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Contact: Charles B. Pyle, Director of Communications, (804) 371-2420
Julie C. Grimes, Communications Manager, (804) 225-2775

Board of Education Approves Local Test Guidelines

The state Board of Education today approved [guidelines for locally developed assessments](#) that will replace five discontinued Standards of Learning (SOL) tests this year.

Legislation approved by the 2014 General Assembly (House Bill 930 and Senate Bill 306) eliminated the following SOL tests, effective with the 2014-2015 school year:

- Grade-3 History/Social Science
- Grade-3 Science
- Grade-5 Writing
- U.S. History I (formerly administered in grade 5 or grade 6)
- U.S. History II (formerly administered in grade 6 or grade 7)

The legislation also requires school divisions to certify annually that they have provided instruction and administered an alternative assessment, consistent with Board of Education guidelines, to students in grades and subject areas that no longer have a corresponding SOL test. The board's guidelines leave the type of assessments developed or selected to local school boards. The possibilities include traditional tests, performance- and project-based assessments, formative or summative assessments, and integrated tests that cover content from more than one subject area.

"It is our hope that these guidelines will provide flexibility for teachers in grades and subjects where there is no longer a state test, while at the same time reassuring teachers in later grades with an SOL test that future students will come to them prepared," Board of Education President Christian N. Braunlich said.

For the current school year, the board recommends that school divisions assess a sampling of SOL content for each subject and grade level. More comprehensive coverage may be required in subsequent years as school divisions gain experience in implementing alternative tests.

"The state board is saying to teachers, 'Be creative this year. Collaborate and take advantage of this opportunity to design assessments that support instruction and assess 21st-century skills as well as SOL content,'" Superintendent of Public Instruction Steven R. Staples said.

The guidelines also encourage divisions to document costs associated with local test creation and administration – including costs related to professional development for teachers in assessment development.

Scores from local assessments will not be reported to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). But VDOE staff will make site visits and conduct reviews to determine how divisions are verifying that required SOL content is still being taught and what types of alternative assessments are being administered. The reviews will help the department identify "best practices" for sharing among school divisions.

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