

Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP)

Questions and Answers for Parents



Virginia Department of Education 2005

Questions:

1. What is the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program?

- The Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP) is an assessment option for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Students meeting the participation criteria for this assessment are instructed in **Aligned Standards of Learning** (Reading, Math, Science and History/Social Science) and specific communication skills. Educators are required to collect information about what a student knows and can do for both the Aligned Standards of Learning and communication skills.
- The VAAP is **not** a “paper and pencil” test. It gives each teacher the ability to use multiple forms of information to show the student’s performance on the selected Aligned Standards of Learning. It can include work samples, observations, interviews, anecdotal records, videos, audiotapes and other sources of data as selected by the teacher and other school personnel. These multiple forms of data are called a Collection of Evidence (COE).

2. Why should students with disabilities, including those with the most significant cognitive disabilities, be included in Virginia’s assessment and accountability system?

- Federal Law under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) require inclusion of **ALL** students with disabilities in Virginia’s assessment system.
- All students are capable of learning at a level that engages and challenges them. Students with significant cognitive disabilities will be taught academic skills and concepts.
- When students with disabilities are part of the accountability system, educators’ expectations for these students are more likely to increase. Educators learn that students with disabilities can make significant gains in academic skills and concepts, just like students who do not have disabilities.

3. What are the Aligned Standards of Learning

- Aligned Standards of Learning serve as the academics statements of skill that will drive the academic curriculum for students with significant cognitive disabilities. These skills were chosen directly from Virginia’s Standards of Learning (SOL). The SOL serves as the general education curriculum for all students in Virginia.
- A group of educational professionals specializing in the education of students with significant cognitive disabilities carefully examined all SOL content areas (English, Math, Science, and History/Social Science) and selected standards that represented essential skills and knowledge for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

- Students with significant cognitive disabilities will be taught Aligned Standards of Learning at own their own pace using instructional strategies appropriate for their learning needs. The number of standards taught to each student will vary.

4. What about functional skills?

- School divisions will be working toward teaching a blended curriculum of Aligned Standards of Learning and functional skills. Functional skills are an essential component of your child's educational program.
- Requirements under No Child Left Behind only call for alternate assessments in the core academic subject areas of Reading, Math, and Science. History/Social Science is required under IDEIA.

5. When will the VAAP be conducted?

- A completed alternate assessment shall be submitted for students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Alternate assessments shall be completed as follows:
 - Grades 3, 5, 8 and 11 - Reading, Math, Science, History/Social Science
 - Grades 4, 6, 7 - Reading and Math
- Check with your school division about local requirements for History/Social Science requirements.
- Collections of Evidence for the VAAP begin in October and are due to local Division Directors of Testing during a locally set date in March.

6. What are the criteria for participation in the VAAP?

Certain criteria must be met to participate in the alternate assessment. The IEP team must answer **YES** to all of the following:

- The student has a current IEP or one is being developed.
- The student demonstrates **significant cognitive disabilities**.
- The student's present level of performance indicates the need for extensive, direct instruction and/or intervention in a curriculum framework based on **Aligned Standards of Learning**. The present level of performance or student evaluation may also include personal management, recreation and leisure, school and community, vocational, communication, social competence and/or motor skills
- The student requires intensive, frequent, and individualized instruction in a variety of settings to show active interaction and achievement
- The student is working toward educational goals other than those prescribed for a modified standard, standard or advanced studies diploma program

The IEP team must document the basis of the team's decision for a student to participate in the VAAP. This decision will be based on information from current sources as well as sources from previous year. Sources of information may include evaluation reports, school records, private treatment records, parent/teacher observations, anecdotal notes, previous IEPs, etc.

7. Will students who participate in the alternate assessment graduate with the same diploma as other students?

- No. Students participating in the alternate assessment will be working toward a special diploma.

8. If a student does not pass the VAAP, what happens?

- A failing score on the alternate assessment will not prevent the student from pursuing his or her course of study. The results will provide the IEP team with information so that the student's Individualized Education Program may be reviewed and adjustments made if necessary.
- A failing score will not prevent a student from graduating with a special diploma.

9. Where can parents learn more about the VAAP?

- Parents may contact local Parent Resource Centers, directors of special education and directors of testing for more about the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program.
- Parents may use TTAC online: <http://www.ttaonline.org> - check under the VA Assessments Red Tab for VAAP to find additional information.
- Parents may use the Virginia Department of Education website to find additional information: <http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/sess/>