In October 2018 the South Carolina Department of Education convened a panel of experts to review item data on the SC READY ELA 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 South Carolina educators and offers the following suggestions for ways to improve student success.** Teachers on this year’s panel felt that last year’s suggestions were still extremely relevant and that teachers should be reminded to look at last year’s Data Review Report (2017). The panel offers these suggestions as an addendum to those from last year.

**Strengths**
The panel noted that students showed improvement in items where they were asked to “determine figurative, connotative, and technical meanings of words and phrases used in a text.” (RI.8.1). The panel recommends continued instruction with RI.8.1 across all grade bands, and also recommends that teachers focus on the remaining demand of the grade level indicators for RI.8.1. This is outlined by grade level in the chart below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 6 RI.8.1</th>
<th>Grade 7 RI.8.1</th>
<th>Grade 8 RI.8.1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Determine figurative, connotative, and technical meaning of words…”</td>
<td>“same as grade 6 except ‘impact of specific words or phrases…””</td>
<td>“same as grade 6 except ‘…analogy or allusions…””</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
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<th>Grade 6 RL.8.1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Describe how a plot in a narrative unfolds and how characters respond…”</td>
<td>“Analyze how setting shapes the characters and/or plot…”</td>
<td>“Analyze how dialogue and/or incidents propel…”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In earlier grades, standard 8 required students to be able to identify elements of plot and characterization. Students in grades 6-8 should move beyond identifying the elements and should now be making connections between plot and character. Students should be able to identify how these elements interact within a text and how the plot shapes the characters in a text. In grade 8, students should also begin looking at how dialogue can propel action and how dialogue reveals aspects of a character. In grades 6-8, students should also be able to make a connection between the context (political, social, cultural, and historical) of a text and how the context impacts the setting, plot, and characters.
The panel recognized that students showed improvement in items where they were asked to analyze the relationship between characters and setting “how characters respond or change,” (6.RL.8.1) “how setting shapes characters,” (7.RL.8.1) and “how … incidents… reveal aspects of a character.” (8.RL.8.1) The panel does recommend focused instruction with RL.8.1 across all grades, and also recommends that teachers focus on the remaining demands of the grade level indicators for RL.8.1.

Sample item 6 in the Grade 6 Sample ELA Items document and sample item 6 in the Grade 7 Sample ELA Items document (https://ed.sc.gov/tests/assessment-information/quick-links-for-teachers/2018-sample-release-items-for-scpass-sc-ready-and-eocep/) provide examples of asking a student how these elements are interconnected.

### Inquiry
The panel noted that while students showed improvement in the Inquiry standards, there is a notable weakness with I.3.3 at all grade levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6-8.I.3.3 “Gather information from a variety of primary and secondary sources and evaluate sources for perspective, validity, and bias.”</th>
<th>This indicator remains the same for grades 6-8. In addition to being able to gather information from a variety of sources, students should be able to evaluate these sources for the perspective, validity, and bias. This means that students should move beyond differentiating between .com and .org websites. Students should be evaluating the information from multiple sources and determining if the information, not just the source, is valid and free from bias.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample item 1 in the Grade 6 Sample ELA Items document (<a href="https://ed.sc.gov/tests/assessment-information/quick-links-for-teachers/2018-sample-release-items-for-scpass-sc-ready-and-eocep/">https://ed.sc.gov/tests/assessment-information/quick-links-for-teachers/2018-sample-release-items-for-scpass-sc-ready-and-eocep/</a>) provides an example of asking a student to determine which “sentence in the source best reveals the author’s bias.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Objective Summaries and Key Details
The panel noted that students across all grade levels need more practice reading and writing objective summaries that are free from personal opinions. The panel recommends that instruction should focus on identifying biased and opinionated language within a variety of text summaries. Sample item 11 in the Grade 8 Sample ELA Items document (https://ed.sc.gov/tests/assessment-information/quick-links-for-teachers/2018-sample-release-items-for-scpass-sc-ready-and-eocep/) provides an example.

### Literary Text Structure and Features
The panel recognized a weakness in students’ abilities to analyze how the author’s choice to structure a text contributes to other elements of literary text.

| 6.RL.12.1 “Analyze how a particular sentence… fits into the overall structure and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.” | In grades 3-5, students were asked to identify and analyze the impact of the structure of texts by genre. Beginning in grade 6, students should now be able to look at the specific |
6.RL.12.2 “Compare and contrast how different text structures contribute to meaning and impact the reader.”

7.RL.12.1 “Analyze how complex text structures in… contribute to development of theme, setting, or plot.”
7.RL.12.1 “Analyze the author’s choice of structures within the text and draw conclusions about how they impact meaning.”

8.RL.12.1 “Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts…analyze how the differing structure of each contributes to the meaning.”
8.RL.12.2 same as grade 7


6.RI.8.2 “Determine text features and structures that support an author’s ideas or claims.
6.RI.11.1 same as 8.2

7.RI.8.2 “Determine the impact of text features and structures on an author’s ideas or claim”
7.RI.11.1 same as 8.2

8.RI.8.2 “Analyze the impact of text features and structures on authors’ similar ideas or claims about the same topic.”

The committee recommends that instruction should focus more on the how an author uses text structures and features in informational text and argument writing and how those features and structures impact an author’s ideas or claims. The panel also suggests that more instructional focus be placed on teaching students various ways that authors use text features and structures to emphasize key details and important information, such as fonts, bullets, illustrations, and subheadings, et al. (Refer to K-5 grade-level indicators for specific features and structures.)

Sample item 13 in the Grade 7 Sample ELA Items document provides an example of how a text feature impacts text. Sample item 15 in the Grade 8 Sample ELA Items document provide an example of how a text feature “contributes to the development of the author’s ideas” in a text. ([https://ed.sc.gov/tests/assessment-information/quick-links-for-teachers/2018-sample-release-items-for-scpass-sc-ready-and-eocep/](https://ed.sc.gov/tests/assessment-information/quick-links-for-teachers/2018-sample-release-items-for-scpass-sc-ready-and-eocep/))
**RL.5.1 and RI.5.1**
Standard 5 for both literary and informational texts ask students to “Cite textual evidence to support analysis” and for students to make inferences drawn from texts. The committee noted that students performed well in citing evidence that is directly stated in a text, but are struggling with making inferences and providing evidence to support those inferences. Sample item 2 in the Grade 7 Sample ELA document provides an example of an EBSR item that asks students to make an inference from the text (Part A) and support that inference with evidence from the text (Part B).

**Reading and Writing Stamina**
The panel suggests that teachers use the gradual release model to help students build their reading stamina. The members recommend that teachers scaffold students into grade level text using a range of complex texts. They also recommend that teachers use shorter cold texts to help build students’ reading stamina. The committee recommends the use of mentor texts for writing. Finally, as part of the reading and writing process, the panel recommends that students be allowed more opportunities to transact with text and with each other through oral and written conversations.

**Text Dependent Analysis**
The panel recommends that instruction of text dependent analysis not be solely focused on the task of writing, but on the process of reading and building into writing through the use of daily questions and conversations about the reading. The panel also suggests that teachers naturally incorporate the language of questioning into instruction and allow students opportunities to think and talk about reading before writing. Additionally, the panel recommends that teachers model the cognitive process of text dependent analysis through the reading of the TDA prompt, breaking down the TDA prompt, reading the text with purpose, going back into the text to find evidence, and modeling writing the responses with an intentional focus on the analysis of the textual evidence. Finally, the panel cautions teachers to not force students into formulaic writing.

**Test Taking Strategies**
Based on student performance on multi-select items and evidence based selected response items (EBSR), the panel recommends that teachers provide students with more practice with these item times. Specifically, the panel suggests that teachers model the cognitive process of answering these types of items and incorporating these item types as part of their classroom-based assessments. In addition, the panel recommends that students have more assessment opportunities with questions that require students to differentiate between best and most likely. Teachers should allow students the opportunity to practice the online platform and various item types by using the Online Tools Training (OTT), which is located at https://wbte.drcedirect.com/SC/portals/sc.