

VDOE Updates: Supporting Students with Visual Impairments

Virginia AER Conference

March 25-27, 2026



About Us



Lia Mason
Alternate Assessment Specialist
Virginia Department of Education



Amy Scott
Coordinator of Sensory Disabilities and Supports
Virginia Department of Education

Learning Objectives

- Analyze recent legislation, policy guidance, and assessment updates to determine implications for instructional services for students who are blind or visually impaired.
- Integrate at least two VDOE resources, initiatives, or professional development opportunities into their instructional or program planning practices.
- Develop an action step or strategy for strengthening access and instructional outcomes for students who are blind or visually impaired.

DIVISION OF EARLY LEARNING AND SPECIAL POPULATIONS

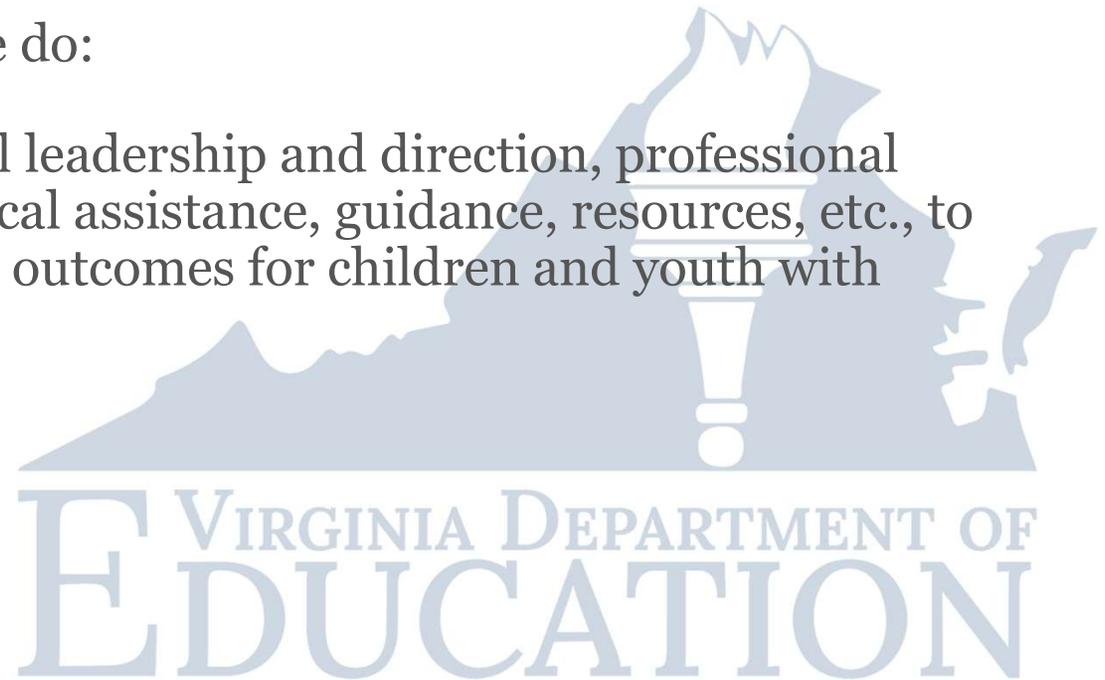
DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND
SPECIALIZED POPULATIONS

OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION
INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICES

Spotlight on SEIS

Who we are, and what we do:

Provide instructional leadership and direction, professional development, technical assistance, guidance, resources, etc., to improve educational outcomes for children and youth with disabilities.



OFFICE OF INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICES

Dr. Zenia Burnett, Director

Dwana Cooper, Coordinator - Specially Designed Instruction

Samantha Gregory, Coordinator - Specially Designed Behavior Intervention and Improvement

Dr. Patricia Morgan, Coordinator - Transition Planning and Services

Amy Scott, Coordinator - Sensory Disabilities and Supports

Dr. Dawn Hendricks, Coordinator - Early Childhood Special Education *Division of Early Childhood Care and Education

Martha Montgomery, Specialist - Evaluation, Eligibility and Related Services

Christine Mooney, Specialist - Specialized Reading and Dyslexia

Dr. Regina Mitchell, Specialist - Mathematics and Special Education

Jennifer O'Berry, Specialist - Autism, Intellectual Disabilities, and Assistive Technology

Rebecca Ceja, Specialist - Transition

Matthew Newton, Specialist - Extensive Support Needs

MAJOR INITIATIVES

The following is a non-exhaustive list of the major initiatives and inter and intra-agency collaboration supported by SEIS:

- Specialized instructional support in literacy (reading and mathematics)
- Disability-specific guidance and technical assistance
- Inclusive practices
- IEP development
- Twice Exceptional Students
- Secondary transition planning and services
 - including self-determination practices, graduation and diploma pathways, post-secondary outcomes
- Leadership development academies (2) in special education administration
- Teacher development academy for early career and provisionally licensed special educators
- Leadership development academy for assistant principals working with students with disabilities with intensive behavioral needs
- Support for early-career special educators
- Assistive technology
- Related services
- Alternate assessments
- Learning and development activities to support public school behavior analysts (BCBAs)
- Evaluation and eligibility
- Management of a state-wide Special Education and Student Services Council
- Behavioral supports
- GovDelivery Communications
 - SEIS Instructional Newsletter
 - OT PT Update
 - SLP News and Updates
 - The Upward Updates (Secondary Transition)
- Statewide technical assistance and capacity-building partnership with the CEEDAR Center (OSEP-funded partner)
 - High-Leverage Practices
 - Critical Educator Shortages

SEIS PROVIDES LEADERSHIP AND DIRECTION TO THE FOLLOWING STATE-FUNDED CENTERS AND AGENCIES THAT SUPPORT VDOE'S PRIORITIES AND INITIATIVES:

- Accessible Instructional Materials Center
- Rehabilitation Research and Training Center at Virginia Commonwealth University
 - Autism Center for Education
 - Center on Transition Innovations
- Commonwealth of Virginia Hearing Device Program
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Center
- Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services
- Educational Interpreter Training Program
- Wilson Workforce Rehabilitation Center
- Virginia Consortium for Teacher Preparation in Visual Impairment
- Virginia Department for the Deaf & Vision Impaired
- Training and Technical Assistance Centers (TTAC) serving Superintendent's Regions:
 - 1 and 8 - Virginia Commonwealth University
 - 2 and 3 – Old Dominion University and The College of William and Mary
 - 4 – George Mason University
 - 5 – James Madison University
 - 6 and 7 – Radford University and Virginia Tech
- Virginia Project for Children & Young Adults with Deaf-Blindness
- Virginia School of the Deaf and Blind, including Outreach Services

State of the Commonwealth

Sensory Disabilities

Virginia Special Education Child Count

- 2024-2025 school year
 - All students with disabilities – 190,120
 - Hearing Impairment/Deafness – 1,105*
 - Visual Impairment – 528*
 - Deaf-blindness – 25*
- *Please note the specific disability counts are for primary disabilities only.

Eligibility and Evaluation

- Medical diagnoses and reports are not required for eligibility determination but can be helpful sources of information.
- Teams should use a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information.

Deaf-blindness Eligibility

- To be eligible for Deaf-blindness, a student must meet the criteria of Deafness/Hearing Impairment and Visual Impairment.
- Regulations do **not** permit students with Deaf-blindness to be found eligible under Multiple Disabilities.

Multiple Disabilities

Multiple Disabilities Worksheet

Name: _____ School: _____ Meeting Date: _____
Student ID: _____ D.O.B. _____ Age: _____ Grade: _____

STEP 1. Team reviewed the IDEA definition of Multiple Disabilities

There is documentation of multiple disabilities. Simultaneous impairments (such as intellectual disability with blindness, intellectual disability with orthopedic impairment) are present and individual specific disability worksheets are attached.

STEP 2. Check all disability worksheets completed and determining the child is eligible:
 True
 False

<input type="checkbox"/> Autism	<input type="checkbox"/> Orthopedic Impairment
<input type="checkbox"/> Deafness	<input type="checkbox"/> Other Health Impairment
<input type="checkbox"/> Developmental Delay	<input type="checkbox"/> Specific Learning Disability
<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional Disability	<input type="checkbox"/> Speech-Language Impairment
<input type="checkbox"/> Hearing Impairment	<input type="checkbox"/> Traumatic Brain Injury
<input type="checkbox"/> Intellectual Disability	<input type="checkbox"/> Visual Impairment/Blindness

AND

STEP 3. There is documentation that the combination of impairments causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments.

True
 False
List and/or describe:

AND

STEP 4. True
 False
The student does not have Deaf-blindness.

Deaf-blindness

Deaf-blindness Worksheet

Name: _____ School: _____ Meeting Date: _____
Student ID: _____ D.O.B.: _____ Age: _____ Grade: _____

In application of the Virginia Department of Education's Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia, this worksheet may assist the eligibility group in applying criteria for students who are being considered for eligibility under the category of Deaf-blindness. A diagnosis included in a report from a medical professional is not sufficient to make an eligibility determination. After consideration of data from multiple sources, review the definition, consider the items below, and note any additional information. Attach this worksheet to the Eligibility Summary Form and include any necessary documentation.

STEP 1.

Team reviewed the IDEA definition of deaf blindness.

STEP 2.
 True
 False

There is documentation of Deaf-blindness.
Complete and attach:
 Visual Impairment including Blindness Worksheet
 Deafness or Hearing Impairment Worksheet

AND

STEP 3.
 True
 False

The combination of the hearing and visual impairments causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.

Looking for Professional Development?



Content Teaching Academy 2026

- June 22-25, 2026 at James Madison University
 - Sensory Disabilities
 - Paraeducator Empowerment
 - Intensive Behaviors
 - Reading
 - Co-teaching
 - Transition
 - Adapted PE
 - Special Education Teacher Support
 - Early Childhood
 - ELL
 - Evaluation and Eligibility



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Assessment Updates

Office of Student Assessment

Office of Student Assessment

Who we are, and what we do:

We offer guidance, support, technical help, and resources for statewide assessments for all students, including those with disabilities and English learners. We also create Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in reading, writing, math, science, and history/social science for every student. For students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, we develop the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP).

GF1

Specifically for students with visual impairments,

- We create Braille and Large Print test forms for students participating in SOL tests.
- We create Visual Impairment Supplements for students participating in the VAAP assessment program.
- We convene Special Forms Committee for appropriateness and accessibility of test items.

GF4

GF5

GF6

Slide 18

- GF1** the most
Gilhooly, Frank (DOE), 2026-03-18T18:54:26.077
- GF2** insert test forms
Gilhooly, Frank (DOE), 2026-03-18T18:55:27.311
- GF3** add s to make this plural
Gilhooly, Frank (DOE), 2026-03-18T18:55:51.077
- GF4** We convene
Gilhooly, Frank (DOE), 2026-03-18T19:30:32.781
- GF5** appropriateness
Gilhooly, Frank (DOE), 2026-03-18T19:30:56.328
- GF6** of test items
Gilhooly, Frank (DOE), 2026-03-18T19:31:11.344

Current Braille Formats: Standards of Learning (SOL) Tests

Content Area Test	English Braille American Edition (EBAE) with Nemeth	Unified English Braille (UEB)	Unified English Braille (UEBT) with Technical	Unified English Braille (UEBN) with Nemeth
Grades 3–8 and EOC <i>Reading</i>		X		
Grades 3–8 and EOC <i>Mathematics</i>			X	X
Content Specific History		X		
EOC <i>History/Social Science</i> (2015 and 2023)		X		
EOC <i>History/Social Science</i> (2008 SOL)	X			
Grades 5 and 8 <i>Science</i> and EOC <i>Science</i> (2018 SOL)			X	X
EOC <i>Science</i> (2010 SOL)	X			
EOC <i>Writing</i>	X			
VAAP Grades 3–8 and High School <i>Reading</i>		X		
VAAP Grades 3–8 and High School <i>Mathematics</i> and Grades 5, 8, and High School <i>Science</i>			X	X

Special Forms Committee

The purpose of the Special Forms Committee is:

- To review test forms to make sure that test items are accessible and fair for student with visual impairments.
- To involve Virginia educators as essential collaborators at major stages of the item and test development processes.

The Special Forms Committee review occurs at the end of the review cycle in order for committee members to apply their expertise and professional judgment when determining accessibility and appropriateness of test items for students with visual impairments rather than focusing on a review of test content.

Slide 20

GF1 delete s to make this singular

Gilhooly, Frank (DOE), 2026-03-18T19:37:13.519

GF2 committee members'

Gilhooly, Frank (DOE), 2026-03-18T19:37:34.019

GF2 0 Consider changing to:

The Special Forms Committee review occurs at the end of the review cycle in order for committee members to apply their expertise and professional judgment when determining accessibility and appropriateness of test items for students with visual impairments rather than focusing on a review of test content.

Gilhooly, Frank (DOE), 2026-03-18T19:42:31.910

Special Forms Committee

- The Special Forms Committee is anticipated to convene in August. Division Directors of Testing and Special Education Directors will receive communication regarding recruitment.
- Includes Virginia GF1 educators with expertise in instruction of students with blindness or visual impairments and administration of Braille and large-print test forms.
- Convenes once or twice a year (summer and/or fall) to review SOL test items to be used on Braille and large- print test forms.

Slide 21

GF1 I would suggest removing the numbers since we've not hit these limits in recent years. As a talking point you can point out our ideal numbers for these committees.

Gilhooly, Frank (DOE), 2026-03-18T20:01:35.243

GF2 Since we are waiting on email and dates approval, I would change to:
The Special Forms Committee is anticipated to convene in August. Division Directors of Testing and Special Education Directors will receive communication regarding recruitment.

Gilhooly, Frank (DOE), 2026-03-18T20:05:18.274

Overview of Committee Tasks

Special Forms Review Committee tasks:

- review test forms that contain items that will be modified for the first time.
- review test items to create practice item sets.
- review GF1 test items that were reviewed previously by the committee and test item that will be modified for the first time to create released test sets.

Slide 22

- GF1** This bullet needs to be reworded to make it clearer what is being reviewed.
Gilhooly, Frank (DOE), 2026-03-18T20:07:19.992

Overview Committee Tasks: Reviewing a Form

The facilitator will open up discussion around the appropriateness of test items with the committee members and decide to:

- Accept as is
- Accept with format modifications
- In very rare occasions, recommend omitting the item because it is not accessible to students with visual impairments.

Development of Special Test Forms

Special Forms Committee
Item Examples



Special Test Forms

- Items are reviewed by Virginia educators for:
 - SOL match
 - appropriateness
 - fairness to all students

Review of Forms: Guiding Questions

The committee reviews test forms using the following guiding questions:

- How accessible is the content for students with visual impairments?
- What item format changes are needed for the item to be accessible – for Braille versions?
- What item format changes are needed for the item to be accessible –for large print versions?

Style Specifications

The Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) Style Specifications for Large Print and Braille are designed by teachers of the visually impaired to provide Pearson with clear instructions on how to construct test items on large print and braille test forms.

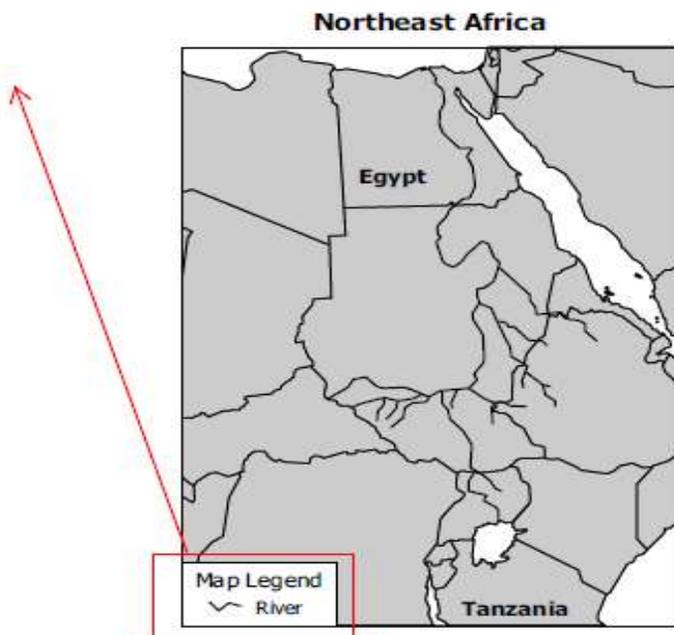
Style specifications will help to ensure consistency across test items in large print and braille test forms within an administration as well as across annual administrations.

Style Specifications: Standard Edits

- Standard edits (edits used across content areas) are global edits applied by the test contractor prior to review by Special Forms Committee.
- Examples of standard edits:
 - Text left justified for Braille
 - Emphasis words placed in all Caps for Large Print
 - En dash removed for Braille and Large Print (-)

Example of Standard Edits

Braille



Large Print



Example of Standard Edits

Braille

The area of West Virginia became a state because

- A its people opposed slavery
- B Abraham Lincoln was elected
- C its people supported women's suffrage
- D John Brown caused a slave revolt

Large Print

The area of West Virginia became a state because

- A its people opposed slavery
- B Abraham Lincoln was elected
- C its people supported women's suffrage
- D John Brown caused a slave revolt

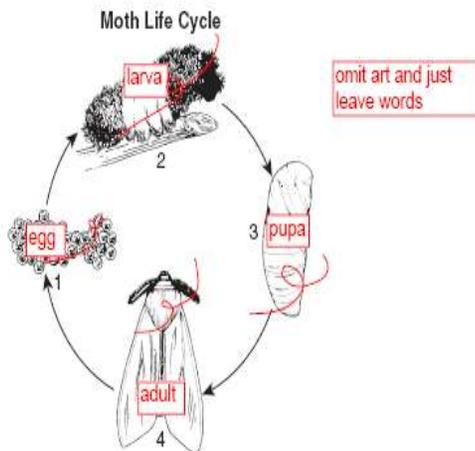
Examples of Braille Item Modifications

- Modifications in braille involves converting visual graphics into tactile graphics following Braille Authority of North America (BANA) guidelines.
- Visual Images are turned into tactile graphics by removing unnecessary details, using distinct textures, different line types, and simplifying images down to basic components to make it easier to understand through touch.

Example of Braille Items

Original Item With Markup

20

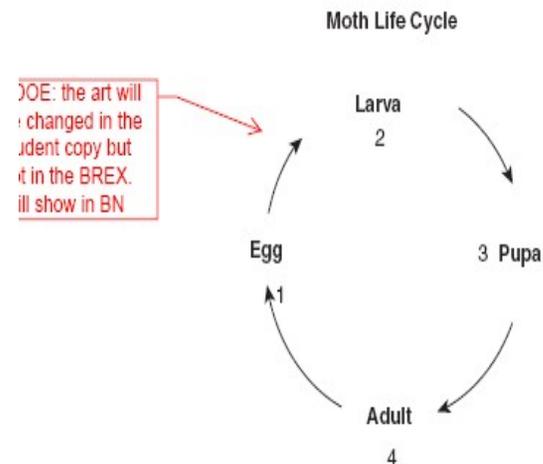


During which stage in the life cycle of the moth does it eat the *most*?

- F 1
- G 2
- H 3
- J 4

Final Items With Applied Edits

20

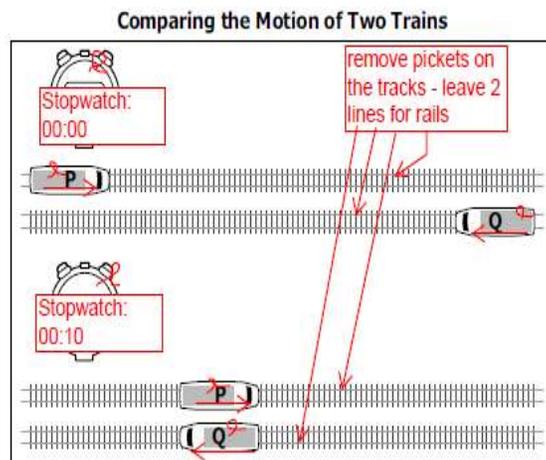


During which stage in the life cycle of the moth does it eat the *most*?

- F Egg
- G Larva
- H Pupa
- J Adult

Example of Braille Items

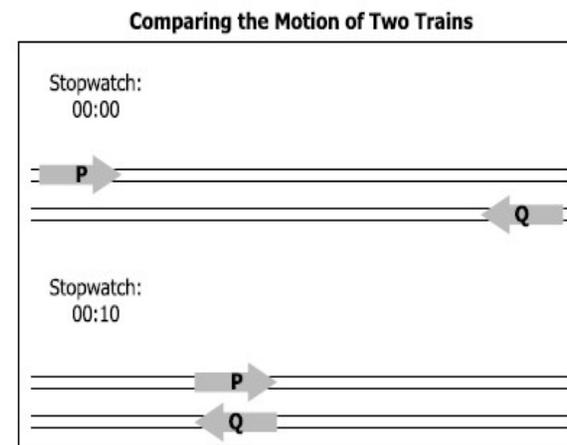
Original Item With Markup



The diagram shows two trains, P and Q. The statement that best describes the motions of the trains is that the trains traveled in ~~+~~

- F the same direction, and train Q had a slower speed
- G opposite directions, and train P had a slower speed
- H opposite directions at the same speed
- J the same direction at the same speed

Final Item with Applied Edits



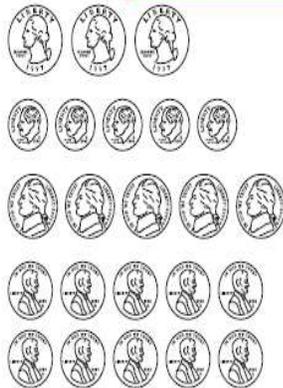
The diagram shows two trains, P and Q. The statement that best describes the motions of the trains is that the trains traveled in

- F the same direction, and train Q had a slower speed
- G opposite directions, and train P had a slower speed
- H opposite directions at the same speed
- J the same direction at the same speed

Example of Braille Items

Original Item With Markup

Christina has the money shown.



use words only - dollar,
quarter, dime, nickel, penny

Exactly how much money does Christina have?

- F \$3.50
- G \$3.60
- H \$3.85
- J \$4.05

Final Item With Applied Edits

Christina has the money shown.

dollar dollar
quarter quarter quarter
dime dime dime dime dime
nickel nickel nickel nickel nickel
penny penny penny penny penny
penny penny penny penny penny

Exactly how much money does Christina have?

- A \$3.50
- B \$3.60
- C \$3.85
- D \$4.05

Examples of Modifications for Low Vision

- Visually impaired students who are considered low vision can access the Standards of Learning (SOL) test through the Large Print Examiner's Copy for testing if the font size in the large print student copy is:
 - **too large** for a student's visual acuity
 - **or not large enough** for a student's visual acuity.
- The use of the large print examiner's copy for testing must be documented in the student's IEP with a detailed explanation for each content area the large print examiner's copy will be used.

Large Print Test Specifications

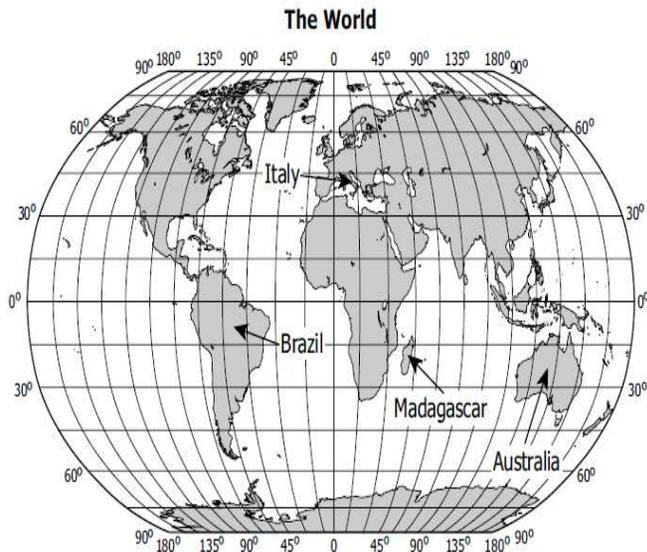
- The font size in the regular version of the form must be 12pt or it will not result in 20pt when enlarged by 167% to create the large print version of the form.
- Due to the complexity of graphics in some test items, some text embedded within graphics may be enlarged proportionally to the graphic rather than enlarged to 20pt to lessen the impact of reformatting needed for large print test items.

Large Print Test Specifications

Format	Specifications	Size
Large Print Student Copy	Font Type: Tahoma Font Size: 18pt-20pt (proportionate to test item)	14 X 18
Large Print Examiner's Copy	Font Type: Times New Roman Font Size: 12pt	8.5 X 11
Writing Prompts	Font Type: Times New Roman Font Size: 20pt	
Mathematics	Font Type for all variables is Times New Roman and are italicized. Font Size: 20pt.	

Large Print Font Size Examples

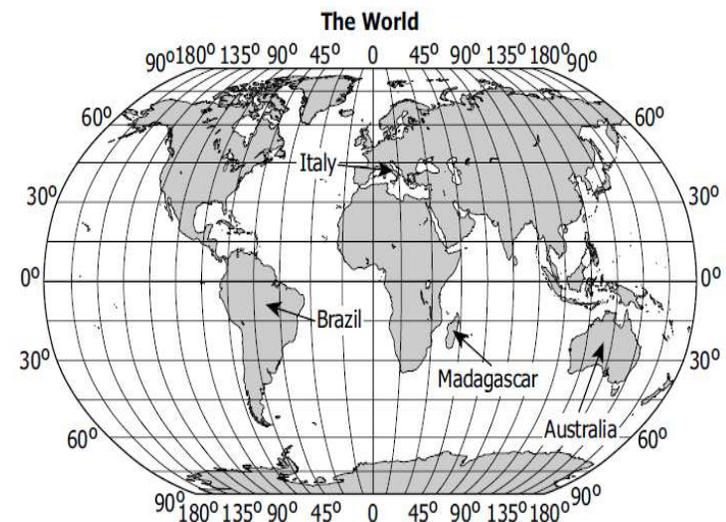
00



Which country contains the latitude and longitude 15°S, 45°W?

- A Brazil
- B Italy
- C Madagascar
- D Australia

00



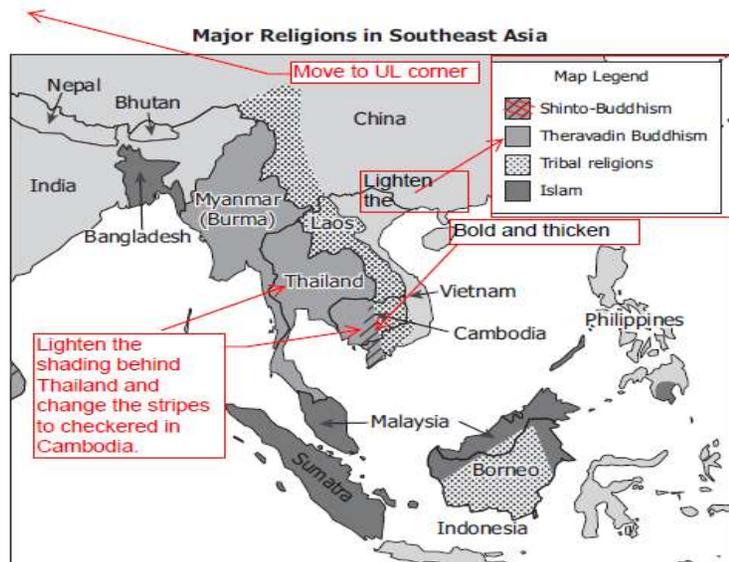
Which country contains the latitude and longitude 15°S, 45°W?

- A Brazil
- B Italy
- C Madagascar
- D Australia

Examples from the 2015 Released Test Sets

Example of Large Print Items

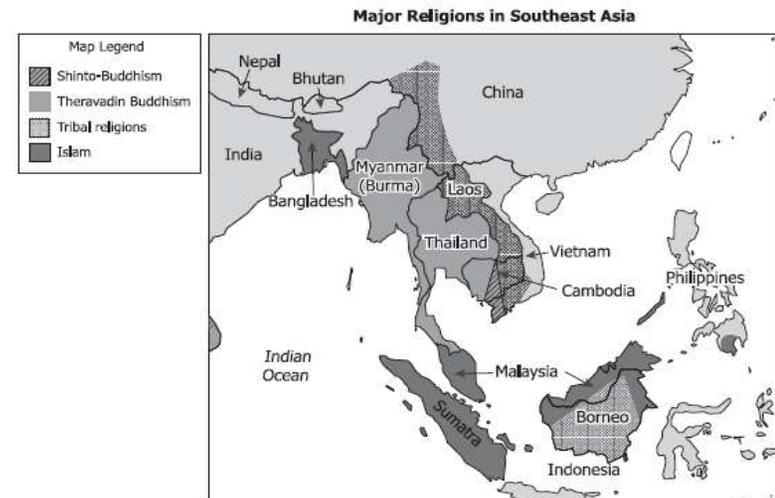
Original Item with Markup



According to this map, in which of these countries are three different religions practiced?

- F Laos
- G Cambodia
- H Thailand
- J Malaysia

Final Item with Applied Edits

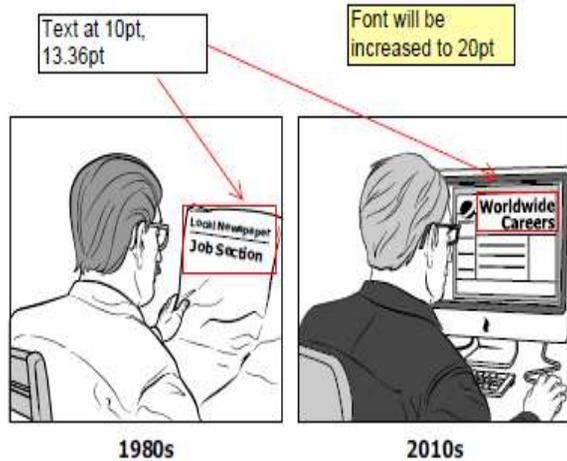


According to this map, in which of these countries are three different religions practiced?

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Example of Large Print Items

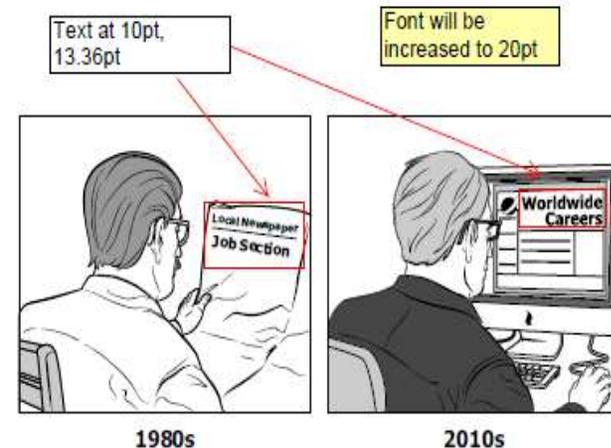
Original Item With Markup



These drawings show an increase in career opportunities because of technology and ✂

- F government action
- G migration
- H work experience
- J globalization

Final Item With Applied Edits



These drawings show an increase in career opportunities because of technology and ✂

- F government action
- G migration
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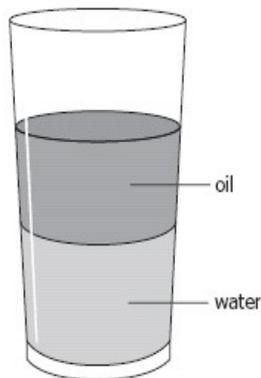
Examples from the 2015 Released Test Sets

Example of Large Print Items

Original Item With Markup

1

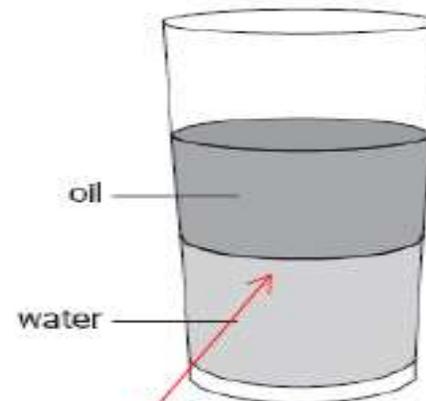
accept last year's art



Students poured oil and water together into a cup. The picture shows that the oil has

- A turned into water
- B mixed with the water
- C dissolved in the water
- D separated from the water

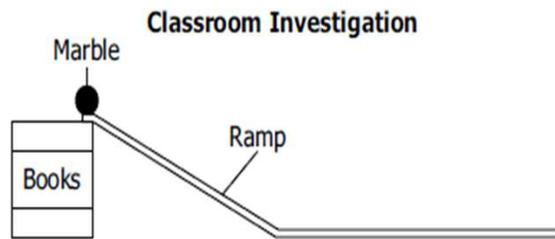
Final Item With Applied Edits



the water line for LP was darkened

Modifications: Braille vs. Large Print

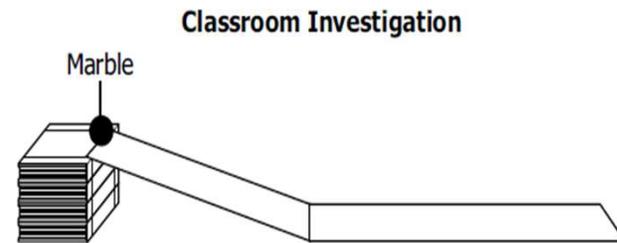
Braille



Students performed several trials using the laboratory setup shown. Students were also given this hypothesis: If friction increases, then the rolling distance of a marble will decrease. What should be changed to best test this hypothesis?

- A Height of the ramp
- B Height and length of the ramp
- C Roughness of the ramp surface
- D Height of the ramp and roughness of the ramp surface

Large Print



Students performed several trials using the laboratory setup shown. Students were also given this hypothesis: If friction increases, then the rolling distance of a marble will decrease. What should be changed to best test this hypothesis?

- A Height of the ramp
- B Height and length of the ramp
- C Roughness of the ramp surface
- D Height of the ramp and roughness of the ramp surface

Modifications: Braille vs. Large Print

Braille

Useful Weeds of the Sea

- 1 Seaweed may not be on many shopping lists, but it plays a big part in people's everyday lives. Seaweed is a plant that grows in the shallow waters near the shores of the world's oceans.
- 2 In some parts of the world, especially near the ocean, people eat seaweed all by itself. It has lots of vitamins and is a healthful treat. In places where seaweed is not served as a meal, people use goods that are made from these plants. Hundreds of everyday items have seaweed in them.
- 3 Seaweed helps many people keep their teeth clean. Toothpaste stays thick when it comes out of the tube because of a gel from a type of red seaweed. No one can see the seaweed in the toothpaste because it is mixed with the gel. This gel is in shampoo and makeup too.
- 4 Without seaweed, ice cream and yogurt would not be as thick or creamy but would seem rather lumpy and watery. Many people eat foods with seaweed without even knowing it.
- 5 Seaweed also helps plants grow. Many farmers around the world spray their fields with seaweed. They buy the seaweed after it has been made into a liquid. The seaweed becomes food for the plants. The vegetables on people's plates often come from these farms.
- 6 People cannot see seaweed in the foods they eat or in the items they use to look their best. However, none of these things would be the same without this useful weed that comes from the sea.

VACR05PK95-1

Large Print

Useful Weeds of the Sea

- 1 Seaweed may not be on many shopping lists, but it plays a big part in people's everyday lives. Seaweed is a plant that grows in the shallow waters near the shores of the world's oceans.
- 2 In some parts of the world, especially near the ocean, people eat seaweed all by itself. It has lots of vitamins and is a healthful treat. In places where seaweed is not served as a meal, people use goods that are made from these plants. Hundreds of everyday items have seaweed in them.
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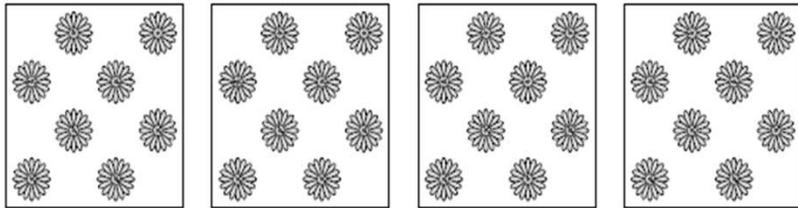
© iStockphoto.com/George #12064155

VACR05PK95-1

Modifications: Braille vs. Large Print

Braille

Which number sentence best represents this set of circles?



F $32 \div 4 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

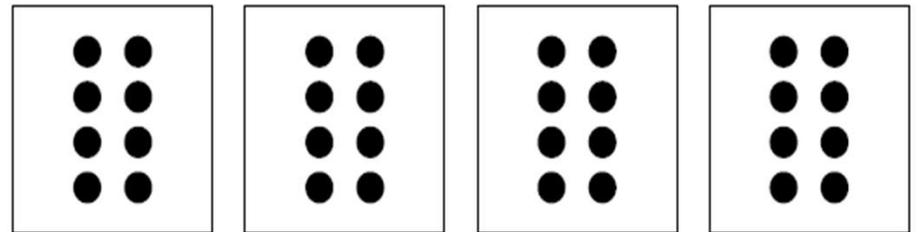
G $32 - 8 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

H $8 + 4 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

J $8 + 8 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

Large Print

Which number sentence best represents this set of circles?



F $32 \div 4 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

G $32 - 8 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

H $8 + 4 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

J $8 + 8 = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$

Practice Item Sets and Released Tests

Braille and Large Print

Released Tests and Practice Item Sets

- Braille and large print released tests and item sets are available for ordering.
- Released tests and practice item sets are available for order in the corresponding test administration in PearsonAccess^{next}.
 - Writing released tests are available under Writing 2025-2026.
 - Non-writing released tests are available under Spring 2026 Non-Writing.
 - VAAP practice item sets are available under VAAP 2025-2026.

Slide 46

GF1 Remove Winter DDOT Meeting footer from slides 48-51.
Gilhooly, Frank (DOE), 2026-03-18T20:26:03.647

Reuse Practice Materials

- These item sets are not secure materials; therefore, the released tests and practice item sets
 - these materials can be kept for instructional purposes,
 - can be reused by students and teachers, and
 - replicate the multiple-choice online practice tests and item sets in TestNav.

Returning Large Print and Braille Paper Answer Documents

- School divisions are encouraged to return large print and braille paper answer documents promptly after the student completes his/her test to maximize time for expedited retakes or for additional attempts for Term Graduates.
- Typically, scores for large print and braille paper tests will be available within 96-hours of arrival at the Pearson processing center.

Test Accommodations for Students with Blindness and Visual Impairments

Use of Large Print and Braille Test Not Permitted at the Same Time

- Visually impaired students accessing a large print test and a braille test at the same time during testing is not permitted for the following reasons:
 - Number test items vary
 - Modifications of test items vary
 - Sequencing of test items vary

Read-Aloud/Audio Accommodation

- Students with a documented visual impairment may have full access to the read-aloud/audio accommodation for all content areas as documented in the student's IEP.
- Students with a documented visual impairment do not have to undergo the eligibility required for the SOL reading test to have access to the read-aloud accommodation.

Comparable Calculators for Statewide Assessments

- SciPlus-2200 VA and SciPlus-2300VA
 - large button, large screen, talking scientific calculator
 - developed by Sight Enhancements Systems, Inc.

- Orion TI-36X Scientific Calculator
 - large button, large screen, talking scientific calculator
 - developed by Texas Instruments

Comparable Calculators for Statewide Assessments

- Both are comparable to scientific calculators on the Virginia Department of Education's list of approved calculators for Standards of Learning (SOL) testing.
- SciPlus which do not have the letters "VA" included in the model name, have additional functions and are not comparable to approved scientific calculators and will require a ***special accommodation request*** form submission.
- Additional information regarding these calculators can be found in the [Procedures for the Calculator Accommodation: Growth Assessments and Standards of Learning \(SOL\) Tests](#)

Questions?

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