

**Report on Petersburg City Public Schools
A. P. Hill Elementary School
Test Irregularity Investigation
August 23, 2017**

BACKGROUND

On Monday, June 12, 2017, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) contacted the Division Director of Testing (DDOT) in Petersburg City Public Schools (PCPS) to inform her that an anonymous report was received alleging that the school administrators at A. P. Hill Elementary School encouraged teachers to closely monitor and assist students on Standards of Learning (SOL) tests administered during the spring 2017 administration of SOL tests. The allegations included that students reported receiving help while taking their SOL tests and that some school staff witnessed the inappropriate assistance. The allegations indicated that school staff were reluctant to report the SOL testing violations for fear of bullying and retaliation. The DDOT shared the allegations with the school division superintendent and immediately opened an investigation into inappropriate assistance at A. P. Hill Elementary School.

The local investigation was led by the PCPS DDOT and included numerous interviews with A. P. Hill Elementary School staff and students. Information obtained by the DDOT from student interviews was instrumental in determining further investigative work to be completed. VDOE staff compiled detailed student assessment data for A. P. Hill Elementary School that were unavailable to PCPS staff, and at the request of the PCPS superintendent, VDOE staff collaborated with division-level staff in conducting follow-up interviews with various A. P. Hill Elementary School staff and the school administrators.

The following report details the investigation, conclusions, and actions to be taken. Given the collaboration of the VDOE with PCPS and the complexity of the assessment data reviewed by VDOE staff in support of the investigation, this report has been compiled by VDOE staff.

METHODOLOGY

During the week of June 12, 2017, the DDOT conducted interviews with A. P. Hill Elementary School staff, the assistant principal, principal, and a number of students. As the DDOT was conducting the investigation, additional information was being reported anonymously to the VDOE. VDOE staff worked closely with the DDOT to ensure the reported information was used to inform the process of the investigation.

The majority of teachers who served as examiners or proctors during the spring 2017 administration of SOL tests were initially interviewed on-site at A. P. Hill Elementary School by the DDOT. It was anonymously reported to VDOE staff, however, that the principal was nearby in the area of the interviews, monitored the length of the interviews, and following some interviews, commented to individuals about the length of their interview and asked about what was discussed. Given this reported information, a number of the A. P. Hill Elementary School staff were re-interviewed at the PCPS school board office away from the school principal. No other staff interviews were conducted on-site in the elementary school throughout the remainder of the investigation.

In addition to conducting staff interviews, the DDOT initially interviewed five students who were selected by the school to be interviewed. After VDOE staff received an anonymous allegation that the students interviewed were not among those who received help, the DDOT returned to the school to conduct additional student interviews. Ten 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students were randomly selected by the DDOT for interviews from the SOL test sessions where inappropriate assistance was alleged to have

occurred. The DDOT was able to conduct 22 student interviews prior to students leaving school for the summer. During some of these student interviews, an additional PCPS division-level staff member was in attendance.

On June 19, 2017, the PCPS superintendent asked the VDOE to collaborate with PCPS staff in conducting follow-up interviews with specific examiners and proctors as they appeared to be reluctant to share information with PCPS staff, and their statements did not align with information learned during the 22 additional student interviews. On June 20, 2017, VDOE and PCPS staff conducted follow up interviews with the five A. P. Hill Elementary School teachers who served as examiners or proctors in the large test sessions where the alleged inappropriate assistance occurred. On June 27, 2017, VDOE and PCPS staff conducted interviews with the school's assistant principal and principal. VDOE staff returned to conduct additional interviews with school staff on July 10 and 13, 2017. Detailed reviews of student assessment data from A. P. Hill Elementary School also were conducted by VDOE staff.

DETAILS FROM INTERVIEWS AND DATA REVIEWS

Established Practices

Throughout the A. P. Hill Elementary School staff interviews, it was stated that the school established a process that was repeated throughout the school year for the administration of all benchmark tests, mock SOL tests, and SOL tests. The school administered SOL tests in large test sessions, ranging in size from 46 to 58 students in a large classroom, and in small test sessions in other classrooms with 10 or fewer students. The small test sessions were for students testing with accommodations (e.g., read-aloud tests, audio tests) and students who exhibited better classroom behavior when testing in a small group. All other students were administered tests in the large sessions. Examiners and proctors were assigned to specific sessions of students, and the rooms and types of devices (laptops or desktops) used for testing were also established and used consistently throughout the year for testing beginning with the first benchmark test in the fall. Staff reported this practice was used to help students become familiar with their testing environment. The principal approved the initial configuration of all test sessions (including students and examiners/proctors) and required final approval of any changes to the sessions.

Another established practice was the use of a specific type of scratch paper during testing. All students were provided with an 8 ½" x 11" sheet of paper with both sides divided into two columns with five rows to make 10 equal blocks that was referred to as a block paper, block sheet, or justification sheet. Students were taught during the school year to use one block on the block sheet for each test item and show their work or justify their answer to each test item throughout the test. All staff interviewed were knowledgeable of the block paper and reported that students were trained on using it as a testing strategy. Accounts varied among staff on whether the use of block paper was required; however, all students reported they were required to use their block paper during SOL testing. When asked about the origin of the block paper, one staff member reported that the principal introduced block paper as a testing strategy at A. P. Hill Elementary School based on using it successfully at another elementary school in the past. The assistant principal and principal confirmed that the block paper was to be introduced to students as a testing strategy from the beginning of the school year and for all tests – even weekly classroom assessments. They stated that the grade level chairs were to instruct new teachers in the use of block paper for all assessment activities. Both administrators stated that while

students were required to use the block paper during all classroom and benchmark assessments, they knew that students could not be required to use it during SOL testing.

Student Interviews

The DDOT, and at times another member of PCPS division-level staff, conducted individual interviews with 22 students randomly selected from the large testing sessions. Students were asked “What teachers are in the room with you during testing?” and then were asked, “What are the teachers doing during testing?” Students said the following:

“Walking around. We had to raise our hand and the teacher checked to make sure the answer is correct. They would either say check the question again or move on. They would not give the answer.”

“They go around and check to see if you wrote anything. If you haven’t written anything, you can’t go to the next question. [Are you using the block sheet?] Yes, that is what I meant. After they check it, they say go to the next question. [This was during the SOL test?] Yes.”

“They looking to make sure we got our answers right.”

“He would let you know if you can go on, but he does not tell you if it is wrong or right.”

“They would look to let you know if you were doing it right or wrong. [How would you know if it was wrong?] They would tap you if it was wrong then you had to do it over. If she told you to go, it was right. Both would tap us.”

When asked, “Has your teacher taught you any testing strategies?” students said:

“I made sure my paper was fully full. [What paper was this?] The block sheet where there is a block for each answer. [What happened if you didn’t use the block sheet?] They wanted to make sure we worked it out before we went on, but they did not tell us any answers. They would tell us to look at it again, but would not tell the actual answer. The looked at the block sheet at the end of each question. For reading had to raise my hand at the end of each paragraph. For math had to raise hand for each question.”

“Have to underline and see where you would find the answer in the passage. Had to write where we found our answer and the keyword. Had to write answer on the block paper. [Can you explain the block paper?] Little boxes and you had to put your name and answer and key words.”

“Yes, work out the problem. [What would happen if you did not work out the problem?] I would have gotten the answer wrong. [Did you have paper to work out the problem?] Yes. [What kind of paper?] Block paper. [Tell me about the block paper.] Ten blocks front and back. [Did they check to see if you did your work on the block paper?] Yes. We would wait for the teachers to check the answer and if it is right we would move on. [Would they ever tell you not to go on?] Yes. [What would they tell you?] Check your answer.”

“Had to write out work on paper. [What kind of paper did you have?] The block paper. Had to write out answers on each of the ten blocks on each side. They told us to write our answer on

the block paper if we had not written our answers. After we write the answer down, we would raise our hand and they would come and check to see if we had it right or wrong. They would tell us it is wrong. They would tell us we had to redo it. If it is right, could go to the next questions.”

When asked, “Can you describe what testing has been like?”

“I would have to show my work. I would have to get the answer right. [How would you know if the answer was right?] Work it out. [Would anyone tell you if your answer was right?] No. [Would the teacher tell you if your answer was right?] No. When you took your SOL, what did they tell you?] They said if it was right they would tell us to go on. If it was wrong, they would tell us to review. [Did they look at every problem?] Yes.”

Test Data Review

All of the SOL tests administered at A. P. Hill Elementary School in spring 2017 were administered to students online. In an online SOL test, any time a student moves to another test item, an entry is recorded in the online assessment system that documents the student’s response to the test item and the exact time the student moved to another test item. These data are not presented in SOL score reports as the data have no bearing on student scores and, practically, the immense volume of data is difficult to manage. However, given the specific information learned throughout the investigation, VDOE staff worked with the state assessment contractor to access various types of data that were valuable to the investigation.

Data were reviewed from the Grades 3, 4, and 5 Mathematics SOL tests which are administered in a computer adaptive format where students must answer each test item before advancing to the next item and they cannot go back to review previously answered test items. The review of these data supported the students’ statements that once they answered a question, they had to wait for their response to be reviewed and approved prior to advancing to the next question. Many students remained on single test items for an unusual length of time (i.e., upwards of 45 minutes or longer). This occurred repeatedly for students as they proceeded through their computer adaptive elementary mathematics test. Data from three students tested in the large group sessions are presented in Data Tables A, B, and C that follow. These tables are representative of the trends that were found in the A. P. Hill Elementary School test data.

Data Table A shows one student’s elapsed time per test item during the Grade 3 Mathematics SOL test. Student A, a 3rd grade student at A. P. Hill Elementary School in the large group test session, logged into the online test at 9:30 a.m. and worked until 4:05 p.m. to complete 16 mathematics questions. The “Elapsed Time” column represents the length of time the student expended on each test item. At 3:10 p.m. the student Exited or logged out of the online test, likely during the afternoon dismissal, and was then logged back into the test at 3:28 p.m. This student remained on the opening screen for another 18 minutes before seeing item # 12 at 3:46 p.m. and then the student finished the test at 4:05 p.m. The student’s elapsed time data are shown for the second day of the Grade 3 Mathematics SOL test.

Data Table A:

Student A

Elapsed Time Per Test Item

Grade 3 Mathematics CAT

Scaled Score: 523

DAY 1			
LOGGED INTO TEST AT:		9:30	on May 16, 2017
ITEM	Start	Finish	Elapsed Time
Sample 1	9:30	9:41	11 min
Sample 2	9:41	9:43	2 min
1	9:43	9:52	9 min
2	9:52	10:00	8 min
3	10:00	10:44	44 min
4	10:44	11:19	35 min
5	11:19	11:54	35 min
6	11:54	12:41	47 min
7	12:41	1:13	32 min
8	1:13	1:24	11 min
9	1:24	1:53	29 min
10	1:53	2:38	45 min
11	2:38	3:05	27 min
12	3:05	3:10	5 min
EXITED TEST AT:		3:10	3:28
LOGGED INTO TEST AT:		3:28	3:46
12	3:46	3:47	1 min
13	3:47	3:55	8 min
14	3:55	4:00	5 min
15	4:00	4:01	1 min
16	4:01	4:05	4 min
Stop Sign	4:05	4:06	1 min
DAY 2			
LOGGED INTO TEST AT:		9:14	on May 16, 2017
ITEM	Start	Finish	Elapsed Time
17	9:14	9:18	4 min
18	9:18	9:36	18 min
19	9:36	9:46	10 min
20	9:46	9:51	5 min
21	9:51	9:54	3 min
22	9:54	10:25	31 min
23	10:25	10:43	18 min
24	10:43	11:11	28 min
25	11:11	11:14	3 min
26	11:14	11:17	3 min

27	11:17	11:27	10 min
28	11:27	11:46	19 min
29	11:46	11:57	11 min
30	11:57	12:25	28 min
31	12:25	12:30	5 min
32	12:30	12:34	4 min
33	12:34	12:43	9 min

Data Table B presents similar data of elapsed time per test item for a 4th grade student during the Grade 4 Mathematics SOL test. Student B was in the large group session on May 18th and expended nearly three hours to complete 10 mathematics questions on the first day of the mathematics test. On Day 2 of the test, after 2 p.m., the student responded to 17 test items (nearly half of the total test) in approximately 7 minutes. Prior to that, the student answered 13 test items in 286 minutes, or an average of 22 min per item. This student scored 473, pass/proficient, on the Grade 4 Mathematics SOL test.

Data Table B:

Student B

Elapsed Time Per Test Item

Grade 4 Mathematics CAT

Scaled Score: 473

DAY 1			
LOGGED INTO TEST AT:		9:42 on May 18, 2017	
ITEM/Description	Start	Finish	Elapsed Time
Sample 1	9:42	9:46	4 min
Sample 2	9:46	9:48	2 min
1	9:48	9:54	6 min
2	9:54	10:14	20 min
3	10:14	10:28	14 min
4	10:28	10:40	12 min
5	10:40	11:17	37 min
6	11:17	11:21	4 min
7	11:21	11:59	38 min
8	11:59	12:08	9 min
9	12:08	12:22	14 min
10	12:22	12:30	8 min
Stop Sign			
DAY 2			
LOGGED INTO TEST AT:		9:20 on May 19, 2017	
11	9:20	9:24	4 min
12	9:24	9:34	10 min
13	9:34	9:36	2 min
14	9:36	9:44	8 min
15	9:44	10:11	27 min
16	10:11	10:16	5 min

17	10:16	11:00	44 min
18	11:00	11:07	7 min
19	11:07	11:31	24 min
20	11:31	12:00	29 min
21	12:00	12:19	19 min
22	12:19	1:01	42 min
23	1:01	2:06	1 hr 5 min
24	2:06	2:07	1 min
25	2:07	2:07	< 1 min
26	2:07	2:07	< 1 min
27	2:07	2:07	< 1 min
28	2:07	2:08	1 min
29	2:08	2:08	< 1 min
30	2:08	2:09	1 min
31	2:09	2:09	< 1 min
32	2:09	2:10	1 min
33	2:10	2:11	1 min
34	2:11	2:12	1 min
35	2:12	2:12	< 1 min
36	2:12	2:12	< 1 min
37	2:12	2:12	< 1 min
38	2:12	2:12	< 1 min
39	2:12	2:12	< 1 min
40	2:12	2:13	1 min

Data Table C shows the elapsed time per test item data for a 5th grade student completing the Grade 5 Mathematics SOL test. This particular 5th grade student started working on test items at 9:35 a.m. and required nearly four hours to complete 12 mathematics items on Day 1. A similar pattern of unexpected lengths of time on single test items is shown in this student's elapsed time data for Day 2 of the test.

Data Table C:

Student C

Elapsed Time Per Test Item

Grade 5 Mathematics CAT

Scaled Score: 406

LOGGED INTO TEST AT:	9:23	on May 25, 2017	
ITEM/Description	Start	Finish	Elapsed Time
Sample 1	9:23	9:29	6 min
Sample 2	9:29	9:35	6 min
1	9:35	9:46	11 min
2	9:46	9:54	8 min
3	9:54	10:16	22 min
4	10:16	10:43	27 min
5	10:43	11:13	30 min
6	11:13	11:48	35 min

7	11:48	12:28	40 min
8	12:28	12:58	30 min
9	12:58	1:05	7 min
10	1:05	1:12	7 min
11	1:12	1:15	3 min
12	1:15	1:17	2 min
Stop Sign			
DAY 2			
LOGGED INTO TEST AT:		9:24 on May 26, 2017	
13	9:24	9:31	7 min
14	9:31	9:56	25 min
15	9:56	10:03	7 min
16	10:03	10:09	6 min
17	10:09	10:14	5 min
18	10:14	10:24	10 min
19	10:24	10:27	3 min
20	10:27	10:40	13 min
21	10:40	10:48	8 min
22	10:48	10:52	4 min
23	10:52	10:55	3 min
24	10:55	11:02	7 min
25	11:02	11:12	10 min
26	11:12	11:27	15 min
27	11:27	11:41	14 min
28	11:41	11:50	9 min
29	11:50	12:10	20 min
30	12:10	12:14	4 min
31	12:14	12:25	11 min
32	12:25	12:30	5 min
33	12:30	12:45	15 min
34	12:45	1:16	31 min
35	1:16	1:19	3 min
36	1:19	1:36	17 min
37	1:36	2:04	28 min
38	2:04	2:10	6 min
39	2:10	2:17	7 min
40	2:17	2:22	5 min

Reviews of data from the Grade 5 Science and the Virginia Studies SOL tests were also conducted. In contrast to the Grades 3, 4, and 5 Mathematics SOL tests, these two assessments are traditional tests where students can navigate backwards and forwards throughout the test and review and change their responses to test items prior to submitting their test. The review of data from these tests reflected this difference and was informative regarding the patterns of how students navigated throughout the test

reviewing items and responses and, in many cases, changing multiple responses to test items just prior to submitting the test as completed.

Data Table D displays data from a Virginia Studies test completed by a 5th grade student at A. P. Hill Elementary School. The student started testing at 9:32 a.m. and finished the 50-item test over three hours later at 12:51 p.m. in the afternoon. The data shown in the table reflects that this student changed answers to eight test items at various locations in the test, although in sequential order, in less than seven minutes prior to submitting the test. All of those responses were changed from incorrect answers to correct answers.

Data Table D:

Virginia Studies Item Response Details

Student D

Started Test: 9:32 AM

Submitted Test: 12:51 PM

Scaled Score: 421

TIME STAMP	ITEM NUMBER	STATUS
12:42:37 PM	5	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
12:42:51 PM	6	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
12:43:31 PM	8	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
12:43:50 PM	9	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
12:47:33 PM	24	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
12:48:29 PM	27	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
12:48:47 PM	28	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
12:49:31 PM	29	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer

Total Items with Responses changed from Wrong to Right Answers: 8

Elapsed Time: 6 min 54 seconds

(12:42:37 PM through 12:49:31 PM)

Data Table E presents data from a Grade 5 Science test completed by a 5th grade student. This student started testing at 9:23 a.m. and finished the test over seven hours later. The data indicated that the student viewed the full set of test items and responded to the questions during that 7-hour timeframe. As shown in Data Table E, the student returned to 19 test items between 4:22 p.m. and 4:30 p.m., an elapsed time of 7 min and 49 seconds. In that period of time, the answers to all 19 items were changed from incorrect responses to correct responses. Thirty-eight percent of the total number of test items on the test were visited and corrected in less than eight minutes.

Data Table E:

Grade 5 Science Item Response Details

Student E:

Started Test: 9:23 AM

Submitted Test: 4:31 PM

Scaled Score: 516

TIME STAMP	ITEM NUMBER	STATUS
04:23:55 PM	4	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
04:24:13 PM	5	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer

04:24:24 PM	7	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
04:24:45 PM	11	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
04:25:30 PM	17	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
04:25:59 PM	22	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
04:26:52 PM	28	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
04:26:59 PM	29	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
04:27:06 PM	30	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
04:27:17 PM	32	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
04:28:35 PM	35	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
04:28:44 PM	36	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
04:28:51 PM	37	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
04:29:01 PM	39	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
04:29:24 PM	43	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
04:29:34 PM	45	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
04:29:57 PM	47	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
04:30:04 PM	48	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
04:30:13 PM	50	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer

Total Items with Responses changed from Wrong to Right Answers: 19

Elapsed Time: 7 min 49 seconds

(4:22:24 PM through 4:30:13 PM)

Data Table F shows data from another student's Grade 5 Science test. This test was an expedited retest by a student who failed the initial test attempt in science. The student's first test attempt, not shown in the data table, extended for 6 hours and 3 minutes, and the student achieved a scaled score of 383. In comparison, the student needed 1 hour and 27 minutes to complete the expedited retest attempt and achieved a score of 473. In the last 31 minutes of the expedited retest, the responses to 11 test items were revisited in sequential order and the responses were changed from an incorrect to a correct response. In the last 1 minute and 33 seconds, the student viewed the last seven items on the test. The data indicated that the student had not viewed those seven items prior to 10:40:27 a.m., yet the student responded to six of the seven items correctly and submitted the test at 10:42:00 a.m.

Data Table F:

Grade 5 Science Item Response Details

Student F:

Started Test: 9:15 AM

Submitted Test: 10:42 AM

Scaled Score: 473

TIME STAMP	ITEM NUMBER	STATUS
10:10:34 AM	13	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
10:12:00 AM	15	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
10:12:46 AM	18	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
10:13:30 AM	20	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
10:14:29 AM	22	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
10:30:11 AM	24	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer

10:31:17 AM	27	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
10:32:01 AM	28	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
10:33:40 AM	31	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
10:36:25 AM	34	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
10:38:11 AM	38	Changed from Wrong to Right Answer
10:40:27 AM	44	Viewed for the first time; answered correctly
10:40:44 AM	45	Viewed for the first time; answered correctly
10:40:55 AM	46	Viewed for the first time; answered correctly
10:41:11 AM	47	Viewed for the first time; answered correctly
10:41:29 AM	48	Viewed for the first time; answered incorrectly
10:41:41 AM	49	Viewed for the first time; answered correctly
10:42:00 AM	50	Viewed for the first time; answered correctly

Total Items with Responses changed from Wrong to Right Answers: 11

Total Items Viewed for the 1st Time and Answered Correctly at the End of the Test: 6 of 7

Elapsed Time for the 18 items: 31 min 26 seconds

(10:10:34 AM through 10:42:00 AM)

Elapsed Time for Last 7 items: 1 min and 33 seconds

(10:40:27 AM through 10:42:00 AM)

The review of the data from the Grades 3, 4, and 5 Reading SOL tests showed a combination of the patterns seen in data from the computer adaptive mathematics tests and the traditional science tests. The elementary reading tests are similar to the mathematics tests in that they also are computer adaptive; however, the reading tests adapt after a student finishes a reading passage and its associated set of test questions rather than after each individual test item like the mathematics tests. This means students are able to navigate among the items that are associated with a passage and review their responses, but after leaving that passage, students can no longer return to view that set of items. The A. P. Hill Elementary School data from the reading test showed students spending an unusually long amount of time on a set of test items associated with a passage and then just prior to advancing to the next passage, some answers were changed quickly from incorrect to correct responses.

As a note, all Virginia school divisions had the option of administering the Grades 3, 4, and 5 Mathematics SOL tests in either one day or over two days with a scheduled break. The same option existed for the Grades 3, 4, and 5 Reading SOL tests. In spring 2017, A. P. Hill Elementary School opted to administer each of the elementary mathematics and reading tests over two days. The data reflected that A. P. Hill Elementary School students were testing for multiple hours each day to complete only part of the elementary reading or mathematics tests (i.e., approximately 10 to 16 test items).

Staff and Administrator Interviews

The DDOT and a member of PCPS division-level staff conducted individual interviews with 18 A. P. Hill Elementary School staff who served as examiners, proctors, and hall monitors in addition to the principal and assistant principal. At the request of the PCPS superintendent after individuals appeared to be reluctant to share information, VDOE staff partnered with PCPS division-level staff to re-interview five staff members who served as examiners or proctors in the large group testing sessions where the alleged inappropriate assistance occurred. VDOE staff and a PCPS division-level staff member also

interviewed the school principal and assistant principal, and VDOE staff interviewed six additional school staff members who served as examiners, proctors, or hall monitors during SOL testing.

The A. P. Hill Elementary School staff who were interviewed by VDOE staff were asked about any training they received prior to the administration of SOL tests in their school. All individuals indicated that training was provided in advance of the Spring 2017 Non-Writing SOL Test Administration. They stated they were trained on SOL test administration procedures and SOL test security by the assistant principal who served as the School Test Coordinator (STC). Individuals, including the STC, referenced the VDOE-provided training materials for SOL test examiners and proctors and for SOL test security. They indicated that they were aware of the *School Division Personnel Test Security Agreement* and potential consequences of committing test security violations to include possible personnel action and licensure action. All examiners and proctors had a signed *2016-2017 School Division Personnel Test Security Agreement* on file.

VDOE staff asked the examiners and proctors to describe the type of scratch paper provided to students during SOL testing. All individuals referenced the block sheet either by name or description and stated that all students received this type of scratch paper for SOL testing as well as benchmark testing and mock SOL testing. Some stated that the students were trained and even conditioned to use the block paper to record information about each test item, show their work, or justify their answer to each question. All staff who were interviewed seemed aware that requiring students to use the block paper or any other testing strategy during the SOL tests is not permitted; however, when asked if A. P. Hill Elementary School students were required to use the block paper, the responses varied. As part of the interviews, VDOE staff read sections of multiple students' statements regarding use of the block paper to the five staff who served as examiners or proctors in the large test sessions. Two of the five examiners/proctors denied throughout their interviews that students were required to use the block paper, despite the student statements. One of those two individuals indicated that students were not required to use it during SOL testing and it was okay if they did not. The second individual stated he/she had no recollection of students being required to use the block paper during SOL testing.

The five examiners/proctors were questioned regarding the student statements about their block sheets having to be checked prior to being able to move to the next test item or next reading passage. Two examiners/proctors denied that this occurred. One of the two individuals indicated the students must have been confused with benchmark testing and that he/she did not review block sheets and was not sure if anyone else reviewed the sheets after testing. The second examiner/proctor had no recollection of students needing to have their block sheets checked and indicated he/she did not observe that happening during SOL testing. The other three examiners/proctors confirmed in their interviews that the actions of the examiners and proctors were consistent with the student statements describing what occurred during SOL testing.

One examiner/proctor said he/she looked at each student's block sheet during SOL testing to see if what the student had written was enough. When questioned about how he/she would know whether it was "enough," the individual said that by looking at the student's screen and block paper, then he/she would know what to say to the student. The examiner/proctor said he/she either told students to "re-read it carefully" or told them to "move on." This individual stated during the interview that he/she was following the lead of another staff member in the room during SOL testing.

This examiner/proctor described another SOL test session that was going late in the day, and the room was loud and chaotic despite students still taking their SOL tests. The examiner/proctor stated another examiner/proctor was in the room and was interacting with students as they were testing. That person's voice level would change or "a look" was given to students to indicate to them whether their answers were right or wrong.

When presented with assessment data similar to the samples included in Data Tables A - F of this report, the examiners/proctors initially offered little explanation as to why students would spend that much time answering individual test items or how students could change that number of answers from wrong to right in the given period of time. One examiner/proctor stated that the day prior to the reading test, students were instructed to always read each passage three to four times before answering questions. This examiner/proctor later made the following statements during the interview: a) "We checked the block paper to determine if they were using it correctly," b) "We looked at block paper to know if it was a correct answer," c) "We did not look at the problems on the computers but based right or wrong on what was written on their block paper," and d) "In preparation for the SOL test, we told students we were going to look at the block paper."

The examiner/proctor stated that the students were not told whether their answers were right or wrong, but rather they were only told to "check their work" or to "go on." When the examiner/proctor was asked if the elementary school students would understand that hearing "check their work" meant they had not answered the item correctly, the examiner/proctor did not comment. Another examiner/proctor in the large testing sessions admitted to telling students to "move on" if what was on the block paper was correct and to "revisit it" if what was on the block paper was incorrect.

The three examiner/proctors who admitted to providing inappropriate assistance were asked why this activity would occur in the school and also go unreported. One individual stated that although the principal and assistant principal had never specifically told him/her to help students, he/she felt the expectation to do this was coming from the head of the school. Another individual stated that although he/she was never directed by anyone to do this, the pressure to "get the scores" to maintain the level of performance desired by the school administration was high. When the individual was asked if the school administration was aware that the inappropriate assistance was occurring, it was reported that these activities were not discussed openly among the school staff or in school leadership team meetings.

Throughout the staff interviews and in the anonymous allegations reported to the VDOE by email and phone, it was repeated that certain staff members were selected by the school administration to administer and proctor SOL tests in the large test sessions where the inappropriate assistance occurred. It was reported that if individuals who were involved in SOL tests did not follow the practice of using the block sheets to check students' work, then they were relieved of their examiner or proctor duties during SOL testing. Individuals stated that the teachers, especially the veteran teachers, at A. P. Hill Elementary School knew what was happening during SOL testing. It was reported to VDOE staff that one individual realized that assistance was provided to a student during SOL testing, but when concern was expressed, the individual was told by a colleague, "Don't say anything. If one person goes down, then we all go down."

It was confirmed during the interviews of the A. P. Hill Elementary School assistant principal and principal that the assistant principal served as the School Test Coordinator (STC) and was responsible for providing all test administration training for staff and overseeing the SOL test administration in the

school to include preparing test sessions and test materials, distributing and collecting all test materials, ensuring that SOL testing policies and procedures were followed, and handling any test administration issues throughout each day. The assistant principal indicated that prior to the start of SOL testing, she and the principal discussed the SOL testing schedule, but that the principal made all decisions regarding which staff served as test examiners and proctors and to which SOL test sessions students were assigned. The assistant principal stated that if individuals did not want to be involved in administering SOL tests, then they were referred to speak with the principal. The principal agreed that she took input from the assistant principal and then made all final decisions regarding both staff and student assignments for SOL testing and the overall plan for administering SOL tests.

It was reported to VDOE staff that some individuals were uncomfortable with what they experienced as examiners during the initial days of SOL test administration in spring 2017, and they asked to not have any further involvement with SOL test administration. When asked if staff requested to not be involved in administering SOL tests, the assistant principal stated that this had occurred before, but that she always referred the staff to the principal to discuss any concerns. When asked about a specific staff member requesting to be removed from SOL testing, the assistant principal provided information in the interview that the principal shared. The principal had shared that the staff member requesting to be removed from SOL testing said he/she did “not want to be another Atlanta” and “I need my license.” Both administrators were aware that the reference to Atlanta related to inappropriate assistance on standardized assessments, but neither the assistant principal nor the principal had any comment regarding why a staff member would make this statement, nor did they indicate any attempt to follow up with the staff member to learn of the individual’s concerns.

When presented with the student statements and the assessment data similar to the Data Tables A - F, neither the assistant principal nor the principal had comments as to why students would spend that much time answering individual test items or how students could change that number of answers from wrong to right in the given period of time. When presented with details from SOL examiners/proctors that were consistent with the student statements regarding the required use of block paper and students having their work checked by examiners/proctors prior to advancing in the SOL tests, both administrators indicated they had no knowledge of these activities among the staff. When asked about an allegation that the principal told certain examiners/proctors that their students needed to achieve an 85% pass rate because the 4th grade math scores were coming in low, the principal indicated she may have expressed concern about test scores, but she would never have directed or implied that staff should assist students to achieve a higher pass rate. The assistant principal confirmed that the principal did monitor SOL test scores during the day as test results began to be available and would communicate any concerns about low performance. The assistant principal stated she was not aware of any individuals being directed to assist students during SOL testing.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Based on statements by randomly selected A. P. Hill Elementary School students and by A. P. Hill Elementary School staff, the VDOE concludes that most, if not all, students were required to use block paper during the Spring 2017 SOL Non-Writing Test Administration. Students were required to complete one block on the sheet for each SOL test item and show their work or justify their answer. If students did not show their work or a justification for an SOL test item, the examiners and proctors required them to go back to complete the block sheet before

allowing them to a) advance to the next test item in the Grades 3, 4, and 5 Mathematics tests, b) advance to the next passage in the Grades 3, 4, and 5 Reading tests, or c) submit their Grade 5 Science tests and their Virginia Studies tests.

From the *2016-2017 School Division Personnel Test Security Agreement* published in the [2017 SOL Non-Writing Test Implementation Manual](#) (pp. 97-100), "...Prohibited actions include, but are not limited to, the following: ... providing reminders of content or testing strategies..." Also in the [2017 SOL Non-Writing Test Implementation Manual](#) (p. 69), "Examiners/Proctors must not direct or remind students to use any specific method or strategy during testing."

2. Based on statements by randomly selected A. P. Hill Elementary School students, statements by A. P. Hill Elementary School staff, and a review of the school's student assessment data, the VDOE concludes that inappropriate assistance was provided to a significant and undetermined number of A. P. Hill Elementary School students during the Spring 2017 Non-Writing Test Administration. SOL test examiners and proctors reviewed student work during the administration of the SOL tests and communicated to individual students when they should review their work and when they could proceed in the SOL test.

From the *2016-2017 School Division Personnel Test Security Agreement* published in the [2017 SOL Non-Writing Test Implementation Manual](#) (pp. 97-100):

2. All persons are prohibited from providing students with answers to secure test items, suggesting how to respond to secure test items, or influencing student responses to secure test items. Prohibited actions include, but are not limited to, the following: providing clues or hints, providing reminders of content or testing strategies, prompting students to correct or check/recheck specific responses, permitting access to curricular materials (e.g., textbooks, notes, review materials, bulletin boards, posters, charts, maps, timelines, etc.), or using voice inflection, facial gestures, pointing, gesturing, tapping, or other actions to indicate a response or accuracy of a student's response.
4. Reading or reviewing any part of a secure test (e.g., test items, answer options, passages, pictures, diagrams, charts, maps, etc.) before, during, or after the test administration is a violation of test security unless an Examiner is reading the test items as part of an accommodation (e.g., read-aloud, interpretation/transliteration, etc.) or is reviewing the test items in preparation for providing that accommodation.
10. All persons are prohibited from attempting to formally or informally score secure SOL tests or individual test items. Prohibited actions include, but are not limited to, creating an answer key, reviewing or scoring a student's SOL item response or responses, reviewing or scoring student scratch paper, or tracking student performance on test items.

3. The VDOE concludes that the culture within A. P. Hill Elementary School was such that individuals were unwilling to report known SOL test security violations to the school principal and assistant principal reportedly for fear of retaliation and bullying from the school administrators and other school staff.
4. The VDOE concludes that the school did not have appropriate steps in place to ensure that all scratch paper was returned to the STC at the end of each test session. This is particularly notable in this situation given the amount of detail recorded about secure test items on the scratch paper as a result of conclusion #1.

As stated in the [*2017 SOL Non-Writing Test Implementation Manual*](#) (p. 51), “Examiners must keep track of all scratch paper distributed to students and ensure that it is all collected and accounted for before students are dismissed from the testing session. The STC may distribute the scratch paper to Examiners prior to testing or on the day of testing, or may instruct Examiners to provide their own scratch paper for testing sessions. All scratch paper must be returned to the STC.”

ACTIONS

In response to the investigation, Petersburg City Public Schools (PCPS) must complete the following and provide results or evidence of an implementation plan to the VDOE by September 29, 2017:

1. Students in the tested grades at A. P. Hill Elementary School will not receive score reports for any Standards of Learning (SOL) tests, the Virginia Grade Level Alternative (VGLA) assessments, or the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP) assessments for the spring 2017 test administration because the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) could not determine the integrity of the test results. PCPS will notify the parents of affected students that they will not receive score reports for spring 2017 assessments. PCPS will document in the students' educational records that the students were tested in their respective grade levels in spring 2017 but that they did not receive score reports for the SOL, VGLA, or VAAP assessments.
2. The PCPS Superintendent or a designee will share the details of this SOL test irregularity and the investigation with division-level staff and A. P. Hill Elementary School staff so individuals are aware of the specific test security violations that occurred.
3. The Division Director of Testing will engage school administrative teams from all Petersburg City Public Schools to ensure school administrators are aware of SOL testing policies and procedures as related to this test irregularity and in support of their School Test Coordinators.
4. In 2017-2018, a division-level staff person will observe SOL test administration training and daily SOL testing at A. P. Hill Elementary School during the Spring 2018 SOL Non-Writing Test Administration to ensure SOL testing policies and procedures are followed. Observations will

be shared daily with the Division Director of Testing.

5. In 2018-2019, an unannounced audit of SOL testing will be conducted by division-level staff during the Spring 2019 SOL Non-Writing Test Administration at A. P. Hill Elementary School.

In response to the investigation, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has completed or will complete the following:

1. Because the VDOE could not determine the integrity of the spring 2017 A. P. Hill Elementary School test results, all spring 2017 scores for the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests, the Virginia Grade Level Alternative (VGLA) assessments, and the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP) assessments have been removed.
2. A request will be made to the Virginia Board of Education at its September 2017 meeting to withhold school accreditation for A. P. Hill Elementary School. This request is based upon a provision in the [Regulations Establishing the Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia](#) as follows:

[8VAC20-131-340](#). Special Provisions and Sanctions.

A. Any school in violation of these regulations shall be subject to appropriate action by the Board of Education including, but not limited to, the withholding or denial of a school's accreditation.

B. A school's accreditation rating may be withheld by action of the Board of Education for any school found to be in violation of test security procedures pursuant to § [22.1-19.1](#) of the Code of Virginia. Withholding of a school's accreditation rating shall not be considered an interruption of the three-consecutive-year period for purposes of receiving an Accreditation Denied status pursuant to [8VAC20-131-300](#).