

Life Science

Introduction

The *Science Standards of Learning* for Virginia Public Schools identify academic content for essential components of the science curriculum at different grade levels. Standards are identified for kindergarten through grade five, for middle school, and for a core set of high school courses — Earth Science, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics. Throughout a student’s science schooling from kindergarten through grade six, content strands, or topics are included. The Standards of Learning in each strand progress in complexity as they are studied at various grade levels in grades K-6, and are represented indirectly throughout the high school courses. These strands are

- Scientific Investigation, Reasoning, and Logic;
- Force, Motion, and Energy;
- Matter;
- Life Processes;
- Living Systems;
- Interrelationships in Earth/Space Systems;
- Earth Patterns, Cycles, and Change; and
- Earth Resources.

Five key components of the science standards that are critical to implementation and necessary for student success in achieving science literacy are 1) Goals; 2) K-12 Safety; 3) Instructional Technology; 4) Investigate and Understand; and 5) Application. It is imperative to science instruction that the local curriculum consider and address how these components are incorporated in the design of the kindergarten through high school science program.

Goals

The purposes of scientific investigation and discovery are to satisfy humankind’s quest for knowledge and understanding and to preserve and enhance the quality of the human experience. Therefore, as a result of science instruction, students will be able to achieve the following objectives:

1. Develop and use an experimental design in scientific inquiry.
2. Use the language of science to communicate understanding.
3. Investigate phenomena using technology.
4. Apply scientific concepts, skills, and processes to everyday experiences.
5. Experience the richness and excitement of scientific discovery of the natural world through the collaborative quest for knowledge and understanding.
6. Make informed decisions regarding contemporary issues, taking into account the following:
 - public policy and legislation;
 - economic costs/benefits;
 - validation from scientific data and the use of scientific reasoning and logic;

- respect for living things;
 - personal responsibility; and
 - history of scientific discovery.
7. Develop scientific dispositions and habits of mind including:
 - curiosity;
 - demand for verification;
 - respect for logic and rational thinking;
 - consideration of premises and consequences;
 - respect for historical contributions;
 - attention to accuracy and precision; and
 - patience and persistence.
 8. Develop an understanding of the interrelationship of science with technology, engineering and mathematics.
 9. Explore science-related careers and interests.

K-12 Safety

In implementing the *Science Standards of Learning*, teachers must be certain that students know how to follow safety guidelines, demonstrate appropriate laboratory safety techniques, and use equipment safely while working individually and in groups.

Safety must be given the highest priority in implementing the K-12 instructional program for science. Correct and safe techniques, as well as wise selection of experiments, resources, materials, and field experiences appropriate to age levels, must be carefully considered with regard to the safety precautions for every instructional activity. Safe science classrooms require thorough planning, careful management, and constant monitoring of student activities. Class enrollment should not exceed the designed capacity of the room.

Teachers must be knowledgeable of the properties, use, and proper disposal of all chemicals that may be judged as hazardous prior to their use in an instructional activity. Such information is referenced through Materials Safety Data Sheets (MSDS). The identified precautions involving the use of goggles, gloves, aprons, and fume hoods must be followed as prescribed.

While no comprehensive list exists to cover all situations, the following should be reviewed to avoid potential safety problems. Appropriate safety procedures should be used in the following situations:

- observing wildlife; handling living and preserved organisms; and coming in contact with natural hazards, such as poison ivy, ticks, mushrooms, insects, spiders, and snakes;
- engaging in field activities in, near, or over bodies of water;
- handling glass tubing and other glassware, sharp objects, and labware;
- handling natural gas burners, Bunsen burners, and other sources of flame/heat;
- working in or with direct sunlight (sunburn and eye damage);

- using extreme temperatures and cryogenic materials;
- handling hazardous chemicals including toxins, carcinogens, and flammable and explosive materials;
- producing acid/base neutralization reactions/dilutions;
- producing toxic gases;
- generating/working with high pressures;
- working with biological cultures including their appropriate disposal and recombinant DNA;
- handling power equipment/motors;
- working with high voltage/exposed wiring; and
- working with laser beam, UV, and other radiation.

The use of human body fluids or tissues is generally prohibited for classroom lab activities. Further guidance from the following sources may be referenced:

- OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration);
- ISEF (International Science and Engineering Fair) rules; and
- public health departments' and school divisions' protocols.

Instructional Technology

The use of current and emerging technologies is essential to the K-12 science instructional program. Specifically, technology must accomplish the following:

- Assist in improving every student's functional literacy. This includes improved communication through reading/information retrieval (the use of telecommunications), writing (word processing), organization and analysis of data (databases, spreadsheets, and graphics programs), presentation of one's ideas (presentation software), and resource management (project management software).
- Be readily available and regularly used as an integral and ongoing part of the delivery and assessment of instruction.
- Include instrumentation oriented toward the instruction and learning of science concepts, skills, and processes. Technology, however, should not be limited to traditional instruments of science, such as microscopes, labware, and data-collecting apparatus, but should also include computers, robotics, video-microscopes, graphing calculators, probeware, geospatial technologies, online communication, software and appropriate hardware, as well as other emerging technologies.
- Be reflected in the "instructional strategies" generally developed at the school division level.

In most cases, the application of technology in science should remain "transparent" unless it is the actual focus of the instruction. One must expect students to "do as a scientist does" and not simply hear about science if they are truly expected to explore, explain, and apply scientific concepts, skills, and processes.

As computer/technology skills are essential components of every student’s education, it is important that teaching these skills is a shared responsibility of teachers of all disciplines and grade levels.

Investigate and Understand

Many of the standards in the *Science Standards of Learning* begin with the phrase “Students will investigate and understand.” This phrase was chosen to communicate the range of rigorous science skills and knowledge levels embedded in each standard. Limiting a standard to one observable behavior, such as “describe” or “explain,” would have narrowed the interpretation of what was intended to be a rich, highly rigorous, and inclusive content standard.

“Investigate” refers to scientific methodology and implies systematic use of the following inquiry skills:

- observing;
- classifying and sequencing;
- communicating;
- measuring;
- predicting;
- hypothesizing;
- inferring;
- defining, controlling, and manipulating variables in experimentation;
- designing, constructing, and interpreting models; and
- interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating data.

“Understand” refers to various levels of knowledge application. In the *Science Standards of Learning*, these knowledge levels include the ability to:

- recall or recognize important information, key definitions, terminology, and facts;
- explain the information in one’s own words, comprehend how the information is related to other key facts, and suggest additional interpretations of its meaning or importance;
- apply the facts and principles to new problems or situations, recognizing what information is required for a particular situation, using the information to explain new phenomena, and determining when there are exceptions;
- analyze the underlying details of important facts and principles, recognizing the key relations and patterns that are not always readily visible;
- arrange and combine important facts, principles, and other information to produce a new idea, plan, procedure, or product; and
- make judgments about information in terms of its accuracy, precision, consistency, or effectiveness.

Therefore, the use of “investigate and understand” allows each content standard to become the basis for a broad range of teaching objectives, which the school division will develop and refine to meet the intent of the *Science Standards of Learning*.

Application

Science provides the key to understanding the natural world. The application of science to relevant topics provides a context for students to build their knowledge and make connections across content and subject areas. This includes applications of science among technology, engineering, and mathematics, as well as within other science disciplines. Various strategies can be used to facilitate these applications and to promote a better understanding of the interrelated nature of these four areas.

Life Science

The Life Science standards emphasize a more complex understanding of change, cycles, patterns, and relationships in the living world. Students build on basic principles related to these concepts by exploring the cellular organization and the classification of organisms; the dynamic relationships among organisms, populations, communities, and ecosystems; and change as a result of the transmission of genetic information from generation to generation. Inquiry skills at this level include organization and mathematical analysis of data, manipulation of variables in experiments, and identification of sources of experimental error. Metric units (SI – International System of Units) are expected to be used as the primary unit of measurement to gather and report data at this level.

The Life Science standards continue to focus on student growth in understanding the nature of science. This scientific view defines the idea that explanations of nature are developed and tested using observation, experimentation, models, evidence, and systematic processes. The nature of science includes the concepts that scientific explanations are based on logical thinking; are subject to rules of evidence; are consistent with observational, inferential, and experimental evidence; are open to rational critique; and are subject to refinement and change with the addition of new scientific evidence. The nature of science includes the concept that science can provide explanations about nature and can predict potential consequences of actions, but cannot be used to answer all questions.

- LS.1 The student will demonstrate an understanding of scientific reasoning, logic, and the nature of science by planning and conducting investigations in which
- a) data are organized into tables showing repeated trials and means;
 - b) a classification system is developed based on multiple attributes;
 - c) triple beam and electronic balances, thermometers, metric rulers, graduated cylinders, and probeware are used to gather data;
 - d) models and simulations are constructed and used to illustrate and explain phenomena;
 - e) sources of experimental error are identified;
 - f) dependent variables, independent variables, and constants are identified;
 - g) variables are controlled to test hypotheses, and trials are repeated;
 - h) data are organized, communicated through graphical representation, interpreted, and used to make predictions;
 - i) patterns are identified in data and are interpreted and evaluated; and
 - j) current applications are used to reinforce life science concepts.
- LS.2 The student will investigate and understand that all living things are composed of cells. Key concepts include
- a) cell structure and organelles;
 - b) similarities and differences between plant and animal cells;
 - c) development of cell theory; and
 - d) cell division.
- LS.3 The student will investigate and understand that living things show patterns of cellular organization. Key concepts include
- a) cells, tissues, organs, and systems; and
 - b) patterns of cellular organization and their relationship to life processes in living things.

- LS.4 The student will investigate and understand how organisms can be classified. Key concepts include
- a) the distinguishing characteristics of domains of organisms;
 - b) the distinguishing characteristics of kingdoms of organisms;
 - c) the distinguishing characteristics of major animal phyla and plant divisions; and
 - d) the characteristics that define a species.
- LS.5 The student will investigate and understand the basic physical and chemical processes of photosynthesis and its importance to plant and animal life. Key concepts include
- a) energy transfer between sunlight and chlorophyll;
 - b) transformation of water and carbon dioxide into sugar and oxygen; and
 - c) photosynthesis as the foundation of virtually all food webs.
- LS.6 The student will investigate and understand that organisms within an ecosystem are dependent on one another and on nonliving components of the environment. Key concepts include
- a) the carbon, water, and nitrogen cycles;
 - b) interactions resulting in a flow of energy and matter throughout the system;
 - c) complex relationships within terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems; and
 - d) energy flow in food webs and energy pyramids.
- LS.7 The student will investigate and understand that interactions exist among members of a population. Key concepts include
- a) competition, cooperation, social hierarchy, territorial imperative; and
 - b) influence of behavior on a population.
- LS.8 The student will investigate and understand interactions among populations in a biological community. Key concepts include
- a) the relationships among producers, consumers, and decomposers in food webs;
 - b) the relationship between predators and prey;
 - c) competition and cooperation;
 - d) symbiotic relationships; and
 - e) niches.
- LS.9 The student will investigate and understand how organisms adapt to biotic and abiotic factors in an ecosystem. Key concepts include
- a) differences between ecosystems and biomes;
 - b) characteristics of land, marine, and freshwater ecosystems; and
 - c) adaptations that enable organisms to survive within a specific ecosystem.
- LS.10 The student will investigate and understand that ecosystems, communities, populations, and organisms are dynamic, change over time, and respond to daily, seasonal, and long-term changes in their environment. Key concepts include
- a) phototropism, hibernation, and dormancy;
 - b) factors that increase or decrease population size; and
 - c) eutrophication, climate changes, and catastrophic disturbances.

- LS.11 The student will investigate and understand the relationships between ecosystem dynamics and human activity. Key concepts include
- a) food production and harvest;
 - b) change in habitat size, quality, or structure;
 - c) change in species competition;
 - d) population disturbances and factors that threaten or enhance species survival; and
 - e) environmental issues.
- LS.12 The student will investigate and understand that organisms reproduce and transmit genetic information to new generations. Key concepts include
- a) the structure and role of DNA;
 - b) the function of genes and chromosomes;
 - c) genotypes and phenotypes;
 - d) characteristics that can and cannot be inherited;
 - e) genetic engineering and its applications; and
 - f) historical contributions and significance of discoveries related to genetics.
- LS.13 The student will investigate and understand that populations of organisms change over time. Key concepts include
- a) the relationships of mutation, adaptation, natural selection, and extinction;
 - b) evidence of evolution of different species in the fossil record; and
 - c) how environmental influences, as well as genetic variation, can lead to diversity of organisms.