



VIRGINIA BOARD OF EDUCATION

AGENDA ITEM

Agenda Item: J

Date: April 21, 2022

Title: First Review of a Proposal to Adopt Special Provisions Regarding the Use of the Chronic Absenteeism Indicator for Accreditation Year 2022-2023

Presenter: Amy Siepka, Director of Accountability

Shelley Loving-Ryder, Assistant Superintendent for Student Assessment, Accountability and ESEA Programs

Email: amy.siepka@doe.virginia.gov

Phone: (804) 225-2102

Purpose of Presentation:

Action required by state or federal law or regulation

Executive Summary:

Chronic absenteeism is one of nine indicators in Virginia's School Accreditation Model. Based in part on the relationship between school attendance and student achievement, chronic absenteeism was selected as a measure of student engagement in the 2017 revision to the *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* (SOA). Chronically absent students are defined as those who are absent 10% or more of their enrolled school days, typically 18 or more days. The performance level a school earns on the chronic absenteeism indicator is used in conjunction with the performance levels of the other indicators to determine a school's accreditation status.

Schools can earn one of three performance levels for an indicator: Level One (at or above the state benchmark); Level Two (near the state benchmark) and Level Three (well below the state benchmark). If all indicators receive a Level One or Level Two performance level, the school is *Accredited*. If one or more indicators receive a Level Three performance level, the school is *Accredited with Conditions*. A school that fails to adopt or fully implement required corrective actions to address Level Three school-quality indicators will receive a status of *Accreditation Denied*.

The Chronic Absenteeism rate, used to determine a performance level, is calculated by dividing the number of students who are absent 10% or more days by all students whose end-of-year membership is greater than or equal to 50%. Excused and unexcused absences are counted in the rate.

Due to the extraordinary circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic, school division leaders have reported increased absenteeism in schools during school year 2021-2022 due to recommended quarantine guidelines for “close-contacts” (someone exposed to a person infected with COVID-19), isolation guidelines for those with illness, and students being kept at home because of symptoms that could not be easily distinguished from COVID-19. Through the beginning of January 2022, quarantine and isolation periods were up to 10 days, and currently remain at 5 days in some situations.

Under normal circumstances, school divisions have control of the programs, school-level policies, processes, and practices they put in place to engage students in school. However, student absences due to COVID-19 were not necessarily a result of the lack of school-level policies and procedures put in place to engage students and curb absenteeism, and as such, the chronic absenteeism data for 2021-2022 may not accurately reflect school efforts to engage students.

In August 2021, guidance was sent to school divisions through [Superintendent’s Memo #230-21](#), which in part stated:

“...divisions should also be prepared to transition individual students in and out of in-person learning for quarantine related to COVID19. In cases of quarantine, a student who is not ill and is able to participate in remote instruction should be offered meaningful opportunities to do so. Students should be counted as present or absent per that division’s policy on attendance tracking and monitoring for any remote learning day. If a division does not offer remote learning to a quarantined student, the student should be counted as absent. This circumstance should be extremely rare, as divisions should be prepared to support students who are healthy enough to participate in remote learning during quarantine.”

While these guidelines were communicated in August 2021, they may not have been implemented with fidelity across the state due to staffing shortages, numbers of students being quarantined at one time, lack of reliable internet connectivity, and/or lack of understanding of the flexibilities afforded to schools. In addition, due to this unprecedented situation, student records may not accurately represent the status of students who were indeed absent or receiving remote instruction.

Because of the circumstances surrounding chronic absenteeism in 2021-2022, the Department is asking the Board to exercise its authority under [8VAC20-131-380 F3](#) of the *Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia (SOA)* to adopt special provisions related to the use of a school quality indicator in determining the accreditation status of schools. Specifically, the SOA states: *“The board may adopt special provisions related to the measurement and use of a school quality indicator as prescribed by the board. The board may also alter the inclusions and exclusions from the performance level calculations by providing adequate notice to local school boards.”*

The Board is being asked to consider the adoption of special provisions to remove the chronic absenteeism indicator from the determination of school accreditation status for 2022-2023 only. In doing so, the earned performance level and chronic absenteeism rate will still be assigned to, and reported for schools, according to provisions in the SOA. Data will be available to school divisions as they prepare for the 2022-2023 school year, and will be available publicly to ensure transparency to all stakeholders in the community.

Action Requested:

Other: The Board is requested to waive first review and adopt special revisions that will remove the use of chronic absenteeism from the determination of school accreditation status in 2022-2023, as authorized by the Standards of Accreditation.

Superintendent’s Recommendation:

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board waive first review and approve the special revision that removes the chronic absenteeism indicator from the determination of school accreditation status for 2022-2023 only, so long as a performance level and rate are still assigned to the school according to provisions in the SOA, and are reported publicly.

Rationale for Action:

Board action is required to provide this one-year flexibility to local school divisions on the chronic absenteeism indicator. Action at this meeting is necessary to provide school divisions with advance notice of the change, and allow VDOE data services staff time to make the necessary changes to the programs and reports surrounding accreditation data.

Previous Review or Action:

Date: April 19, 2022

Action: Review of chronic absenteeism at the Board work session.

Background Information and Statutory Authority:

Chronic absenteeism is one of nine indicators in Virginia’s School Accreditation Model. Based on the relationship between school attendance and student achievement, chronic absenteeism was

selected as a measure of student engagement in the 2017 revision to the SOA. Chronically absent students are defined as those who are absent 10% or more of their enrolled school days. The performance level a school earns on the chronic absenteeism indicator is used in conjunction with the performance levels of the other indicators to determine a school's accreditation status. For all schools, the indicators are: Academic Achievement in English, mathematics, and science; Achievement Gap in English and mathematics; and Chronic Absenteeism. Additional indicators, for schools that have a graduating class, are Dropout rate, Graduation and Completion Index (CGI); and the College, Career, and Civic Readiness Index (CCCRI, which will become active in accreditation year 2023-2024).

Schools earn a Performance Level for each of the indicators:

- **Level One:** Indicator rate meets or exceeds state benchmark or shows sufficient improvement from the previous year.
- **Level Two:** Indicator rate is near the state standard or shows sufficient improvement from the previous year.
- **Level Three:** Indicator rate is below standard and does not meet the criteria for Level One or Level Two.

The combination of performance levels determines a school's Accreditation status. If all indicators are Level One or Level Two, then the school is *Accredited*. If one or more indicators are a Level Three, then the school is *Accredited with Conditions*. A school that fails to adopt or fully implement required corrective actions to address Level Three school-quality indicators will receive a status of *Accreditation Denied*.

For Chronic Absenteeism, the performance levels are described as:

- **Level One:** Current or cumulative three-year chronic absenteeism rate is 15% or lower or Current year rate is in Level Two range and decreased chronic absenteeism rate by 10% (R10) from previous year.
- **Level Two:** Current year or cumulative three-year rate is greater than 15% but less than or equal to 25% or Current year rate within level three range decreased chronic absenteeism rate by 10% (R10) from previous year.
- **Level Three:** Current year or cumulative three-year rate is more than 25% or Current year rate has stayed at a Level Two or three through four consecutive years. (Level Three - 4 Years Rating).

The Chronic Absenteeism rate, used to determine a performance level, is calculated by dividing the number of students who are absent 10% or more days by all students whose end-of-year membership is greater than or equal to 50%. Excused and unexcused absences are counted in the rate.

Due to the extraordinary circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic, school division leaders have reported increased absenteeism in schools during school year 2021-2022 due to recommended quarantine guidelines for “close-contacts” (someone exposed to a person infected with COVID-19), isolation guidelines for those with illness, and students being kept at home because of symptoms that could not be easily distinguished from COVID-19. Through the beginning of January 2022, quarantine and isolation periods were up to 10 days, and currently remain at 5 days in some situations.

Under normal circumstances, school divisions have control of the programs, school-level policies, processes, and practices they put in place to engage students in school. However, student absences due to COVID-19 were not necessarily a result of the lack of school-level policies and procedures put in place to engage students and curb absenteeism, and as such, the chronic absenteeism data for 2021-2022 may not accurately reflect school efforts to engage students.

In August 2021, guidance was sent to school divisions through [Supt's Memo #230-21](#), which in part stated, “...divisions should also be prepared to transition individual students in and out of in-person learning for quarantine related to COVID19. In cases of quarantine, a student who is not ill and is able to participate in remote instruction should be offered meaningful opportunities to do so. Students should be counted as present or absent per that division’s policy on attendance tracking and monitoring for any remote learning day. If a division does not offer remote learning to a quarantined student, the student should be counted as absent. This circumstance should be extremely rare, as divisions should be prepared to support students who are healthy enough to participate in remote learning during quarantine.”

While these guidelines were communicated in August 2021, they may not have been implemented with fidelity across the state due to staffing shortages, numbers of students being quarantined at one time, lack of reliable internet connectivity, and/or lack of understanding of the flexibilities afforded to schools. In addition, due to this unprecedented situation, student records may not accurately represent the status of students who were indeed absent or receiving remote instruction.

Because of the circumstances surrounding chronic absenteeism in 2021-2022, the Department is asking the Board to exercise its authority under [8VAC20-131-380 F3](#) of the *Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia (SOA)* to adopt special provisions related to the use of a school quality indicator in determining the accreditation status of schools. Specifically, the SOA states: “The board may adopt special provisions related to the measurement and use of a school quality indicator as prescribed by the board. The board may also alter the inclusions and exclusions from the performance level calculations by providing adequate notice to local school boards.”

The Board is being asked to consider the adoption of special provisions to remove the chronic absenteeism indicator from the determination of school accreditation status for 2022-2023 only. In doing so, the earned performance level and chronic absenteeism rate will still be assigned to, and reported for schools, according to provisions in the SOA. Data will be available to school divisions as they prepare for the 2022-2023 school year, and will be available publicly to ensure transparency to all stakeholders in the community.

The chronic absenteeism performance level and performance rates for the current and previous two years will be provided to schools through the Accreditation Detail Report in the Department's Single Sign-on Web Systems (SSWS). Performance level and rates will be provided to all stakeholders on the Virginia Department of Education website under the [School Quality Profiles](#) page.

Timetable for Further Review/Action:

Following Board approval of the proposal, VDOE will communicate with school divisions and begin work on the programmatic changes necessary to determine and report accreditation for 2022-2023.

Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources:

There is no impact of the action on the VDOE's resources (fiscal or human), nor on the local school divisions' resources.