Buena Vista City Public Schools

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Division Superintendent

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TERESA ELLISON
School Board Chairman

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To: Jim Chapman

From: Buena Vista City Public Schools

Date: February 3, 2023

Subject: Elimination of Local Graduation Requirement

In the spring of 2018, the Virginia Department of Education approved Buena Vista City Schools' request to add a local graduation requirement. The requirement had four components:

1. Beginning with the 2019-2020 school year, all freshmen began taking Information Technology Fundamentals (VDOE SCED Code: 10254 and VERSO Code: 6670) as a local graduation requirement, unless an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determined otherwise. (*This course would be referred to as IT Fundamentals throughout this request.*)
2. Students transferring in during **or** after their ninth-grade year, would **not** be required to meet this local graduation requirement.
3. A student could choose to utilize this course as an elective to satisfy the Standard or Advanced Studies Diploma options.
4. This course would not be counted as a sequence for the Business/Information Technology pathway.

After four years of implementation, Buena Vista City Public Schools is requesting approval to eliminate this local graduation requirement beginning with the 2023-2024 school year. Buena Vista City Public Schools continuously strives to create and adapt programs that will meet the societal, cultural, and economic demands that each of our student-citizens will face upon graduation. With this in mind, it is not in our students' best interest to continue with this local graduation requirement. In theory, mandating each freshman take Information Technology Fundamental was a good idea. In practice, after four years of implementation, we have discovered several unintended consequences.

The Information Technology Fundamentals course curriculum that was proposed and approved goes above and beyond the State competencies that are required. Although the course is required, it is counted as an elective. We have a number of students who have

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no interest in IFT as freshmen, but feel they are being forced to take it. This has resulted in a higher than usual failure rate. In 2019-2020 the failure rate was 22 percent. 2020-2021 had a failure rate of 27.5 percent. In 2021-2022 the failure rate was 14 percent, and 1st semester this year, the failure rate was 28 percent. In comparison, based on data from our CTE Annual Performance Report, CTE students average 97% competency attainment (pass rate).

The approved enhanced curriculum used for the graduation requirement not only has an extensive unit on the programing language Python and 3D modeling, but also requires each student to take the IC3 digital literacy certification exam. Many freshmen are not developmentally ready for the more advanced programing and 3D modeling concepts of the course or the IC3 exam. Typically, students who take industry certifications like the IC3 are Juniors or Seniors who are CTE completers, having had at least two years of information technology type courses to prepare them for the exam. The IC3 digital literacy certification is a difficult, 3-part exam. The average pass rate for all three parts of the IC3 is 10% for the freshman taking Information Technology Fundamentals. As expected, failing this exam is frustrating and stressful for our students.

Requiring all students to take Information Technology Fundamentals as freshmen, regardless of their interest, is negatively impacting enrollment in our other Business and Information Technology courses. As students grow through high school, their interests often change. The negative experience students have from not being successful in Information Technology Fundamentals or failing the IC3 is causing them to not take other Business and Information Technology courses as upper classmen. This year, we did not have enough students sign up for AP Computer Science or Computer Information Systems, to have the classes. When asked why they did not sign up for those classes, many responses were "IFT was too hard" or "I'm not good at computers". We never want to have students exiting a course with that mentality.

Most importantly, requiring Information Technology Fundamentals is putting our students at a disadvantage when compared to students in other schools. Since Information Technology Fundamentals is a local graduation requirement, it cannot be counted as a completer course in the Business and Information Technology pathway. This puts students who wish to complete a Business and Information Technology sequence at a disadvantage by requiring them to take 3 classes in the Business and Information Technology pathway. The Information Technology Fundamentals requirement takes up one of students' freshmen electives. Therefore, it takes many students 3 years to be a

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completer in any pathway.   This again puts our students at a disadvantage because they do not have the opportunity to schedule and complete two different sequences.

The reasoning behind requiring IFT for all freshmen was to teach them computer skills and introduce students to concepts covered in other CTE courses. We are accomplishing these goals in other ways. The increased school-wide use of Chromebooks, laptops, and remote learning, coupled with technology and workplace readiness skills covered in other CTE and core courses, has made keeping IFT as a graduation requirement unnecessary.

Therefore, we are requesting your approval to remove the Information Technology Fundamentals local graduation requirement beginning with the 2023-2024 school year.

Moving forward, we will continue to offer Information Technology Fundamentals, but teach it according to the State competences and use it as part of completer sequences for the Business & Information Technology pathway.

Sincerely,

Tony Francis, Ed.D
Division Superintendent

Ms. Teresa Ellison
Buena Vista City School Board - Chair