# Virginia Department of Education

# Frequently Asked Questions: Performance Assessment[[1]](#footnote-1)

## Introduction

The Virginia Board of Education, with support from the General Assembly and leaders in education, has adopted significant changes to the Standards of Accreditation, including the development of the Profile of a Virginia Graduate and reforms to school accreditation. The Profile outlines the knowledge, skills, competencies, and experiences students should attain during their K-12 education to make them “life-ready” and set them on a path to participate in our evolving global economy as successful citizens. The Profile further articulates the importance of the 5 C’s—critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, communication, and citizenship.

The implementation of the Profile of a Virginia Graduate requires changes in both instruction and assessment. Instruction must provide opportunities for students not only to develop strong content knowledge, but also to acquire skills embodied in the 5 C’s and to take greater ownership of their learning. Assessment options should allow students flexibility in demonstrating content mastery through a variety of formats.

The use of locally developed performance assessments provides school divisions flexibility and removes reliance on a single, state-administered test to provide information on student performance to stakeholders. This change restores authority to local divisions and teachers and allows a more balanced approach in assessment to meet the requirements for the Profile of a Virginia Graduate by:

1. developing instructional lessons and activities that engage students with the content, applying skills and practices within each discipline;
2. teaching for greater understanding;
3. engaging in effective collaboration and integration between disciplines; and
4. providing exemplars that lead to deeper learning and promote critical and creative thinking.

In all courses where performance assessments are administered, school divisions are expected to use the guidance tools (Quality Criteria Tool and VDOE common rubrics) to develop performance assessments aligned to the SOL and provide deeper learning opportunities for students. Regardless of whether or not there is a state SOL test for a subject area, the use of local assessments that include performance assessment enhances instruction, fosters student development of the 5 C’s, and promotes deeper learning of content and skills.

Performance assessment can serve as both a formative and summative means of determining student mastery of content and skills. As students learn the skills and content in a subject, they should be exposed to multiple opportunities to apply these skills through the use of performance tasks. Through the use of performance tasks, teachers and students identify what content students have mastered as well as student misconceptions and any gaps in understanding.

A comprehensive, balanced instruction and assessment framework that includes different methods of instruction and assessment types (e.g., diagnostic, formative, summative, etc.) allows students to show their learning in a variety of ways and provides different types of information to teachers and learners. School divisions are encouraged a balanced approach that includes assessment of and for learning to support and guide instruction. A balanced assessment plan may include formative assessments embedded within daily instruction that range from questioning strategies used by a teacher to determine the appropriate next steps in instruction, to performance tasks used during the course of a unit of instruction, as well as summative performance assessments completed at the end of a unit of instruction. School divisions are encouraged to consider each assessment administered and how the results will be used when determining whether or not the assessment should be part of its balanced assessment plan. In moving toward a balanced assessment system, school divisions are encouraged not only to add performance assessments but also to consider decreasing reliance on and frequency of other forms of assessment (e.g., benchmark assessments, etc.).

The frequently asked questions included in this document have been compiled to assist school divisions as they develop and implement performance assessments, aligned to the goals outlined in the Profile of a Virginia Graduate.

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## Definition of Terms

*Local Alternative Assessment—*administered in the place of eliminated Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. Currently, this refers to the five SOL assessments in grades 3 through 8 (Grade 3 History and Social Science, Grade 3 Science, Grade 5 Writing, United Stated History to 1865, and United States History: 1865 to the Present) eliminated by the General Assembly in 2014. It is expected that local school divisions include performance assessments as a part of their local alternative assessments for these eliminated SOL tests.

*Performance Assessment—*generally requires students to perform a task or create a product and is scored using a rubric or set of criteria. Authentic performance assessments often include tasks with a “real world” context and/or are authentic to the academic discipline.

*Balanced Assessment System*—the combination of assessments that form a comprehensive measure of student learning. In Virginia, a balanced assessment system should include a variety of assessment types that are matched to the content being assessed and the purpose of the assessment data, including the need to meet accountability measures. A balanced assessment system should allow opportunities to measure student achievement and growth based on content standards, specific learning goals, and the 5 C’s (critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, communication, and citizenship); the data gathered should provide meaningful information that supports and guides classroom instruction.

*Balanced Assessment Plan*—illustrates how a school or division will teach and assess the skills and content within a course or content area across the school year. School divisions are expected to develop Balanced Assessment Plans that include performance assessments for SOL tests replaced with local alternative assessments beginning with the 2019-2020 school year.

These locally developed plans should reflect the essential knowledge and skills from content standards on which instruction is based and should include opportunities for all students to develop and apply the 5 C’s. A Balanced Assessment Plan is likely to include:

* Diagnostic assessments that determine students’ individual strengths, needs, knowledge, skills, and understandings prior to instruction;
* Formative assessments that intentionally gauge student learning during the instructional process and provide feedback to teachers and students alike, allowing for teachers and students to make adjustments that move the learners closer to the learning goals;
* Summative assessments that measure student learning, skill acquisition, and academic achievement at the conclusion of instruction for a unit, project, course, semester, program, or school year; and
* Performance tasks and performance assessments that require students to perform a task or create a product to demonstrate the application of knowledge, understanding, and proficiency with content and skills. Performance tasks and performance assessments frequently are constructed to include the opportunity for students to develop and demonstrate the acquisition of one or more of the 5 C’s.

Each assessment included in a Balanced Assessment Plan should serve an explicit purpose and provide meaningful information that will be used to support and guide classroom instruction and advance student growth and achievement.

*Local Alternative Assessment Plan—*outlines how the content from courses with replaced SOL tests has been taught and assessed. The Standards of Quality (SOQ) require local school boards to certify annually that all content in these courses has been taught and assessed; the local alternative assessment plan may be used by the local school board in this certification process. Information from the local alternative assessment plan is submitted to VDOE for review only if a school division is selected for desk review as described in the *Guidelines for Local Alternative Assessments*. The information provided in local alternative assessment plans will become part of Balanced Assessment Plans beginning with the 2019-2020 school year.

## General Questions

What is the current legislation concerning SOL performance assessments in Virginia?

Legislation in the 2014 General Assembly (House Bill 930 and Senate Bill 306) amended

[§22.1-253.13:3.C](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title22.1/chapter13.2/section22.1-253.13:3/) of the *Code of Virginia* to eliminate five SOL assessments in grades 3 through 8 (Grade 3 History and Social Science, Grade 3 Science, Grade 5 Writing, United States History to 1865, and United States History: 1865 to the Present), while requiring local school divisions to continue to teach the content and measure student achievement with local alternative assessments, including authentic or performance based assessments.

Specifically, the *Code* now states:

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, and mathematics in grade eight; (e) science after the student receives instruction in the grade six science, life science, and physical science Standards of Learning and before the student completes grade eight; and (f) Virginia Studies and Civics and Economics once each at the grade levels deemed appropriate by each local school board.

The legislation eliminating these SOL tests also requires that each local school board annually certify that instruction has been provided and an assessment has been administered to students in these SOL subject areas. 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.

Is there a revised timeline for implementing performance assessments?

In response to the elimination of five SOL tests by the General Assembly in 2014, *Local Alternative Assessment Guidelines for 2014-2015* communicated initial expectations. *Guidelines for Local Alternative Assessments for 2016-2017 through 2018-2019* were adopted by the Board to clarify and communicate the expectation that school divisions are to demonstrate progress toward the use of performance assessments in their schools. The expectations for implementation have been adjusted to provide time for divisions to use guidance tools provided by VDOE. Current expectations are outlined in the *Guidelines for* *Local Alternative Assessments for 2018-2019 through 2019-2020* adopted by the Board of Education in January 2019.

What resources are available to help with the construction and implementation of performance assessments?

The [Virginia Quality Criteria Tool for Performance Assessments](https://www.doe.virginia.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/20630/638043629410830000) and subject-specific common rubrics have been developed and shared by the VDOE to achieve this purpose. School divisions are expected to use the Virginia Quality Criteria Tool to ensure that locally developed performance assessments meet the requirements for rigor and quality. School divisions are also expected to use the common rubrics, which define consistent achievement expectations for students across Virginia. The component parts of the common rubrics may be used separately to evaluate performance on an individual criterion within the rubric, or the common rubrics may be used as a whole to provide an overall evaluation of student work.

Do the local alternative assessments used for a class need to be the same for each school within a division?

Each school division will determine if the local alternative assessments used for a class (or course) are the same for each school. School divisions are expected to utilize both the Quality Criteria Review Tool and relevant common rubrics to ensure consistency in quality of assessments used and to ensure consistency in evaluating and providing feedback on student learning across divisions.

Are we required to use the common rubrics?

For all performance assessments used to replace the SOL test, teachers are expected to use the VDOE common rubric for the content area. Use of these common rubrics will contribute to consistency in the evaluation of student achievement across the Commonwealth.

Should local alternative assessments be used at the end of a unit or at the end of the year? If we administer one performance assessment a year, is this sufficient?

The frequency of administering local alternative assessments and the number of performance assessments that will be administered over the course of a year is a local decision; however, best practice is to replace each removed SOL test with a balanced variety of assessments. Performance assessments allow students to demonstrate the acquisition of deeper learning by applying content knowledge, skills, and processes to an authentic task. School divisions are encouraged to provide opportunities for students to complete performance tasks at various times throughout the year in order to practice and “grow” these skills and processes. In moving toward a balanced assessment system, school divisions are encouraged not only to add performance assessments but also to consider decreasing reliance on and frequency of other forms of assessment (e.g., benchmark assessments).

Should performance assessments be based on discipline skills rather than on strands or reporting categories? Do we have to administer a performance assessment for each strand?

A performance assessment is not required for each strand or skill. While all skills, SOL strands, and reporting categories must be taught and assessed during a particular content course, it is not expected for one specific performance assessment to cover all of the skills or content standards within a strand or reporting category. It is best practice to administer a variety of assessments, including performance assessments, in order to adequately assess each of the strands and/or reporting categories of an SOL content area. As a whole, the balanced assessment plan must address all of the content and provide opportunities for students to demonstrate the skills required by the discipline.

When will we need to submit our performance assessments to the state?

At this time, all divisions are expected to develop a Local Alternative Assessment Plan. Divisions selected for desk review may submit plans in a format that they created or use a template to be provided by VDOE at the time of selection. Selected divisions will be notified by student assessment staff in early 2019 regarding the process for submission.

Additionally, some school divisions from each of the Superintendent’s Regions will be selected randomly to submit evidence of their performance assessments as part of the desk review process described in the *Guidelines for Local Alternative Assessments for 2018-2019 through 2019-2020*. School divisions selected for desk review will complete the template provided and submit additional documentation, which will include performance assessments and ancillary materials. Examples of ancillary materials include instructions provided to the teacher, materials provided to the student, and samples of scored student work that represent each level of achievement in the common rubric.

How will teacher evaluations be adjusted? How do performance assessments impact school accreditation and federal accountability?

The role that performance assessment plays in teacher evaluation is a local decision. Student scores and achievement on local alternative assessments, including performance assessment, are not included in calculations for school accreditation or federal accountability.

Will we be able to make changes to the local alternative assessments that have already been used by the division?

School divisions are expected to use the Virginia Quality Criteria Tool for Performance Assessment to evaluate existing tasks and use the results of this evaluation to determine if tasks should be revised; however, the decision to make any changes to local alternative assessments is a local decision.

What materials should be retained for the desk reviews related to the five SOL tests eliminated by the General Assembly in 2014?

According to the guidelines adopted by the Board, for 2018-2019 school divisions are expected to retain the following:

1) Documentation that demonstrates that the assessments administered address each strand or reporting category included in the SOL for that grade and subject;

2) Copies of the assessments, including performance tasks; and

3) Any ancillary materials such as rubrics or sample student responses used to train teachers.

For 2019-2020, materials retained at the division for possible review should include the following:

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

How long do we store student performance assessment work?

The Library of Virginia has established regulations governing the retention and disposition of these records. [General Schedule 21](https://www.lva.virginia.gov/agencies/records/sched_local/GS-21.pdf), series 240, states that records related to scoring of non-verified credit courses must be retained for one year after the end of the academic year.

Are there different expectations for performance assessments used in courses with verified credit and performance assessments used in non-verified credit courses?

The expectations for performance assessments used to verify credits are different from those used in non-verified credit courses. Currently the only credit that can be verified using local performance assessments is writing. The Board adopted *Guidelines for the Use of Local Performance Assessments to Verify Credits in Writing* on September 20, 2018, which include specific criteria that must be met if verified credit is to be awarded. It is important to note that different guidelines exist for two cohorts of students: those in grade 11 English or beyond in the 2018-2019 school year and those who are enrolled in grade 10 English or below in the 2018-2019 school year.

How do the common rubrics translate into assigning student scores?

It is a division decision whether scores on performance assessments will be applied to a student grade and how the scores will be calculated; however, it is not expected that the number of points on the common rubric will be translated into a specific grade based on percentage. Common rubrics provide students with descriptive feedback on their performance and by nature provide students with information about how to better master both content and skills. Students’ scores on performance assessments will not be reported to the VDOE.

Are students able to “retake” a performance assessment?

Localities will determine whether students will retake performance assessments for non-verified credit courses; however, school divisions are encouraged to provide additional opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery with new performance assessments after providing additional instruction.

Will we receive more professional development on performance assessment?

Professional development opportunities on performance assessment will continue to be offered in 2019. Currently, VDOE content area, special education, and student assessment staff members have partnered to develop resources and professional development opportunities that include utilizing the tools to create performance assessments, defining best practices for instruction, and developing protocols for scoring performance tasks and assessments. These professional development opportunities will continue to be announced in Superintendent’s Memos and posted in Teacher Direct.

## History and Social Science Performance Assessment

How can we include community service in high school social science?

Including a community service aspect into the creation and administration of the local alternative assessment is a local decision. The inclusion of community service within a performance assessment may provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate one or more “Life-Ready Competencies” from the Profile of a Virginia Graduate (content knowledge, career planning, workplace skills, and community and civic responsibility) included in Criterion 1 of the Quality Criteria Tool and would lend authenticity to the task, as defined in Criterion 2 (i.e., relevant to the real-world, students’ community, students’ interests, future careers, or other meaningful context).

When will all of the SOL tests for history and social science be removed?

Any removal of state SOL assessments would result from actions of the Virginia Board of Education and/or legislation enacted by the Virginia General Assembly.

Once the 2015 History and Social Science SOL are fully implemented (fall 2018), will high school end-of-course (EOC) tests be updated to reflect this, or will high school move to local alternative assessments?

Currently, the state SOL assessments have not been updated to reflect the 2015 History and Social Science SOL. All state SOL assessments will be based upon the 2008 History and Social Science SOL. The VDOE expects all school divisions to fully implement the 2015 History and Social Science SOL, beginning in fall 2018. To support the full implementation, the VDOE has created [Assessment Supplements](https://www.doe.virginia.gov/home/showdocument?id=11938) to help guide the development of a division’s local curriculum. All history and social science courses are encouraged to use performance tasks and/or assessments during instruction.

Will one high school course for history and social science be chosen by the VDOE as the only course in which students can earn a verified credit?  If so, will this test remain multiple choice?

At this time, students may earn a verified credit in any one of the high school courses where an SOL test is offered. The current high school history SOL assessments include multiple-choice questions; technology-enhanced items have been included as field-test questions in these assessments since spring 2016. If a change is made to include other types of questions, school divisions will be notified in advance. Under the new Standards of Accreditation, a high school student enrolled in a history and social science course would only take the SOL test if the verified credit is needed to meet graduation requirements.

Can performance assessments be used for locally-awarded verified credits in EOC history and social science courses?

As background, the 2018 Appropriations Act provides that the only way to earn a verified credit in history and social science is through successfully completing: (i) a Standards of Learning assessment; (ii) a substitute test that incorporates or exceeds the course content; or (iii) a locally-awarded verified credit.

Based on current policy, performance assessments can be used as evidence of student achievement during the appeal process for determining if a student will receive a locally-awarded verified credit in EOC history and social science courses.

The granting of locally-awarded verified credits occurs at the conclusion of an appeal process at the local level. During the appeal process, the local school division must first determine that a student qualifies for consideration of a locally-awarded verified credit (student must pass the high school course and score within a 375-399 scale score range on any administration of the SOL test after taking the test at least twice). If the student qualifies, a local review panel convenes to review evidence of the student's achievement of adequate knowledge in the SOL content. The local panel has discretion in determining the information to be considered. It is up to the local school division to determine if student work on performance tasks and/or performance assessments will be included in the additional academic assignments or remediation. Board policy states,

This information may include, but not be limited to, results of classroom assessments, divisionwide exams, course grades, and additional academic assignments (e.g., papers, projects, essay or written questions) as deemed appropriate.

It is up to the local school division to determine if student work on performance tasks and/or performance assessments is included in this review. Board policy also states,

Based on the evidence reviewed, the local review panel may award the verified credit, deny the verified credit, suggest participation in a remedial program and retesting, or make additional academic assignments as deemed appropriate prior to determining whether to award the verified credit.

If it is determined that additional academic assignments are necessary, the local school division has the authority to determine if student work on performance tasks and/or performance assessments will be included in additional academic assignments or remediation.

Please see *[Guidance Governing the Use of Locally-Awarded Verified Credits](https://www.doe.virginia.gov/home/showdocument?id=35082" \t "_blank)*for additional details.

Are there discussions to consider a combined verified credit performance assessment for history and social science and English (writing) at the secondary level?

There are no plans at this time to offer a combined verified credit performance assessment for history and social science and English (writing) at the secondary level.

Should the "core expectations” be scored on ALL history and social science performance tasks and assessments?

When using the state common rubric to evaluate student work, these core expectations should always be demonstrated and scored. The “core expectations” in the common rubric for history and social science include synthesizing information, explaining evidence, and verifying accuracy of content. The other domains within the common rubric (evaluating sources, determining causes or effects) are task specific.

Currently, schools and school divisions are using the reporting categories aligned to the 2008 History and Social Science SOL to meet the requirements for local alternative assessments. Will reporting categories be developed for the 2015 History and Social Science SOL to support the use of performance assessments according to the most recent Board approved guidelines?

Department staff are developing test blueprints aligned to the 2015 History and Social Science SOL that may be used to support performance assessment. These blueprints identify the strand and reporting category for each SOL. School divisions will be notified when these documents are finalized.

Legislation mandates that students enrolled in Virginia Studies and Civics/Economics take the corresponding state SOL test. Are there plans within VDOE or the Virginia Board of Education to move these courses toward performance assessment?

Replacing these state tests with performance assessments would require action by the Virginia General Assembly or the Virginia Board of Education. Currently, the Board does not have plans to replace these SOL tests with performance assessments. Regardless of whether or not there is a state SOL test for a subject area, the use of performance assessment enhances instruction, fosters student development of the 5 C’s, and promotes deeper learning of content and skills.

## Science Performance Assessment

Since the Biology course will be the measure for federal accountability for participation in science, will Earth Science and Chemistry tests be replaced by performance assessments?

At this time, the Earth Science and Chemistry SOL tests have not been replaced by performance assessments. Under the new Standards of Accreditation, students enrolled in these courses would only take the SOL tests if the verified credit is needed to meet graduation requirements.

## Mathematics Performance Tasks and Assessments

What are the expectations for the use of performance tasks and performance assessments in mathematics?

Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II SOL tests have not been replaced by performance assessments. Under the new Standards of Accreditation, students enrolled in these courses would only take the SOL assessment if the verified credit is needed to meet graduation requirements or to satisfy federal accountability requirements.

The use of rich mathematical tasks, performance tasks, and performance assessments to support deeper learning serve as important components of locally-designed curriculum and a balanced assessment system. Student learning is greatest in mathematics classrooms where the tasks consistently encourage high-level student thinking and reasoning. The VDOE, in collaboration with teacher specialists, has begun building a bank of rich mathematical tasks which will be shared with school divisions. In addition, the VDOE will offer regional statewide professional development opportunities targeting research based instruction surrounding the creation and implementation of rich mathematical tasks. This professional development will support deeper learning opportunities for students and strengthen locally-designed curricula.

## English Performance Assessment (Writing)

Where can I find information for performance assessments in English (Writing)?

Information regarding 5th grade writing performance assessment is located on the Performance Assessment & Local Alternative Assessments page, in the Resources from VDOE, under the heading “Common Rubrics.” Information regarding the 5th grade writing blueprint, rubric, and menu of Grade 5 writing options can also be found on this web page.

1. Information in this document pertains to performance assessments that are not used to verify credits. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)