



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

August 15, 2014

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Steven R. Staples, Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: Clarifications Regarding 2014 Legislation Impacting the Standards of Learning Testing Program

Legislation in the 2014 General Assembly amended [§ 22.1-253.13:3.C](#) of the *Code of Virginia* to eliminate several Standards of Learning (SOL) tests:

- Grade 3 History,
- Grade 3 Science,
- Grade 5 Writing,
- United States History to 1865, and
- United States History: 1865 to the Present.

Specifically, the *Code* now states (emphasis added):

The Standards of Learning assessments administered to students in grades three through eight shall not exceed (a) reading and mathematics in grades three and four; (b) reading, mathematics, and science in grade five; (c) reading and mathematics in grades six and seven; (d) reading, writing, mathematics, and science in grade eight; and (e) Virginia Studies and Civics and Economics once each at the grade levels deemed appropriate by each local school board.

Since the legislation was signed into law, Virginia Department of Education staff have received a number of questions from school divisions regarding its implementation. School division staff have asked if the legislative restrictions on the tests that can be administered at certain grade levels prohibit other tests from being offered to students in these grade levels. For example, school divisions have asked if the Virginia Studies test can be administered at grades 4 or 5, if the Civics and Economics test can be administered at grades 7 or 8, and if end-of-course SOL tests can be administered to accelerated students in the upper elementary and middle school grades. As the Department understands the legislation, its intent was to eliminate certain SOL tests as noted above. School divisions retain flexibility in determining when the Virginia Studies and Civics and Economics tests are administered and in administering any end-of-course tests to students when they have covered the content.

School divisions with certain history and social science course sequences at the middle school level have also asked about the impact of this legislation. For example, some school divisions have previously integrated the Civics and Economics content into instruction for United States History to 1865 and United States History: 1865 to the Present rather than teaching it as a separate class. In this scenario students were required to take the United

States History to 1865 SOL test and the United States History: 1865 to the Present SOL test when they completed the content. However, students were not required to take the Civics and Economics SOL test. School divisions have asked if their students will now be required to take the Civics and Economics SOL test. As the Department understands the intent of the legislation, all students are now expected to take the Virginia Studies and the Civics and Economics SOL tests beginning with the 2014-2015 school year.

The Department realizes that meeting this expectation will require some school divisions to make changes to the courses currently offered to students. School divisions that are unable to administer these SOL tests to students during the 2014-2015 school year must submit a plan of transition to Student_Assessment@doe.virginia.gov by September 30, 2014. The plan will be reviewed by both instruction and assessment staff within the Department and approvals will be provided in order for all school divisions to fully implement the administration of the Virginia Studies and Civics and Economics tests during the 2015-2016 school year.

The legislation also requires each local school board to annually certify that it has provided instruction and administered an alternative assessment, consistent with Virginia Board of Education guidelines, to students in grades three through eight in each SOL subject area in which the SOL assessment was eliminated. Specifically, the *Code* now states:

Each school board shall annually certify that it has provided instruction and administered an alternative assessment, consistent with Board guidelines, to students in grades three through eight in each Standards of Learning subject area in which a Standards of Learning assessment was not administered during the school year. Such guidelines shall (1) incorporate options for age-appropriate, authentic performance assessments and portfolios with rubrics and other methodologies designed to ensure that students are making adequate academic progress in the subject area and that the Standards of Learning content is being taught; (2) permit and encourage integrated assessments that include multiple subject areas; and (3) emphasize collaboration between teachers to administer and substantiate the assessments and the professional development of teachers to enable them to make the best use of alternative assessments.

Alternative assessments should be administered for each of the following previously administered SOL tests now eliminated: Grade 3 History, Grade 3 Science, Grade 5 Writing, United States History to 1865, and United States History: 1865 to the Present. The Virginia Board of Education is in the process of developing local assessment guidelines for school divisions to follow in implementing this requirement. A draft of the guidelines was received by the Virginia Board of Education for first review at the July 24, 2014, meeting. The Board item can be found at [First Review of Proposed Local Assessment Guidelines Developed in Response to 2014 Acts of Assembly](#). The draft guidelines have been updated as of August 14, 2014, and the updated version may be found at [Draft Guidelines for Local Alternative Assessments for 2014-2015](#). The Board is expected to take action on the guidelines at the September 18, 2014, meeting.

If you have questions about these clarifications as they impact the SOL testing program, please contact the student assessment staff by e-mail at Student_Assessment@doe.virginia.gov or by telephone at (804) 225-2102. If you have questions about history/social science course sequencing at the middle school level, please contact Christonya Brown by e-mail at Christonya.Brown@doe.virginia.gov or by telephone at (804) 225-2893.

SRS/SLR/cb