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| **Virginia Board of Education Agenda Item** | **Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia** |

# Agenda Item: L

## Date: July 22, 2021

### Title: Report on African American History Education in Virginia

#### Presenter: Ms. Christonya Brown, History and Social Science Coordinator

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## Purpose of Presentation:

For information only: No action required.

**Executive Summary:**   
On August 24, 2019, Governor Ralph Northam signed Executive Order Thirty Nine establishing the Commission on African American History Education (“Commission”). Additionally, the Governor directed the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE or “Department”) to work with Virtual Virginia, WHRO Public Media, and committees of history and social science public school educators, university historians, and college professors to develop a new African American history elective course for high school students. This new elective will be available to students in the Commonwealth virtually beginning in the fall of 2020. As an update to the Governor’s charge and directives, this item outlines the actions taken by the Department in the areas of the implementation of the approved Curriculum Framework content, the new elective course, targeted professional development, and the Standards Revision process.

**Curriculum Framework Implementation and Support**On October 23, 2020, Department staff took the steps to support school divisions with the implementation of the approved changes beginning with [Superintendent’s Memo #286-20: Adoption of the Edits from the Governor’s Commission on African American History Education](https://www.doe.virginia.gov/administrators/superintendents_memos/2020/286-20.docx). Additionally, the VDOE’s History and Social Science Program partnered with local school divisions, the Virginia Social Studies Leadership Consortium (VSSLC), local historians, Virginia museums, and colleges and universities to provide resources, materials and professional development that correlate with the approved changes starting in November 2020.

**African American History Elective Course**During the 2020-2021 school year, the African American History elective course was piloted in 16 school divisions to provide feedback on the course content, to suggest professional development (content and practices) needed. In collaboration with historians and professors, the Department provided on-going targeted professional development (August 2020 - June 2021) to support and equip teachers with instructional practices, content, and resources to teach African American history in the Commonwealth.

**Targeted Professional Development**In collaboration with the Equity office, History and Social Science staff hosted a [Teaching Black History Conference and Equity Summer Institute](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRTyI0-OTuVOoI2KKdNxxj9F6a7T5LJKe) on June 15-16, 2021. The theme for the conference was *Teaching Black History through Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies*. All K-12 teachers, school division leaders, teachers, instructional specialists, school board members, central office personnel, legislators, and education stakeholders were encouraged to participate. This conference was a continuation of the work of the Commission.

**Standards Revision Process**Using an established review process and criteria, the Department has begun the review of the current *History and Social Science Standards of Learning* according to the [projected timeline](https://www.doe.virginia.gov/boe/meetings/2021/01-jan/item-t.docx) received by the Board on January 28, 2021.

## Action Requested:

No action requested.

## Superintendent’s Recommendation: The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education accept this report.

## Previous Review or Action:

October 14, 2020, the Board approved recommendations made by the Standards Subcommittee of the Governor’s Commission on African American History Education in Virginia.

**Background Information and Statutory Authority:**  
On August 24, 2019 Governor Ralph Northam signed Executive Order Thirty Nine establishing the Commission on African American History Education in Virginia (“Commission”). The Governor charged the group with reviewing Virginia’s history standards, and the instructional practices, content, and resources currently used to teach African American history in the Commonwealth; and with examining and making recommendations on the professional development supports needed to equip all teachers for culturally competent instruction.

Leading the Standards Subcommittee was Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Professor of History, Norfolk State University as chair. The Standards Subcommittee was divided into three work groups: Technical Edits, Standards Overhaul, and Process Review. The Technical Edit workgroup, led by Dr. Edward Ayers, Professor of the Humanities, University of Richmond, presented their work product for review through virtual meetings on July 6, 14, 15, and 16, 2020. The Standards Subcommittee reviewed and approved recommendations. Virginia Department of Education senior leadership and staff have reviewed the recommendations and organized the charts for the Board’s review. The Board approved specific recommendations made by the Commission on October 15, 2020.

Department staff took the following actions to support the implementation of the approved edits through the development of resources and professional development opportunities.

Department staff:

* October 21, 2020: met with leadership of the Virginia Social Studies Leadership Consortium (VSSLC) to discuss support needed for implementation of the approved changes.
* November 10, 2020: met with members of VSSLC during their fall meeting to discuss the work of the Commission, approved recommendations, and targeted support needed for local curriculum adjustments.
* November 23, 2020: invited division history and social science specialists and coordinators to complete an application for the Dr. Carter G. Woodson Collaborative (Collaborative) ([project summary](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_uhz3iQZMN6yeP1a2P-L_fYhdoxcWqkFXL_B3WZcrGo/edit?usp=sharing)).
  + a grant-funded project to develop classroom resources in support of the Commission.
  + a joint venture between the VSSLC, the Virginia Association of Museums (VAM), the VDOE, and #GoOpenVA.
  + goal to curate, develop, and provide high-quality history and social science resources, materials, and access to information for professional growth specific to African American people and their history and culture.
* December 7, 2020: met with VSSLC leadership and coordinator for #GoOpenVA to discuss and plan for the Collaborative’s work and connect with the VAM to participate.
* January 15, 2020: convened an information session with selected specialists about the Collaborative.
* January 22, 2020: convened an information session with Virginia Museums and selected specialists to work together to provide support for the history and social science edits recommended by the Commission.
* February - April 2020: provided training and support for Collaborative leadership, history specialists, and museum educators to develop resources and materials.
* April 30, 2020: presented final resources and materials from the [Dr. Carter G. Woodson Collaborative](https://goopenva.org/hubs/woodsoncollaborative) to VSSLC membership available on the [#GoOpenVA](https://goopenva.org/) website.

Alongside the signing of Executive Order Thirty-Nine, Governor Northam also directed the Department to work with Virtual Virginia, WHRO Public Media (WHRO), and committees of history and social science public school educators, university historians, and college professors to develop a new African American history course for high school students. During the fall of 2019, the Department brought history and social science educators together in order to create a Course Map and write content for the elective course online modules to be digitized by WHRO. Using the written content, WHRO designed the online course using the work of the content developers. Members of Governor Northam’s Commission on African-American History Education in the Commonwealth provided comments and guidance during the development process. Commission members from Norfolk State University, Old Dominion University, University of Richmond, and Virginia Commonwealth University assisted with in-depth reviews of proposed content. The full-credit elective course surveys African American history from precolonial Africa through the present.

The elective course, presented in a blended learning model: Facilitated Units (traditional face-to-face) and Online Modules (independent and asynchronous learning) giving students the opportunity to engage in the content through teacher-led class discussions and interactive digital content. Through the Online Modules, students are provided with overviews, reading selections, assessments, opportunities for reflection, and summaries. Through the Facilitated Units, students are provided an opportunity to delve deeper into a topic, explore local history, or encounter a different perspective. To earn credit for the state-developed course, instruction must be provided through both the online modules and facilitated units.

As part of this project, WHRO developed five African American History elective course specific videos that have been incorporated into the online modules. WHRO established a playlist within its eMediaVa system for African American history. The course specific videos are also available outside of the online modules for all teachers.

During the 2020-2021 school year, the course was piloted in 16 school divisions. Throughout the program, the Department provided ongoing targeted professional development and support to the teachers (August 2020 - June 2021) which included:

* **Orientation** - Selected teachers and division leadership invited to an orientation to discuss the curriculum map for the course, the planned professional development, schedules, responsibilities of all involved, and establish communication norms and small working groups.
* **Content -** History professors from several Virginia institutions of higher education provided content sessions providing background information, access to primary and secondary sources, and provided opportunities for reflection. History professors were assigned a cohort of 5 -7-classroom teachers to mentor in at least three sessions to support the academic and pedagogical growth of the teachers.
* **Anti-biased/anti-racists education** - The Office of Strategic Engagement in the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University designed a cadre of options that included training to develop competencies for culturally responsive practitioners. Culturally responsive practitioners recognize the importance of leveraging students' cultural backgrounds to make learning experiences more relevant and effective. The training intentionally addressed topics related to racial equity by engaging participants in a series of reflective and collaborative learning activities designed to build cultural competency.
* **Resource Development** - Selected teachers developed resources for future use by teachers and schools offering the African American History course and other United States History courses.
* **Check-in meetings** - Monthly participants came together for professional learning, instructional adjustments, and collaboration.

As a continuation of the work of the Governor’s Commission on African American History Education, the History and Social Science Program in collaboration with the Equity office hosted a [Teaching Black History Conference and Equity Summer Institute](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRTyI0-OTuVOoI2KKdNxxj9F6a7T5LJKe). Remarks and support for the conference were provided by the Governor, First Lady of Virginia, Secretary, Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Dr. Rosa Adkins, Chair of the Commission. The goal was to equip participants with content knowledge to inspire courageous teaching and ensure that Virginia’s public education system is one that maximizes the potential of all students.

**Timetable for Further Review/Action:**  
The Department intends to continue to provide targeted support for teachers in continuation of the Commission's work.

**Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources:**

The Department’s implementation of the updated Curriculum Frameworks, African American History elective course, and standards revision process are able to be supported by existing staff and identified resources.