



#053-21

Commonwealth of Virginia
Virginia Department of Education
Superintendent's Memo #053-21

DATE: March 2, 2021
TO: Division Superintendents
FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction
SUBJECT: **Correspondence from the United States Department of Education and Virginia's Assessment Plans for Spring 2021**

On February 22, 2021, the [United States Department of Education \(USED\) sent a letter](#) (PDF) to chief state school officers providing an update on the accountability, reporting, and assessment requirements for the 2020-2021 school year under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In this letter, states were invited to submit a waiver for the 2020-2021 school year of the accountability and school identification requirements of ESSA. A state receiving this waiver would not be required to implement and report the results of its accountability system, including calculating progress toward long-term goals and measurements of interim progress and identifying schools for support using data from the 2020-2021 school year.

The letter noted that it is “urgent to understand the impact of COVID-19 on learning” and stated that USED is not inviting blanket waivers of assessments. However, states are encouraged to “focus on assessments to provide information to parents, educators, and the public about student performance and to help target resources and supports.” To support this focus, states are asked to exercise flexibility in the administration of their state assessments through steps such as: 1) administering shorter tests, 2) extending the testing window to the extent possible, and 3) considering remote administration where feasible. As you know, Virginia’s testing windows have already been extended and the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in reading and mathematics for grades 3-8 were shortened when the commonwealth moved to computer adaptive testing a few years ago. Because remote proctoring of the SOL tests is not available at this time, remote administration of the tests is not feasible.

As school divisions plan for the spring 2021 test administration, it is important to remember that the SOL tests are to be administered under secure, standardized testing conditions at school in the presence of school personnel. All local requirements for the use of personal protective equipment and social distancing within the school must also be followed.

While the results of the SOL tests administered in 2020-2021 will provide valuable information regarding the impact of the pandemic on student achievement and a baseline for growth for future accreditation calculations, Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) staff are aware that some parents may refuse to have their students tested due to concerns related to COVID-19. In this situation, a Testing Status 52 is to be assigned to the test record by the division. Testing Status 52 - Refusal Due to COVID-19, will not result in a score of "0" for the student but rather a "No Score" on the test.

Because information on students' achievement is so important this year, VDOE is providing another testing option for students who are not administered the SOL tests in spring 2021 due to COVID-19 concerns. These assessments, called the Virginia Remote Student Progress Tests, will be available for reading and mathematics in grades 3-8 and for science in grades 5 and 8. The assessments will include items measuring the Standards of Learning and may be administered remotely to students beginning in early May. Students eligible for this assessment are those who continue to receive all of their instruction remotely and whose parents have refused to allow them to come to school to take the SOL test.

The results of the Virginia Remote Student Progress Tests may be used to determine student achievement and to identify areas in which students may need additional instruction. However, because the assessments will be administered remotely and secure testing conditions cannot be assured, the results will not be used as a baseline for growth in the 2022-2023 accreditation ratings or federal accountability determinations.

Additional details regarding the administration of the Virginia Remote Student Progress Tests will be provided to Division Directors of Testing (DDOT), and VDOE assessment staff will work closely with DDOTs to support them in the implementation of these tests.

For more information

Questions about the Virginia Remote Student Progress Tests should be directed to the student assessment staff at Student_Assessment@doe.virginia.gov or (804) 225-2102.

JFL/SLR/as