

# Standardized Testing 101



**What are Standardized Tests?** Standardized tests establish a baseline of expectations for what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade or course. Because large numbers of students throughout the country take the same test, they give educators a common "standard" of measure to determine how well school programs and students are doing.

**What standardized tests must my child take?** ACPS students in grades K-2 take a reading test called PALS (Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening). Students in grade 3 and above take the SOL (Standards of Learning of the State of Virginia) exams. Many students also take the ACCESS test for English Proficiency.

ACPS analyzes the results of the PALS and SOLs to see how a student is doing and whether a student needs extra help in school. ACPS students must pass certain SOLs to be promoted from one grade level to another in middle and high school and to graduate and receive their high school diploma.

If your child has not passed the PALS or SOL exams, he/she may be eligible for tutoring from the school. Ask your child's school about this additional tutoring support.

## **How can I find out how my child did on standardized tests?**

Parents/guardians receive a letter in the mail that will include your child's test scores.

**What do the test results mean about my child's skills and abilities?** Standardized tests measure a broad range of abilities or skills that are considered important to success in school. However, these tests alone do not determine a child's ability. You can discuss your child's test results at parent-teacher conference or make an appointment with your child's teacher to determine if the results are consistent with his/her performance in the classroom.

**What other means of evaluation will the teacher or the school use to measure your child's performance?** Teachers combine the results of the standardized test with other methods to gain insights into the skills, abilities and knowledge of your child. These methods include classroom observation, day-to-day classwork, homework assignments, quizzes and tests.

## **Help Your Child Prepare for Tests**

1. Communicate regularly with your child's teacher to monitor his/her progress. Ask your child's teacher what activities you can do at home to support your child's learning.
2. Monitor your child's homework. Make certain he/she is doing homework every night and studying what he/she has learned at school.
3. Have your child ask his/her teacher for samples of SOL questions or exams from previous years and practice with friends. If you have internet at home, your child can access SOL practice items at [www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/practice\\_items/index.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/practice_items/index.shtml). Teachers also hold study sessions to help students prepare.
4. Make certain your child gets plenty of rest the night before and eats a healthy breakfast the morning of the exams.
5. Encourage reading at home. Read to or with your child every day for at least 20 minutes.
6. Reassure your child as he/she prepares for exams. Encourage your child to view exams as tasks to be accomplished rather than "tests" of his/her ability. This will help your child feel less nervous.
7. Encourage your child to take tests seriously and to do their best.