

August 10, 2015 – Positive Trends in SOL Pass Rates

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POSITIVE TRENDS IN SOL PASS RATES

(Staunton, VA) – A student greets the teacher at the door, announcing, "I can pass, and I am SO ready! Do I really have to go to PE? I want to get started!" The student was preparing for his second opportunity at taking the grade 5 Reading assessment, after the Virginia Board of Education approved the expedited retake process in Spring 2015. Similar to the procedure that has been in effect for students at the high school since 2000, students in grades 3-8 scoring in a range of 375-399 were allowed an opportunity to retake. The student's highest score is used in final calculations.

In total, Staunton City Schools administered 574 expedited retake assessments - about 300 in grades 3-8 and the remainder at the high school. Unlike the high school, the elementary and middle school assessments required parent permission prior to testing. About 91% of those eligible retasted. About half of those students retesting received a passing score on the second attempt. This new opportunity provides several benefits for students, as explained in a school memo to parents, including:

- Allows second chance for success; no longer just a "one shot" opportunity
- Supports the belief that persistence is important
- Allows time for targeted remediation and support in specific areas
- Builds student self-concept and pride by working hard and building skills
- Provides another opportunity to show mastery of standards
- Prepares students for high school courses, where assessments are required for graduation

Ware Elementary School principal, Dr. Sharon Barker, says she is very proud of the work of teachers and students in her school. Of those students in the failing expedited retake range, 61% passed on the second attempt. She states: "Being able to get testing results quickly was a key factor in our plan for expedited retakes. These results allowed staff to have purposeful conversations with students about specific areas of focus and plan for targeted instruction. This targeted approach and the opportunity to re-test empowered our students. Students were excited about re-taking the test and seeing their growth! I can't tell you the number of students who stopped me in the hallway to say, 'Mrs. Barker, I did it! I passed my test!' Some students were so excited they wanted to go tell all of their former teachers the good news. Being a part of that type of celebration was so powerful for our staff, too. It really solidified the belief that we are all share a part in helping our students achieve success."

The addition of expedited retakes at grades 3-8 is just one of many steps that have been recommended by the state-level SOL Innovation Committee that was convened last year to re-examine the current accountability system. This committee is also offering alternatives to our current state accreditation methods, which have been impacted as the difficulty of state-level assessments was ratcheted up beginning in the 2011-2012 school year. As the state has raised the bar in education, Staunton City Schools has continued to respond to these new challenges. Highlights of student performance in each of the subject areas include:

- Reading
 - Reading pass rates increased by 9% for the division.
 - All subgroups had significant growth in Reading (from an 8% to 13% increase). The combined group of economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, and English language learners had the greatest increase at 13%.
 - The elementary schools and middle school had significant growth in Reading, with a range of 6 - 18% overall increase for each school.
- Writing
 - Local assessments are now given for Grade 5 Writing; these results are NOT included in state calculations.
 - High school writing results exceed the state average for the third consecutive year with Staunton City grade 11 writing at 86%
- Mathematics
 - Mathematics pass rates increased by 3% for the school division.
 - Multiple subgroups had significant growth, with the black subgroup having the most increase at a 10% gain.
 - Scores ranged as high as 100% in middle school math (Geometry and Algebra I) for 2014-2015, with a pass advanced rate of 92% in Algebra I
 - In comparison to the previous year's data, the most significant growth was in grade 3 mathematics (11% increase), grade 6 mathematics (11% increase), and grade 7 mathematics (18% increase).
 - In high school, the pass advanced rate in Algebra II increased to a rate of 33%, a significant increase from 10% pass advanced rate the previous year.
- Science
 - Local assessments are now given for Grade 3 Science; these results are NOT included in state calculations.
 - Grade 5 Science had an overall increase of 8% for the division.
 - Chemistry exceeded the state average for the fifth consecutive year, with an overall pass rate of 91%.

- History
 - Local assessments are now given for Grade 3 History, United States History I, and United States History II; these results are NOT included in state calculations.
 - Grade 4 Virginia Studies had an overall 5% increase from the previous year.

Stephanie Haskins, Director of Assessment and School Improvement, explains, "In addition to examining areas of strength, each school and the division annually reviews pass rates and looks for any areas of need, particularly subjects or courses that are falling below a 70 - 75% pass rate. While we are pleased with the growth made in the majority of our pass rates, we are working with our staff to address specific areas where more support is needed,"

"We are pleased to see an overall positive trend in our pass rates. The persistence of students, involvement of parents and volunteers, and commitment of teachers and staff are factors leading to improvement. We will continue to work collaboratively to engage students in meaningful work that impacts not just pass rates but high-level thinking and problem-solving that prepares students for life," states Dr. Linda Reviea, Superintendent.

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