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VDOE Shares Strategies for Reducing Math SOL Test Times

High expectations for students, thorough knowledge of the 2009 Mathematics Standards of Learning (SOL) Curriculum Framework and an emphasis on multistep problem solving and vocabulary throughout the year are cited by teachers and administrators as contributing to the success of students who completed Virginia's challenging new mathematics assessments in three or fewer hours.

In response to concerns from school divisions about the amount of time it took some students to complete the new mathematics SOL tests last year, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) surveyed teachers and other educators from 16 relatively high-scoring divisions.

Students in all of the surveyed divisions achieved mathematics pass rates of at least 70 percent during 2011-2012 and, in all of the divisions, at least 75 percent of students in grades 3-8 completed their mathematics SOL tests within two hours and 90 percent completed their end-of-course assessments within three hours.

"Educators across the state worked hard last year — and continue to work hard — to help students meet the Board of Education's rigorous new mathematics standards," Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I. Wright said. "But some school divisions stand out in how well prepared their students were for the new mathematics tests, and I believe all divisions can benefit from their experiences."

Survey participants were asked to identify reasons most of their students were able to complete their tests successfully within the above time frames. Teachers cited the following as critical in preparing students for success on the new mathematics tests:

- Incorporating multistep problem solving in lessons throughout the year;
- Increasing the rigor of classroom instruction and assignments, including quizzes and tests;
- Collaborating with other teachers to create common unit assessments; and
- Analyzing classroom assessment data to identify students in need of remediation.

Educators also emphasized the importance of making sure that teachers were aware of — and able to locate — instructional resources and practice test items on the VDOE website. Respondents also stressed professional development for teachers focused on the 2009 mathematics standards as a critical factor supporting student success on the new tests.

The Board of Education strengthened Virginia's mathematics standards in 2009 to ensure that students are prepared for the challenges of the first year of college or meaningful entry-level employment when they graduate from high school. The 2011-2012 mathematics SOL tests were the first to reflect the increased rigor of the new standards.

A [summary of the survey results and instructional strategies](#) for minimizing testing times was shared with school divisions late last month and posted on the VDOE website.