| **Virginia Board of Education Agenda Item** | **Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia** |
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# Agenda Item: F

## Date: June 18, 2020

### Title: Final Review of Revisions to the Emergency Guidelines for Locally Awarded Verified Credits Due to COVID-19

#### Presenter: Dr. Leslie Sale, Director of Policy

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## Purpose of Presentation:

Action required by Board of Education regulation.

Executive Summary:
On March 23, 2020, Governor Ralph Northam ordered that all K-12 schools close for the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic year in an effort to control the spread of COVID-19. In response to the extended closures, the Superintendent of Public Instruction waived the requirement that school divisions administer Standards of Learning (SOL) end-of-course assessments for the spring 2020 term and suspended the spring 2020 SOL administration window. Students who were enrolled in high school credit-bearing courses at the time of the closures were unable to earn the associated verified credit, if applicable, through a SOL end-of-course assessments. Students who had been previously enrolled in an eligible course and at the time, did not pass the associated SOL end-of-course assessment, were also unable to test for the second time before being eligible for a locally-awarded verified credit.

The Board of Education’s *Regulations Establishing Standards for the Accreditation of Public Schools -* or Standards of Accreditation - establish multiple pathways for earning a verified credit, including a passing score on the associated SOL assessment. Alternatively, there is the option for students meeting certain conditions to use the locally-awarded verified credit process. As established in the Standards of Accreditation, a prerequisite for a locally-awarded verified credit is that the student must have attempted, unsuccessfully, to pass the corresponding SOL. The Board of Education’s *Guidance Document Governing Certain Provisions of the Regulations Establishing Standards For Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* further states that the student must have been unable to pass the corresponding SOL at least twice before being eligible for a locally-awarded verified credit.

The revised guidelines extend the flexibility provided originally in the *Emergency Guidelines for Locally Awarded Verified Credits* to students who had earned a standard credit in a course prior to spring 2020 and intended to sit for an SOL end-of-course assessment for a verified credit during the 2020 spring test administration. Changes to the guidelines still promote student accountability but recognize that these unprecedented circumstances may have impeded a student’s ability to earn a verified credit or access the locally-awarded verified credit option.

The revised guidelines supplement the *Guidance Document Governing Certain Provisions of the Regulations Establishing Standards For Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia.* The latter document as well as the Standards of Accreditationremain in effect for the purpose of awarding locally-awarded verified credits for students who do not meet the exemption criteria.

## Action Requested:

Final review: Action requested at this meeting.

Superintendent’s Recommendation:
The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education approve the revised *Emergency Guidelines for Locally Awarded Verified Credits* for immediate implementation.

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## Rationale for Action:

By adopting the revised *Emergency Guidelines: Locally-Awarded Verified Credits*, the Board extends its earlier relief measures to certain students whose ability to earn a verified credit through existing pathways was hindered by interrupted instruction and delayed testing as a result of the extended closure. The revised guidelines also correct an oversight in the original Guidelines approved on April 2, 2020 and clarifies that locally-awarded verified credits can be applied towards either a Standard of Advanced Diploma.

## Previous Review or Action:

Previous review and action. Specify date and action taken below:

Date: April 2, 2020

Action: Final Review of E*mergency Guidelines for Locally Awarded Verified Credits* due to COVID-19.

Background Information and Statutory Authority:
The *Code of Virginia* establishes the Board of Education’s authority to prescribe graduation requirements.

§ 22.1-253.13:4 of the *Code of Virginia*:

A. Each local school board shall award diplomas to all secondary school students, including students who transfer from nonpublic schools or from home instruction, who meet the requirements prescribed by the Board of Education and meet such other requirements as may be prescribed by the local school board and approved by the Board of Education. …

The Board’s *Standards of Accreditation*, at 8VAC20-131-50 and 8VAC20-131-51, set out the number of verified credits a high school student needs to earn for either a Standard or Advanced Diploma. For students entering high school prior to 2018-2019, students must earn either 6 or 9 verified credits, depending on diploma type. For student entering high school after 2018-2019, students must earn 5 verified credits for either diploma.

Verified credits can be earned through one of three pathways (or four pathways for writing). 8VAC20-131-110 states, in part:

B. A "verified unit of credit" or "verified credit" is a credit awarded for a course in which a student earns a standard unit of credit and completes one of the following:

1. Achieves a passing score on a corresponding end-of-course SOL test. In accordance with the provisions of the Standards of Quality, students may earn a standard and verified unit of credit for any elective course in which the core academic Standards of Learning course content has been integrated and the student passes the related end-of-course SOL test. Such course and test combinations must be approved by the board.

Upon waiver of the 140-clock-hour requirement according to board guidelines, qualified students who have received a standard unit of credit shall be permitted to sit for the relevant SOL test to earn a verified credit without having to meet the 140-clock-hour requirement.

2. Achieves a passing score on an additional test, as defined in 8VAC20-131-5, as a part of the Virginia Assessment Program.

3. Meets the criteria for the receipt of a locally awarded verified credit when the student has not passed a corresponding SOL test.

a. Students who enter the ninth grade for the first time prior to the 2018-2019 school year and do not pass SOL tests in science or history and social science may receive locally awarded verified credits from the local school board in accordance with criteria established in guidelines adopted by the board. Credit accommodations for students with disabilities may be used to confer locally awarded verified credits as provided in 8VAC20-131-50 B 3.

b. Students who enter the ninth grade for the first time in the 2018-2019 school year or thereafter and do not pass SOL tests in English, mathematics, laboratory science, or history and social science may receive locally awarded verified credits from the local school board in accordance with criteria established in guidelines adopted by the board. No more than one locally awarded verified credit may be used to satisfy graduation requirements, except as provided in 8VAC20-131-51 B 3 for students with disabilities seeking a standard diploma.

4. Meets the criteria for the receipt of a verified credit in English (writing) by demonstrating mastery of the content of the associated course on an authentic performance assessment, that complies with guidelines adopted by the board. Such students shall not also be required to take the corresponding SOL test in English (writing).

The Board of Education’s *Guidance Document Governing Certain Provisions of the Regulations Establishing Standards For Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*, as most recently revised in May 2019, clarify these regulatory requirements. Among the relevant clarifications are that students must attempt, unsuccessfully, the corresponding SOL test at least twice and score within the 375-399 range in order to be eligible for a locally-awarded verified credit.

Students still have an opportunity to take the corresponding SOL this fall during the extended spring 2020 testing administration (only available for those course for which there is a verified credit). However, interrupted instruction may undermine a student’s ability to perform as well as they might with a normal assessment timeline. This gap between instructional time and testing is also exacerbated for certain students who had previously taken a course, had been unsuccessful on the first SOL test administration, were being provided with remedial instruction or enrolled in a course, and intended to take the SOL test this spring. For example, a student who had earned a standard credit in Algebra I prior to spring of 2020 but did not pass the SOL may have intended to retest in the spring of 2020. Even if enrolled in an Algebra, Functions, and Data Analysis course in the spring of 2020, remediation instruction was likely interrupted or possible ceased due to the extended closures. Additionally, this student was unable to test for a second time to either earn a verified credit or potentially be eligible for a locally-awarded verified credit based on scoring within the 375 – 399 range. If broadened, the locally-awarded verified credit process could provide needed reprieve and flexibility to like students seeking to earn a verified credit.

The proposed guidelines are meant to supplement the *Guidance Document Governing Certain Provisions of the Regulations Establishing Standards For Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia.* The latter document as well as the Standards of Accreditationremain in effect for the purpose of awarding locally-awarded verified credits for students not meeting the eligibility criteria as enumerated in the emergency guidelines.

Timetable for Further Review/Action:
Upon Board approval, and any technical or editorial edits by Department staff, the *Emergency Guidelines* will be posted to Town Hall and become available to local school divisions for determining the award of verified credits for students in the 2020-2021 graduating cohort and beyond.

## Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources:

There are no costs associated with the development and dissemination of the *Emergency Guidelines*.