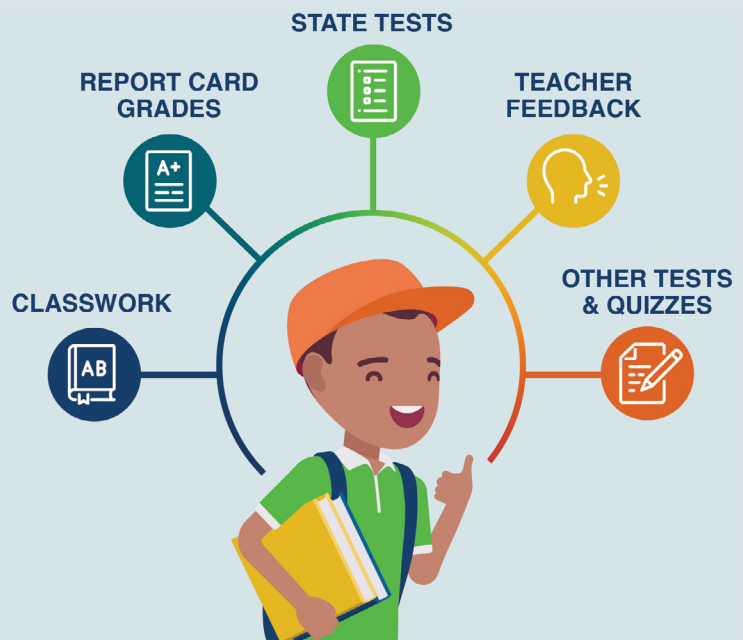




A FAMILY GUIDE TO ANNUAL STATE TESTS IN VIRGINIA: One of Many Measures of Student Learning

There are many ways to measure academic performance, and annual state tests are only one of them. These tests are not meant to tell the whole story. They are meant to be combined with other measures, including teacher feedback, classwork and projects, and report card grades. Together, these measures can give families a more complete picture of a student's performance so they can better support learning at home and advocate for their child.



State Assessments 101

The Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA, requires students to take state tests in reading and math every year in third through eighth grade and once in high school. In Virginia, students in third through eighth grade take the Standards of Learning (SOL) in English language arts and math. Students in fifth and eighth grade also take an SOL in science. High school students take end-of-course SOL tests in selected English, math, social science and science courses. Those courses include: Algebra 1 and 2, Geometry, Trigonometry, Computer Mathematics, Probability and Statistics, Discrete Mathematics and Analysis; Biology, Earth Science and Chemistry; Economics and Personal Finance.

To earn a standard diploma, students must receive a passing score of 400 in at least five SOLs that cover all content areas (English, math, science and social sciences). Students may retake a test if they need to and there

are other options available to show a student has mastered the content of a course that can be decided upon by the school and teacher.

A Focus on Grade Level Skills

Unlike other tests, SOLs are focused on grade level material and are aligned to the state standards. The test questions match what students do and learn in the classroom everyday throughout the year, which are the grade level skills that are most important for students to learn in order to move on to more challenging content.

SOL tests are taken online. In third through eighth grade, the reading and math tests are computer adaptive, which means they adjust the difficulty of the questions based on the student's responses. The tests include a variety of different types of questions, including traditional multiple choice questions, open ended and ones that ask students to use critical thinking skills.

Grade 6: Math

Mia is working on projects that require $3\frac{1}{2}$ yards of ribbon per project. Mia has 28 yards of ribbon. What is the greatest number of projects that Mia can complete with this ribbon?

- A 98
- B $31\frac{1}{2}$
- C $24\frac{1}{2}$
- D 8

Grade 3: ELA

Which two words are synonyms of ordinary?

One of Mario's toy cars is very rare while the other one is ordinary.

regular

easy

popular

common

interesting



Useful Information for All

FAMILIES: Understanding Grade Level Performance

SOL reports give families information on how well their child performed on different sets of skills in each subject. Families can use this information to identify where their child is doing well and where they may need support or practice. This helps families better support learning at home. It can also help them start meaningful conversations with teachers, to set goals for each student's areas of improvement and identify resources and strategies that can be used at home and in school to help students make progress.

Questions to Ask the Teacher about Your Child's SOL Report:

- What does this mean about my child's learning?
- Is my child on grade level?
- Where does my child need more support or improvement?
- What short-term learning goals should my child meet to show progress?
- How can I support learning at home?



TEACHERS: Informing Instruction

Students take different types of tests throughout the school year. Some students take benchmark or diagnostic tests, such as MAP Growth or i-Ready. These are taken several times a year and measure mastery of important concepts and skills in reading and math. Students take a test at the beginning of the year to identify their “starting point” and again throughout the year to measure their progress. Benchmark tests help teachers identify and address learning gaps early on so students can stay on track to meet grade level expectations. While the SOL is only given at the end of the school year, it is one way of showing how much progress students made from the beginning of the year and how well they met grade level expectations.

While teachers use SOL results to understand each student's unique needs and support them in the areas where they need extra help, they also help teachers to improve their instruction. Teachers can use the results to look for trends in their students' learning to see what skills or concepts students learned and what content they struggled with. This helps teachers identify what they taught effectively and where they need to improve or change their instructional strategies.

SCHOOL & DISTRICT LEADERS: Informing Decisions

SOL results are critical for school and district leaders to make informed decisions about schools and students. School and district level SOL scores show leaders how students across a school or district are performing and indicate if a certain group of students or schools need more support. This allows them to target additional support or resources to help those schools improve. District leaders can also use SOL scores to understand what strategies and changes are working.



STATE LEADERS: Helping Schools Improve

State leaders use SOL results to identify schools and districts that need more support and resources. They identify the schools with the lowest performance in the state, as well as schools with certain groups of students that performed much lower on the test than the rest of the students in that school. These schools receive additional funding and resources from the state to support students and teachers. For example, schools may hire more teachers or tutors or they may purchase additional instructional materials and programs, depending on the needs of their students.

Where Can I Go for More Information?

- For more information visit, [DOE.Virginia.gov/Testing/Index.shtml](https://doe.virginia.gov/Testing/Index.shtml)
- To see a practice test, visit [DOE.Virginia.gov/Testing/SOL/Practice_Items/TestNav8.shtml](https://doe.virginia.gov/Testing/SOL/Practice_Items/TestNav8.shtml)
- For ideas on how to support your child's learning at home, visit [PTA.org/FamilyGuides](https://pta.org/FamilyGuides)
- For more information about the Virginia PTA visit [VAPTA.org/](https://vapta.org/)

