

# VITALNews

Virginia Initiative for Technology and Administrative Leadership



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## VITALNews

Virginia Initiative for  
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### It's Time to Get Involved

This issue of the *VITALNews* is particularly late because I have spent a good bit of March on the road. I presented a paper about my work at William and Mary at the [Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education](#)'s annual conference in Phoenix, Arizona. This gathering includes educators from all over the world and focuses primarily on teaching pre-service teachers. Last week, I did several presentations at [VSTE](#). We are so lucky to have such a great organization in Virginia, dedicated to technology and education.

At both conferences, I was reminded that all educators from PK-16 share the same concerns about how technology can best be used to enhance student learning and provide new experiences in the classroom. I always return with new energy and excitement.

Except for one problem: one issue that came up at both conferences was the problem of funding.

As many of you may know, President Bush's preliminary budget zeroed-out all federal money dedicated to Enhancing Education Through Technology. For the past three years, this money has provided training and resources for school divisions throughout our state. Many have built strong coalitions that will be jeopardized if the funding goes away.

What can you do? It's simple: just send an email or fax to your Congressional representatives letting them know the importance of this funding. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) and The Consortium for School Networking (CoSN) have joined forces and created the [Ed Tech Action Network](#). You can learn more about the work of this group at its website. Joining the Action Network is free and provides you with crucial updates as well as the opportunity for participating in state activities as well as training and tutorial sessions.

*Happy surfing,  
Karen*

## NECC in Philadelphia

The early-bird registration deadline for the National Educational Computing Conference is March 31. NECC is one-of-a-kind educational technology conference is definitely high energy and guaranteed to excite even the most reluctant technology user.

Here's the really good news: this year, NECC is in Philadelphia, just a half-day's drive from most parts of Virginia. This is a wonderful conference for teachers and administrators, and I would encourage you to send a team of folks to enjoy this experience. And don't just send the geeks and technoenthusiasts. Look around for some content folks who, even though they may not be techies, are open to new ideas and excited about learning. To learn more, [visit the conference website](#).

## Reviewing for the SOL

By Dr. Robert Hanny

The SOL writing test is over, and now all eyes turn to the assessment in May. What can you be

doing now to review for those tests? I put this question to Dr. Robert Hanny, professor emeritus from William and Mary, and he shares his review strategies below:

It is tempting to start this by saying that it is too late in the year to start reviewing for the SOL assessments!

The reason for saying this is that most experts suggest that, in a perfect world, the best review cycle is 1) to review at the end of the class that something is taught, 2) give homework that provides an opportunity to use what is taught, 3) review at the beginning of the next class to be sure students are ready for the next level, 4) review before you assess what was taught, 5) go over the material at a natural calendar break, i.e. end of nine weeks or semester, and 6) before the SOL assessment.

Obviously, this kind of a review cycle would be extremely difficult given the realities of what happens in schools and the tremendous amount of material that has to be covered. However, the thinking behind such a cycle is that review should be fairly systematic and spaced, not jammed into the two weeks before the SOL assessments are given.

Let's assume that you have a month or six weeks before the assessments and you want to use the time wisely. What are some good review practices? Let's start with some "don'ts".

**Don't provide your students with a review sheet(s) that summarizes all the essential knowledge, process, and skills on the test.** The students who need the review most will not read this document, and if they do read it they will read it mindlessly. At one time or other we all have read something mindlessly and when we read this way it doesn't stick.

**Don't tell your students to get out their notebooks and write down what you tell them or lecture on.** This is slightly better than plain reading, but it still can be a somewhat mindless activity.

**Do use strategies that force or cause students to retrieve material they previously learned or if they don't remember it, will cause them to go find it.** This is what will happen when they take the tests, they will be asked *questions* that require retrieval from memory. So, to improve retrieval, ask your students *questions* that cover the material, rather than just giving them the material.

One way to do this would be to get inside the SOL that will be tested and identify the essential knowledge, skills and processes for those SOL. For each SOL or bullet, make a question that will be answered by the identified material. Divide these questions by the number of days left before the test and cover that many questions per day. For instance, if you start on a Monday, during the last 10 minutes of class pass out the questions for that day and tell the students to answer as best they can without reviewing the text or their notes. Then for homework, tell them to find the material that answers the question and write it in. Then, first thing the next class, put the students in small groups to check their understanding of the questions and have them compare their answers and share answers to questions. Then, you check their answers with an oral or written quiz/review. Repeat this each day if you can.

For a last-minute review, pass out the list of questions and have students attempt answers without consulting the answers they came up with during the previous review. You can do this as a whole class, small group, individual seatwork, or homework.

A variation on this would be to use a graphic organizer such as a “web” or a set of frames for each SOL. These should be a full page, possibly with holes punched for a notebook or kept in a folder. In fact I have worked with teachers who used this kind of an organizer starting in September.

The key to good review is to have the students be actively engaged. Simple note-taking where one writes down what is heard or read is not very active. Having a review that centers around looking for answers is much more engaging, it lends itself to retrieval, and it is close to the process students will go through when they take SOL tests.

Another activity is to use practice questions from SOL item banks. This should be done *after* a formal review similar to what was described above. Practice items by themselves may not lead to a systematic review of all material, so if you do use practice items be sure you cover the SOL in a systematic way.

Please share this valuable information with your teachers and most of all...

**Good Luck!**

## **First In Math Offers Online Math Review and Practice**

One of the first places I head when I go to VSTE is the exhibit hall. This year, I discovered a new math program called First In Math, developed by Suntext International, Inc. This online program, which has been adopted by a variety of schools including the School District of Philadelphia, provides engaging activities for students along with real-time assessment for teachers, making it easy to follow student progress and learning.

It's tough to adequately describe a program so First In Math has provided a way for you to sample the content. Just log on to the website: <http://www.firstinmath.com>. Besides reading more about the program and its implementation, you can use the following ID and password to try out some of the games yourself. Warning: do this when you have some time because there's lots to do and, it really does make math fun!

USER ID: love

Password: math

I'm only sorry I didn't have access to this when I was studying for the GRE!

## School Check In Helps Front Office

I travel to lots of schools and generally find myself signing a book in the front office then scribbling my name on a tag. It was only a matter of time before someone automated this process.

School Check In software, installed on a computer in the front office, allows volunteers, visitors, students and parents to log their arrival and print name tags and passes. Unlike the notebook, School Check In makes it possible to quickly determine who is in the building along with tracking volunteer hours or student tardies.

While it does require a computer, the annual subscription fee for the software is just \$85. Right now, you can download a free, fully functional 21-day trial to see if this program might help your office staff better regulate the sign in procedures. Visit the [School Check In website](#) to learn more and download the free demo.

## Karen's InBox

*A monthly feature in which we get a peek into Karen's InBox for items of interest to the VITAL community*

## Kids Master Multimedia

A national Kaiser Family Foundation survey found children and teens are spending an increasing amount of time using "new media" like computers, the Internet and video games, without cutting back on the time they spend with "old" media like TV, print and music. Instead, because of the amount of time they spend using more than one medium at a time (for example, going online while watching TV), they're managing to pack increasing amounts of media content into the same amount of time each day.

The study, Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-olds, examined media use among a nationally representative sample of more than 2,000 3rd through 12th graders who completed detailed questionnaires, including nearly 700 self-selected participants who also

maintained seven-day media diaries. You can read the report at the [Kaiser Family Foundation website](#).

## TechLEARNING Webinar on Wireless Security

Districts everywhere recognize that in implementing wireless access to online content, student data, and other information to administrators, teachers, parents, and students, districts also acquire inherent risks to security and privacy. During this Webinar, sponsored by CDW-G and Proxim, find out the practical and policy issues you need to know to secure your wireless network. You'll hear from a leading expert and from district staff who have been there, done that, and can tell you their stories for both Wireless LAN (indoor) and Wireless WAN (outdoor) installations.

You can find out more and register for this free event at the [TechLEARNING website](#).

