# Superintendent’s Memo #249-19

[](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/index.shtml)  
**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA   
Department of Education**

DATE: October 18, 2019

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction

## SUBJECT: Resources for Implementation of the 2017 English Standards of Learning

On August 13, 2019, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) released data on the performance of students on Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and history and social science during the 2018-2019 school year. We have decided to begin promoting resources to improve reading instruction due to a steady decline in the performance of Virginia students on the Standards of Learning reading tests over the past few years. In the most recent year, the downward trend was modest with 78 percent of students passing the reading tests in 2018-2019 as compared to 79 percent in 2017-2018; however, looking at the data over a longer period of time suggests a need for focus and action in this area. This trend presents an opportunity for school and division leaders to engage with teachers and students as we make an effort to improve outcomes for all students. Working together in collaboration with the VDOE and other school divisions, literacy leaders are encouraged to visit classrooms, identify and promote best practices in instruction including interdisciplinary collaboration between English Language Arts and other content areas, and share quality feedback with educators. The full implementation of the 2017 *Standards of Learning* provides an opportunity for school divisions to reimagine literacy instruction in their divisions and move in a direction that will transform educational outcomes for all students so they may thrive after graduation.

Closing achievement gaps in reading and all subjects are central to the Virginia is for Learners initiative to ensure equitable outcomes for all students. To support this effort, VDOE staff will collaborate with school divisions to focus on improving reading skills for all students and to address widening achievement gaps in reading, especially in the elementary grades. Department staff will work with schools and divisions that did not see declines in reading performance in order to identify best practices and successful strategies for improving reading skills. The effort will include a review of the effectiveness of interventions to assist young readers not reading at grade level.

As the school year continues, school divisions are encouraged to provide students with daily opportunities to read. While it is important to meet each child where he or she is instructionally, all students need opportunities to read grade-level text daily, including nonfiction and fiction pieces.

The list of resources that follows includes an annotated listing of several key instruction and assessment supports and guidance provided to school divisions since 2017 to assist with the implementation of the 2017 *English Standards of Learning*.  It may be useful to have this information accessible as school divisions continue the implementation of the 2017 English standards in 2019-2020.

**Resources for Implementation of the 2017 *English Standards of Learning***

On January 26, 2017, the Board of Education adopted the revised *English Standards of Learning* for public schools in Virginia. The goals of the *English Standards of Learning—*teaching students to read, write, research and communicate—align with the components of the Profile of a Virginia Graduate. The standards include the foundational skills of critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, communication, and citizenship. Students should be prepared to participate in society as literate citizens, equipped with the ability to think analytically, solve problems, communicate effectively, and collaborate with diverse groups in their communities, in the workplace, and in postsecondary education.

The 2017 *English Standards of Learning* and Curriculum Framework provide a foundation for instructional programs designed to raise the academic achievement of all students in Virginia and are an important part of Virginia’s efforts to provide challenging educational programs in the public schools. The following is an annotated listing of several key instruction and assessment supports and guidance provided to school divisions since 2017 to assist with the implementation of the 2017 *English Standards of Learning*.  It may be useful to have this information available for the final preparation for the new *English Standards of Learning* assessments in spring 2020.

***Read! Read! Read!***

Students need opportunities to read daily. Students need to read extended pieces of text and grade-level material. While it is important to meet each child where he or she is instructionally, all students need opportunities to read grade-level text daily, including nonfiction and fiction pieces. Schools should provide students with opportunities to read and compare paired passages (fiction and nonfiction) on the same topic as appropriate.  When students are analyzing ideas in two texts and searching for textual evidence to support their conclusions, they are engaging in deeper learning and thinking critically; skills that will support their comprehension and their understanding of the 2017 *English Standards of Learning*.

[**Standards of Learning and Curriculum Framework Documents**](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2017/stds-all-english-2017.docx)The goals of the 2017 [*English Standards of Learning*](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2017/stds-all-english-2017.docx) are to teach students to read, write, research, and communicate. Although the English strands are developed separately, they are expected to be seamlessly integrated in the classroom. Through the rigorous application of the *English Standards of Learning*, students become critical thinkers, effective contributors, and global citizens. The Curriculum Framework provides guidance for instruction and assessment of the 2017 *English SOL*. In the [2017 Curriculum Framework](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2017/cf/english-cf-2017.docx), the *Teacher Notes* section was added to the beginning of each strand. This section includes background information for teachers, content that may extend teachers’ knowledge beyond the current grade level, best practices, instructional strategies, and suggestions that will help teachers plan lessons focusing on integrating the standard(s).   
  
[**English Crosswalk between the 2010 and 2017 Standards**](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2017/english-crosswalk-2017-2010.docx)  
The Crosswalk provides detail on additions, deletions, and changes included in the 2017 *English SOL*.

[**Progression Charts**](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/index.shtml)These charts identify the grade level at which specific skills are formally introduced in the 2017 *English SOL* for [Communication](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2017/progression-chart/communication-progression-cht-2017.docx), [Reading](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2017/progression-chart/reading-progression-cht-2017.docx), [Writing](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2017/progression-chart/writing-progression-cht-2017.docx),  [Grammar](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2017/progression-chart/grammar-progression-cht-2017.docx), and [Research](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2017/progression-chart/research-progression-cht-2017.docx).

[**Resources from 2018 English SOL Institutes: Deeper Learning**](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/english/professional_development/institutes/2018/index.shtml)To assist school division teachers and leaders in implementing the new standards, the VDOE’s English Language Arts Institutes provided targeted professional development presented by teachers from around the Commonwealth.

[**Understand Scoring**](https://va.scoring.pearsonassessments.com/understandscoring/)   
This application offers valuable insight into the constructed response scoring process used with the Virginia Standards of Learning tests. Through using this application, there is an opportunity to practice scoring sets of student papers and view feedback on the scores assigned. In support of local performance assessments to verify a credit in writing, the following is available: [Guidelines for the Use of Local Performance Assessments to Verify Credits in Writing](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/guidelines-eoc-writing-final.docx), [Common Rubric for High School Writing](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2017/hs-rubric-2017-standards.docx), [High School Writing Rubric](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2017/2017-scoring-rubric-final.docx), [Sample Writing Tasks that could be used for the Body of Evidence to Verify Credits in Writing](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/sample-writing-tasks.docx), updated [Performance Level Descriptors](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2017/writing-eoc-pld-2017-final.docx), and [Implementation Support for the Use of Local Performance Assessments to Verify Credits in Writing](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2017/implementation-support-2019.docx).

[**Multisensory Structured Language Intervention (MSLI)**](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/disabilities/learning_disability/index.shtml)  
The MSLI Initiative consists of 30+ hours of professional development and participants are trained to implement this structured, direct reading instruction using the Orton-Gillingham approach. It is designed to address the needs of struggling readers who have difficulty with reading, spelling, and writing including those with a specific learning disability such as dyslexia. Resources including instructional strategies, guidance, and best practice are available on the VDOE [website](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/disabilities/learning_disability/index.shtml).

## [Dyslexia](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching/licensure/dyslexia-module/story_html5.html)

The Dyslexia Module covers awareness of reading difficulties and evidence-based reading interventions spanning across grades PreK-12. School divisions are required to have a Dyslexia Advisor. [VDOE resources](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/disabilities/learning_disability/dyslexia.shtml) include information and instructional resources, online educational opportunities, professional organizations, and reading centers**.**

[**K-3 English Achievement Records**](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/english/elementary/k-3_english_achievement_records.shtml)The Standards of Accreditation require schools to maintain an early skills and knowledge achievement record in reading and mathematics for each student in grades kindergarten through grade 3 to monitor student progress and to promote successful achievement on the third-grade Standards of Learning.

[**Sample Text-Dependent Questions with Paired Passages**](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/2017/text-dependent/index.shtml)   
These samples provide fiction samples paired with companion nonfiction texts and offer a series of text-dependent questions, vocabulary activities, writing assignments, and opportunities for research.

[**Early Intervention Reading Initiative (EIRI)**](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/english/elementary/reading/early_intervention_reading.shtml)   
EIRI provides intervention services to students who demonstrate reading deficiencies on the Phonological and Literacy Screening (PALS) assessment.

[**Elementary Reading Early Literacy Instructional Videos**](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/english/elementary/reading/early_literacy_strategies.shtml)  
These demonstrations are done by Virginia teachers sharing early literacy instructional strategies and activities.

**High Quality Instructional Materials**  
High-quality instructional materials in combination with a strong curriculum are proven to have positive impacts on student learning. School divisions are encouraged to seek materials that are research based, aligned to standards, and peer reviewed when considering instructional materials for their divisions. Both [What Works Clearinghouse](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/) from the U.S. Department of Education and [EdReports.org](https://www.edreports.org/) provide research and information to support school divisions as they consider instructional materials.

[**Early Childhood Executive Directive Four**](https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/executive-actions/ED-4-Establishing-The-Governors-Executive-Leadership-Team-on-School-Readiness.pdf)  
In July 2019, Governor Northam signed Executive Directive Four to identify ways to improve access and quality for children ages birth-five. As a result of this Directive, a collaborative team has been working to review funding streams and make recommendations to maximize access for underserved children, starting with all at-risk three- and four-year-olds. The team is also proposing a strategy to build, pilot, and scale a uniform quality measurement system for all birth-five publicly-funded programs, and examining strategies to consolidate state oversight of early childhood care and education programs.

[**English Learners**](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/esl/index.shtml) **(EL)**  
Information is available from the VDOE to provide links to resources that support educators in providing equitable instruction and services to English Learners (EL).

[**School Readiness**](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/curriculum/index.shtml)   
Support for effective early childhood programs that provide engaging learning experiences which promote [school readiness](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/school-readiness/index.shtml). [Early Childhood Special Education Resources](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/early-childhood/disabilities/index.shtml) are available to support each child's unique learning needs.

## [Specially-designed Instruction](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/content_literacy_continuum/index.shtml) Specially-designed Instruction is provided to teachers in schools identified as needing to improve instruction and results for students with disabilities. Instructional tools include components of the *Strategic Instruction Model (SIM*) that consist of content enhancement routines and learning strategies. These tools include evidence-based materials that teachers can use in the classroom to improve reading instruction. In addition, the [Content Literacy Continuum](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/content_literacy_continuum/index.shtml) (CLC) is a coordinated and aligned schoolwide approach to improve literacy for all students in secondary schools.

[**SOL Testing Blueprints**](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/english/index.shtml)Posted SOL testing blueprints indicate the reporting categories for each of the reading and writing SOL tests, the SOL assessed in each reporting category, the number of test items for each reporting category and for the test as a whole, and the number of field test items for the test.  
  
[**SOL Practice Items**](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/practice_items/testnav8.shtml)To support student preparation for test questions that assess the 2017 *English SOL*, a set of practice items delivered via [TestNav™](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/practice_items/testnav8.shtml), was developed and posted on the VDOE website for each SOL Reading test. SOL practice items provide students an opportunity to become familiar with new types of items that reflect the increased rigor and new content. SOL practice items contain technology-enhanced items (TEI) that require students to demonstrate their learning in ways other than a multiple choice format. [Computer Adaptive Testing](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/test_administration/cat/index.shtml) (CAT) is an assessment that is customized for every student.

Tests begin with a student being administered a passage and an associated set of items that have a medium level of difficulty. Each subsequent passage and set of items administered to a student is selected based on the student’s performance on the previous set of questions. This is determined by whether the questions were answered correctly by the student as well as the difficulty level of those questions. A student who answers more questions correctly in a passage set of items is more likely to get a slightly more difficult set of items in the next passage set. Conversely, if a student answers more questions incorrectly in the passage set, a slightly less difficult set of items will likely be administered in the next passage set.

**It is important to note that while the CAT adapts for each student, the test items and passages are based on grade level Standards of Learning and reading material.**

[**Participation and Inclusion Guidelines**](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/participation/index.shtml)  
All students in tested grade levels and courses are expected to participate in Virginia’s assessment program, unless specifically exempted by state or federal law or by Board of Education regulations. Virginia’s assessment system includes students with disabilities and limited English proficient (LEP) students. Students with disabilities and LEP students may take Standards of Learning tests with or without accommodations or they may be assessed through alternate or alternative assessments.

[**Approved Textbooks**](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/textbooks/english/index.shtml)The VDOE posted the list of textbooks for K-12 English that was approved by the Board of Education.  Included are SOL correlations for each approved textbook to assist school divisions in the local textbook adoption process.

This is the first of several Superintendent’s Memos that will address literacy resources and best practices for classroom use during the 2019-2020 academic school year. Questions regarding English instructional resources should be directed to Jill Nogueras, English Coordinator, by email at [Jill.Nogueras@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:Jill.Nogueras@doe.virginia.gov) or by telephone at (804) 225-2227; or Carmen Kurek, Elementary English and Reading Specialist, by email at [Carmen.Kurek@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:Carmen.Kurek@doe.virginia.gov) or by telephone at (804) 225-3203. Questions regarding Assessment resources should be emailed to [Student\_Assessment@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:Student_Assessment@doe.virginia.gov) or by telephone to (804) 225-2102. Questions related to Special Education and Student Services should be directed to the Department of Special Education and Student Services, Office of Instructional Services at (804) 225-2932 and questions related to English Language Learner Instruction should be directed to  [Jessica.Costa@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:%20Jessica.Costa@doe.virginia.gov?subject=English%20Memo), English Language Learner Specialist, at (804) 786-3927.

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