Graduation Requirements, Awarding of Credits, and Continuity of Learning
March 23, 2020
Revised March 27, 2020 (see change log at the end of this document)

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.

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.

The goal of this document is to provide school divisions with 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.

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.

Students Scheduled to Graduate with the 2019-2020 Cohort

The Superintendent will provide as much flexibility as is prudent and allowable by the *Code of Virginia* for those students currently enrolled and 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 verified credit in order to graduate;

- Students who have previously been awarded standard credit, 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 or pursuing alternate pathways to the 140-clock-hour requirement based on revised Board of Education's *Emergency Guidelines for Local Alternatives for Awarding Standard Units of Credit* (pending approval on April 2, 2020).

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 currently enrolled in a course for which standard credit is required should be awarded that credit if they were successfully completing the course as of March 13, 2020. For students who were not passing a class at the time of the school closure, the VDOE recommends that these students be provided with opportunities to demonstrate competency so that a standard credit may be awarded for graduation. Nothing in this guidance prevents a school division from requiring new instruction for these students, especially if a majority of the standards in any given course had not been completed.

Some students may not have been enrolled in all of the standard credits required for graduation. In these cases, school divisions may offer distance or remote course opportunities to help them graduate on time, so long as the student completes these extra courses.

Students may not have completed some of the graduation requirements listed with asterisks by March 13, 2020, schools should make efforts to complete those requirements with students during the closure before utilizing the waiver for the student.

Students enrolled in CTE courses that may have state licensing requirements established by regulatory boards have been provided with flexibility that will be included in the [COVID-19 FAQ](#) listed on the VDOE website and updated as additional information becomes available. This would include certain courses in trade and industrial education and health and medical sciences.

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

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.

The school division's plan to address missing content should not prevent student promotion to the next grade level or next sequential course. While the student is completing missing content, the VDOE recommends that schools denote, through any means allowable in the student information system, the credits on the transcript with an asterisk or note explaining that the asterisk or note will be removed upon completion of the missing content. For purposes of documenting graduation credits, the student should receive the standard credit with the same asterisk or note until the missing content is completed. For students who were not passing a class at the time of the school closure, the VDOE recommends that these students be provided with opportunities to demonstrate competency so that a standard credit may be awarded.

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** (waived from the SOA per Executive Order Fifty-One (2020)). 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

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.

The school division's plan to address missing content should not prevent student promotion to the next grade level or next sequential course. School divisions have the authority to promote or retain students based on a complete review of all student performance prior to the school closure, according to local policy. School divisions should also consider assigned work completed during the school closure and prior to the start of the 2020-2021 school year as evidence in the decision-making process. For students who were not passing a class at the time of the school closure, the VDOE recommends that these students be provided with opportunities to demonstrate competency before considering retention or course failure.

Continuity of Learning

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

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.

Change Log

Date of Change	Page	Change (~~deleted~~ <u>added</u>)
3/27/20	1	The Superintendent will provide as much flexibility as is prudent and allowable by the *Code of Virginia* for those students <u>currently enrolled and </u>graduating with the 2019-2020 cohort.
3/27/20	1	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;
3/27/20	2	• Students who have <u>previously been awarded standard credit </u>~~successfully completed a course required for graduation~~, but have not earned the associated verified credit;
3/27/20	2	*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 ~~<u>or </u>pursuing alternate pathways to the 140-clock-hour requirement based on revised Board of Education's <u>*Emergency Guidelines for Local Alternatives for Awarding Standard Units of Credit*</u>~~guidelines~~ (~~forthcoming~~<u>pending approval on April 2, 2020</u>).
3/27/20	2	<u>Students currently enrolled in a course for which standard credit is required should be awarded that credit if they were successfully completing the course as of March 13, 2020. For students</u> <u>who were not passing a class at the time of the school closure, the VDOE recommends that these students be provided with opportunities to demonstrate competency so that a standard credit may be awarded for graduation. Nothing in this guidance prevents a school division from requiring new instruction for these students, especially if a majority of the standards in any given course had not been completed.</u> <u>Some students may not have been enrolled in all of the standard credits required for graduation. In these cases, school divisions may offer distance or remote course opportunities to help them graduate on time, so long as the student completes these extra courses.</u>

		Students may not have completed some of the graduation requirements listed with asterisks by March 13, 2020, schools should make efforts to complete those requirements with students during the closure before utilizing the waiver for the student.
3/27/20	3	~~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 CTE courses that may have state licensing requirements established by regulatory boards have been provided with flexibility that will be included in the COVID-19 FAQ listed on the VDOE website and updated as additional information becomes available. This would include certain courses in trade and industrial education and health and medical sciences.
3/27/20	4	The school division's plan to address missing content should not prevent student promotion to the next grade level or next sequential course. While the student is completing missing content, the VDOE recommends that schools denote, through any means allowable in the student information system, the credits on the transcript with an asterisk or note explaining that the asterisk or note will be removed upon completion of the missing content. For purposes of documenting graduation credits, the student should receive the standard credit with the same asterisk or note until the missing content is completed. For students who were not passing a class at the time of the school closure, the VDOE recommends that these students be provided with opportunities to demonstrate competency so that a standard credit may be awarded.
3/27/20	4	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** (waived from the SOA per Executive Order Fifty-One (2020))
3/27/20	5	The school division's plan to address missing content should not prevent student promotion to the next grade level or next sequential course. School divisions have the authority to promote or retain students based on a complete review of all student performance prior to the school closure, according to local policy. School divisions should also consider assigned work completed during the school closure and prior to the start of the 2020-2021 school year as evidence in the decision-making process. For students who were not passing a class at the time of the school closure, the VDOE recommends that these students be provided with opportunities to demonstrate competency before considering retention or course failure.