



**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA**  
**Department of Education**

**DATE:** March 23, 2020

**TO:** Division Superintendents

**FROM:** James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction

**SUBJECT:** **Guidance on Graduation Requirements, Awarding of Credits, and Continuity of Learning**

To ensure the safety of citizens of Virginia during the COVID-19 outbreak, the Governor of Virginia closed all schools for the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic year. While the health and well-being of students and staff remain the top priority, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) also recognizes the incredible strain that extended closures have placed on local school divisions in meeting their obligations to students and the state. Like all educators, the VDOE is devastated that the end of the school abruptly ended and has disrupted the lives of our schools, staff, students, and families.

VDOE has been fielding questions and concerns regarding the impact of extended closures. Some of the common and most critical issues for school divisions are the instructional and logistical barriers to meeting graduation requirements, awarding of credits, and continuity of learning.

To address these questions and concerns, the VDOE provides the attached document with the goal of providing school divisions information and potential solutions regarding graduation requirements, promotion, new instruction, and ease of process. The intent is not to over burden or restrict our school divisions, but to provide hope, engagement, and a measure of normalcy during this period of unprecedented uncertainty. The guidance is to ensure 12<sup>th</sup> grade students who are on-track to graduate, will graduate on time; that students who are on track will be promoted to the next grade level; that we ensure students are served equitably, regardless of income level, access to technology, English learner status, or special needs; and that learning gaps that will inherently occur because of these closures, will be addressed. School divisions are not being asked to replicate the existing school day or year, but provide opportunities for students to make academic progress and continue to learn and grow.

This document does not address seat time, SOL testing and other assessments, and accreditation and will issue separate communications on those items once state and federal waiver processes have been completed.

School divisions are encouraged to track and collect data on the expenses related to COVID-19 that are projected to be incurred above and beyond anticipated expenditures. This data could be used to support funding to be detailed at a later date.

Questions may be addressed to Michael Bolling by email at [Michael.Bolling@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:Michael.Bolling@doe.virginia.gov) or by phone at (804) 225-2034.

JFL/mfb

**Attachment: Graduation Requirements, Awarding of Credits, and Continuity of Learning**

## **Graduation Requirements, Awarding of Credits, and Continuity of Learning**

March 23, 2020

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The goal of this document is to provide school divisions information and solutions around graduation requirements, promotion, new instruction, and ease of process. The intent is not to over burden or restrict our school divisions but to provide hope, engagement, and a measure of normalcy during this period of unprecedented uncertainty. School divisions are not being asked to replicate the existing school day or year, but provide opportunities for students to make academic progress and continue to learn and grow.

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### **Students Scheduled to Graduate with the 2019-2020 Cohort**

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The Superintendent will provide as much flexibility as is prudent and allowable by the *Code of Virginia* for those students graduating with the 2019-2020 cohort. Flexibility provisions will need to consider students facing the following barriers to graduation.

The following graduation requirements can be waived based on authority granted to the Superintendent of Public Instruction per Executive Order Fifty-One (2020):

- Students currently enrolled in a course for which they need a standard or verified credit in order to graduate;
- Students who have successfully completed a course required for graduation, but have not earned the associated verified credit;

- Students who have not completed the student-selected test;
- Students who are currently enrolled in or have previously completed a course leading to a CTE credential necessary for a Standard Diploma but have not yet earned the credential;
- Students who have not completed a United States and Virginia history course\*;
- Students who have not completed a fine or performing arts or career and technical education course\*;
- Students in the second of sequential courses\*;
- Students who have not completed an economics and personal finance course\*.

\*Some credit-based graduation requirements are still provided for in the *Code of Virginia*. While these cannot be waived outright, these can be addressed by providing new instruction and pursuing alternate pathways to the 140-clock-hour requirement based on revised Board of Education guidelines (forthcoming).

The following graduation requirements will require action by the General Assembly in order to be waived:

- Students who have not completed training in emergency first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and the use of automated external defibrillators, including hands-on practice of the skills necessary to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation; and
- Students who have not completed a virtual course.

Students enrolled in cosmetology or master barber courses will be eligible to take the licensure examination if their instructor submits a Training Verification form certifying the student completed the VDOE-required training, regardless of the hour amount.

### **Students Enrolled in High School Credit-Bearing Courses Graduating in 2021 or After**

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School divisions must award standard credit for high school credit-bearing courses by ensuring that students have completed a majority of required standards, competencies, and objectives, including those that are essential for success in subsequent coursework. This process must be based on revised guidelines provided by the Board of Education (forthcoming) on the alternatives to the 140-clock-hour requirement.

School divisions should focus efforts on:

- identifying the specific required content that had not been taught as of Friday, March 13, 2020; and
- developing learning modules to address the missing content necessary for awarding standard credit with a particular focus on content that is essential for success in subsequent coursework.
  - Learning modules could be delivered to students through various instructional models, including face-to-face, blended, or self-paced under teacher supervision.

- Learning modules should provide equitable access to all learners, including students with disabilities, English learners, students lacking access to high-speed Internet or devices to access, and students who are economically disadvantaged, among others.

Instructional delivery necessary to award standard credits may include a variety of options such as:

- providing instruction during the extended closure;
  - The provision of instruction should be done with careful consideration of providing equitable access and support for a variety of students.
  - Accessible technology may afford students, including students with disabilities, an opportunity to have access to high-quality instruction.
  - After the extended closure, divisions are responsible for reviewing how the closure impacted the delivery of services to students with disabilities and English learners. **OR**
- for certain students who were not able to receive instruction during the closure, school divisions may choose offering instruction to those students during the summer of 2020; **OR**
- providing instruction by adjusting the 2019-2020 or 2020-2021 calendars; **OR**
- incorporating learning modules into the courses students take during the 2020-2021 school year schedule.

Suggestions for providing new or additional instruction is not meant to require that schools use the above methods to meet the 180-day/990-hour minimum teaching time requirement.

**Schools will still be eligible for a length of school term waiver for teaching time lost due to the mandatory school closures.**

**STANDARD CREDIT:** Awarded upon successful completion of course requirements

**VERIFIED CREDIT:** Verified credits can be awarded in accordance with 8VAC20-131-110 in the Board of Education’s *Regulations Establishing Standards for the Accreditation of Public Schools (also known as the SOA or Standards of Accreditation)*. A student currently enrolled in a high school credit-bearing course eligible for a verified credit during the 2019-2020 school year and who has received the standard unit of credit may be awarded a locally-awarded verified credit. For these classes only, the requirement to attempt the associated SOL end-of-course test twice and score within the 375-399 scaled score range in order to earn the locally awarded verified credits will be waived. This flexibility applies to students seeking either a Standard or Advanced Diploma. As a result, the locally-awarded verified credits awarded to students affected by the 2019-2020 extended school closures **will not count toward the cap on locally-awarded verified credits** (and thus, the cap is waived from the SOA per Executive Order 51). Students eligible for a special permission credit accommodation should continue to use the IEP/504 process. For students who elect to earn a verified credit by taking the associated SOL end-of-course assessment, the spring 2020 testing window will be extended.

## Students in Grades Pre-K - 8

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School divisions must ensure that students are equitably prepared for success in subsequent courses.

School divisions should focus efforts on

- identifying the specific content in core content areas that had not been taught as of Friday, March 13, 2020;
- developing an equitable plan to incorporate the missing content in core content areas into the curriculum for all students. This will require additional instructional time and/or an adjustment to grade-level curricula and pacing.

School divisions should also provide instruction addressing missing content in non-core content areas as much as possible.

Instructional delivery necessary to award standard credits may include a variety of options such as:

- providing instruction during the extended closure;
  - The provision of instruction should be done with careful consideration of providing equitable access and support for a variety of students.
  - Accessible technology may afford students, including students with disabilities, an opportunity to have access to high-quality instruction.
  - After the extended closure, divisions are responsible for reviewing how the closure impacted the delivery of services to students with disabilities and English learners. **OR**
- for certain students who were not able to receive instruction during the closure, school divisions may choose offering instruction during the summer of 2020; **OR**
- providing instruction by adjusting the 2019-2020 or 2020-2021 calendars; **OR**
- incorporating learning modules into the existing 2020-2021 school year schedule.

## Continuity of Learning

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As a support to parents and guardians, school divisions are encouraged to focus on providing guidance on organizing a student's daily schedule and on instructional activities that will assist in continuing thinking, learning, and inquiry for all students.

From the COVID-19 In Virginia Schools: Parent Guide

Parents and families can support student's thinking and learning during extended school closures.

- Collaborate with your child to organize the day to include time for learning and exercise.
- Read to and with your child and have conversations about what you've read together.
- Take a walk and ask about your child's observations and about being a good citizen.
- Encourage critical thinking.
- Encourage conversations about the mathematics in your child's day.
- Explore your child's creativity by creating art, music, or dance.
- Write a letter to a relative or friend or community hero.
- Be mindful of screen time and have alternatives for children to play outside.
- Listen to your child about his or her feelings and fears and offer comfort, honesty, and reassurance.

In addition, school divisions are encouraged to:

- identify the specific content that had not been taught and assessed as of Friday, March 13, 2020;
- develop an equitable plan to incorporate the missing content into the curriculum for all students, per guidance included in this document for specific groups of students.

Instructional delivery options as described in this document will need to be explored.

Options for supporting and delivering instruction may include but are not limited to: online instruction, virtual courses, instruction during summer school, TV-based instruction, packet delivery, or providing Internet hotspots to students or to the community through Internet providers.

As local school divisions begin to explore options for virtual or online instruction and other instructional delivery methods, these decisions should be done with careful consideration of providing equitable access and support for a variety of student learning needs. Additional specific information and resources can be found in the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and the U. S. Department of Education as detailed in the Superintendent's Memo titled "Addressing the Risk of COVID-19 in Preschool, Elementary, and Secondary Schools While Serving Children with Disabilities." Additional decisions should be held in consultation with division level counsel and/or school board attorneys.

## **Grading and Grade Point Averages**

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The authority to award grades and determine grade point averages rests with local school divisions. School divisions should consider the guidance related to distance and online learning and the considerations regarding equity and a thoughtful approach to instruction, and the impact of alternative measures of achievement and mastery, including the possibility of offering "pass" or "fail" as a final grade. Whereas the VDOE recognizes that decisions on grades are a local decision, the VDOE does not recommend grading work completed during the closures since schools are closed. Additionally, VDOE recognizes that grade calculations and GPA are a local

policy issue. VDOE does recommend that school divisions establish a methodology to fairly calculate grades based on work previously completed and a methodology for including said grades in GPA calculations and on student transcripts. VDOE encourages school divisions to work closely with VDOE should they feel they need additional flexibility within the transcript regulations.