

Frequently Asked Questions on Local Alternative Assessments

Definitions:

The General Assembly has asked that school divisions conduct *alternative assessments* for those eliminated SOL tests.

- Does that mean tests as an “*alternative*” to the SOL
- Or

-*Alternative* in the sense of other-than-traditional objective and similar type items.

For the purposes of the local alternative assessment guidelines, alternative assessments are assessments that are administered in place of the eliminated SOL tests; that is, they are the alternative to the SOL test that has been eliminated.

What is meant by the term “authentic assessment”? Authentic Assessments examine students' abilities in contexts that approach what might be encountered in daily life. *Authentic* assessments are a type of performance assessment, but not all performance assessments are authentic assessments. Authentic assessments generally replicate, in an age-appropriate fashion, those performances that might be faced in real situations, similar to what might be encountered, for example, in a job setting. Authentic assessments are often presented as realistic scenarios. This would include factors such as 1) why you're performing the work; 2) why it's important, 3) for whom the work is being done, 4) crafting the plan to complete the performance; 5) how you know when you're finished; and 5) determining if the product/performance meets the original intent.

What is meant by the term “performance assessment”? Performance assessments require students to demonstrate their competency in applying knowledge, skills, and practices by conducting a performance, producing a product, researching a complex question, or determining a relationship. Performance assessments can measure isolated practices or skills, or they can assess how students integrate content with skills and practices in a novel situation.

What is meant by the term “integrated assessment”? Integrated assessments include more than one content or subject area.

What is the difference between alternative and alternate assessments, and what resources are available for the local *alternate* assessment? The Local Alternative Assessment Guidelines, approved by the Board of Education, state that school divisions must develop and implement *alternate* [italics added] assessments and guidelines for the participation of children with disabilities in alternate assessments for those children who cannot participate in regular assessments, even with accommodations, as indicated in their respective Individualized

Education Programs (IEPs). This applies to students who were participating in the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP). The local *alternate* can continue to be a collection of evidence or the school division can develop novel ways to provide an *alternate* to their local alternative assessment.

The Virginia Department of Education posted resources for teachers on TTAC online at http://www.ttaonline.org/staff/assessment/vaap_res_teach.asp. These resources are the expired or “Retired” Aligned Standards of Learning (ASOL) for 3rd Grade Science and 5th Grade Writing. The ASOL are listed under “Retired ASOL.” The ASOL for the eliminated history state assessments were incorporated in the VAAP Implementation Manual for 2014-15. These resources can be used to guide teachers in their instruction and assessment for these content areas.

Please refer to the IDEA guidelines for further information.

http://doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/regulations/state/index.shtml

Implementation:

What are the Virginia Board of Education guidelines for the local alternative assessments? The Virginia Board of Education developed [Guidelines for Local Alternative Assessments for 2014-2015](#) in response to legislation in the 2014 General Assembly that amended [§ 22.1-253.13:3.C](#) of the Code of Virginia. This document is posted on the Virginia Department of Education website at

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/meetings/2014/07_jul/agenda_items/draft_local_assessment_guidelines.pdf.

When do divisions have to begin using locally designed alternative assessments in lieu of the Grade 3 History and Social Science SOL test, the Grade 3 Science SOL test, the Grade 5 Writing test, the U.S. History to 1865, and the U.S. History: 1865 to the Present test? In accordance with the timeline in the legislation, school divisions are expected to administer local alternative assessments for each of the eliminated tests during the 2014-2015 school year.

What are some types of effective alternative assessments that are useful in informing instruction and gauging student mastery? Teacher checklists of student behaviors, point-in-time profiles, or observational summaries are examples of alternative assessments. These purposefully provide a description of students’ efforts and degree of mastery of skills, behaviors, and/or attainment or use of information in an instructional setting. Similarly, portfolios, an aggregate alternative assessment, 1) are a record of multiple samples of varying types of student work over time and 2) are organized around a set of predetermined criteria. This type of alternative assessment provides a record of change over time and a concrete snapshot of what students know, understand, and can do.

How are performance assessments graded? Analytic criteria for assessing student performances are often presented as a rubric. A rubric is generally organized in a manner that defines sequential levels of student performances likely to be encountered on a specific task. Detailed descriptions for each of the performance levels are presented, which, in the aggregate, define a continuum of student sophistication and mastery. High-quality rubrics use objective language.

May a multiple-choice test be used as an alternative assessment? The legislation does not mandate the type of local assessment that should be administered and the guidelines for 2014-2015 provide considerable flexibility, so multiple-choice tests are one type of assessment that may be used. School divisions may choose a specific test or assessment method or they may use a combination of several different assessments in lieu of the eliminated SOL tests.

May local divisions use other standardized test such as Stanford 10 as alternative assessments? Local divisions may purchase existing standardized tests; however school divisions must ensure that the alternative assessments they administer cover the Standards of Learning content. Standardized achievement tests, such as Stanford 10, may not cover the Virginia Standards of Learning content and thus may not meet this requirement.

The guidelines call for the local alternative assessment to cover each strand or reporting category. How do you know if you are covering all the necessary material? The existing SOL test blueprints organize the strands for each subject area into reporting categories. They can be used to help identify which strand each SOL statement falls under. As long as the local assessment covers some SOL from each strand and/or reporting category, it should meet the criteria.

There are some SOL which were excluded on the SOL blueprints because they were not suitable to a multiple-choice format which could be tested in a performance assessment. Examples of these are the SOL 2.11 for Writing or SOL 1.e for U.S. History: 1865 to the Present.

The SOL tests for Grade 3 History and Social Science, Grade 3 Science, and Grade 5 Writing are cumulative tests covering standards from several years of instruction. Do the local alternative assessments have to cover the same material? The expectation is that the same material will be covered; however, the guidelines are deliberately flexible, especially for the first year of implementation. Different divisions may approach the coverage in different ways. One may choose to leave the collection of evidence to the last year (Grade 3 for Science or History/Social Science and Grade 5 for Writing), while another may choose for the evidence to be collected at each grade level and passed on to the next.

What skills and knowledge will be required to be assessed? Will it follow the blueprint? For the 2014-2015 school year, school divisions should administer assessments that incorporate each

strand or reporting category for that content area and grade level; however, the assessments for 2014-2105 are not required to follow the blueprint and are not expected to cover all of the content standards in each strand or reporting category. The requirements for coverage of the content standards may increase in subsequent years as experience in implementing local assessments is gained; however, just as on a SOL test, the alternative assessments will never be expected to cover all SOL.

How much choice will the students and teachers have in determining the type of performance-based alternative assessment used? The selection of the local assessments is left to the discretion of the school division. Local school divisions may choose to administer the same assessments for particular grade levels and content areas to all students in the division, or they may choose to allow more flexibility at the school level in selecting the assessments.

Will there be limits on the amount of time allowed to complete the alternative assessment? The amount of time allowed to complete the alternative assessment will be determined by the local school division.

What type of accommodations and modifications will be allowed to address the needs of students with disabilities? Will they be the same allowed on the SOL assessments? The Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan team is responsible for making the decision concerning students with disabilities' participation in the local assessments. As part of that decision-making, the IEP or 504 team is required to determine the need for and selection of accommodations and/or modifications to be used for the student to access the assessment.

Will there be standard conditions that apply to all testers? The conditions under which the assessment will be administered will be determined by the local school division.

Resources:

Will VDOE release the item banks for those SOL tests that have been discontinued? There is no plan at this time to release the existing SOL item banks.

Will there be a cost to students for materials, supplies, etc. used for a performance-based alternative assessment? Funding for the alternative assessments will be a local division decision.

Accountability:

May divisions use the previous two years of SOL scores as a rolling average with remaining SOL test scores to determine accreditation? Yes, the pass rates for accreditation and federal accountability will continue to include the three year rolling average as an option. The three-year average will continue to include the eliminated SOL tests for the next two years.

How will the results of the alternative assessments be communicated to all stakeholders (i.e. Students, parents, public, etc.)? How will the information be used? According to guidelines, the assessments used should be designed to provide feedback to parents and teachers regarding the extent to which the student has demonstrated proficiency in the content included in the SOL covered. The local school division will determine how that information is communicated to all stakeholders. The results of the local alternative assessments will be maintained by the local division, either in the school or in the central office. Student scores should be used to inform instruction and to determine the level of proficiency demonstrated by the student.

Who will be involved in evaluating student responses, products or performances for the alternative assessments? Local school divisions will determine who will be involved in evaluating student responses, products or performances for the alternative assessments.