

BOARD BRIEF

Date: June 5, 2020

BOARD INFORMATION: X

MEETING PREPARATION:

FROM: Gerald R. Mann, Jr., Ed.D., Executive Director, Secondary Instruction
Darrell Sampson, Director, K-12 School Counseling
Jennifer Abbruzzese, Director of Policy and Board Initiatives
Theresa A. Werner, M.Ed., J.D., Executive Director of Specialized Instruction
Marya Runkle, Director of Technology Services, Education and Business Systems

THROUGH: Terri Mazingo, Ed.D., Chief Academic Officer
Julie A. Crawford, Ed.D., Chief Student Services Officer
Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Cindy Anderson, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Diploma Requirement Waivers for SY 2019-2020 Graduation Cohort

ACPS 2020 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL:

Goal 1: Academic Excellence and Educational Equity

Goal 2: Family and Community Engagement

SY 2019-2020 FOCUS AREA:

Focus Area 1: Educational Equity

FY 2020 BUDGET PRIORITY:

Specialized Instruction

English Learner Services

Gap Group Achievements

Academics

SUMMARY:

On March 23, 2020, Governor Ralph Northam ordered all Virginia K-12 schools closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic year in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. His [Executive Order 53 \(2020\)](#) extended the initial closure ordered on March 13, 2020. Recognizing the impact that such an extended closure has on students enrolled in high school credit-bearing courses, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and the Virginia Board of Education (VBOE) issued emergency guidelines on April 2, 2020 for students scheduled to graduate with the school year (SY) 2019-2020 cohort (hereinafter the “Class of 2020”).

The “Class of 2020” is defined as any student who attained 12th grade status during the 2019-2020 school year with an ability to graduate by June or August of 2020. It also includes students originally in the graduation cohort of 2021 who are graduating early in June or August of 2020.

BOARD BRIEF

The following guidance documents reflect the issuance of amended qualifications and processes for awarding standard and verified credits and diploma seals, as well as waivers for industry credentials and other specific graduation requirements.

- [Guidance on Graduation Requirements, Awarding of Credits, and Continuity of Learning](#)
- [Emergency Guidelines for Local Alternatives for Awarding Standard Units of Credit](#)
- [VDOE COVID-19 FAQ](#)

The resulting, amended standards and waivers below apply only to the Class of 2020.

I. Standard Credits

Standard credits will be awarded if students meet **both** of the following conditions:

- The student was currently enrolled in a course and/or training required for graduation during the spring 2020 term **or** enrolled in a course and/or training required for graduation at the end of the summer 2020 term; **and**
- The student has *demonstrated mastery* in a majority of the standards, competencies, and objectives in the entire course and/or training.

Based upon recent [VDOE guidance](#) and revisions to [Policy IKC](#) and [Regulation IKC-R](#) as adopted by the School Board on April 17, 2020, Class of 2020 students will be awarded standard credits if they *demonstrate mastery* through **either** of the two options below:

- The student was passing their course with a grade of D or higher based upon the average of their grades from Quarters 1, 2 and 3; **or**
- The student was passing their course with a D or higher based upon the average of their grades from Quarters 1, 2, 3 and 4.
 - Quarter 4 will be graded on a Pass/No Grade scale. A Pass factors into the final grade calculation as a 100.

In support of VDOE's updated guidelines, ACPS continues to provide instruction in all high school credit-bearing courses to ensure students receive additional exposure to content standards and have opportunities to demonstrate mastery. Class of 2020 students who would not pass a course required for graduation based upon their Quarters 1-3 grade average are strongly encouraged and supported in engaging in the completion of their work during Quarter 4.

II. Verified Credit and CTE Industry Credential Waivers

As authorized by [Executive Order 51 \(2020\)](#), the Superintendent of Public Instruction issued [waivers](#) addressing the inability to fulfill graduation requirements for:

- Students currently enrolled in a course for which they need a verified credit to graduate;

BOARD BRIEF

- Students who have previously been awarded standard credit but who have not yet earned the associated verified credit;
- Students who have not completed the student-selected test; and
- Students currently enrolled in, or who have previously completed a high school course leading to a CTE credential necessary for a Standard Diploma, but who have not yet earned the credential.

Verified Credits (Broad Waivers)

Class of 2020 students who need **any** verified credits for either a Standard or Advanced Studies Diploma are now deemed in **receipt of a waiver** of those requirements. This applies to:

- Any verified credits needed in current courses or courses taken in the past; and
- The student-selected verified credit.

Class of 2020 students with or without disabilities will not be required to pursue either Locally-Awarded Verified Credits (LAVC) and/or Special Permission Locally-Awarded Verified Credit Accommodations (SPLAVC-A) as these requirements are fully waived.

CTE Industry Credentials (Standard Diploma)

Class of 2020 students unable to complete their CTE industry credential for the Standard Diploma are now deemed in **receipt of a waiver** of this requirement. This applies to:

- Any CTE industry credential tied to a current high school course or a high school course taken in the past.

Class of 2020 students with disabilities are not required to meet this requirement through the completion of competencies as this requirement is fully waived. (Note: the CTE industry credential is only required for the Standard Diploma for students who entered 9th grade prior to the 2018-19 school year.)

III. **First Aid/CPR/AED and Online (Virtual) Course Requirements**

On April 24, 2020, Governor Northam approved budget amendments passed by the Virginia General Assembly on April 22, 2020. [Amendment #5](#) granted additional flexibility to the Superintendent of Public Instruction to waive requirements during the current COVID-19 school closure. Superintendent Lane has indicated that waivers will be provided to any Class of 2020 student in the following two areas:

First Aid/CPR/AED

Class of 2020 students who are unable to complete the First Aid/CPR/AED requirement towards graduation are in receipt of a waiver from this requirement per [Superintendent's Memo #105-20](#).

BOARD BRIEF

Online (Virtual) Course

Class of 2020 students who are unable to complete the online (virtual) course requirement towards graduation are in receipt of a waiver from this requirement per [Superintendent's Memo #105-20](#).

IV. Diploma Requirement Waivers: Impact on Students with Disabilities

As discussed above, Class of 2020 students with or without disabilities will not be required to pursue either Locally-Awarded Verified Credits (LAVC) and/or Special Permission Locally-Awarded Verified Credit Accommodations (SPLAVC-A) as the requirements are fully waived. In addition, Class of 2020 students with disabilities are not required to meet the CTE industry credential requirement (tied to a current course or course taken in the past) through the completion of competencies, as this requirement is also fully waived.

These waivers will result in the graduation of some students with disabilities who would not otherwise have met graduation requirements. Students who have completed the requirements for a Standard or Advanced Studies Diploma, including through the application of verified credit and/or CTE credential waivers, will be considered as graduated from ACPS and special education services will cease at that time. Case managers and/or school counselors will contact impacted students' families with additional information.

V. Test-Takers

Students from previous graduating cohorts who completed the standard credit requirements for their diploma but who still require verified credits or a CTE industry credential are eligible to continue to return to ACPS to attempt any tests needed towards graduation. Such students exited public school prior to the 2019-2020 school year without a diploma and are returning solely to take an end-of-course SOL or credential test and are referred to as "test-takers" by VDOE. Although not considered to be enrolled at T.C. Williams High School, they are reported in the Spring Student Record Collection (SRC) to the VDOE as test-takers.

VDOE has determined that because such students are not enrolled, they are **not** eligible for waivers under the emergency guidelines ([VDOE FAQ #47](#)). They will need to test once schools reopen to earn any required verified credits or CTE industry credentials.

VI. Additional Waivers and Flexibility

VDOE and VBOE have also provided considerations for some of the more specific graduation requirements with particular restrictions and complexities. These include those encountered by:

- Students who have not completed a United States and Virginia history course;
- Students who have not completed a fine or performing arts or career and technical education course;
- Students in the second of sequential courses; and

BOARD BRIEF

- Students who have not completed an economics and personal finance course.

These (standard credit) requirements may not be waived outright. Students must still complete the course and earn the standard credit(s). If needed, students would be allowed to **demonstrate mastery through additional flexibility** in the 140-seat hour requirements as outlined in the [Emergency Guidelines for Local Alternatives to Awarding Standard Units of Credit](#).

Given ACPS' calendar, high school credit structure, and the opportunity for students to continue to demonstrate mastery in Quarter 4, it is not anticipated that students scheduled to graduate will need to access these additional waivers. The T.C. Williams Director of Counseling is working with Central Office staff to resolve any individual cases not addressed by the broad waivers discussed in the previous sections above.

In addition, VDOE has provided updated criteria for the awarding of diploma seals through [Superintendent's Memo #119-20](#) due to the COVID-19 school closures and their impact on students' abilities to meet certain requirements.

VII. Additional References

Grading

- VDOE Guidelines: [Grading and Grade Point Averages](#) (March 23, 2020)
- ACPS [Policy IKC](#) and [Regulation IKC-R](#): Grading
- [April 17, 2020 Board Memo](#): Proposed Changes to Grading Policy IKC and Regulation IKC-R for SY 2019-2020 (Q4) in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic School Closure

Class of 2020 Graduation Requirements

- VDOE Guidelines: [Graduation Requirements, Awarding of Credits and Continuity of Learning](#) (Revised April 16, 2020).
- ACPS [Policy IKF](#) and [Regulation IKF-R](#): The Virginia Assessment Program and Graduation Requirements
- [May 29, 2020 Board Brief](#): School Board Policies Impacted by the COVID-19 School Closure

BACKGROUND:

On Friday, March 13, 2020, ACPS closed all schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic in order to promote physical distancing and the safety and wellness of school staff, students, and their families. The same day, Governor Northam ordered all Virginia schools closed for a period of two weeks. On March 23, 2020 the Governor ordered all Virginia schools to remain closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year ([Executive Order 53](#)).

IMPACT:

Recent VBOE and VDOE waivers and amended guidelines are intended to help mitigate the various barriers to graduation resulting from the COVID-19 school closure. The Superintendent of Public Instruction has therefore provided ["as much flexibility as is prudent and allowable by](#)

BOARD BRIEF

[the Code of Virginia for those students currently enrolled and graduating with the 2019-2020 cohort.](#)

RECOMMENDATION:

The Superintendent recommends the School Board review the information regarding diploma requirement waivers for students scheduled to graduate with the SY 2019-2020 cohort.

CONTACTS:

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