

**DRAFT Interim Recommendations Report**  
**SOL Innovations Committee**  
**October 24, 2014**

The Standards of Learning Innovations Committee (the “Committee”) is guided by a commitment to inspire, engage, and personalize learning every day for every student in the Commonwealth. The Committee’s focus is to ensure Virginia has an accountability system that is fair, balanced, and supportive of this vision as the Commonwealth prepares our students for success beyond their high school years.

The Committee believes:

- Accountability for teaching and learning plays a crucial role in ensuring educational success.
- The current accountability and assessment systems have improved student performance over time.
- Students need and deserve an education that prepares them for responsible citizenship and success in the world beyond school while capitalizing on their curiosity and natural desire to learn.
- Changes to Virginia’s assessment and accountability systems, including potential further reductions in state-mandated testing, provide the opportunity to promote innovative and creative teaching and, in turn, enhance student learning, if made carefully so as not to compromise the benefits of accountability.

- I. **Statement of Principle:** The state accountability system should include provisions to acknowledge the progress of schools toward meeting the accreditation benchmarks and to recognize individual student growth.

**Existing Requirements:**

Schools are currently accredited based on whether the school’s pass rates on the state assessments meet the accreditation benchmarks: 75% for English (pass rate includes both reading and writing tests) and 70% for mathematics, history, and science. High schools must also meet benchmarks on the Graduation and Completion Index. As described in the Standards of Accreditation (SOA) (8VAC20-131-300 C.1., Accreditation ratings defined), a school will be fully accredited:

- c. With tests administered beginning in the academic year 2012-2013 for the accreditation ratings awarded for school year 2013-2014 and beyond, a school will be rated Fully Accredited when its eligible students meet the pass rate of 75% in English and the pass rate of 70% in mathematics, science, and history and social science. Additionally, each school with a graduating class shall achieve a minimum of 85 percentage points on the Board of Education's graduation and

completion index, as described in 8VAC20-131-280 B 2, to be rated Fully Accredited.

d. For accreditation purposes, the pass rate will be calculated as single rates for each of the four core academic areas by combining all scores of all tests administered in each subject area.

In the current system, accreditation ratings provide “extra credit” for “remediation recovery.” This process recognizes the efforts of schools that successfully remediate students who failed the SOL tests in reading and mathematics during the previous school year and who passed the tests during the current year. The scores of “remediation recovery” students are counted twice in the calculation of the accreditation pass rate—once for the current year and a second time in recognition of the student’s successful remediation.

While progress toward meeting the accreditation benchmarks was a part of the accreditation system when it was first implemented, the current system does not recognize such progress. In addition, there is no recognition for growth for students who may have made significant progress during the school year but did not pass the state tests. Finally, unlike the federal accountability system, there is currently no process in place for school divisions to appeal a school’s accreditation rating.

**Recommendations:**

1. Recommend revisions to the Standards of Accreditation to add accreditation ratings to recognize the progress of schools in meeting the accreditation benchmarks or to recognize student growth. For example, schools that have not met the pass rates required for full accreditation but have demonstrated progress in meeting the targets might be rated as “provisionally accredited—progress demonstrated.” An additional rating might also be provided for schools that have not improved their overall pass rates but have demonstrated growth on the statewide reading and/or mathematics tests for a majority of their students. The accreditation rating for these schools might be: “provisionally accredited—significant student growth.”

[Recommendation Derived from Desired Result #7: “Accountability measures should include information on student growth that can inform teaching and acknowledge progress in schools, particularly in challenging environments.”]

2. Recommend revisions to the Standards of Accreditation to add an appeals process for schools that are not fully accredited and do not show improvement in the pass rates or significant growth on the state assessments for their students. Such an appeals process would allow schools to submit evidence of student growth from other state approved assessments as evidence of progress or to provide evidence of extenuating circumstances impacting the school’s progress.

[Recommendation Derived from Desired Result #5: “Individual school accreditation status should be based on the mixture of this rebalanced emphasis of existing measures and other measures to be introduced.”]

3. Recommend revisions to the Standards of Accreditation to provide flexibility in how often schools are accredited. Schools might be accredited annually, every three years, or every five years based on their past accreditation statuses. Schools that do not achieve full accreditation would be permitted to request that their accreditation rating be recalculated the following year. Pass rates on the state-mandated tests would continue to be posted annually on the School Performance Report Card.
4. Recommend that the General Assembly support funding for the movement of additional tests to a Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT) format. The use of a CAT format will allow for on demand testing, additional opportunities for retests, and, potentially, additional opportunities for students to demonstrate growth from the beginning of the school year to the end.

[Recommendation Derived from Desired Result #4: “The system should support “on demand” testing options for students to ensure that student readiness, not a fixed testing window, determines when assessments are administered.”]

Additional Information about Computer Adaptive Testing: Computer Adaptive Testing customizes the test for each individual student based on the accuracy of the student’s responses to the test questions as the test is administered. This is different from the traditional assessment format in which all students taking a particular test are administered one of several versions of that test. Computer adaptive testing may allow for more “on demand” testing since the need to wait for the development of new versions of the tests each year is eliminated. In addition, with CAT it may be possible to allow students to test early in the school year and again later in the year to measure the amount of growth the student has made during the year. More information about Computer Adaptive Testing may be found at <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/index.shtml>

5. Recommend legislation and funding to provide opportunities for students in elementary and middle school levels who have failed a SOL test initially, but came close to meeting the benchmark, to retake the test during the same test administration. Such opportunities would be provided as an option for students and parents; students would not be required to retake a failed test. Schools would be required to provide remediation to students before retesting.

[Recommendation Derived from Desired Result #13: “Consideration of ‘expedited re-takes’ (currently available only to high school students) is also a factor for discussion at the elementary and middle school levels.”]

**II. Statement of Principle: Alternative opportunities for students to demonstrate college and career readiness in order to meet graduation requirements should be provided. Doing so will foster innovation and creativity in the classroom and better align students' skills with workforce needs.**

[Principle Derived from Desired Result #14: "At the secondary level, the interface of testing policies with graduation requirements and the definition of course credit will be key areas for discussion and recommendations."]

**Existing requirements:**

Currently students must accrue both standard and verified credits to earn a diploma. Students earn standard credits by passing the course (e.g., Algebra I). In the current SOA a standard credit is defined as follows:

"Standard unit of credit" or "standard credit" means credit awarded for a course in which the student successfully completes 140 clock hours of instruction and the requirements of the course. Local school boards may develop alternatives to the requirement for 140 clock hours of instruction as provided for in 8VAC20-131-110.

Students earn verified credits by passing the course and the corresponding end-of-course test or a substitute test approved by the Board of Education. A list of the approved Board-approved substitute tests may be found at:

[http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/substitute\\_tests/index.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/substitute_tests/index.shtml)

The SOA also permit school divisions to provide "locally awarded verified credits" to students who meet certain criteria. The SOA provides the following guidance regarding locally awarded verified credits.

Students who do not pass Standards of Learning tests in science or history and social science may receive locally awarded verified credits from the local school board in accordance with criteria established in guidelines adopted by the Board of Education.

Additional criteria included in the guidance document for the SOA is provided below:

To be eligible to earn locally awarded verified credits in science, or history/social science under this guidance, a student must:

- Pass the high school course,
- Score within a 375-399 scale score range on any administration of the Standards of Learning after taking the test at least twice, and Demonstrate achievement in the academic content through an appeal process administered at the local level.

The Board of Education requires that local school boards adopt policies to govern procedures used to award local verified credit.

**Recommendations:**

6. Recommend legislation and funding to provide incentives for local school divisions to 1) identify alternative ways for students to accrue standard credits outside of the traditional seat time requirements and 2) to identify additional opportunities to earn verified credits beyond passing an end-of-course SOL test or a board-approved substitute test. Recommend the Board of Education establish guidelines to ensure that the quality of curriculum is maintained.
7. Recommend the Board of Education expand the availability of locally awarded verified credits to students in subjects where SOL tests are not mandated by federal requirements. School divisions would be permitted to award verified credits to any student who has demonstrated proficiency in the content through an approved alternative assessment.

[Recommendations Derived from Desired Result #8: "Measures that impact high school graduation should include authentic evidence of student competencies and should reduce dependence on a tally of Carnegie units."]

- III. **Statement of Principle:** As the Standards of Learning are revised, the state should ensure that the learning needs of today's students are addressed in the revised standards. The implementation timeline should allow sufficient time for the incorporation of new content and skills into the curriculum before their inclusion in the state tests used for accountability.

[Principle Derived from Desired Result #1: "The state should utilize the existing revision schedule for the Standards of Learning objectives to develop Standards which reflect the learning needs of today's students."]

**Existing Requirements:**

The Standards of Learning are reviewed, and potentially revised, every seven years. The Standards of Learning review schedule may be found at [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/assessment\\_committees/review\\_schedule.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/assessment_committees/review_schedule.pdf)

Tests that measure the revised SOL in the content areas that are part of the state assessment program are typically administered three years later. For example, revised history Standards of Learning will be adopted by the Board of Education in early 2015. New tests measuring the revised history standards will be administered for the first time in the 2017-2018 school year.

**Recommendations:**

8. Recommend the Board of Education and the Department of Education ask the committees of educators responsible for revising the Standards of Learning to

consider fewer and deeper goals in the revised content standards. The revision process for the Standards of Learning should also include opportunities for input from businesses, institutes of higher education, and citizens to ensure that the revised standards include the knowledge and skills that are most important and relevant to students' future success.

[Recommendation(s) Derived from Desired Result #9: "There is a need to further define knowledge and skills that are most important and relevant to students' future success. Upcoming Standards of Learning revisions may result in fewer and broader learning goals."]

9. Recommend that the Standards of Learning revision schedule be structured so that school divisions have sufficient time to incorporate new content into the curriculum before it is included on the state assessments.
10. Recommend that the Board of Education and the Department of Education consider the inclusion of interdisciplinary assessments as new tests measuring the revised Standards of Learning are developed.

**IV. Statement of Principle: The state accountability system should allow for a balance between alternative assessments and the existing assessments that comprise the state assessment system, allowing for autonomy and flexibility within school districts.**

[Principle Derived from Desired Result #6: "As new alternative assessment measures are implemented, the state should strike a balance between alternative assessments and standardized tests."]

11. Recommend that the General Assembly provide funding for initiatives at the local level that demonstrate the use of effective authentic alternative measures of student growth and achievement. Funding should be included for professional development and for increased capacity at the Virginia Department of Education in order to provide technical assistance to local school divisions.