

Guidelines for Local Alternative Assessments: 2023-2024 and Beyond

Purpose of the Guidelines

The *Guidelines for Local Alternative Assessments: 2023-2024 and Beyond* replaces the *Guidelines for Local Alternative Assessments for 2021-2022 and Beyond*. The new guidelines recommend that school divisions use the new integrated reading and writing component that is being added to the grade 5 Standards of Learning (SOL) Reading test beginning in spring 2024 to fulfill the requirement that school divisions administer a local assessment of grade 5 writing. In the new integrated reading and writing items administered as part of the grade SOL Reading test, students are presented with a nonfiction passage based on history or science content that is accompanied by several questions connected to the passage in addition to a writing prompt based on the passage. The nonfiction passage provides context for students to use when responding to the prompt, or it may serve as a springboard for students who choose to incorporate personal experiences in their responses.

The intent of the new item type is twofold: (1) to reinforce the importance of students writing about what they have read to support the development of literacy skills; and (2) to provide a measure of students' writing skill without the burden of an additional test. Because this new item type provides a measure of writing for grade 5 students, the administration of a local alternative assessment for Grade 5 Writing is no longer required.

The updated guidelines continue to emphasize the use of the [Virginia Quality Criteria Tool for Performance Assessments](#) and require the use of common rubrics developed by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to provide consistent achievement expectations for Virginia students.

Legislation in the 2014 General Assembly amended § 22.1-253.13:3(C) of the *Code of Virginia* to eliminate the following state-developed SOL tests and replace them with locally developed alternative assessments:

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

In addition to replacing these SOL tests, the legislation also required each local school board to certify annually that it had 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, § 22.1-253.13:3(C) states, in part, the following:

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.

Certification That Content Has Been Taught and Assessments Administered

Local school boards and division superintendents will continue to certify through the annual Standards of Quality compliance assurance that instruction has been provided and local alternative assessments measuring the SOL and adhering to the Board's guidelines administered in the following subject areas:

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

While school divisions may choose to continue to administer a local alternative assessment in grade 5 writing, use of the integrated reading and writing component of the Grade 5 SOL Reading test to fulfill the requirement is recommended.

Definition of Authentic Performance Assessments

Performance assessments generally require students to perform a task or create a product that is typically scored using a rubric. Authentic performance assessments often include tasks that mirror those that might occur in a “real-life” situation and/or are authentic to the academic discipline. It is up to the local school division to determine whether a performance task is authentic.

Implementation of Performance Assessments

School divisions are required to implement performance assessments as part of their local alternative assessment plans. Continued use of the *Virginia Quality Criteria Tool for Performance Assessments* during the development of new performance assessments and/or the revision of existing tasks is expected in order to ensure that all students have access to quality assessments aligned to the SOL. School divisions will continue to refine local alternative assessment plans that describe how performance assessments that are designed to inform instruction are being implemented.

Expectations for the 2023-2024 School Year and Beyond

School divisions are required to continue to develop Balanced Assessment Plans for each course in which local alternative assessments are administered and to continue to utilize resources provided by VDOE that promote consistency across the Commonwealth. Balanced Assessment Plans for Grade 3 History, Grade 3 Science, Grade 5 Writing (only for those divisions that do not use the integrated reading and writing component of the Grade 5 SOL Reading Test to meet the assessment requirements for Grade 5 Writing), United States History to 1865, and United States History: 1865 to the Present will continue to more fully detail the various types of local alternative assessments used to measure the skills and content included in the SOL for each

course. These plans are to indicate a variety of assessment types, including performance assessments.

The development and selection of the local assessments that comprise the Balanced Assessment Plans are left to the discretion of the school division; however, assessments administered should be designed to provide feedback to students, parents, and teachers regarding the extent to which the student has demonstrated mastery in the content and skills included in the SOL covered and should demonstrate continued progress in implementing performance assessments as part of a balanced local assessment system.

Local school divisions may choose to administer the same assessments for particular grade levels and content areas to all students in the division or may provide schools with flexibility in selecting the assessments to be administered.

School divisions are to use the common rubrics provided by VDOE when scoring student responses to performance assessments and performance tasks in classrooms where an SOL assessment has been replaced by local alternative assessments. Additionally, school divisions are expected to continue to provide opportunities for cross-scoring student responses to performance assessments within schools and across schools within the school division. Professional learning opportunities related to scoring and the application of the common rubrics will be provided by VDOE in order to maximize the opportunity for classroom teachers to participate in these events.

Use of Integrated Assessments

The legislation encourages integrated assessments that include multiple subject areas. For example, a local assessment might address content from both Grade 3 History and Grade 3 Science. If such assessments are used, the results should include information about the extent to which the student has demonstrated proficiency in each specific set of SOL covered.

Professional Development

The capacity of teachers to design and implement assessments that are intended to inform instruction varies across the Commonwealth. School divisions are encouraged to evaluate the capacity and experience of their teachers in implementing and interpreting the results of such assessments and further encouraged to use this information when designing professional development. Professional development that promotes the collaboration of teachers within and across grades is strongly recommended. School divisions are encouraged to incorporate the resources and materials shared on the [Performance Assessments and Local Alternative Assessments webpage](#) into local professional development. Additionally, divisions are encouraged to share locally-developed resources for local alternative assessments and performance assessments through [#GoOpenVA](#).

Reporting to Students, Parents, and Families

School divisions are expected to provide to the student and parents or guardians information regarding the outcome of each local alternative assessment administered. The format for this reporting is to be determined by the local school division. When reporting scores on performance assessments or performance tasks, it is best practice not only to report the score but also to provide a copy of the rubric, a description of the performance assessment/task, and the student's response. School divisions are expected to report scores or grades but are not expected to report achievement levels associated with the scores achieved on SOL tests (e.g., Pass/Advanced, Pass/Proficient, Fail/Does Not Meet, etc.).

Documentation and Reporting to the Virginia Department of Education

VDOE staff will conduct annual site visits or “desk reviews” in a sample of school divisions. As a part of these “desk reviews,” documents will be examined and school division staff interviewed either by webinar or by telephone. The purpose of these reviews will be to determine how local school divisions are verifying that the content is being taught, to determine the types of alternative assessments that are being administered, to identify exemplars of performance assessments that may be shared with other school divisions, and to assist teachers, schools, and school divisions in strengthening their own alternative performance assessments. The reviews will help Department staff to identify “best practices” for sharing with other Virginia school divisions.

Balanced Assessment Plans will continue to be included in the “desk review” process. Materials retained at the division for possible review should include:

- 1) Balanced Assessment Plan for each of the replaced SOL assessments;
- 2) Copies of assessments administered, including performance tasks;
- 3) Division-specific material used to train teachers; and
- 4) Samples of student responses representing each of the various score points of the rubric.

School divisions are to retain these documents for one year after the end of the academic year, as outlined in the [Records Retention and Disposition Schedule, General Schedule No.GS-21](#) (Series 000236, 000240). The VDOE will not require the retention of individual student work beyond the student work samples that demonstrate division scoring.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

School divisions should be aware of the following requirement found in Section 300.160(c)(1) of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*:

A State (or, in the case of a district-wide assessment, an LEA) must develop and implement alternate 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 IEPs, as

provided in paragraph (a) of this section.

If school divisions choose to meet the local alternative assessment requirements through the use of division-wide assessments, an alternate assessment for students with disabilities who cannot participate in regular division assessments must be provided.

Use of Local Assessments in State Accreditation or Federal Accountability

The results of the local alternative assessments will not be used to designate state accreditation or federal accountability status.