

Virginia Board of Education

EMERGENCY GUIDELINES

Local Alternatives to Awarding Standard Unit of Credits

Pursuant to *Code of Virginia* §§ 22.1-79.1 and 22.1-253.13:4

Context

On March 23, 2020, Governor Ralph Northam ordered that all K-12 schools close for the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic year in an effort to control the spread of COVID-19. This announcement was an extension of the earlier closure order issued by Governor Northam on March 13, 2020. Recognizing the impact that such an extended closure has on students enrolled in high school credit-bearing courses, the Board of Education has put forth the below emergency guidelines on the awarding of standard units of credit.

The below is based on the Board's authority to promulgate guidelines for waiving the 140-clock-hour requirement per [§ 22.1-253.13.4 \(15\)](#) in the *Code of Virginia* as well as its *Regulations Establishing Standards for the Accreditation of Public Schools*, or Standards of Accreditation. Section 22.1-253.13.4 (15) of the *Code* further provides that a school division may waive the requirement that a student receive 140 clock hours of instruction to earn a standard credit, effective with students enrolled in the 2015-2016 school year, consistent with the Standards of Quality and Board guidelines.

These emergency guidelines are meant to supplement the *Guidelines for Graduation Requirements: Local Alternative Paths to Standard Units of Credit (Alternatives to the 140-Clock-hour Requirement)*, which was adopted by the Board of Education on October 22, 2015. The original 2015 [Guidelines for Graduation Requirements](#) remain in effect for the purpose of awarding standard units of credit before or beyond the spring of 2020.

Eligible Courses

The 140-clock-hour waiver flexibility during the 2019-2020 school year applies to the below course-types:

- 1) Board-approved courses;
- 2) Career and Technical Education courses, as applicable*; and
- 3) Local elective courses.

Local elective courses must also: (a) be approved by the local school board; (b) be explicitly described in the school division secondary course of study; and (c) have clearly-defined and publicly-available learning objectives commensurate in scope and detail with state learning standards and competencies.

*Local school divisions will need to refer to regulations and guidance provided by the regulatory board for such courses in trade and industrial education and health and medical sciences in order to determine any additional requirements for completion.

Guidelines for Students Scheduled to Graduate with the 2019-2020 Cohort

The 2019-2020 graduating cohort includes students scheduled to graduate in the spring or summer of 2020.

These emergency guidelines are in place to assist school divisions in determining whether students graduating with the 2019-2020 cohort have met the minimum requirements for being awarded a standard unit of credit in the absence of having had 140-clock-hours of instruction per [8VAC20-131-5](#). These guidelines should apply to any course a student needs to earn a diploma, including those courses specifically provided for in the *Code of Virginia*, such as: (1) a United States and Virginia history course; (2) a fine or performing arts or career and technical education course; (3) a set of sequential courses; and (4) an economics and personal finance course.

For students scheduled to graduate with the 2019-2020 cohort, local school boards may award a standard unit of credit to students meeting **both** of the following criteria:

- The student was currently enrolled in a course and/or training required for graduation **OR** was planning to enroll in a course and/or training required for graduation during the spring 2020 term or before the end of the summer 2020 term; **AND**
- The student has completed a majority of the standards, competencies, and objectives in the entire course and/or training.

Nothing in this section should be construed to mean that any student graduating with the 2019-2020 cohort should automatically be awarded a standard unit of credit by virtue of enrollment only. Local school divisions are still required to exhaust all options to provide such students with the instruction and remediation they need to meet the above criteria and be set up for post-secondary success before awarding a standard unit of credit.

Local school boards are responsible for evaluating the academic record of each student in need of a standard unit of credit for graduation to determine whether they are eligible for the flexibility provided in the emergency guidelines.

Guidelines for Students Graduating After the 2019-2020 Cohort AND Enrolled in a High School Credit-Bearing Course in Spring 2020

For students enrolled in a high school credit-bearing course during the spring of 2020, local school boards may award a standard unit of credit to those students demonstrating they have completed a majority of required standards, competencies, and objectives, namely those that are essential for subsequent coursework.

Such students may demonstrate completion through a locally-determined measure which may include *but is not limited to*:

1. Work sample portfolio
 - a. Evidence must encompass a comprehensive assemblage of media products, artifacts, and performance that demonstrate a student has mastered academically rigorous material and meets a majority of learning standards, competencies, or objectives for the entire course.

- b. The assemblage of evidence and overall process must be managed and evaluated by a licensed and endorsed teacher (in the area of the coursework).
 2. Completing a locally-developed or Standard of Learning assessment
 - a. A student must demonstrate mastery in a majority of required standards, competencies, or objectives including those essential subsequent coursework in a locally-developed assessment. This may be an oral examination, performance (e.g., recital/concert), written test, or some other objective tool or process developed by the school division.
 - b. The division may also use applicable Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments for this purpose. The Virginia Department of Education will extend the spring 2020 assessment administration window to give students the opportunity to leverage this pathway.

*Please note that while the division may use the SOL assessments for awarding a standard credit as permitted above, SOL assessments can also continue to be used for the verification of credits.

3. Demonstrated achievement via national or international assessments
 - a. The assessment must: (a) have a standardized administration; (b) be determined to be valid and reliable by an external body; and (c) be used in other states or internationally.
 - b. The assessment must be scored independently of the school division.
 - c. The division must have completed a rigorous review of the assessment, in accordance with the local school board policy and determined that it is aligned with the course objectives for which the waiver is being requested.
 - d. The division must have determined beforehand or developed a process for determining a qualifying score for awarding a standard credit that the division equates with mastery of the entire course content and skills.
 - e. The division policy must define the number of attempts a student may make to achieve the qualifying score during a given time period and must ensure equitable access for all students should assessments have a monetary cost.

Additional Conditions and Requirements

Notwithstanding [8VAC20-131-110](#), school divisions seeking to use the flexibility outlined in this document do not need a local school board policy in place prior to awarding standard units of credit according to the above nor do they need to inform the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) that they are exercising the waiver flexibility beforehand. Rather, school divisions using this flexibility shall provide notice to the VDOE in the annual Standards of Quality SOQ Compliance & Other Certifications Data Collection report.

For those divisions with a local school board policy in place, local school boards may suspend their policy for the 2019-2020 school year if a disclaimer is added to the written policy for the duration of its impact on student graduation.