

Virginia Department of Education
Effective Practices Related to Student Success on Standards of Learning Assessments
With Emphasis on the 2008 History and Social Science Tests
March 29, 2011

As school divisions prepare students to take the new *History and Social Science Standards of Learning* (SOL) tests based on the 2008 SOL, the Virginia Department of Education would like to bring to the attention of school division personnel the following information that may assist teachers and students as they review SOL content and skills.

The Standards of Learning Revision Process

The Code of Virginia requires that Virginia's SOL be reviewed on a seven-year cycle. Following revisions to the standards in each content area, the subject area curriculum framework is updated to align with the new standards and additional resources such as the Enhanced Scope and Sequence are edited.

Development of Standards of Learning Assessments

SOL tests are designed to assess whether students meet specific minimum expectations for achievement expressed in the SOL. Tests are developed through an extensive process of review and field testing to ensure that tests are fair and of appropriate difficulty for the grade or course. Test developers use the SOL and the curriculum frameworks as a source of material for the test questions. As such, it is particularly important for teachers to embed the content of the curriculum framework in their instruction since the framework details the specific knowledge and skills students must demonstrate on the assessments.

SOL test blueprints guide test developers as they write test questions and construct the assessments. They also provide information to educators, parents and students, including:

- Specific SOL covered by the test;
- Number of test items in each reporting category and on the total test; and
- SOL assigned to each reporting category.

Virginia teachers, school administrators and content specialists participate in the development of SOL assessments by serving on committees that review test items and forms to ensure that they measure student knowledge accurately and fairly.

Timeline for the Implementation of the *History and Social Science Standards of Learning*

The Virginia Board of Education adopted the revised *History and Social Science Standards of Learning* at the January 10, 2008, meeting, with full implementation of the revised *History and Social Science Standards of Learning* at all levels beginning in fall 2010. School divisions were notified of the implementation schedule in Superintendent's Memo No. 49 that may be found at: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents_memos/2008/inf049.html, dated February 29, 2008. Recognizing that curriculum alignment efforts required planning, time, staff development, and resources, the Department advised school divisions to begin to review and

align history and social science curricula with the revised standards, review current resource materials and correlate them with the revised standards, develop new materials where needed, and provide staff development for teachers.

To provide additional information, on August 28, 2008, the student assessment staff released Superintendent's Memo No. 239-09, that explained where the new history blueprints were located and when assessments developed using the new blueprints would be administered for the first time. It stated that assessments developed using the new blueprints would be administered for the first time in the fall 2010 administration for only the end-of-course history and social science tests. The remainder of the new history blueprints would be effective with the spring 2011 test administration. Details of the test administration are included in Superintendent's Memo No. 239-09 that may be found at:

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents_memos/2009/239-09.shtml

Superintendent's Memo No. 279-09

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents_memos/2009/279-09.shtml

announced that the 2008 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework had been updated and posted as a tool to assist school divisions in aligning their existing curricula with the revised 2008 Standards of Learning for history and social science. In addition, the approved changes to the curriculum framework were indicated with underlines for additions and strikethroughs for deletions in a separate document that is still available online at:

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/history_socialscience/index.shtml#strike_framework

Further communication was provided regarding technical edits made to the 2008 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework through Superintendent's Memo No. 171-10, on July 23, 2010 http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents_memos/2010/171-10.shtml and Superintendent's Memo No. 269-10 on October 29, 2010,

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents_memos/2010/269-10.shtml.

Instructional Resources for the 2008 *History and Social Science Standards*

The Department of Education has developed specific K-12 online instructional resources for the 2008 *History and Social Science Standards of Learning*. The History and Social Science Standards of Learning Enhanced Scope and Sequence, which has been enhanced and updated to align with the 2008 *History and Social Science Standards of Learning*, is a resource intended to assist teachers in aligning their classroom instruction with the *History and Social Science Standards of Learning*. This document provides teachers with sample lesson plans that are aligned to the Curriculum Framework. The History and Social Science Enhanced Scope and Sequence may be found at:

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/history_socialscience/index.shtml#strike_framework.

Additional resources include current news and announcements for teachers and administrators regarding information related to the history and social science standards, important documents and maps designed to reinforce the content in the standards, and professional development and organizations that teachers might find useful. These resources may be found at:

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/history_socialscience/index.shtml#strike_framework.

Finally, content specific resources for elementary, middle, and high school teachers are located at the links listed below.

- Additional instructional resources for elementary school teachers are located at: <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/history/elementary/index.shtml>
- Additional instructional resources for middle school teachers are located at: <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/history/middle/index.shtml>
- Additional instructional resources for high school teachers are located at: <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/history/high/index.shtml>

Overview of the New *History and Social Science Standards of Learning Assessments Based on the 2008 SOL*

The new end-of-course history and social science tests (World Geography, World History I, World History II, and Virginia and United States History) based on the 2008 SOL were administered for the first time in fall 2010. The first administration of the Grade 3 History, Virginia Studies, U.S. History to 1865, U.S. History: 1865 to the Present, and Civics & Economics tests will occur in spring 2011.

The Virginia Board of Education has adopted new “cut scores” that represent the achievement levels of “Pass/Proficient” and “Pass/Advanced” for the new history and social science tests. In general, students will need to demonstrate a higher level of achievement in order to receive a Pass/Proficient or Pass/Advanced score.

There have been no changes to the number of items or test format. There were some style changes implemented as stated in Superintendent's Memorandum No. 201-10 on August 20, 2010:

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents_memos/2010/201-10.shtml. Each test continues to include items that have a range of difficulty; however, the overall rigor of the tests has increased. Approximately 50 percent of the questions on the new tests require students to apply knowledge, compare information, or analyze/interpret information in order to respond to the item. Sample questions that might be found on an SOL test are presented in the chart below. While the samples represent items from each test, similar items may be found in other history content tests as well.

Grade Level/Course	Sample Question
Grade 3 History	Compare characteristics of ancient civilizations.
Virginia Studies	Understand the cause and effect relationship between events in Virginia history.
US History I	Analyze a quotation to determine how it relates to an event in United States history.

Grade Level/Course	Sample Question
US History II	Use the information in a map to determine the impact of an event in U.S. history.
Civics & Economics	Interpret a scenario to determine the result of an economic decision.
World Geography	Analyze information in a table to determine the geographic characteristics of a region.
World History I	Categorize information about an ancient society presented in a diagram.
World History II	Interpret a political cartoon that describes an event in World History.
VA and US History	Sequence events in United States history.

The History SOL are amplified by the Curriculum Framework that delineates four major areas: 1) essential understandings, 2) essential questions, 3) essential knowledge, and 4) essential skills. School divisions are encouraged to develop curricula based on all four of these areas and teachers should use them as a basis for their instruction. Test questions may be drawn from any of the four areas and content of items may not be a verbatim reflection of the information presented in the Curriculum Framework.

Schools divisions may also find helpful the Student Performance by Question report which can better help administrators and teachers identify the content and skills where students need additional attention.

Strategies for Success on New Standards of Learning Assessments

Over the years, the Department of Education has surveyed schools and school divisions that demonstrate student success on new assessments with a higher success rate than the norm. The following strategies have been identified by these schools and school divisions as having a positive impact on their student success rate, and may be useful to schools as Virginia moves toward implementation of new Standards of Learning tests in the coming years: teacher collaboration, multiple remediation opportunities, remediation decisions based on data, common assessments, administrative involvement, increased instructional time, subject area coaches, instructional foci, and professional development. Many of the strategies reported by the schools can be successfully replicated. The two that seemed to have the greatest impact based on the number of schools that used them are 1) increased teacher collaboration on strategies that have been deemed successful in the research literature, and 2) the establishment of data-driven, multiple remediation and intervention opportunities for students.

The section below provides further information about successful strategies used by schools to support instruction as new Standards of Learning and assessments are implemented:

Teacher Collaboration

The most widespread strategy was the establishment of teacher collaboration through common planning time. While the details of the planning time differed among the schools, the effort put forth to increase collaboration among grade-level and subject-area teachers was the same.

Multiple Remediation Opportunities

Many schools created multiple remediation and intervention opportunities for their students. Combinations of extra assistance before school and after school, during an elective period, and in-school tutoring were specific strategies named by schools.

Remediation Based on Data

Many schools reported that remediation efforts were directly tied to data collected through many sources such as SOL results, common quizzes, mid-terms and benchmark tests. During common planning time, teachers analyzed various sources of data, assigned students to remediation classes, and planned lessons based on the weaknesses identified by the data.

Common Assessments

Various forms of common assessments were used in many of the schools. Teachers collaborated on these assessments and used many types of tests including weekly common quizzes, unit tests, and teacher created benchmarks. Assessments were often created based on common lessons developed and taught by teachers.

Increased Instructional Time in the Content Area

Many schools indicated that instructional time in the content area was instrumental to the success of struggling students. Strategies included double-blocking instruction, identifying students for targeted “SOL Academies” during a study hall, and other creative ways to provide increased opportunity for learning.

Subject Area Coaches

Some schools hired either part-time or full-time content area coaches, also referred to as consultants or specialists. These coaches modeled lessons, met with teachers during planning time to design lessons and refine pacing guides, and provided professional development, among other duties.

Administrative Involvement

A strong, involved administration contributed to SOL success in a majority of the schools. Faculty and staff in the schools reported that the entire administrative team (principals, assistants, subject area specialists) provided follow up to the teachers’ endeavors. This included attendance at teachers’ planning meetings for discussion of data and individual student needs, frequent observations of classes, meeting with at-risk students, and attending and following up on professional development related to history and social science instruction.

Instructional Foci

Three topics received the most attention in the area of instructional changes. These included the increased use of hands-on materials, a focus on vocabulary development specific to the content area, and a regular review of content, particularly in a format that mirrored the SOL test design.

Schools where teachers implemented more hands-on lessons with increased student engagement and critical analysis reported increased success with their students. Successful schools also focused on development of vocabulary specific to the content area, often with classroom activities and lessons discussed during the common planning time.

Students in classes where there was a regular review of content previously taught also were more likely to be successful. While the schools used many different formats for review, SOL-style questions were always involved. Several schools reported that an increase in instructional time also facilitated the review efforts.

Professional Development

Nearly all of the schools reported that their teachers participated in professional development activities on both instruction and assessment, including those provided by the Department of Education at conferences and meetings, by private consultants, or within the school divisions themselves. Teachers who attended these sessions then shared what they learned with their respective faculties, either as a requirement by their administration or by the culture of collaboration in their school.

Final Considerations

As noted under the Assessment Overview, it is important for teachers to review all four major areas in the History and Social Science Curriculum Framework that include the categories of essential understandings, essential questions, essential knowledge, and essential skills. Teachers are encouraged to use the essential skills to amplify the content under review. The essential skills are the fundamental intellectual abilities that students should have—what they should be able to do—to be successful in accomplishing historical and geographical analysis.

For additional information regarding the standards or related instructional resources, please contact Beverly Thurston, coordinator for history and social science, Office of Standards, Curriculum, and Instruction, by e-mail at Beverly.Thurston@doe.virginia.gov or by telephone at (804) 225-2893, or Betsy Barton, specialist for history and social science, Office of Standards, Curriculum, and Instruction, by e-mail at Betsy.Barton@doe.virginia.gov or by telephone at (804) 225-3454.

For additional information regarding the SOL assessments, please contact the student assessment staff by e-mail at student_assessment@doe.virginia.gov or by telephone at (804) 225-2102.