

Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs) for Students with Disabilities

A Resource Document



What are the Virginia Standards of Learning?

When someone mentions the Virginia **Standards of Learning (SOLs)**, many parents automatically think of the **SOL tests** which are required in certain grades. The SOL tests are important because they impact graduation.

However, the SOLs are **more than just tests**. The SOLs are the **standards for achievement** for students in grades K-12 in English, math, science, history/social science, technology, fine arts, foreign language, health and physical education, and driver education.

The SOLs **set the expectations for student learning and achievement**. There is a curriculum framework in place for English, math, science, and history/social science which establishes the specific knowledge and skills students must have to meet the standards in these subject areas.

The **Virginia Department of Education (VDOE)** has developed guides, sample lesson plans, and instructional resources for teachers as well as test blueprints and other resources. You can access the SOLs for each topic and grade on the VDOE website [here](#).

What do Parents of Students with Disabilities Need to Know?

Standards of Learning and Graduation

Students participating in the **general education curriculum** are participating in the **Standards of Learning** curriculum. This includes most but not all students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities have access to the **Standard Diploma**, **Advanced Studies Diploma**, and **Applied Studies Diploma**. The IEP team determines which diploma the student will work towards. To graduate with a [Standard](#) or [Advanced Diploma](#), students must participate in the SOL curriculum and SOL tests with or without accommodations.

Graduation with a Standard or Advanced diploma will mean that your child can attend a **2 or 4-year college or university** if they meet the other college entrance requirements for that school. Some two-year universities will allow students to enroll without a diploma if they can pass certain entrance exams, but these exams may be difficult to pass.

Students **who do not** earn a Standard or Advanced diploma, i.e., they obtain the [Applied Studies Diploma](#), which is based on alternate achievement standards, will not gain entry to most colleges and universities (unless it is a specialized program) and may not be able to obtain some forms of federal financial aid for college or other post-secondary education training programs. This can hinder a student's future success.

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A Resource Document

Making the Right Choice for Your Student

Deciding about keeping your child with a disability in the Standards of Learning curriculum is an important decision. The IEP team should consider the decision carefully.

Sometimes when their child is young, parents will feel that their child is not able to participate in the SOLs or that the SOL tests will cause stress to the child. However, it is not always possible to predict the future, and **removing the child from the SOL curriculum too early can affect that future.** While parents may be told that they can change their minds and move their child back into the SOL curriculum later, that is not easy to do. The child may be too far behind to catch up to be able to earn the Standard or Advanced Diploma.



Therefore, before making that decision, the IEP team should **explore supplementary aides and resources (accommodations) that will allow the student to participate in the SOL curriculum and tests.** Accommodations do not reduce learning expectations. They provide access to the curriculum. There are four types of accommodations: **presentation** (example; reading directions to a child), **response** (example; allowing for answers to be dictated to a scribe), **timing/scheduling** (example; allowing sub-tests to be taken in a different order), and **setting** (example; providing special lighting or acoustics). You can learn more about accommodations on [this PEATC resource document](#).

Some students with **significant cognitive disabilities** will not be able to participate in the Standards of Learning even with accommodations. These students will be in a modified curriculum, called the **Virginia Essentialized Standards of Learning (VESOLs)**. **Modifications change what is learned.**

Students participating in the VESOLs will only be able to obtain an **Applied Studies Diploma**. This may be the right choice for your child! But it's important to think about the implications of every educational choice. VDOE's [Critical Decision Points Document](#) can help you make decisions about curriculum and testing participation.

Virginia Essentialized Standards of Learning

All students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are required to have a **Standards-Based IEP** which is aligned with the state's academic content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled.

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A Resource Document

As we mentioned earlier, if your child is **not participating in the Standards of Learning** curriculum, they will be in the [VESOLs](#), which used to be called the Aligned Standards of Learning or ASOLs. VESOLs are **alternate academic achievement standards** (revised academic content standards) for students with significant cognitive disabilities who are enrolled in grades 3-8 and high school. The VESOLs **reduce the depth, breadth, and complexity of the SOLs** to make them relevant, accessible, and appropriate for students with significant disabilities.

We will talk more about **statewide assessments** below, but for now, it's important to know that students participating in the VESOLs **will not take the SOL tests**; they will only be eligible to participate in the [Virginia Alternate Assessment Program](#) (VAAP). The VESOLs are to be used by special educators to **guide instruction for those students who meet VAAP criteria**. VESOLs and the tests administered through the VAAP are aligned and reinforce each other.

Here are two examples presented by VDOE that show the SOL academic achievement standard as compared with the reduced VESOL academic achievement standard.

Grade 3 Math SOL Goal: The student will estimate and determine the sum or difference of two whole numbers.

Grade 3 Math VESOL Goal based on Alternate Achievement Standard: The student will add and subtract whole numbers from 0 through 20.

Grade 5 Reading SOL Goal: The student will summarize plot events using details from the text, discuss the impact of the setting on plot development, describe character development, and explain the resolution of conflict (s).

Grade 5 Reading VESOL Goal based on Alternate Achievement Standard: The student will identify a character, setting, or event in a story that is read to the student or that the student reads.

Participation in Virginia's Statewide Assessment Program

All students are expected but not required to participate in the statewide assessment program which consists of the **SOL Assessments** for students participating in the SOL Curriculum, and the **VAAP** for students participating in the VESOL Curriculum.



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A Resource Document

SOL Assessments

The SOL assessments are used in Grades 3-12 for federal and state accountability purposes. They are used to meet federal requirements for annual testing in reading, math, and science; state requirements for testing in writing and social studies; and graduation requirements for verified credits for the student to earn a Standard or Advanced Studies Diploma. Graduation requirements are complex, including requirements to obtain locally verified credits. One way to obtain a locally verified credit is to pass the end-of-course SOL test. You can find learn more about these requirements on the VDOE website [here](#).

The Code of Virginia does not say students are **required** to take SOL tests, only that they are **expected** to take them.

Elementary and Middle School. In the early grades, SOL tests are not needed for a student to move to the next grade. If a student fails the test or does not take it, they can still be promoted to the next grade. Therefore, it is not necessary to make a premature **decision to remove a child from the SOL curriculum** unless the IEP team determines that the student will not be able to participate in the SOL curriculum even with accommodations.

High School. The requirements for taking and passing SOL tests change when a student is taking high school-level courses. Passing some SOL tests (or receiving locally verified credits) is necessary to graduate with a **Standard or Advanced Diploma**. This doesn't mean a student must take every SOL test offered for their courses. Once the student has passed enough SOLs in a subject to meet the requirements for their diploma, they can refuse to take the remaining SOLs in that subject, unless the test is necessary for the school to meet federal requirements.

The student's school counselor or case manager can meet with the student and parent to make a plan to complete the courses needed to graduate and figure out which SOL tests will be required. The number of required SOL tests is different depending on when the student entered ninth grade and which diploma type they want to earn.

Refusing SOL Testing. While there is no opt-out provision for SOL Assessments, parents can refuse to have their children participate in the SOL tests. VDOE requires schools to fully inform parents of the disadvantages of not taking these tests. Students who do not participate in one or more SOL tests will receive a zero for the test. If a parent refuses their child's participation in grade 3-8 assessments, consequences may include:

- teachers, parents, and students will not receive information on student progress contained in the assessment score reports; and
- the student may not have an opportunity to experience an assessment in the content area before taking the assessments required for graduation.

Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs) for Students with Disabilities

A Resource Document

Testing Accommodations. Students with disabilities have the right to testing accommodations. These accommodations must be listed in their IEP and must be used for instructional purposes throughout the school year. They cannot be used only for SOL tests. It is important to note that some instructional accommodations are not allowed to be used for SOL tests. For more information on testing accommodations see PEATC's resource document on [Testing Accommodations for Students with IEPs](#).

The Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP)

Students who are participating in the **Virginia Essentialized Standards of Learning (VESOLs)** participate in the VAAP. The VAAP is designed for students with **significant cognitive disabilities**. The U.S. Department of Education caps this at 1% of a school division's student population. While waivers to the 1% requirement can be sought, a school division that seeks a waiver must submit a plan for getting down to the 1% cap.

The **VAAP was significantly revised for the 2021-22 school year** and beyond, based on U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) requirements. The VAAP used to be portfolio-based, where student work was compiled throughout the year and then reviewed to determine whether the student met their IEP goals. USDOE determined that a portfolio-based system was not a satisfactory accountability mechanism.



VAAP now **links together academic standards, assessment, and instruction** in reading, math, and science for eligible students in grades 3-8 and high school. It offers a variety of testing conditions, supports, and accommodations to help students show what they know.

The **VAAP is based on the VESOLs** meaning SOL content has been reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity. **The IEP team** still determines whether a student is eligible for the VAAP. Students who take the VAAP will only be eligible for an **Applied Studies Diploma**.

The VAAP includes **multiple-choice test items** with 3 answer options. Easier items are presented first, followed by more difficult items. Students can take a computer or paper version of the VAAP. Unlike SOL testing which is group-based in most cases (unless a specific accommodation is needed), **VAAP testing is mostly individual**. VAAP tests can be administered **over multiple days** for students who are not able to complete a test in one testing period.

Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs) for Students with Disabilities

A Resource Document

There are **numerous ways to access VAAP test items**. Since these are available to all students taking the VAAP, they are not considered accommodations. They include supports, such as specific verbal prompts, frequent breaks, test over multiple sessions, augmentative communication, amplification, magnification, slant board, manipulatives, calculators, etc. However, students are still **eligible for additional accommodations** if they need them to participate in the test **and** the accommodations that they need are not available to all VAAP participants. As with SOL tests, if an accommodation is needed for participation in the VAAP, it **must be listed in the IEP and used for instructional purposes**.

VAAP scores do not impact the promotion of students to the next grade. VAAP scores also do not affect graduation with an Applied Studies Diploma.

Additional Resources

[Code of Virginia- Student Achievement Expectations](#)

[VDOE Guidelines for Assessment Participation](#)

[VDOE Virginia Alternate Assessment Program \(VAAP\)](#)

[VDOE Special Education Standards-Based IEPs](#)

[VDOE FAQ Special Permission for Locally Verified Credit Accommodations](#)

[Virginia Essentialized Standards of Learning \(VESOL\) 2022-2023](#)

[Virginia Essentialized Standards of Learning \(VESOL\) Instructional Resources - TTAC Online](#)



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