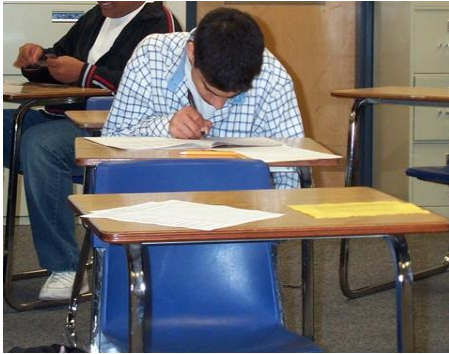


What is the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP)?

The Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP) is a specialized assessment designed for students in grades 3-8 who have significant cognitive disabilities and are not in the Standards of Learning (SOL curriculum). The VAAP is only for students who are unable, due to their level of disability, to participate in the SOL tests in a content area, even with accommodations. The VAAP allows these students to demonstrate their learning using alternative methods.



The VAAP is based on academic standards that have been reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity. These academic standards are called the **Virginia Essentialized Standards of Learning (VESOL)**. The VESOL is aligned with the SOL standards but simplified for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

The VAAP used to be a portfolio-based assessment. In the 2020-21 school year, it was replaced with multiple-choice math, reading, and science assessments.

Why is VDOE Issuing New Guidance on VAAP Participation?

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has developed guidance to ensure that students participating in the state's accountability system are being appropriately assessed. The purpose is to ensure that only students with **the most significant cognitive disabilities** are found eligible to participate in the alternate assessment program vs. the SOL tests. The VAAP participation tool has very specific criteria for participation. This ensures that students are not misidentified or placed on an academic and assessment track that is inconsistent with their abilities and capabilities and/or does not meet the requirements of the federal **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)** and **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**.

Participating in VAAP may impact a student's ability to earn a standard or advanced studies diploma in Virginia and their future employment opportunities or access to post-secondary education.

Who is Eligible for the VAAP?

To participate in the VAAP instead of the SOL tests, students must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and meet specific criteria established by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE).

- ✓ The student must have **significant cognitive disabilities** that drastically impact their ability to learn and participate in the SOL assessments, even with accommodations. A significant cognitive disability cannot be based only on an IQ test score. It is also not based on a specific disability category. It is based on an understanding of the complex needs of the student. Students eligible for the VAAP will have well below-average intellectual functioning and adaptive skills.
- ✓ The student is **participating in the VESOLs**. They are learning the same content as their peers but reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity. They require direct intensive instruction, substantially adapted materials, modified instructional strategies, accommodations, or supports to access and progress in the grade and age-appropriate curriculum.
- ✓ Students who only qualify for an IEP because of a **learning disability or speech-language impairment** are **not** eligible to participate in the VAAP.
- ✓ Students who are identified under the IDEA Disability categories of **Deaf/Hearing Impaired, Emotional Disability, Orthopedic Impairment, Other Health Impairment, and Vision impairment** are very unlikely to be eligible for the VAAP unless they also have a significant cognitive disability.

How is Eligibility Determined?

Eligibility for VAAP is determined through a **collaborative process** involving parents, teachers, and other professionals. The student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, which includes the parents, **reviews the student's educational needs, strengths, challenges, and learning goals**. The team considers the student's **performance on assessments, classroom observations, progress reports, and other relevant information**. This is done using the VAAP Participation Decision-Making tool.

The VAAP Participation Decision-Making Tool

Effective July 1, 2024 (earlier if a school division decides to use it), the IEP team must use a matrix provided by VDOE to guide their decision-making process for VAAP eligibility. This tool is available here: www.doe.virginia.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/51942/638400437751285771 and includes the following sections:

Section A

- ✓ Does the student have an IEP? (If no, the process stops)
- ✓ What is the student's eligibility category under IDEA? (This question is asked because students with certain disabilities, e.g., a learning disability, are automatically disqualified from taking the VAAP.)

Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP) Eligibility

A Resource Document



Section B. The team assesses the student's cognitive functioning level in various domains (areas), looking at things like intellectual abilities, adaptive behaviors, communication skills, social skills, and independence in daily tasks.

Conceptual Domain-Adaptive Skills. This describes skills needed to communicate, apply academic skills, and manage and accomplish tasks. The team evaluates the student's academic achievement and progress in relation to grade-level expectations, curriculum standards, and instructional objectives.

Social Domain. This describes behaviors needed to engage in appropriate interpersonal interactions. The team examines self-esteem, social problem-solving, following rules, using leisure time, picking up on social cues, using behavior to communicate, and more.

Practical Domain. The team assesses the students' functional performance and the levels of support needed in various areas, including self-care abilities, health needs, and functioning in classroom and community activities, including their awareness of safety issues.

Section A: Determining Initial Eligibility
Directions: Complete the following questions to determine if the student may be eligible for participation in the alternate assessment.

1. Does the student have a current individualized education program (IEP)?

Select the appropriate box below to determine Next Steps.	Instruction
No, the student does not have an IEP. <input type="checkbox"/>	Stop here. The student is not eligible for alternate assessment.
Yes, the student has a current IEP. <input type="checkbox"/>	Proceed to the next question.

2. Review the student's eligibility identification(s) under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. What student disability categories meet the eligibility criteria?

Student meets the eligibility criteria under these disability category designation(s). (Select those applicable.)	Instruction
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deafness/Hearing Impairment <input type="checkbox"/>• Emotional Disability <input type="checkbox"/>• Orthopedic Impairment <input type="checkbox"/>• Other Health Impairment <input type="checkbox"/>• Specific Learning Disability <input type="checkbox"/>• Speech or Language Impairment (only) <input type="checkbox"/>• Visual Impairment <input type="checkbox"/>	A student identified solely with any one of these disability categories very rarely will be a student with a most significant cognitive disability; therefore, rarely or if ever, the student will qualify for the alternate assessment. Proceed with caution to Section B.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Autism <input type="checkbox"/>• Deaf-Blindness <input type="checkbox"/>• Intellectual Disability <input type="checkbox"/>• Multiple Disabilities <input type="checkbox"/>• Traumatic Brain Injury <input type="checkbox"/>	A student identified with any one of these disabilities may have a cognitive disability. However, not all students eligible under one of these disability identifications may have a most significant cognitive disability that would qualify them for the alternate assessment. Proceed to Section B.

Most Significant Cognitive Disability Determination

The information from the matrix, Sections A and B, is then reviewed. To be eligible for the VAAP, the student must have significant deficits in all adaptive skills domains.

If the student does not have significant deficits in each domain, they are not eligible for the VAAP even if they have been found eligible in the past.

If the students are found to have significant deficits in all adaptive skills domains, they meet the qualification of having a most significant cognitive disability and move on to the next step, Section C.

Section C. The team uses the matrix to determine if the student requires **extensive, direct, individualized instruction aligned to the VESOL and substantial support to achieve measurable gains in grade and age-appropriate curriculum.** The areas included in Section C include:

Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. This area describes the student's daily learning needs as included in their IEP. It looks at present levels, annual goals and objectives, alignment with grade-level standards, and instructional needs.

Accommodations and Modifications. This area describes the accommodations and modifications in the IEP the student needs. The team examines whether the student is receiving standard accommodations for instruction and assessment or whether the modifications and

accommodations needed go beyond those listed in VDOE's *Testing Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: Growth Assessments and Standards of Learning (SOL) Tests* due to cognitive, communication or sensory needs.

Assistive Technology (AT). For this section of the tool, the team looks at how the student uses assistive technologies to actively engage and participate meaningfully and productively in school, home, community, and work activities. Determining AT needs is a required part of the IEP process, and VDOE has developed a guidance document to assist IEP teams in this area. For the VAAP participation tool, the team will determine if the student requires AT and the extent of AT needed across all domains.

Next, the team will determine **whether the student requires extensive, direct, individualized instruction and substantial support**. If they do not, the student is **not** eligible for the VAAP, and the process concludes. If they do, the team proceeds to Section D.

Section D. This section looks at additional considerations the team must consider before determining whether the student is eligible for the VAAP. The team must conclude that the decision to have the student participate in the alternate assessment is **NOT based solely** on any of the following:

- ✓ Disability category, educational environment, or instructional setting.
- ✓ A student's instructional reading level is below grade level.
- ✓ Expected poor performance on the grade-level general assessment with or without accommodations and/or modifications.
- ✓ Administration decision or anticipated impact of student scores on the accountability system.
- ✓ Anticipated disruptive behavior or emotional duress during general assessments.
- ✓ Poor attendance or extended absences.
- ✓ The student is an English learner or has other social, cultural, or economic differences.
- ✓ Need for accommodations (such as AT or augmentative and alternative communication) to participate in the general assessment.
- ✓ Academic and other services the student receives and percentage of time receiving those services.
- ✓ Visual or auditory disabilities.

If the IEP team's decision to have the student participate in the alternate assessment is based solely on any of the above, the student **is not** eligible for the VAAP.

Decision Summary

First, the team must review Sections A, B, and C and ensure the decision has not been made solely based on any of the additional considerations in Section D. Second, the team must confirm that the decision to have the student participate in the alternate assessment is based on meeting all the criteria in **Sections A, B, and C of the participation tool**.

Team members, including parents, need to understand that participating in VAAP may impact a student's ability to earn a standard or advanced studies diploma in Virginia and could impact their future employment opportunities or access to post-secondary education.



If the student **does not meet the criteria** in Sections A-C, they are **not eligible** for participation in the VAAP. In these cases, the team may consider how specially designed instruction, accommodations, and/or differentiation of the SOL curriculum can ensure access to grade-level standards.

After making the decision, all IEP team members must sign the participation tool. If a parent disagrees with the decision, they can access the dispute resolution process.

Additional Resources

[VAAP Participation Tool - FAQs / Virginia Department of Education](#)

[Assessments & Accommodations | Virginia Department of Education](#)

[Diploma Options | Virginia Department of Education](#)



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