

# Board of Education Agenda Item

Item: B.

Date: February 23, 2005

Topic: First Review of a Request for a Waiver of a Provision of the *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*

Presenter: Mrs. Anne Wescott, Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communications

Telephone Number: (804) 225-2403

E-Mail Address: Anne.Wescott@doe.virginia.gov

## Origin:

Topic presented for information only (no board action required)

Board review required by

State or federal law or regulation

Board of Education regulation

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Action requested at this meeting  Action requested at future meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

(date)

## Previous Review/Action:

No previous board review/action

Previous review/action

date \_\_\_\_\_

action \_\_\_\_\_

## Background Information:

The *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*, in 8 VAC 20-131-100, set the requirements for instructional programs in secondary schools. The regulations specify that: "The secondary school shall provide each student a program of instruction in the academic areas of English, mathematics, science, and history/social science that enables each student to meet the graduation requirements described in 8 VAC 20-131-50 and shall offer opportunities for students to pursue a program of studies in academics, fine arts, and career and technical areas...."

The regulations also specify the minimum number of course offerings that must be available to provide students with opportunities to meet the requirements for graduation. Among those minimum course offerings is the requirement for a secondary school to offer a minimum of three course offerings in foreign language. Students seeking an Advanced Studies Diploma must earn a minimum of three units of credit in one foreign language or two units each of two foreign languages.

## Summary of Major Elements:

At its meeting on September 22, 2004 the Board of Education reviewed a request from the school board of Fairfax County for approval of an alternative accreditation plan for three alternative high schools: Bryant

Alternative High School, Mountain View School, and Pimmitt Hills School. All of the schools offer programs designed to help students whose life circumstances could result or have resulted in an interruption of their education or in their dropping out of school. At that time, the day and evening programs serve, on average at each campus, over 400 students of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnic groups, and age levels. The school population consists of students who have been identified as being "at risk" due to serious life adversities or challenges. Students who enroll in the alternative high schools may be homeless; pregnant or teen parents, facing language barriers, combating poverty, recommended for exclusion/expulsion by the School Board, and/or fighting drug addiction. They may be older students who are returning to finish courses to earn a high school diploma, or students who need a flexible or extended program to accommodate their work or family requirements. An increasing number of students are refugees from war-torn countries who are still recovering physically, emotionally, and psychologically from unspeakable trauma. Many have experienced difficulties in traditional school settings as evidenced by poor academic achievement and/or a history of behavioral and disciplinary events. On average, 85% of the students work more than 20 hours per week in addition to going to school due to economic need. Approximately one third of the populations at the three schools are English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and over 34 languages are routinely spoken by the student body at each of the three schools.

The alternative high schools follow essentially the same program of studies and standards-based curriculum used in all FCPS traditional high schools. Student achievement expectations outlined in the standards/program of studies remain exactly the same for all students whether they are in a traditional school or non-traditional schools. What makes these alternative schools unique is the design of the master schedule that can allow for additional learning time, a lower student/teacher ratio, and flexibility in scheduling. The schools operate on a "modified" 4X4 schedule with rolling enrollment that allows students to enter the program approximately every 2 weeks.

After further study of the alternative accreditation plan proposal, the school board decided that an alternative plan would not benefit the schools at this time and asked that its proposal be withdrawn. However, in an effort to strengthen the instructional program, it would be beneficial to the school if it was relieved of the requirement to provide three course offerings in foreign language since the vast majority of the students attending the schools come in as speakers of languages other than English and seek a Standard Diploma. The Standard Diploma does not require credit in foreign language. Thus, the school board is seeking a waiver of the requirement of 8 VAC 20-131-100.B. to provide three course offerings in foreign language. Students who wish to seek an Advanced Studies Diploma will be concurrently enrolled in another high school for foreign language instruction.

**Superintendent's Recommendation:** The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education waive first review and approve the request from the Fairfax County school board for a waiver of the requirement for a secondary school to offer a minimum of three course offerings in foreign language at three alternative high schools: Bryant Alternative High School, Mountain View School, and Pimmitt Hills School.

**Impact on Resources:** There is no impact on resources of the Department of Education.

**Timetable for Further Review/Action:** Staff of the Department of Education will notify the Fairfax County Public Schools of the Board of Education's action.