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State Superintendent Announces Start of Phaseout of VGLA ***New online reading and math tests for students with disabilities***

Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright announced today that the Virginia Grade-Level Alternative (VGLA), a locally scored portfolio assessment for students with disabilities, will be replaced by a new online test — beginning with mathematics testing in 2011-2012 and reading testing in 2012-2013.

The new assessment, the Virginia Modified Achievement Standard Test (VMAST), is designed for students with disabilities who are learning grade-level content but cannot fairly be held to the same achievement standards as their nondisabled classmates. Items on the VMAST will include supports and simplified items not available to students who take Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in reading and mathematics.

“There will be strict criteria for the selection of students for the VMAST and safeguards to prevent misuse,” Wright said. “And because it will be computer scored like SOL tests, VMAST will be an objective and reliable measure of student achievement.”

VMAST mathematics assessments for grades 3-8 and Algebra I will be introduced during 2011-2012. VMAST reading assessments in grades 3-8 and high school will be introduced the following year.

Initial development of the tests was supported with a 2007 grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Federal special education funds were identified this week to cover the costs of implementing the VMAST mathematics and reading assessments.

The VGLA was introduced during 2004-2005. It was intended for students with disabilities capable of meeting grade-level standards but unable — because of their disability — to demonstrate their achievement on standard SOL tests, even with accommodations permitted in Virginia's testing program.

This spring, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) directed assessment, special education and other staff in divisions with VGLA participation rates of 25 percent or greater to undergo training on proper administration of the test. The state average is 20 percent in both reading and mathematics.

The 2010 General Assembly expressed its concern about overuse of the test by passing legislation requiring superintendents to certify that students assessed with the VGLA meet the participation criteria. House Bill 304, sponsored by Delegate John M. O'Bannon of Henrico County, also states the legislature's desire that VDOE phase out the assessment.

"Today's announcement is the first step in carrying out the will of the General Assembly and addressing my own concerns about overuse and misuse of the VGLA," said Wright.

A time table has not been established yet for phasing out use of the VGLA for writing, history and science.

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