Grade 6-8 SOL Final Preparations Tip Sheet

As your school begins final preparations for the SOL tests, the Office of Student Learning would like to share a few tips and suggestions to support SOL review and preparation.

Gentle Reminders:

On the Week of the Test: Minimize anxiety! Even a well-prepared student can feel pre-test anxiety. Encourage students to relax and to view the test as a chance to show what they have learned. Reassure them that it's natural to feel a little nervous and for them to try their best. Finally, some last pieces of advice to make everyone in the family feel prepared for the testing experience:

The Day Before: A good night's sleep the night before is most important. Test scores can be greatly affected when a child hasn't gotten enough rest.

Test Day: A good breakfast the morning of the test is a terrific brain booster; nutrients help to stimulate the brain. Don't forget last minute supplies, such as number 2 pencils.

Mathematics

Suggested Resources

- **Analysis of the 2014 Student Performance** (view in PowerPoint slideshow view) http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/performance_analysis/index.shtml should be watched and used to make instructional decisions;
- Each SOL-Tested math course has a folder on Math Staff Communities titled, **99 SOL Review Materials,** that contains
  - **Released Mathematics SOL Tests** in a printable format. VDOE PDF versions are posted on http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/released_tests/index.shtml;
  - A Group Activity Practice (GAP) of these items; and
  - Other review materials such as the three years of suggested practice combined into one presentation and sorted by SOL.
- The TestNav8 **SOL Practice Items** allow students to experience online testing, but is not scored. http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/practice_items/testnav8.shtml
  Some teachers have students work and discuss the math items in class and then practice on the computer with a focus on proper use of the tools. Use the VDOE TestNav 8 Guides to provide concise and thorough directions on the use of tools.

Suggested Tips

- Be selective in what is used for test practice. It is best to practice in a format where students are engaged in discussion about solution strategies and test taking strategies;
- Calculators should have appropriate settings and applications loaded. Students should be using the version of calculator with which they are familiar when they test;
- The Group Activity Practice (GAP) may be used to review for test. This contains the released test items;
- SOL released items and practice items may be used as warm-ups;
- Students should be showing work on all practice and when they take any math test. Teachers can determine student misconceptions by looking at the student work; and
- Be sure that students understand only the pointer tool selects an answer, including a location on a graph. The dot tool marks the spot, but is not scored as an answer until clicked with the pointer.

The best preparation for the test is continued quality teaching and formative assessments.

History and Social Science

Suggested Resources

- Released Tests: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/released_tests/index.shtml;
- SOL Institutes Resources: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/history/professional_development/institutes/index.shtml;
- Prince William County Public Schools Social Studies web page under "Staff Communities";
- Stanford History Education: http://sheg.stanford.edu/;
- Gilder Lehrman History by Eras: https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era;
- Civics/Government Resources: http://civics.pwnet.org/; and
- Technology Enhanced Items (TEI): (**Field items only, these will not count toward student's score**) http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/practice_items/testnav8/history-social-science/virginia_studies.pdf.

Suggested Tips

- **Reminder: Assessment based upon 2008 History and Social Science SOLs and Curriculum Framework; field testing TEI based upon content common to the 2008 and 2015 History and Social Science SOLs and Curriculum Framework;**
- Enhanced rigor, ask students to compare content from different eras;
- Sequencing of events is crucial for understanding the scope of content studied in each course. The use of timelines and similar strategies support developing concepts of chronology and cause and effect; and
- Increase focus on skills and students ability to apply knowledge and understanding of content, not just factual knowledge.

Science

Reminder: Beginning with the spring 2017 test administration, all end-of-course Science SOL tests for high and middle school levels will be delivered using a newer version of the test delivery system, TestNav 8.

Suggested Resources

- Publically released Science SOL tests and practice item sets in TestNav 8 on the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) page http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/science/index.shtml; and
- Online websites for reviewing content material and practicing released SOL test items: http://www.solpass.org/ and http://education.jlab.org/solquiz/.

Suggested Tips

- The best way to prepare students for the grade 8 SOL test is by reviewing science content for grades 6-8;
- Teachers should embed the review as part of their daily instruction;
- Assignments and assessments should reflect the type of questions students will experience on the SOL test, including multiple choice (requiring one correct answer), multiple response (requiring more than one answer), and items requiring interpretation of data, diagrams, and models; and
- Students should be provided with multiple opportunities to practice their test-taking skills on computers.

Specific challenges from the 2016 SOL assessment:

Grade 8: metric units of measurement; organization of the solar system; animal adaptations; genetics; the Periodic Table and classification of elements; chemical symbols and formulas; sound waves; and policies and practices important to our environment.

Language Arts

10 Ways to Prepare for the Middle School English SOL Tests

- **Provide Time to Read** – Our guidance from VDOE is that stamina is an area of concern. To deeply comprehend and lengthen stamina while reading, students need extended amounts of time to read. Follow the link for six key elements of reading instruction: http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar12/vol69/num06/Every-Child%2C-Every-Day.aspx.
- **Provide Exposure to Multiple Genres of Text** – Students should have opportunities to read, think, and discuss all genres identified in the SOLs. Instruction and reading should include texts of fiction, nonfiction, informational and digital texts, and paired passages at the student's independent reading level. For all genres, students practice:
  - Summarizing;
  - Drawing conclusions and making inferences; and
  - Identifying and analyzing cause and effect relationships.

  Resources for practice:
  - Text dependent and paired passages with VDOE;
  - Text dependent questions with Commonlit;
  - Paired passages with ReadWorks.org (must create a free account to access); and
  - Comprehension skills of inferring, making predictions, asking questions, understanding author's purpose, and summarizing.

Know each student's needs. Use data you have collected pertinent to word analysis and comprehension of texts to identify and instruct areas of specific needs for each student.

- Practice **word analysis strategies** with authentic texts that include:
  - Applying knowledge of word origins;
  - Using word roots and affixes; and
  - Using context to determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word.
- Areas of practice and instruction for **reading a variety of fiction texts** include:
  - Identifying and analyzing figurative language (including symbols and imagery);
  - Explaining the meaning or purpose of figurative language;
  - Explaining the use of symbols (8th grade);
  - Analyzing elements of plot, including character development and changes in attitude;
  - Analyzing the effect of literary elements on the plot or conflict; and
  - Analyzing the impact of word choice and imagery.
- Areas of practice and instruction for **reading a variety of nonfiction texts** include:
  - Locating information to support conclusions and inferences;
  - Choosing an appropriate heading or subtitle for a section;

    - Identifying the purpose of a specific section of text;
    - Identifying and interpreting text features;
    - Choosing information appropriate to include under a specific heading; and
    - Identifying the purpose and function of pictures, maps, and other graphics.
- **Model Questioning Texts** – teach students to use Questioning that Deepens Comprehension.
- **Write About Reading** – Students should have opportunities to write authentic reflections about what they have read to deepen comprehension. For recommendations, see page 11 of http://bit.ly/1ppB8D5 (you may need to copy and paste this link in your browser to access).
- **Talk About Reading** – Productive talk is essential to teaching and learning. The amount of talk that students do is correlated with their achievement. In the Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey article, "Speaking Volumes," they provide rationale and opportunity for talk in the classroom (cut and paste this link if you have trouble accessing the document http://bit.ly/1Xqm3eU).
- **Metacognitive Skills** – Prepare your learners by helping them become metacognitive. **Metacognition** is a critically important, yet often overlooked component of learning. Effective learning involves planning and goal-setting, monitoring one's progress, and adapting as needed. All of these activities are metacognitive in nature. By teaching students these skills, all of which can be learned, we can improve student learning. There are three critical steps to teaching metacognition:
    - Teaching students that their ability to learn is transferable;
    - Teaching planning and goal-setting; and
    - Giving students ample opportunities to practice monitoring their learning and adapting as necessary.
- **Habits of Close Reading** – Help students develop the habit of reading closely by using strategies that help them think about texts at deeper levels of understanding (cut and paste this link if you have trouble accessing the document http://bit.ly/22enOCJ).
- **Daily Opportunities to Write** – Prepare your learners by giving them multiple opportunities to write in a variety of modes and for a variety of purposes. Kelly Gallagher identifies 6 distinct writing purposes that students should explore: Express and Reflect, Inform and Explain, Evaluate and Judge, Inquire and Explore, Analyze and Interpret, and Take a Stand/Propose a Solution.
- **Embrace the Writing Process** – Writing is a process that students need to engage in routinely. Provide some opportunities for students to practice writing to an assigned prompt such as those provided by VDOE, but offer students regular opportunities to write to authentic audiences using the writing process to support their learning.
- **Self-Assess** – Use the VDOE writing rubric and anchor papers to help students analyze their own work and determine how their writing might be improved.