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**Results from the Virginia Education Association  
Cyber Town Hall Meeting  
On the proposed elimination of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade social studies  
Standards of Learning Test  
June 2009**

## Summary

The Virginia Education Association first heard of the proposal to eliminate the third grade social studies Standards of Learning test at the May 2009 Board of Education meeting. After hearing the pros and cons of the changes, we decided to ask our membership for their thoughts via a “cyber town hall meeting.” We posted a summary of the proposal, along with a brief synopsis of the arguments for and against elimination, on our website and asked interested people to answer a short questionnaire regarding the proposal. What we discovered is that teachers across the state are conflicted about this proposal.

Approximately 60 percent of respondents indicated that they were in favor of eliminating the third grade social studies test. Approximately 30 percent were opposed to elimination. The final 10 percent were undecided. Within those results, 44% of people in favor of elimination indicated that the reason they supported this reform is because standardized tests are inappropriate for third grade. Sixty percent of the people who were opposed to elimination indicated that they were concerned that social studies would be under-emphasized as a result. The undecided respondents had less consensus among their reasons, but the largest group (28%) indicated that they were concerned that this proposed change would result in an overly broad social studies at the next tested grade level.

Proponents of elimination cited a need to focus on reading and math instruction as one of their reasons for eliminating the test. As one respondent stated, “Children need a firm foundation in reading so they can comprehend other subjects. Reading in the content area needs practice and K, 1, 2 and 3 help develop the necessary skills. By 4th grade the foundation should be solid.” Another pointed out that not testing does not have to equal not teaching, “Taking away the 3rd grade social studies SOL test will allow more time for reading instruction. The extra time for reading instruction, however, does not mean less

time for social studies. Spectacular reading lessons can be created with social studies reading passages. Students need to practice reading non-fiction as much as fiction.” Others expressed concern for the children. As one respondent stated, “I believe that the present Social Studies standards for K-3rd grades are developmentally inappropriate. The test should definitely be eliminated.” Another said, “I feel that all of these tests that we give the students place too much pressure on our young students. I have had my own children coming home crying because that are afraid that they are not going to pass.”

Others indicated that their philosophical feelings toward testing conflicted with how they perceive the current realities of testing in education. As one commenter said, “I will be perfectly honest in saying that I do not believe in the SOL test as it is now. It is one size fits all, and does not look at our diversified students. With that said, being that we are in a society with SOL tests, if the 3rd grade social studies SOL test is removed, I fear that the teaching of social studies will suffer. Already in middle school more emphasis is placed on math and reading, and as a result, we have been given less time to cover social studies. As much as people say that this will not occur in elementary school, I fear that it will as long as there are other SOL tests to worry about. Math, reading, and science—while important subjects—are not any more or less important than social studies, but if the removal of the 3rd grade social studies test becomes a reality, I fear that social studies will meet a tragic fate.”

In fact, people argued that the very proposal demonstrates the under-emphasis they are afraid would occur. As one comment stated, “Social Studies is already under-emphasized in elementary school & high school and this cut would worsen the problem. Dropping a social studies program to benefit another program is never the answer.” On the flip side, many people took offense with the implication that without a test, teachers would

stop teaching social studies. “Why are some people so afraid that social studies won't be taught effectively? Weren't teachers teaching social studies before SOLS? It is insulting that the "higher ups" think teachers won't teach social studies because there isn't an SOL test for teacher accountability. We have curriculum requirements and specific hours/minutes that social studies must be taught. To insinuate that teachers might not follow these guidelines is insulting.”

In our attempts to clarify our thinking regarding this proposal, we ended up raising more questions than answers. Our members have learned that in this time of high-stakes testing, the pressure to make accreditation has resulted in actions that no one would have anticipated. Therefore, many are reluctant to endorse a position regarding this proposal until more information can be provided. Many of the comments mentioned that this proposal was rushed and had not been communicated to them prior to its appearance on the Board agenda. As one respondent stated, “I would like to know the real reason for the decision to drop this test. Complaints about testing have been overlooked for several years; why now and why this test? Is it a way to save money? Is it that the state realizes how the 3rd grade curriculum is too advanced for the grade level? I feel that there is more to this than what meets the eye, therefore I'm undecided as to what is best regarding the test.”

Many questions were posed regarding the change. What will happen to social studies professional development funds at the local level? How will changes to the reading passages affect the validity of that test? What processes and programs will be implemented to increase the focus on literacy in the early grades? How will this proposed change affect the Virginia Studies test?

## All Respondents

### 1. Should the third grade social studies test be eliminated from the SOL testing program?

yes	468	57%
no	262	32%
undecided	85	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>815</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 2. What grade level do you work with?

Pre-K-5 <sup>th</sup> grade	591	73%
6th through 8th grade	112	14%
9th through 12th grade	97	12%
I am not a school employee	13	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>813</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 3. Please check the response that most applies to your reason.

Yes-I am opposed to all high stakes standardized tests for our students.

92    11%

Yes-I think that high stakes standardized tests are inappropriate for the age/grade level.

218    27%

Yes-I think that high stakes standardized tests are inappropriate for social studies.

71    9%

Yes--as long as the third grade reading test includes passages related to the social studies SOLs.

123    15%

No-I think that high stakes standardized tests are necessary to monitor student and school performance.

18    2%

No-I am concerned that social studies will be under-emphasized as a result of removing the test.

171    21%

No-I am concerned that this move will make the fourth grade test too broad.

79    10%

No-I am concerned that this move will make the reading test into an inappropriate measure.

34    4%

**Total** **806    100%**

## Elementary School Teachers

### 1. Should the third grade social studies test be eliminated from the SOL testing program?

yes	358	61%
no	170	29%
undecided	61	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>589</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 2. Please check the response that most applies to your reason.

Yes-I am opposed to all high stakes standardized tests for our students.  
58    10%

Yes-I think that high stakes standardized tests are inappropriate for the age/grade level.  
162    28%

Yes-I think that high stakes standardized tests are inappropriate for social studies.  
61    10%

Yes--as long as the third grade reading test includes passages related to the social studies SOLs.  
97    17%

No-I think that high stakes standardized tests are necessary to monitor student and school performance.  
10    2%

No-I am concerned that social studies will be under-emphasized as a result of removing the test.  
102    17%

No-I am concerned that this move will make the fourth grade test too broad.  
63    11%

No-I am concerned that this move will make the reading test into an inappropriate measure.  
30    5%

**Total** **583    100%**

## Middle School Teachers

**1. Should the third grade social studies test be eliminated from the SOL testing program?**

	yes	59	53%
	no	42	38%
	undecided	11	10%
<b>Total</b>		<b>112</b>	<b>100%</b>

**2. Please check the response that most applies to your reason.**

Yes-I am opposed to all high stakes standardized tests for our students.

17    15%

Yes-I think that high stakes standardized tests are inappropriate for the age/grade level.

33    30%

Yes-I think that high stakes standardized tests are inappropriate for social studies.

6    5%

Yes--as long as the third grade reading test includes passages related to the social studies SOLs.

9    8%

No-I think that high stakes standardized tests are necessary to monitor student and school performance.

4    4%

No-I am concerned that social studies will be under-emphasized as a result of removing the test.

27    24%

No-I am concerned that this move will make the fourth grade test too broad.

14    13%

No-I am concerned that this move will make the reading test into an inappropriate measure.

1    1%

**Total** **111    100%**

## High School Teachers

**1. Should the third grade social studies test be eliminated from the SOL testing program?**

	46	47%
yes		
no	39	40%
undecided	12	12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100%</b>

**2. Please check the response that most applies to your reason.**

Yes-I am opposed to all high stakes standardized tests for our students.

13    14%

Yes-I think that high stakes standardized tests are inappropriate for the age/grade level.

21    22%

Yes-I think that high stakes standardized tests are inappropriate for social studies.

3    3%

Yes--as long as the third grade reading test includes passages related to the social studies SOLs.

17    18%

No-I think that high stakes standardized tests are necessary to monitor student and school performance.

3    3%

No-I am concerned that social studies will be under-emphasized as a result of removing the test.

33    35%

No-I am concerned that this move will make the fourth grade test too broad.

2    2%

No-I am concerned that this move will make the reading test into an inappropriate measure.

3    3%

**Total** **95    100%**

## Undecided Respondents

### 1. What grade level do you work with?

Pre-K through 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	61	73%
6 <sup>th</sup> through 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	11	13%
9 <sup>th</sup> through 12 <sup>th</sup> grade	12	14%
I am not a school employee	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 2. Please check the response that most applies to your reason.

Yes-I am opposed to all high stakes standardized tests for our students.

12    16%

Yes-I think that high stakes standardized tests are inappropriate for the age/grade level.

11    14%

Yes-I think that high stakes standardized tests are inappropriate for social studies.

2    3%

Yes--as long as the third grade reading test includes passages related to the social studies SOLs.

13    17%

No-I think that high stakes standardized tests are necessary to monitor student and school performance.

0    0%

No-I am concerned that social studies will be under-emphasized as a result of removing the test.

8    11%

No-I am concerned that this move will make the fourth grade test too broad.

21    28%

No-I am concerned that this move will make the reading test into an inappropriate measure.

9    12%

**Total** **76    100%**

## Respondents Supporting Elimination

### 1. What grade level do you work with?

Pre-K through 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	358	77%
6 <sup>th</sup> through 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	59	13%
9 <sup>th</sup> through 12 <sup>th</sup> grade	46	10%
I am not a school employee	2	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 2. Please check the response that most applies to your reason.

Yes-I am opposed to all high stakes standardized tests for our students.  
79    17%

Yes-I think that high stakes standardized tests are inappropriate for the age/grade level.  
206    44%

Yes-I think that high stakes standardized tests are inappropriate for social studies.  
68    15%

Yes--as long as the third grade reading test includes passages related to the social studies SOLs.  
107    23%

No-I think that high stakes standardized tests are necessary to monitor student and school performance.  
0    0%

No-I am concerned that social studies will be under-emphasized as a result of removing the test.  
5    1%

No-I am concerned that this move will make the fourth grade test too broad.  
0    0%

No-I am concerned that this move will make the reading test into an inappropriate measure.  
1    0%

**Total** **466    100%**

## Respondents Opposed to Elimination

### 1. What grade level do you work with?

Pre-K through 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	170	65%
6 <sup>th</sup> through 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	42	16%
9 <sup>th</sup> through 12 <sup>th</sup> grade	39	15%
I am not a school employee	11	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 2. Please check the response that most applies to your reason.

Yes-I am opposed to all high stakes standardized tests for our students.

1      0%

Yes-I think that high stakes standardized tests are inappropriate for the age/grade level.

1      0%

Yes-I think that high stakes standardized tests are inappropriate for social studies.

0      0%

Yes--as long as the third grade reading test includes passages related to the social studies SOLs.

3      1%

No-I think that high stakes standardized tests are necessary to monitor student and school performance.

18      7%

No-I am concerned that social studies will be under-emphasized as a result of removing the test.

158      60%

No-I am concerned that this move will make the fourth grade test too broad.

57      22%

No-I am concerned that this move will make the reading test into an inappropriate measure.

24      9%

**Total** **262      100%**

## Social Studies Teachers

### 1. Should the third grade social studies test be eliminated from the SOL testing program?

yes	33	30%
no	66	61%
undecided	10	9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 2. What grade level do you work with?

Pre-K through 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	42	39%
6 <sup>th</sup> through 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	30	28%
9 <sup>th</sup> through 12 <sup>th</sup> grade	36	33%
I am not a school employee	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>100%</b>

### 3. Please check the response that most applies to your reason.

Yes-I am opposed to all high stakes standardized tests for our students.  
8      7%

Yes-I think that high stakes standardized tests are inappropriate for the age/grade level.  
14      13%

Yes-I think that high stakes standardized tests are inappropriate for social studies.  
5      5%

Yes--as long as the third grade reading test includes passages related to the social studies SOLs.  
9      8%

No-I think that high stakes standardized tests are necessary to monitor student and school performance.  
4      4%

No-I am concerned that social studies will be under-emphasized as a result of removing the test.  
58      54%

No-I am concerned that this move will make the fourth grade test too broad.  
10      9%

No-I am concerned that this move will make the reading test into an inappropriate measure.  
0      0%

**Total** **108      100%**