VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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OFFICE OF MEDIA RELATIONS

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State Superintendent, Board of Education and Secretary of Education Approve SOL Flexibility

RICHMOND — Elementary and middle school students this spring may take local assessments instead of Standards of Learning tests in history and social science and English writing under waivers and emergency guidance approved today by Superintendent of Public Instruction James Lane, the state Board of Education, and Secretary of Education Atif Qarni. In addition, school divisions will have greater flexibility in awarding credits toward graduation.

The waivers and guidance are designed to reduce the need for in-person testing this year as schools contend with the coronavirus pandemic.

“The waivers and emergency guidance will simplify the logistics of SOL testing this year and ensure that COVID-19 pandemic does not unduly prevent any student from earning a diploma,” Lane said. “The Board of Education and I are also creating opportunities for school divisions to create multiple pathways for students to demonstrate content mastery while prioritizing health and safety. This includes expanding the use of performance assessments that encourage deeper learning and assess the acquisition by students of the skills and attributes we call the Five C’s: critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration and citizenship.”

The waivers became effective following review and approval by Qarni.

“These waivers provide relief and agility to students and educators who are managing a lot of personal and professional pressure during this tumultuous time,” Qarni said. “Innovation is necessary to keep Virginia students learning safely this academic year, and we will continue working to create new pathways for student and educator success as they adapt to changing circumstances and forms of instruction.”

During today’s Board of Education meeting, Lane noted that it is unlikely that the U.S. Department of Education will waive federal rules that require annual testing in reading and mathematics in grades 3-8. Federal education law also requires reading and math tests in high school, and science testing at least once in elementary, middle and high school.

The state, however, does have flexibility in the administration of SOL tests in history and social science and English writing that are not federally mandated.

Citing his authority under Governor Ralph Northam’s Executive Order 51, Lane issued an emergency waiver allowing school divisions this year to replace the Virginia Studies, Civics and Economics, and Grade-8 Writing SOL tests with local assessments, providing that they follow emergency guidance approved by the Board of Education and report student performance data to the state. The SOL tests will continue to be available for school divisions that choose to administer them.

(more)

In addition, the Board of Education approved emergency guidance granting school divisions additional flexibility in the awarding of verified credits and reducing the need for students to return to school buildings to retake end-of-course SOL assessments.

Under the guidance, school divisions may award a verified credit for a course taken in fall 2020 if the student achieves a score of at least 350 on the test and meets local criteria for course achievement.

“The emergency guidance approved today is in keeping with the commitment the Board of Education made during the beginning of the pandemic in March to do everything possible to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on students and schools,” Board of Education President Daniel Gecker said.

Lane also exercised emergency authority granted by the 2020 General Assembly to waive a requirement that high school students attempt to pass an end-of-course SOL test in history before becoming eligible to earn a locally awarded verified credit. The waiver allows school divisions to verify achievement in high school history courses during 2020-2021 with locally developed performance assessments.

Students in divisions that are unable to offer local performance assessments in history and social science this year are still required to attempt an SOL end-of-course assessment at least once and achieve a score of at least 350 to become eligible for a locally awarded verified credit.

Lane also waived a cap on the number of locally award verified credits a school division may issue during the course of a year.

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