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Date: December 22, 2017  
From: Albemarle County Public Schools  
To: Dr. Daniel Gecker, President of the Virginia Board of Education  
Subject: Waiver from 8VAC20-160-50. Weight of Advanced-Level Courses and Permission for Additional Graduation Requirement pursuant Standard of Accreditation 8 VAC 20-131-50.

On December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017, the Albemarle County School Board approved - and is now advancing - two initiatives to the Virginia Board of Education in pursuit of our vision for implementing *the Virginia Profile of a Graduate. High School 2022*, our plan for implanting the profile, will begin a shift in programming for our students, starting with the entering ninth grade class of 2018-19, and aligns with the intentions outlined in *Virginia's Profile of a Graduate*. The specific requests are the following:

1. Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) seeks a waiver for a period of five years, as authorized by Section 22.1-253.13:3 (H) from administering the following regulation, as provided in the Board of Education's *Regulations Governing Secondary School Transcripts*:

8VAC20-160-50. Weight of Advanced-Level Courses.

Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses shall be weighted. Local school boards shall determine which other courses/programs are to receive weighted credits, the amount of weight such courses shall receive, and how those weighted credits will be used in the determination of grade point averages in the school or school division.

2. Albemarle County Public Schools seeks permission to add an additional local high school graduation requirement pursuant to Section 8 VAC 20-131-50 (A) of the Board of Education's *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*.

We are providing the following rationale for these two requests based on sixteen months of design work, curriculum framework development, and community outreach.

The weight we add to honors and college level courses is a distinct disincentive for students when choosing courses. This statement is supported by data collected from parent surveys and focus group meetings with students during a recent program evaluation of our AP and Dual-Enrollment courses. Many students choose to take only weighted classes or study halls to boost their grade point averages. They avoid electives- even those they are interested in taking. They continue to do this in spite of the fact that we no

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longer report class rank on student transcripts. Students self-report that removing weight from Advanced Placement classes will reduce stress levels and competition among peers.

For the ninth grade cohort entering high school in the 2019-20 school year, we plan to eliminate course weighting. However, without a waiver from the VDOE, we cannot do so for our AP offerings. If AP courses remain weighted, this will likely place an even greater premium on these classes for competitive students; hence, we would prefer to eliminate all weighting at once so that no ACPS courses, including Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate, shall be weighted.

In addition, based on the findings of our program evaluation, we plan to place a cap on the number of AP courses students may take while exploring ways to increase our Dual Enrollment course offerings. Stakeholders wish to maintain rigorous instruction, remain competitive for admission to elite colleges, and maximize earnings of college credit. By defining a limit on AP courses, we will be redefining our most rigorous course load so that students will feel more freedom to choose electives and experiences based on passion, personal interest, and career readiness.

The second request is to approve an additional local graduation requirement, which is the freshman seminar course for ninth graders beginning with the entering class of 2018-19. This course will emphasize social emotional learning as well as self-assessment for skills, interests, and career development. The course will count as one of the current VDOE elective credit requirements for graduation and will not increase the number of credits a student needs to earn a diploma. Transfer students will not be required to take the course if they transfer after the ninth-grade year. However, the course will have a non-credit bearing mentoring component that will extend into tenth through twelfth grade.

Our hypothesis is that by providing a mentored and social-emotional learning based- experience and by the elimination of weighted grades, we will see that students balance out their schedules with elective courses and work-based learning experiences. This will enrich their experiences and help us shift our engagement data, as well as better prepare all students for life and work after high school.

We will measure the impact of these two programmatic changes by using this year as a baseline year and looking at enrollment in each course in our high school program. As the elimination of weighted grades takes effect, we will analyze enrollment patterns and plan for next steps in fostering a high school model in which students are guided by their personal interests rather than perceived rigor.

This high school model, *High School 2022*, is a strategy for equity as well as excellence that aligns with the *Virginia Profile of a Graduate*. We have engaged in more than a year of planning with stakeholder groups, developing a draft program guide (attached) and communications brochure (attached) that was disseminated to all middle school families on September 29, 2017. Since then, we held five community conversations at our middle schools with approximately 600 parents in attendance. Feedback from these community conversations indicated a high degree of support for both of these initiatives. We have also developed a web page for community information. This culminates community conversations that have taken place with all of our advisory groups and committees as well as a community-wide event during the 2016-17 school year where we viewed *Most Likely to Succeed* followed by breakout discussion sessions.

The ACPS Board charged central staff to develop a program to reimagine the high school experience for Albemarle County students. We plan to shift our emphasis away from a heavy reliance on content knowledge to a more balanced approach that shows how we value workplace skills, career exploration, community engagement and civic responsibility, while also ensuring equity of access to all. High School 2022 is a focused, four-year effort to guarantee meaningful and relevant high school experiences that best serve the needs and engage the interests of every student. An extension of innovative programs developed by our teachers and embraced by our students, High School 2022 empowers students to identify, develop and pursue their interests. Through High School 2022, we aim to expand and ensure access to opportunities that will enrich not only our students' education, but also their lives. Rather than causing our students to adapt to existing high school structures, we aspire for our programming to respond to the unique needs of each individual student. Our goal is to optimize choice for all students, and ultimately, to

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afford them the highest potential for success after high school. For more information about Albemarle County's High School 2022 project, please visit our web page: [ACPS High School 2022](#).

We greatly appreciate your entertaining these two requests as well as the Board and Virginia Department of Education's overall approach to improving the quality of high school in Virginia. We are hopeful that you will see the alignment between our program shifts with your vision, and our staff looks forward to presenting to you and gaining your feedback.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katherine L. Acuff". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Kate Acuff, Ph.D.  
School Board Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Pamela R. Moran". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Pamela R. Moran, Ed.D.  
Division Superintendent

cc: Members of the Virginia Board of Education  
Dr. Steven Staples, Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Dr. Cynthia Cave, Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communications  
Zachary Robbins, Director of Policy