



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education

June 19, 2015

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: Steven R. Staples, Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: Middle Grades Science Preparation and High School Laboratory Science Courses

Over the last few years, Virginia school divisions have developed new pathways for student enrollment in high school laboratory science courses prior to matriculation in ninth grade. In providing these opportunities, school divisions have constructed curricula that ensure accelerated preparation in the critical concepts, skills, and practices defined in the middle grades science standards.

In order to ensure a clear bearing to school divisions that may be considering similar programs, the Department of Education provides the following direction.

- All students must be provided instruction based on the three sets of middle grades science standards (Sixth Grade Science, Life Science, and Physical Science) prior to advancing to a high school laboratory science course.
- Student instruction on the middle grades science standards may be completed on a schedule established by the school division, generally **three years or less**, depending on how the middle grades curriculum is sequenced and prior to the end of grade eight.
- All students must take the middle grades *Science Standards of Learning* assessment. This must occur at the **completion of instruction** on the middle grades science standards and prior to enrolling in a high school laboratory science course.

These requirements are based on the *Code of Virginia* and education regulations including the following:

[Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia \(SOA\)](#)

8 VAC 20-131-30. Student achievement expectations. (page 4)

- A. Each student should learn the relevant grade level/course subject matter before promotion to the next grade. ...
- B. In kindergarten through eighth grade, where the administration of Virginia assessment program tests are required by the Board of Education, each student shall be expected to take the tests; students who are accelerated shall take the tests of the grade-level enrolled or the tests for the grade level of the content received in instruction. No student shall take more than one test in any content area in each year. ...

Code of Virginia § [22.1-253.13:1](#). B.

... School boards shall implement the Standards of Learning or objectives specifically designed for their school divisions that are equivalent to or exceed the Board's requirements. Students shall be expected to achieve the educational objectives established by the school division at appropriate age or grade levels. The curriculum adopted by the local school division shall be aligned to the Standards of Learning.

Code of Virginia § [22.1-253.13:3](#). C (HB 1714, adopted through Acts of Assembly, Chapter 323, effective July 1, 2015)

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, ~~and science~~ 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; ...*

If you have questions regarding the middle grades science instructional program, please contact Eric Rhoades, director, Office of Science and Health Education, by e-mail at Eric.Rhoades@doe.virginia.gov or by telephone at (804) 786-2481.

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