assessments, and we recommend this practice. However, we know that this development takes time and rarely occurs on the same schedule across all content areas and grade levels. Resources vary from division to division, and flexibility will allow each division to make this individual decision. We discourage the Board from requiring division-wide assessments, at least in the short term, as we believe this hinders this powerful collaborative process.

6. Must local assessments provide a summative measure of student achievement or will interim assessments administered throughout the year be sufficient?

Assessments administered throughout the year allow for (1) more timely information about student learning that informs instruction, (2) a balanced system that includes multiple assessment types, (3) repeated assessments of important skills that build over time, and (4) better integration of assessment and instruction. We strongly recommend that assessment not be limited to a single end-of-year measure.

7. Will the guidelines allow for group work? If so, will there be guidance as to how the contribution of individual students will be captured?

The decision about whether and how to incorporate group work is best left to the locality. Some types of assessment lend themselves well to a combination of group and individual work. If students worked together on a multiple choice test and turned in one paper, those responses would not be valid indicators of the performance of individual group members. On the other hand, students might work together to research a topic, share resources and findings with each other, discuss and debate the topic, and then compose individual responses to an open-ended question. We believe teachers are capable of skillfully implementing a range of models while capturing data that represents each student’s performance.

8. If performance tasks are used,

– will students be permitted to attempt the same task again if they are unsuccessful on the first attempt?

This is a decision best made locally based on the design of each assessment. A student who completes a project over a period of multiple weeks might submit parts of that project along the way (a hypothesis or a data collection plan in science, for example) to the teacher for feedback. The project gets stronger as the student learns from this feedback. Then, the assessment score is based on the final project. One could say that the student has had multiple attempts, but the ability for students to improve their performance before the final demonstration is a strength of this type of assessment. To illustrate, imagine a musician taking lessons prior to a concert or an athlete receiving coaching to prepare for a competition. This is how they learn and improve, but the instruction does not detract from the importance of or the ability to assess the final performance.

- will it be permissible to use the same tasks from year to year or will it be necessary to develop new tasks?

Performance tasks are generally open-ended, requiring students to generate their own designs and ideas. In fact, many of the SOL that lend themselves best to performance assessment indicate that producing a unique answer is necessary to succeed on the task. An illustration of this is the definition of “understanding” in the Science SOL, which includes the ability to *“explain the information in one’s own words, comprehend how the information is related to other key facts, and suggest additional interpretations of its meaning or importance.”* When students are engaged in these higher-level activities, requiring not only replication but processing and use of ideas, then each person’s response or product may (and should) be different. This allows performance tasks to be used repeatedly.

9. If integrated assessments are used, will the requirements be different?

We hope that many school divisions will take advantage of the opportunity to develop and use integrated assessments. We recommend that requirements be consistent whether assessments are integrated or not.

10. What professional development must be provided to teachers?

The professional development needs of teachers vary due to several factors, including:

- their existing knowledge and practice.
- the degree to which the school division’s assessment practices have given them related experience.
- the level of interest on the part of the teacher or the division in using alternate forms of assessment.
- whether they will be implementing alternate forms of assessment designed by others or be designing assessments and rubrics.

All of these factors must be taken into account by local school divisions when professional development programs are designed. Funding is and will continue to be, a key issue in assuring delivery of appropriate and adequate professional development for teachers and administrators. A great deal of expertise in this area exists in Virginia’s education community. We recommend that the Department of Education seek ways to support quality professional development options, including by partnering with school divisions, associations and teacher education programs.

Just as we are advocating for practices that move Virginia forward in the area of assessment, we

encourage policymakers to consider the qualities of effective professional development in designing professional development or selecting programs to support. Members of the Roundtable are familiar with the research in this area and available as resources to support this work.

11. What support will be provided to small school divisions?

Small school divisions will need opportunities to collaborate with other divisions, associations, and teacher educators in order to increase capacity and efficiency. Care should be taken to ensure that within and among these networks, current technology is leveraged, professional development is offered, calibration sessions are available, and model assessments are shared. We encourage the Board to seek financial support to encourage such partnerships and networks.

12. How will “adequate academic progress” be defined?

Data provided by classroom teachers in the form of assessment scores and student grades will indicate the level at which each student has achieved proficiency of the SOL content and skills.

13. IDEA requires that alternate assessments be provided for students who are unable to participate in the regular district assessment. How will school divisions ensure that this requirement is addressed?

When students are unable to participate in regular assessment, their IEPs or 504 Plans indicate the accommodations to be provided, both on classroom and large-scale assessments. We do not see any need for this to change.

Conclusion

The members of the Assessment and Accountability Roundtable appreciate your consideration of our positions, and we hope to be engaged further in the important work being undertaken by the Board. We are encouraged by and eager to participate in policy discussions related to modernizing Virginia’s assessment and accountability systems. Reductions in high-stakes testing open opportunities for classroom practices that increase student engagement, emphasize higher-level thinking, and allow for more direct links between classroom lessons and real-world experiences.

It is essential that the Board of Education stay true to the intent of HB930/SB306 in crafting its guidelines, remembering the stated intent of the legislation:

- reduction in the number of tests;
- devotion of more time to instruction;
- assessment of higher order thinking skills; and
- greater local flexibility in regard to timing and content.

While we are eager to see student assessment in Virginia become more performance-based and authentic in nature, we see neither legislative language nor any other reason for the Board to rush to establish guidelines that restrict the range of options available to school divisions. In an environment where policymakers, educators and parents are all concerned about too much testing, we hope the Board will resist adding requirements to replace those that were so recently removed. An approach that is more prescriptive than necessary is likely to cause confusion, hurried implementation of models without ample time to prepare, and results that can’t be trusted. In order to maintain consistency across school

divisions, the Board should require certification that SOL content and skills are being taught and student achievement and progress are being assessed. We believe this approach is sufficient and allows school divisions the space to encourage and support innovation and creativity. In all its actions, we encourage the Board to return as much autonomy as possible for assessment of student learning to the division, building, and classroom levels, where educators are uniquely qualified to engage in this work.

Our desire to leave decisions about assessment in non-SOL areas largely to localities does not indicate any lack of interest in assuring assessment quality. On the contrary, many of our members are currently engaged in activities that support design and implementation of evidence-based alternate assessments. We would welcome the opportunity to share these efforts with the Board and the Department of Education as appropriate.