On November 15, 2017, the South Carolina Department of Education convened a panel of experts to review item data on the ELA SC READY assessment for grades 6-8. The panel looked at items with a high percentage of students answering correctly and items with a low percentage of students answering correctly. The discussions of that panel yielded the following recommendations.

The panel recognizes the hard work of SC educators and offers the following as suggestions for ways to improve student success on the ELA SC READY assessment for grades 6-8.

**Inquiry**

The panel recommends that during instruction, students should have practice developing, writing, and refining research topics and questions. Also, the panel recommends that teachers provide students with research opportunities that allow them to evaluate a variety of sources, determine the relevancy and credibility of those sources, and decide to either use or discard those sources. While the panel suggests that more instructional emphasis should be placed on the process of research rather than the product of research, they especially stress students’ ability to evaluate the credibility of sources as an area of weakness. Based on these areas of weakness, the panel recommends students receive more instructional guidance and practice:

- reading a scenario and then formulating a research question.
- reading a scenario and then determining how to narrow a research topic or broaden a research topic.
- evaluating sources for relevance, credibility, and validity.
- organizing and categorizing important information as it relates to a research topic or question.

**Reading Literary Text**

The panel recommends that students should have experience reading a variety of rigorous, complex, literary text types as recommended in the *South Carolina College-and-Career-Ready Standards for English Language Arts*. “By the end of eighth grade, students read four major types of literary texts in print and multimedia formats: fiction, literary nonfiction, poetry, and drama. In the category of fiction, the read the following specific types of texts: chapter books, adventure stories, historical fiction, contemporary realistic fiction, science fiction, folktales, tall tales, and myths. In the category of literary nonfiction, they read personal essays, classical essays, memoirs, autobiographical and biographical sketches, character sketches, and speeches. In the category of poetry, they read narrative poems, lyrical poems, humorous poems, free verse, odes, songs/ballads, and epics.”

In grade 6, the panel recognizes that students need more instructional guidance and practice:

- providing explicit and implicit evidence to support analysis of text.
- determining how details convey a theme.
- analyzing how an author’s word choice impacts meaning and tone
- explaining how an author develops point of view
In grade 7, the panel recognizes that students need more instructional guidance and practice:
- providing multiple examples of text evidence to support implicit and explicit inferences.
- analyzing the development of one or more themes.
- analyzing the impact of author’s words and phrases on meaning and tone.
- analyzing how an author develops point of view

In grade 8, the panel recognizes that students need more instructional guidance and practice:
- evaluating implicit and explicit text evidence
- analyzing the relationship between theme and character, setting, or plot
- analyzing the author’s development of character perspective

Reading Informational Text

The panel recommends that students should have experience reading a variety of rigorous, complex, literary text types as recommended in the *South Carolina College and Career-Ready Standards for English Language Arts*. “By the end of eighth grade, students read informational (expository, persuasive/argumentative) texts in print and multimedia formats of the following types: essays, historical documents, research reports, contracts position statements, informational trade books, textbooks, news and feature articles, magazine articles, advertisements, encyclopedia entries, book, movie or product reviews, journals, and speeches. They also read directions, schedules, and recipes embedded in informational texts. In addition, they examine commercials, documentaries, and other forms of multimedia informational texts.”

In grade 6, the panel recognizes that students need more instructional guidance and practice:
- citing explicit and implicit textual evidence
- citing key supporting details
- analyzing multiple accounts of the same event or topic

In grade 7, the panel recognizes that students need more instructional guidance and practice:
- citing multiple examples of explicit and implicit textual evidence
- providing an objective summary of a text with two or more central ideas
- analyzing the impact of specific words or phrases on meaning and tone
- determining an author’s purpose or perspective

In grade 8, the panel recognizes that students need more instructional guidance and practice:
- citing evidence that most strongly supports analysis of a text
- analyzing the impact of specific words, phrases, analogies, or allusions on meaning and tone

Overview of Reading Literary and Informational Texts

In grades 6-8, the panel offers the following as suggestions for ways to improve student success with literary and informational texts.

- Literary Text Standards 9-12 and Informational Text Standards 8-11 fall under the key idea of Language, Craft, and Structure. The panel suggests that more instructional time be devoted to not just identifying text structures, but analyzing how the structure of a text relates to the author’s craft. In other words, the panel encourages teachers to focus more on the “how and why” of the standards. The panel identifies RI.8.2 as an area of concern for grades 6-8 and recommends that instruction move beyond identifying the structures of informational text to focus more on the impact of a text’s structure on an author’s ideas or claims.
The panel recommends that more instructional focus be placed on the “how and why” of Reading Literary Text Standard 8. The panel notes that the “how and why” of this standard’s indicators is an area of concern for grades 6-8. On the assessment, students may be asked to provide evidence showing how character and plot interact, how characters respond or change, how incidents propel action, or how dialogue interacts with plot and character.

The panel identifies RI.10 as an area of concern for grades 6-8. In grade 7, the panel suggests that more instructional time be devoted to analyzing how the author distinguishes his perspective and/or position from other’s perspectives and/or positions. In grade 8, the panel suggests that more instructional time be devoted to analyzing how the author responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

The panel identifies RI.11.2 as an area of concern for grades 6-8. In grade 6, the panel suggests that more instructional time be devoted to distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from those that are not. In grade 7, the panel suggests that more instructional time be devoted to assessing the relevance of specific claims made in a text. In grade 8, the panel suggests more instructional time be devoted to differentiating between relevant and irrelevant evidence.

The panel also recommends that analysis of text should be ongoing through close reading of text and that teachers provide more opportunities for students to think through and talk through the analysis of text.

The panel recommends that students be presented with multiple summaries of a text and be asked to evaluate each summary. On the assessment, students may be presented with several summaries of text and asked to select the best summary. The panel suggests that students have practice writing their own summaries and evaluating summaries written by others.

Writing

Grade 6
- W1.1e, W2.1g: develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing building on personal ideas and the ideas of others.

Grade 7
- W1.1f, W2.1g: develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing building on personal ideas and the ideas of others.

Grade 8
- W1.1f, W2.1g: develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing building on personal ideas and the ideas of others.

The panel suggests that instruction should focus more on the process and quality of writing rather than the product of writing. In addition, the panel suggests that teachers provide students with more opportunities to think and talk before they write.
General
The panel recommends that students have more exposure to and practice with the test item types that may appear on the SC READY assessment. These item types may be found at https://ed.sc.gov/tests/middle/south-carolina-college-and-career-ready-assessments-sc-ready/. In particular, the panel suggests that teachers provide students more practice with evidence-based selected response items (EBSR) and multi-select items.

- EBSR items are two part items that require students to “read a piece of text or passage and choose the best answer from the answer choices.” Students will then be asked to “support their response [to part A] with evidence from the text [Part B].” Sample EBSR items may be found in the Online Tools Training (OTT) on our website.

- Multi-select items are items that prompt students to select more than one correct answer. “The multi-select items may have 5 or 6 answer choices.” Sample multi-select items may be found in the Online Tools Training (OTT) on our website.

The panel also recommends that teachers more frequently incorporate the language of the South Carolina College-and-Career-Ready Standards for English Language Arts into routine classroom instruction and assessment.