

Virginia Board of Education

Guidelines for Graduation Requirements: Local Alternative Paths to Standard Units of Credit (Alternatives to the 140- Clock-hour Requirement)

Adopted October 22, 2015

**[House Bill 1675](#) and [Senate Bill 982](#), the 2015 General Assembly
Code of Virginia §§ [22.1-79.1](#) and [22.1-253.13:4](#)**

Background

The Virginia Board of Education interprets the waiver of the 140-clock-hour requirement as applying to: (a) BOE-approved courses; (b) Career and Technical Education courses, as applicable; and (c) local elective courses. Local elective courses must: (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.

Guidelines

Pursuant to HB 1675 and SB 982 (2015), effective with students enrolled in the 2015-2016 school year and beyond, school divisions may waive the requirement that a student receives 140 clock hours of instruction to earn a standard unit of credit. School divisions that choose to exercise this option may issue waivers for qualified students under the following conditions.

- I. Approved School Board Policy: A school division shall have in place a written policy that is in compliance with the *Regulations Establishing the Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* (SOA) and includes specific criteria ensuring that:
 - A. the outcomes of the work for which standard credit is awarded are equal to progress and learning achieved in 140 clock hours of instruction;
 - B. upon completion, a student has demonstrated mastery by meeting the specific objectives and performance requirements of the course that match or exceed the expectations of students who have received 140 clock hours of instruction with similar standards, competencies, or objectives;
 - C. the evidence of mastery of the pertinent content and skills for a student receiving a waiver is fully documented; retained securely by the school division, electronically or in hard copy consistent with student records retention requirements; and available for review by the Virginia Department of Education if requested;
 - D. success criteria for awarding a waiver of the 140-clock-hour requirement for the course are clear, objective, and agreed upon prior to a student embarking on the effort;
 - E. a student receives prior approval from the school principal (or designated school staff person) before pursuing the work, task, or assessment that is required to meet the waiver success criteria;
 - F. student eligibility for prior approval is based on local school board criteria that include such elements as current and prior academic performance, student demonstrated readiness, and/or recommendations by school staff or other knowledgeable adults;
 - G. there is a process for developing accommodations for students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency;
 - H. the total number of standard credits that can be achieved via the waiver option is defined;
 - I. the consequences of standard credits achieved by waiver are accounted for in terms of factors such as class rank, grade point average, extracurricular eligibility, and high school transcripts;
 - J. a clearly-defined school division appeal process is in place for solving disputes should they arise; and
 - K. the process for a student pursuing the waiver option is fully transparent and communicated with parents and the community.

II. Waiver Pathway Options: A school division that chooses to use the waiver of the 140-clock-hour requirement may select among three general paths to award standard credits. These include:

- A. Courses that award a standard credit and have less than 140 clock hours of instruction
The school division must have documentation based on the local school board policy that defines its rationale for the reduction of instructional time and substantive evidence that it provides equivalent instruction with equivalent outcomes in the reduced clock hours.
- B. Independent study, work sample portfolio, demonstrated performance, and locally developed or Standard of Learning assessment
 - 1. Evidence must encompass a comprehensive assemblage of media products, artifacts, and performance that demonstrate a student has mastered academically rigorous material and meets or exceeds approved learning standards, competencies, or objectives for the course.
 - 2. The required content and evaluative criteria for the products must be defined prior to the advent of student work and based on the same objectives as the standard course.
 - 3. The assemblage of evidence and overall process must be managed by a licensed and endorsed teacher (in the area of the coursework) with an agreed-upon series of program checkpoints throughout a specified timeline for the study.
 - 4. The school division must determine whether the aggregate work: (a) is of commensurate depth and quality as work performed in the traditional secondary classroom; and (b) meets predefined evaluative criteria shared with the student.
 - 5. A student must meet a predefined performance level on a locally-developed assessment for the coursework. 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. The division may also use applicable Standards of Learning assessments for this purpose.
- C. Demonstrated achievement via national or international assessments
 - 1. 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.
 - 2. The assessment must be scored independently of the school division.
 - 3. 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.
 - 4. The student must provide evidence to the school principal (or designated staff person) through performance, product, interview, and/or school staff professional judgement that he/she has some command of the course content and should be allowed to demonstrate mastery-level performance for a standard credit.
 - 5. The division must have determined beforehand or develop a process for determining a qualifying score for awarding a standard credit that the division equates with mastery of the course content and skills.

6. 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.

Continuing Role of State Assessments

While the division may use the Standards of Learning assessments for awarding a standard credit as outlined in II. B. 5. of these guidelines, the Standards of Learning assessments will continue to be used in their traditional role as determiners of awarding verified credits.

Compliance and Reporting

The school division will annually provide the following information to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE).

- I. The school division will inform the VDOE, by the start of the school year, whether it is exercising its option to waive the 140-clock-hour requirement to award standard units of credit and indicate which, if any, of the alternative paths it will use.
- II. If using the waiver option, the school division will report on the Compliance with the *Standards of Quality* and Other Requirements data collection that:
 - A. it has an approved school board policy in place that meets the elements defined in the Guidelines section above; and
 - B. expectations for student achievement (and past student performance, if applicable) for alternative paths are commensurate with 140 clock hours of instruction.