

BOARD BRIEF: TALKING POINTS

Date: March 12, 2019

For ACTION _____

For INFORMATION X_____

Board Agenda: Yes ___

No X_____

FROM: Helen Lloyd, Director of Communications

THROUGH: Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Cindy Anderson, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Changes to Spring SOL Testing for High School Students

BACKGROUND: On Wednesday, April 10, the Virginia Department of Education issued a news release highlighting changes in the Standards of Learning assessment program. The news release coincides with the opening this week of the spring non-writing SOL testing window.

Talking Points on the Changes to Spring SOL Testing for High School Students

The key messages in the release are as follows:

- High school students are taking fewer end-of-course SOL tests this spring due to revised graduation and school accreditation standards approved by the Board of Education in 2017.
- Reducing end-of-course testing allows more flexibility for teachers and more opportunities for students to explore careers and develop the life skills identified in the Profile of a Virginia Graduate as Five C's: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, citizenship and communication.
- *The new - fewer - graduation requirements became effective with students who entered the ninth grade in the fall of 2018 (class of 2022). Students in grades 10-12 are grandfathered under the old requirements.*
- All students — regardless of when they entered the ninth grade — are no longer required to take an SOL test for a course if they have already earned the verified credit in that content area that they need to graduate.
- In addition, new mathematics SOL tests are being introduced at all grade levels this spring, and the end-of-course assessments in Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II are five items shorter than the previous tests.
- The state is also changing the pass rates for science, history and mathematics tests, which will mean new base lines will be set in those subjects.

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What will this mean for ACPS?

- This will effectively mean a reset for SOL test data. These high school results will not be comparable to previous years' results. Do not try to compare results as it would be apples to oranges.
- The state's new approach, which does not allow students to take tests once they have passed, will result in smaller pools of struggling students taking the exams. This is anticipated to impact the data we are required to report to the state for accreditation.
- Historically, student performance suffers across all groups when a new test is introduced. We should plan to see a dip in overall student performance on math this year because the state has issued new math standards and a new test. Next year, it will introduce a new ELA test and we can again expect a dip in all student performance then.
- T.C. Williams is likely to be among the first high schools in the state to experience a negative impact from these changes.
- In anticipation of the above, ACPS has been providing additional resources to struggling students.

What is ACPS' plan for communicating these changes for High School testing?

T.C. Williams and ACPS have informed parents about changes to SOL testing at a PTA meeting and through a general letter of explanation. There are processes in place to notify families regarding which SOL tests students are required to take and whether students will not be allowed to take an exam because they have already met their verified credits for graduation in that course of study.

In late April through mid-May, ACPS will be communicating to media, parents, staff and the community that the state has changed testing policy, effectively establishing a new baseline.

This will be done through a news release, media briefing, ACPS Express and ACPS Insider, social media, a Board Brief, Superintendent chats, PTA and PTAC meetings, and local newspaper op-eds.

In early August through mid-August before SOL scores are released, ACPS will be re-communicating the changes to media, parents, staff and the community. Media will be invited in for a training session on how to look at SOL scores. The state public information office (PIO) will be invited to join in this training session as well as testing experts and the ACPS Department of Accountability.

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VDOE News Release:

2019 SOL Testing: Fewer and Shorter End-of-Course Tests for Students

RICHMOND, Va. — Virginia students are taking fewer end-of-course Standards of Learning tests this spring due to the revised graduation requirements and school accreditation regulations approved by the state Board of Education in 2017.

The new graduation requirements became effective with students who entered the ninth grade in the fall of 2018 (class of 2022). The number of standard credits for a Standard Diploma and for an Advanced Studies Diploma remained the same, but the number of required verified credits — earned by passing a course in the content area and passing the associated end-of-course SOL test — was reduced to five (one each in English reading, English writing, mathematics, science, and history/social science) for both diplomas.

In addition, all high school students are no longer required to take end-of-course SOL tests if they have already earned a verified credit in the subject — unless additional testing in mathematics or science, or both, is required by the Every Student Succeeds Act, also known as ESSA. The federal law requires annual testing in reading and mathematics in grades 3-8 and at least once in high school. Students must also test in science at least once in elementary school, at least once in middle school, and at least once during high school.

“The Board of Education sees value in limiting the number of high-stakes assessments required to earn a diploma and in allowing students to demonstrate content knowledge through performance-based assessments,” Board of Education President Daniel Gecker said. “The revised graduation requirements maintain high expectations for learning while providing more flexibility for teachers in delivering instruction and more opportunities for students to develop life skills useful beyond school.”

Superintendent of Public Instruction James Lane noted that because of the reduction in testing this year, pass rates for end-of course SOL tests in mathematics, science and history for 2018-2019 will mark the beginning of new trend lines.

“The mathematics, science and history pass rates the department will report for high schools this summer will reflect the achievement of far fewer students because students are no longer required to take an end-of-course SOL test if they’ve already earned a verified credit in the subject area — unless additional testing is required by ESSA,” Lane said. “This is a dramatic change in testing patterns and comparing 2018-2019 pass rates with performance in 2017-2018 would be an apples-to-oranges exercise.”

The Spring 2019 testing window also marks the introduction of new mathematics assessments based on the 2016 Mathematics Standards of Learning. The new Algebra I, Geometry and Algebra II end-of-course tests each have 45 items, five fewer than previous versions of the tests.

“This year marks a major step toward the creation of a balanced assessment system that supports classroom innovation while maintaining accountability for improving outcomes for

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students,” Lane said. “It is really exciting to travel around the state and see how teachers are taking advantage of this opportunity to engage their students in real-world challenges that promote deeper learning across the curriculum.”

While eighth graders and high school students took SOL writing tests in March, the main spring testing window opened on April 8. Students in the western part of the state typically test in April and May, while students in central and eastern Virginia test in May and June.

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