

## Decision Brief: Reduce Number of Verified Credits Needed to Earn a Diploma

### Background

The *Standards of Accreditation* (SOA) states “each student in middle and secondary schools shall take all applicable end-of-course SOL tests following course instruction.” The SOA further articulates the requirements for graduation:

- The Standard Diploma requires 22 Standard Units of Credit and six (6) Verified Credits (two in English, and one each in math, science, and history).
- The requirements for an Advanced Studies Diploma are 26 Standard Units of Credit and nine (9) Verified Credits (two each in English, math, science, and history).

*Definition: “Verified unit of credit” or “verified credit” means credit awarded for a course in which a student earns a standard unit of credit and achieves a passing score on a corresponding end-of-course SOL test or an additional test approval by the Board of Education.*

### Proposal for Consideration

As the Board considers revisions to graduation requirements in support of the Profile of a Graduate, it is asked to consider that each student in secondary schools earn four verified credits, one each in math, English, science, and history and social science. Students may earn the verified credits by passing an End-of-Course (EOC) Standards of Learning (SOL) test in any courses for which EOC SOL tests are available. For the history and social science and the proposed alternative science course sequence\*, schools may use locally developed performance assessments following guidelines provided by the Board of Education to verify credits locally.

### Explanation

This proposal would result in a reduction of SOL testing for students taking high school courses. Currently, students could take as many as eleven SOL tests, but this proposal could reduce the number to as few as four by only needing one verified credit for graduation and not requiring students to take all applicable end-of-course SOL tests.

Both the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), current federal law, and the newly approved Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which goes into full effect with the start of the 2017-2018 school year, require annual testing in reading and math, in grades 3-8 and once in high school, and science once in elementary, middle and high school. This proposal fulfills these requirements.

### Advantages of Action

- By reducing the number of verified credits needed to graduate, teachers would have more time to engage students in more authentic, performance-based work versus multiple choice type assessments.
- There could be financial savings if some of the current EOC SOL tests are eliminated, although additional professional development around problem-based/experiential learning and other aspects of the Profile may be needed.

### Considerations

- There could be possible implications to school accreditation if all students are not required to take all EOC tests.

- Another consideration would be that students completing SOL courses in middle school could have the required verified credits before entering high school.

### **Legislation/SOL Innovations Committee Recommendations to Consider**

Legislation approved by the 2016 General Assembly and Governor (HB 525) requires the Standards of Learning Innovation Committee to review and, no later than November 1, 2016, make recommendations to the Board of Education on the number, subjects, and question composition of standardized tests administered to public high school students in the Commonwealth. Further, HB 895 removes existing provisions related to standard and advanced studies diplomas and standard and verified units of credit.

A number of bills to limit SOL tests to only those required by the federal government were either incorporated or carried over to 2017.

In its Fall 2015 Report, the SOL Innovations Committee noted that *“to support the change in student expectations, the Board should identify the types and timing of assessments that best align with the skills and knowledge outlined in the Profile.”* The report further articulated the committee’s desire to develop *“appropriate changes to Virginia’s accountability system can occur by further emphasizing measures of individual student growth while rebalancing the emphasis on students passing standardized tests.”*

### **Stakeholder Summary**

- Teachers, principals, and superintendents indicated the need to de-emphasize SOL tests due to the negative impact on instruction, problem-based/experiential learning, and teacher and student morale and confidence.
- Parents indicated there is too much testing, but also questioned if gifted students will still be pushed after they achieve their required credits.

### **Actions from other States**

Many states are beginning to move away from standardized state assessments. Minnesota students, for example, are no longer required to achieve a specified score on an assessment in order to graduate or meet graduation assessment requirements, effective with the cohort that began 8th grade in 2012.

#### **NEXT STEP**

- Accept for Immediate Inclusion (First Review in June)
- Approve, but Not Ready for the Initial Phase
- Reject

### **\* Proposed alternative science course sequence**

The two proposals for consideration are:

1. a sequence of one-semester or segmented treatments of the four core science areas: Earth Science, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics, which can be aggregated for up to two science credits; and
2. a three-year, three-credit sequence of integrated, problem-based, applied science courses that utilizes concepts and laboratory skills/practices from multiple science strands.