

## Frequently Asked Questions about SOL Test Scores

### ***What is the passing score for the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) tests?***

The passing score for the Virginia SOL tests is 400 based on a reporting scale that ranges from 0 to 600. A scaled score of 0 to 399 means a student did not pass a test. A scaled score of 400 to 499 means a student passed a test and was classified as *Proficient*. A scaled score of 500 to 600 means a student passed a test and was classified as *Advanced*.

### ***What is a scaled score?***

A scaled score is a mathematical transformation of a raw test score, which is the actual number of questions a student answers correctly. This type of transformation is not unlike converting inches into centimeters or Fahrenheit degrees to Celsius. In both cases, the magnitude of the thing being measured does not change during the transformation process, only the units used to express that magnitude. In the case of reporting SOL test performance, a student's relative standing and pass/fail status do not change when their raw test score is transformed into a scaled score, only the units used to express their performance.

### ***Why are test scores equated and scaled?***

Individual test questions can become exposed through repeated test administrations. Because of this, the Virginia SOL testing program uses multiple test forms during each testing window and then refreshes those forms across subsequent testing windows. Although each new test form is constructed using the same set of approved content specifications, and every attempt is made to match test forms in terms of their difficulty, there are instances when tests vary slightly in difficulty because different questions appear on different test forms. Because it would be unfair to require a student taking a slightly more difficult form of a test to answer as many questions correctly as a student taking an easier form of that test, a statistical procedure known as *equating* is used. Equating is the process of converting a set of scores on one test to a set of scores on another test that measures the same content so that scores derived from either test are equivalent and interchangeable (Angoff, 1982). Through this process, passing scores are equated so that students are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged by the test form that is administered to them.

Once test scores have been equated, a common frame of reference is required to interpret and report test performance. You can imagine how confusing it would be if different passing scores were reported for different tests, even though equated scores had been determined. Scaled scores provide that common frame of reference. The important thing to remember is that the use of scaled scores does not negatively impact a student's ability to pass a test or their performance classification. Scaled scores merely represent an alternative way to report student performance using a common scale for all test takers.

### ***How was the passing score determined?***

Passing scores for the Virginia SOL assessments were established using a systematic process called *Standard Setting*. Educators from across the state of Virginia were selected to participate in workgroups that identified performance standards associated with SOL test content. Under the guidance of a Standards Setting Advisory Committee (SSAC), these workgroups began by reviewing the SOL test blueprints and then developing descriptions of what a student at each performance level should know and be able to do. Workgroups used a formalized, research-based process to make judgments about test questions and how students at each level of proficiency would perform on them. At the completion of this process, the SSAC submitted a recommendation to the Virginia Board of Education for their approval. Following their review, the Virginia Board of Education adopted the proposed standards and applied them to current and future SOL test forms.

***Will a student get the same score if they retake a test?***

If another version of a test was taken, a student might obtain a slightly different score because no single test measures with 100% accuracy and consistency. If a candidate took several different versions of a test, they would probably obtain a number of different scores that cluster around their typical or average score. As you would expect, some of their scores would be higher and some would be lower than their average score. In actual practice, you do not know an average score, but only the score from a single test administration. Because of this, a concept known as error of measurement can be used to estimate where a student's actual real score is positioned. Typically, error of measurement is something that is considered when developing test forms and setting passing points for those tests.

***What information about student scores will be provided to parents?***

Parents will be provided with a report that details their student's performance on SOL assessments. Reports contain information about each test a student took, his or her scaled score and a level of performance. Scaled scores for the SOL assessments range from 0 to 600. Performance level indicators are reported as *Fail/Basic*, *Pass/Proficient* and *Pass/Advanced*.

For more information about passing scores for the Virginia SOL assessments, please visit the Virginia Department of Education's Division of Student Assessment and School Improvement webpage at:

<http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/index.shtml>