

and Requests to Allocate Electives from Local School Boards, adopted by the Board of Education on June 25, 1998, for use in considering future requests. A copy of the guidance documents may be found in Attachment A.

The guidance document states that graduation requirements outlined in the SOA are intended to be a floor, not a ceiling. It has been common practice for local school divisions to add local graduation credit requirements to statewide minimum requirements. The guidance includes the following:

Local Additional Credits Required for Graduation:

- For the Standard Diploma, generally the Board will approve requests from local school divisions to require up to two additional local credits for this diploma for a maximum of 24 credits. (It should be noted that Martinsville City Public Schools is currently approved to require 25 credits for the Standard Diploma. The proposal does not increase the total number of required credits.)
- Requests for additional local credits outside the core discipline areas for the Standard Diploma are considered on a case-by-case basis.
- For the Advanced Studies Diploma, generally the Board will approve requests from local school divisions for additional local credits above the current number outlined in the Standards of Accreditation, which is 24, if such credits are in the discipline areas of English, mathematics, science, history/social sciences, fine arts or practical arts, or foreign language. (It should be noted that Martinsville City Public Schools is currently approved to require 30 credits for the Advanced Studies Diploma. The proposal does not increase the total number of required credits.)
- Provisions must be in place so that the Standard or Advanced Studies Diploma may not be denied to any transfer student who has otherwise met the requirements contained in the SOA, if the transfer student can only meet the division's requirements by taking a heavier load than normal course load in any semester, by taking summer schools, or by taking courses after the time when he or she otherwise would have graduated.
- The requirements for graduation would be those in effect at the time the student would have been a first-time ninth grader or students who have earned sufficient credit in middle school or through other means prior to entering high school to be placed in a grade higher than the ninth grade when they enter high school for the first time.

Allocation of Electives:

- Generally, the Board will approve requests from local school divisions to allocate elective credits for local prescribed course requirements, while reducing the number of electives by an equal amount so that the total number of graduation credit requirements remains unchanged.
- For the Standard Diploma, generally the Board will approve allocations of electives to prescribed credits in core discipline areas of English, mathematics, science, or history and social sciences. Requests to allocate electives for prescribed credits outside of the core disciplines will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- Generally, in addition, a local school division may offer, as an option to students, the opportunity to pursue concentrated courses of study by taking related courses in a specialty area (for example, vocational education, fine or performing arts), or to choose to take a variety of elective courses.

The SOA and its related guidance document address graduation requirements, not the approval of individual courses offered by local school boards to satisfy graduation requirements. Consequently, the

request made by Martinsville City Public Schools is considered by the Board only in the context of credit requirements for graduation. Board review of this request does not address the individual course offerings made by Martinsville City Public Schools in order for students to earn either a Standard Diploma or an Advanced Studies Diploma.

Summary of Major Elements:

Martinsville City Public Schools, in correspondence dated May 10, 2006 and updated on June 12, 2006, has requested approval from the Board to modify the requirements for both a Standard and Advanced Studies Diploma. On May 8, 2006, the Martinsville City School Board unanimously adopted changes to raise academic standards and expectations for all students. Following a review by department staff, the request was modified and was approved by the Martinsville City School Board on June 12, 2006.

The request submitted by Martinsville City Public Schools is to shift electives offered in the school division and not to increase the number of credits currently required for graduation. By making this change, the local school board hopes to increase the percentage of students who will seek either a postsecondary education or better preparation for the workforce upon graduation. The proposal before the Board is also intended to close the achievement gap.

Effective with the ninth-grade class of 2006-2007, students pursuing a Standard Diploma would be required to earn one additional standard credit in mathematics, one additional credit in technology, and two additional credits in a foreign language. The number of electives would be reduced from six to two.

Effective with the ninth-grade class on 2006-2007, students pursuing an Advanced Studies Diploma would be required to earn one additional credit in technology. The number of electives would be reduced from six to five.

Effective with the ninth-grade class of 2006-2007, students pursuing either a Standard Diploma or an Advanced Studies Diploma would be required to complete 40 hours of community service over a four-year period as part of their graduation requirements. The community service module is designed to provide a practical experience to students through work with adults in the community, such as physicians, nurses, child care providers, teachers, and nonprofit organization leaders. Provisions are in place to ensure student safety, and the program will provide for special accommodations and arrangements to ensure that all students can participate. Finally, there will be a variance in place so that this requirement may be modified by the principal based on extenuating circumstances, such as illness.

Attachment B summarizes the request made by Martinsville City Public Schools. Attachment C contains the request made by the Martinsville City Public Schools to the Acting Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Superintendent's Recommendation: The Acting Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board waive first review and approve the request.

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

Timetable for Further Review/Action: Staff of the Department of Education will notify the school division of the Board's action.

Attachment A

Excerpts from Guidelines Governing Certain Provisions of the Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia (8 VAC 20-131-10 et seq.)

Standard: 8 VAC 20-131-50.A. Additional Local Graduation Requirements

The requirements for a student to earn a diploma from a Virginia high school shall be those in effect when that student enters the ninth grade for the first time. Students may be awarded a diploma or certificate upon graduation from a Virginia high school.

When students below the ninth grade successfully complete courses offered for credit in grades nine through twelve, credit shall be counted toward meeting the standard units required for graduation provided the courses meet SOL content requirements or are equivalent in content and academic rigor as those courses offered at the secondary level. To earn a verified unit of credit for these courses, students must meet the requirements of 8 VAC 20-131-110.B.

The following requirements shall be the only requirements for a diploma, unless a local school board has prescribed additional requirements which have been approved by the Board. All additional requirements prescribed by local school boards, and in effect as of June 30, 1997, are approved to continue those requirements pending further action by the Board. The requirements for Certificate of Program Completion are developed by local school boards in accordance with the Standards of Quality.

November 30, 2000 Guidelines

The Board of Education has prescribed that the requirements for graduation will be those in effect the first time a student enters the ninth grade. The requirements for graduation will be those in effect at the time the student would have been a first-time ninth grader or students who have earned sufficient credit in middle school or through other means prior to entering high school to be placed in a grade higher than the ninth grade when they enter high school for the first time.

The Board, in its 1997 version of the standards, grandfathered local requirements that exceeded those adopted by the Board on a year-to-year basis. Those grandfathered provisions were approved indefinitely with the adoption of revised standards on September 28, 2000. As a result of the provisions in the revised regulations, those additional local requirements can remain in effect until such time as a local school board seeks to amend those requirements of action by the Board of Education.

In June 1999, the Board approved guidelines to govern the approval of additional requirements by local school boards that were not grandfathered by the 1997 version of the standards. Those guidelines, which will govern future approvals, are found in Attachment A of this document.

**June 25, 1998 Guidance Document
Regarding Requests for Additional Graduation Credit Requirements and
Requests to Allocate Electives from Local School Boards
(Excerpts from Attachment A to the November 30, 2000 Guidelines):**

I. Local Additional Credits Required for Graduation

Observations and Considerations:

The Board is most concerned and will act most cautiously in evaluation requests from local school divisions for local additions to the Standard Diploma requirements. The Standard Diploma is the basic diploma offered in Virginia public schools. Students who are seeking an Advanced Studies Diploma may fall short of its requirements, yet still graduate from high school with a Standard Diploma. However, students who fail to meet the requirements for a Standard Diploma will suffer the consequences of obtaining no diploma at all.

Virginia has just embarked on a nationally-recognized, sweeping reform initiative that will raise expectations for students, parents, teachers, administrators, schools and local school divisions as never before. Many in the public education community stated repeatedly in commenting on the new SOA prior to its adoption last year that reforms on such a scale should not – and could not – be done too hastily and should be phased in over many years to give all concerned time to adapt and prepare for such fundamental changes. The Board listened to these comments and responded by adopting a gradual phased-in schedule of implementation in which the new SOA will not be entirely in effect until the 2006-2007 school year.

Following the same principle, while the Board encourages local efforts to raise student expectations and academic standards higher as our new reforms are gradually phased in, we believe that local school divisions should concentrate on improving student achievement in the core academic disciplines for which the new Standards of Learning (SOL) tests are given (passage of which will become a statewide graduation requirement beginning with the Class of 2004), before seeking numerous and wide-ranging additional local credit requirements for the Standard Diploma.

The Board is much more willing to give a greater degree of flexibility to local school divisions that wish to add local credit requirements for the Advanced Studies Diploma, since students who fail to meet its requirements can still obtain the Standard Diploma.

Guidance:

A. Standard Diploma

1. Generally, the Board will approve requests from local school divisions to require up to two additional local credits to obtain the Standard Diploma (maximum of 24 required credits).

Generally, the Board will approve local requests for additional graduation credit requirements in the core discipline areas of the Standards of Learning (English, mathematics, science, or history/social studies).

For example, a local request to add one additional credit requirement in history and one in science would generally be approved, because that would not exceed a total graduation credit requirement of 24 and those credits are in the core disciplines.

Requests for additional local credits in disciplines outside the core discipline areas will be considered on a case-by-case basis, but the Board will proceed cautiously for the reasons outlined above. In evaluating requests for additional local graduation credits outside the core discipline areas, the Board generally may consider, among other criteria, a local school division's graduation and drop-out rates and its students' performance on the SOL tests.

2. Generally, if requested by a local school division which has local additional credit requirements that were "grandfathered" until June 30, 1999, under the SOA provision cited above, the Board will extend approval for such local additional credit requirements until June 30, 2000.

B. Advanced Studies Diploma

Generally, the Board will approve requests from local school divisions for local additional credits required for the Advanced Studies Diploma above the 24 contained in the SOA if the credits are in the discipline areas of English, mathematics, science, history/social studies, fine arts (including performing arts) or practical arts (option), or foreign language. The Board will consider credits outside these disciplines on a case-by-case basis.

C. Transfer students

Any local school division receiving approval to increase its course credit requirements may not deny either the Standard or Advanced Studies Diploma to any transfer student who has otherwise met the requirements contained in the SOA, if the transfer student can only meet the division's requirements by taking a heavier load than normal course load in any semester, by taking summer schools, or by taking courses after the time when he or she otherwise would have graduated.

D. Prospective Application/Advance Notice

A local high school division's additional credit requirements should apply only to students who have not yet entered high school at the time the additional credits are approved.

II. Allocation of Electives

Observations and Considerations:

Some local school divisions have requested that they be allowed to allocate one or more of the SOA's elective credits for a prescribed credit, without raising the *total* number of credits required to graduate.

The current SOA set forth a 22-credit requirement for the Standard Diploma, of which 16 are prescribed and 6 are electives. For an Advanced Studies Diploma, the SOA requires 22 prescribed credits and 2 electives, for a total of 24.

In reality, however, the vast majority of Virginia students have far more opportunity to take electives than those contained in the SOA. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of local school divisions in Virginia are now on schedule configurations such as “clock” that allow the student to earn eight credits per year, for a total opportunity of 32 credits in high school, plus any additional high school course credits that may have been earned in middle school.

More than one-fourth (27%) of Virginia local school divisions are on seven-period-day schedules, enabling the student to earn 28 credits in high school, plus credits towards graduation that may have been earned in middle school. One-tenth (10%) of local school divisions are on six-period-day schedules, enabling the student to earn 24 credits, plus credits towards graduation that may have been earned in middle school.

A student pursuing a Standard Diploma in a local school division on a block schedule has the opportunity to earn 32 credits in high school (plus credits earned in middle school), of which 16 are prescribed in the SOA and the rest are electives. While students in local school divisions on seven- or six-period daily schedules have less opportunity for electives than students in block schedules, nonetheless the Board believes there is ample room to allow local school divisions to allocate some elective credits as prescribed credits and still allow reasonable opportunity for student choice of other electives.

Guidance:

Generally, the Board will approve requests from local school divisions to allocate elective credits for local prescribed course requirements, while reducing the number of electives by an equal amount so that the total number of graduation credit requirements remains unchanged.

For the Standard Diploma, generally the Board will approve allocations of electives to prescribed credits in core discipline areas of English, mathematics, science, or history/social studies. Requests to allocate electives for prescribed credits outside of the core disciplines will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Generally, in addition, a local school division may offer, as an option to students, the opportunity to pursue concentrated courses of study by taking related courses in a specialty area (for example, vocational education, fine or performing arts), or to choose to take a variety of elective courses. Offering such options shall not require Board approval so long as choosing a particular concentration of elective courses is not mandatory for graduation.

Attachment B

Summary of Graduation Requirements Proposed by Martinsville City Public Schools

Standard Units of Credit Required for a Standard Diploma

Ninth Grade Class 2006-2007	Current SOA requirements	Current requirements for Martinsville City*	Proposed requirements for Martinsville City*	Difference
English	4	4	4	
Mathematics	3	3	4	1
Laboratory Science	3	3	3	
History/Social Science	3	4	4	
Health/Physical Education	2	2	2	
Fine Arts/Practical Arts	1	2	2	
Technology	0	1	2	1
Foreign Languages	0	0	2	2
Electives	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>(4)</u>
Total	22	25	25	
Community Service	0	0	40 hours	40 hours

Standard Units of Credit Required for an Advanced Studies Diploma

Ninth Grade Class 2006-2007	Current SOA requirements	Current requirements for Martinsville City*	Proposed requirements for Martinsville City*	Difference
English	4	4	4	
Mathematics	4	4	4	
Laboratory Science	4	4	4	
History/Social Sciences	4	4	4	
Foreign Languages	3	3	3	
Health/Physical Education	2	2	2	
Fine Arts/Practical Arts	1	2	2	
Technology	0	1	2	1
Electives	<u>2</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>(1)</u>
Total	24	30	30	
Community Service	0	0	40 hours	40 hours

*Within these requirements, students must meet the graduation requirements set forth in 8 VAC 20-131-50 of the *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* (Standards of Accreditation) for a Standard Diploma or an Advanced Studies Diploma.

It should be noted that the Standards of Accreditation and the related guidance document address graduation requirements, not the approval of individual courses offered by local school boards to satisfy graduation requirements. Consequently, approval of this request by the Board of Education is considered only in the context of credit requirements for graduation. It does not address the individual course offerings by Martinsville City Public Schools for students to earn a Standard Diploma or an Advanced Studies Diploma.



Martinsville City Public Schools

"Where Learning Has No Limits and Academic Excellence is Measured One Child at a Time"

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DIVISION OF POLICY & COMMUNICATIONS

JUN 15 2006

June 12, 2006

Mrs. Anne Wescott
Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communication
P. O. Box 2120
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Mrs. Wescott:

As requested, on June 12, 2006, the Martinsville School Board unanimously amended and adopted new proposed requirements for graduation based on the comments you and your staff shared with our high school principal, Dr. Tom Fitzgibbons, and me during our phone conference. The approval we are seeking from the State Board of Education, as required under 8 VAC 20-131-50 Requirements for Graduation, would go into effect for the entering class of 2006-2007. Our request is not seeking to increase the number of credits required to graduate but to shift electives to what we consider more rigorous courses that will, hopefully, increase the percentage of students that will seek a post secondary education program and/or be better prepared for the workforce.

Specifically, we are requesting to add one credit in math and technology and two credits in foreign language for those students seeking a standard diploma. These additional credits in math, technology, and foreign language would replace some of the elective options. The advance diploma candidates would be required to take one more credit in foreign language and technology. In the area of math, the standard diploma candidate would have to take at least one credit above geometry, such as Algebra II, Math Foundations II (Survey of Algebra II, Pre-Calculus and Statistics), or Mathematical Analysis/Pre-Calculus. The additional technology credit can include computer information systems, information technology fundamentals, technical design and illustration, etc. As you will see from the enclosed handout, Martinsville Public Schools has already received permission to increase elective graduation requirements for both the standard and advanced diplomas.

We are also requesting that our students be required to participate in 40 hours of community learning over a four year period as part of their graduation requirements. The

practical experience that our students will gain by working closely with adults in the community, such as physicians, nurses, child care providers, bankers, non-profit leaders, teachers, manufacturing and retail personnel, etc., will be a life long valuable learning lesson. Our students would benefit greatly by working with an adult mentor who will teach them the tools they will need to succeed in a constantly changing workplace or higher education environment. There are many research articles that support our request. Recognizing that this letter is not the appropriate form to share the research, I do want to cite one paragraph from an article entitled "A Study in Student Involvement in Community Service," that was published in the *Journal of Higher Education*, May-June 1998 v69 p227 (21). "From an educational standpoint, it makes sense to link community service activities with intentional learning objectives whenever possible. Obviously, when student participation in community service can be connected to specific learning activities involving reflection, group interaction, writing and so on, the experience is likely to have a greater impact on student learning and move into the realm of service learning (cooper, 1998;Eyler,Giles,&Schmiede,1996). I have enclosed a few articles from our local newspaper highlighting our students attending the Governor's School that just completed a community learning project with our local Free Medical Clinic as part of their course work. We are trying to replicate this positive experience for all of our students.

Please also note that we will make sure that our students are properly supervised off site and all applicable laws will be followed to ensure a student's safety. In addition, the principal will be given the authority to make special accommodations and arrangements e.g. transportation and flexible schedule so a student can fully participate. Finally, the principal will be given the authority to modify the number of hours a student will need to meet the community learning component based on extenuating circumstances such as illness, mobility, etc.

Martinsville City Public Schools is a very diverse school system with approximately 65% of its student population designated as minorities and approximately 67% of our students eligible for free and reduced lunch. The requested changes are more aligned with what colleges and universities are seeking as prerequisites for admissions and, more importantly, to help all of our students be prepared for the challenges that lie ahead. Mathew Gandall, executive vice president of the bi-partisan non profit organization "Achieve, Inc", states that "some worry that raising graduation requirements will hurt students but nothing is more harmful than sending young people out in the real world unprepared".

You may be asking, "What is driving this request?" Martinsville City is a tale of two school systems. The gap between "white" and "black" students in almost all indicators of academic success is significant. For example, during the past two years, only 26% of advanced diplomas were obtained by black students and a significant majority of black students obtained standard diplomas. White students obtained 74% of the advanced diplomas during the same time period. Eighty-five percent of our white students attend

Mrs. Anne Wescott

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June 12, 2006

college but only 42% of our black students attend college. Our high school is 59.1 % black.

We are making significant changes pk-12 to raise the standards and expectations for all students. We cannot continue to accept the low performance and expectation of any student, especially those who are most vulnerable. Martinsville has one of the highest state rates of adults 26 and older without a college degree and this trend has to discontinue. The proposed changes will raise the expectations for all students, provide adult mentoring and guidance, and will drive higher expectations and requirements at all grade levels.

I look forward to addressing the Virginia State Board of Education on this important request and thank you for your cooperation and assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SRK', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Scott R. Kizner, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Martinsville City Schools

SRK/lwp

Enclosures

Martinsville High School
Comparison of Current & Proposed Graduation Requirements

Standard Diploma

Current and Proposed SOA		MCPS Current Requirements 2005 – 2006		MCPS Proposed Requirements for Entering Class of 2006 – 2007	
English	4	English	4	English	4
Health/PE	2	Health/PE	2	Health/PE	2
History/SS	3	History/SS	4	History/SS	4
Math	3	Math	3	Math	4
Lab Science	3	Lab Science	3	Lab Science	3
Fine/Practical Arts	1	Fine/Practical Arts	2	Fine/Practical Arts	2
Technology	0	Technology	1	Technology	2
Electives	6	Electives	6	Electives	2
				Foreign Language	2
Total	22	Total	25	Total	25

Advanced Diploma

Current and Proposed SOA		MCPS Current Requirements 2005 – 2006		MCPS Proposed Requirements for Entering Class of 2006 – 2007	
English	4	English	4	English	4
Health/PE	2	Health/PE	2	Health/PE	2
History/SS	4	History/SS	4	History/SS	4
Math	4	Math	4	Math	4
Lab Science	4	Lab Science	4	Lab Science	4
Fine/Practical Arts	1	Fine/Practical Arts	2	Fine/Practical Arts	2
Technology	0	Technology	1	Technology	2
Foreign Language	3	Foreign Language	3	Foreign Language	3
Electives	2	Electives	6	Electives	5
Total	24	Total	30	Total	30

**Martinsville High School
Graduation Statistics**

Number of Degrees Awarded								
Year	Advanced Diploma		Standard Diploma		GED		Modified Standard Diploma	
2005	White	50	White	40	White	1	White	2
	Black	18	Black	51	Black	2	Black	4
			Asian	2				
			Hispanic	2				
	Total	68	Total	95	Total	3	Total	6
2005 Total = 172								
2004	White	54	White	30	White	3	White	1
	Black	20	Black	52	Black	7		
	Asian	1	Hispanic	3				
	Total	75	Total	85	Total	10	Total	1
2006 Total = 171								

Editor

Education outside the walls

Two programs that concluded last week showed the exciting things going on in area schools.

The first was the semester-long research project designed to raise awareness of the needs and impact of the Free Clinic of Martinsville and Henry County. It was conducted by junior research students in Dr. Nina Huff's Piedmont Governor's School class.

These students spent months studying the role of free clinics nationwide as well as locally, using surveys, interviews and journals. They also worked to recruit volunteers and medical personnel to help the clinic, and pitched in themselves to get a firsthand look at the operation and the people it serves.

The results of their work were presented to the public Tuesday morning but by all accounts, the impact of their studies will continue. Whether it is through more awareness of the clinic as a result of the Web site students built, increased volunteerism or their better understanding of the needs of the less fortunate in the community, these students have learned lessons that will last long after their class ends.

The second program was the Trout in the Classroom project in which students raised brown trout fingerlings in their schools and released them into the Smith River. The program was funded by local orthodontist Dr. David Jones, who believes hands-on learning will help children become good stewards of the environment.

This is a program that deals with more than fish. Teachers were able to work the process of raising fish in tanks into lessons throughout their curriculum, and they reported an awakened enthusiasm for learning as a result. That is a payoff that you cannot put a price tag on.

Both of these programs — and likely others going on throughout the area's schools — are engaging students, helping them learn and helping them appreciate the process of learning. They have taken education outside the school walls and made it relevant, and that is education at its best.

Project earns a 'Wow'

Students make their case for clinic's impact

By MATTHEW McCORMICK
Bulletin Staff Writer

It took them months to complete and more than an hour to explain, but Iriswood District Supervisor Paula Burnette summed up a semester's worth of work for 24 area high school juniors with a single word: "Wow."

That was Burnette's reaction to Dr. Nina Huff's Piedmont Governor's School junior research class's presentation of a semester-long project that was designed to raise awareness of the needs and impact of the Free Clinic of Martinsville and Henry County.

The clinic, which provides medical care to the uninsured, underinsured and/or unemployed residents, is run by the Martinsville-Henry County Coalition for Health and Wellness.

Following the students' remarks to a group of friends, family and local school and government officials at the Henry County Administration Building Tuesday morning, audience members lauded their work not only for its quality but also for its practical impact.

"I feel like we're doing an outstanding job with our young folks," said Curtis Millner, chairman and Iriswood District representative on the Henry County School Board. "The greatest thing to me is the students' insight into how to help the community as a whole."

"The Free Clinic is probably the entity in the community that needs the most exposure and help right now," added Burnette. "And the fact that they got new volunteers — I don't think we (local government officials) could do that."

Those 10 new Free Clinic volunteers came out of presentations that, during the last three months, two of Huff's students made to area church and school groups.

The pair of juniors was part of a larger team of students



Sixteen-year-old Magna Vista junior Kristen Jamison, daughter of Bernard and Vanessa Jamison, presents a portion of her Governor's School class' semester-long research project at the Henry County Administration Building Tuesday morning. (Bulletin photo by Matthew McCormick)

who focused on designing a marketing campaign — which also included the creation of an informational pamphlet and Web site as well as one-on-one appointments with area doctors — to reach out to the Free Clinic's potential donors, patients and medical and clerical volunteers.

Other teams of students studied the medical center's impact

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Clinic

(Continued from Page 1-A)

on people already involved with the clinic, gathering information through surveys, interviews and journals that chronicled the personal experiences of the students, who each spent a minimum of two hours volunteering at the clinic.

"It (the project) was a lasting experience that I will always remember," said 16-year-old Magna Vista junior Kristen Jamison, daughter of Bernard and Vanessa Jamison. "It made me want to volunteer more at the clinic to help out the community."

But as Huff pointed out, while the project touched the student's hearts, it also impacted their minds.

"They became immersed in the process of research," she said.

Indeed, months before they set foot in the Free Clinic, they had poured over hundreds of

articles, Web sites and books, soaking up information on international, national and local health care issues.

That research helped place local needs in the context of larger trends affecting citizens across the country and globe.

One of those is the rising cost of health care, which, according to the students' statistics, has increased 49 percent in the past three years, with some Americans paying as much as \$400 a month for single-patient health coverage.

For more than 3.5 million Americans, those costs make health insurance unaffordable. But such enormous rolls of uninsured citizens only drives up the price of health care, making it even less affordable, the students said, because it encourages the uninsured who are sick to wait until the last minute — when fixing a medical problem often is most expensive — to

seek help.

Informed by that broad understanding of why free clinics are so vital to the communities they serve — nearly 50 operate in Virginia alone — the students' attention turned to their own back yard.

There, they found the same need for affordable health care that affects communities across the country. Of the area's 69,000 residents, some 40 percent have been affected by the relocation of industry and 12 percent live below the poverty line, the students said.

And the research did not stop there. From studying the effects of community service on volunteers to looking up tips for effective public speaking, the students hit the books to prepare for the specific roles they would play in the project.

Even the class's group approach to their work became fodder for investigation.

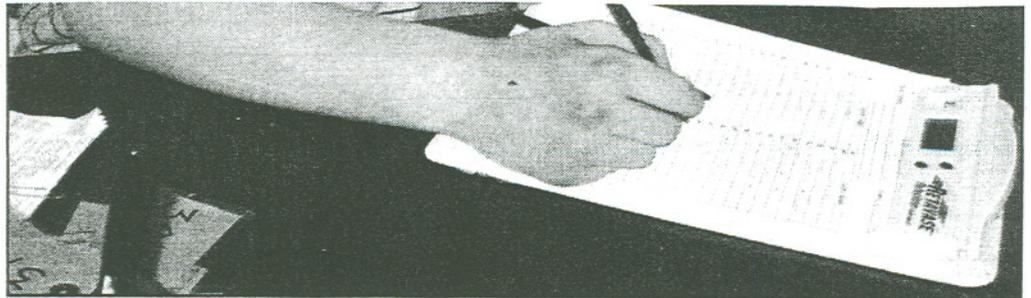
Citing research demonstrating that the inherent clashes of group work helps foster the development of important social skills, 17-year-old Bassett junior Stephanie Blankenship, daughter of Ricky and Anna Blankenship, told the audience: "The success of group work is vital to the growth of the individual not only in the present but in the future."

The same, said Free Clinic volunteer coordinator Cathy Philbrook, can be said of the students' impact on the medical center.

From inspiring their peers and the community as a whole to volunteering with the clinic to creating a Web site, she said the students' work would continue to serve the medical center.

The project "was an opportunity for them (the students) and for we as a community that they did" this project, said Philbrook, "and I think it was wonderful."

(Bulletin photo)



Students learn at Free Clinic

By MATTHEW McCORMICK
Bulletin Staff Writer

It may be a cliché, but after months of careful, engaged study, a group of area high school juniors has verified what parents and teachers always told them: Knowledge is power.

"If all you do is keep your nose in a book, then you'll never help anyone," explained 17-year-old Bassett junior Autumn Clark, daughter of LeAnne Bray and Wally Clark. "But if you apply what you know, you can make a real difference."

And that is exactly what Bray and her Piedmont Governor's School

classmates have done. Over the past three months, Dr. Nina Huff's junior research students have worked on a class project designed to raise awareness of the needs and impact of the Free Clinic of Martinsville and Henry County.

The students will present their project at 9 a.m. Tuesday in the Henry County Administration Building's first-floor conference room to members of the Martinsville City Council and county board of supervisors.

The Free Clinic, which is run by the Martinsville-Henry County Coalition for Health and Wellness, provides medical care to uninsured, underinsured and/or unem-

ployed residents.

For Huff's 24 juniors, finding out how vital those services are to the 2,500 or so patients the clinic serves each year was more than just homework — it was a wake-up call.

"The Free Clinic is the only source of medication and care for a lot of people," said Sara Shelton, a 17-year-old Bassett junior and daughter of Mike and Debbie Shelton. "Without this project, I might never have known that type of situation existed."

Huff's students had, by January, ingested an impressive amount of

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Students

(Continued from Page 1-A)

facts and figures related to local, national and international health care issues. But they had barely scratched the surface of their subject.

So they broke up into small groups, each of which used the past three months to seek a deeper, hands-on understanding of one aspect of the medical center and its services.

Some students tackled the all-important task of finding medical and clerical volunteers by interviewing doctors and speaking to community groups.

Others studied the impact of the clinic on patients, volunteers and medical providers through interviews, field notes

and volunteering themselves.

What those students found was that the Free Clinic touches the lives not only of the people it serves but also those who serve the clinic.

That was not immediately apparent to Clark when she and partner Stephanie Blankenship, 17, a Bassett junior and daughter of Ricky and Anna Blankenship, began what would be 10 volunteer hours at the clinic. Given tasks such as filing, stapling and packing, the students at first were skeptical that their work would have any impact on themselves or their community.

But they soon learned that even a big change happens one staple at a time.

"The more we went the

more we realized" how important small tasks are, said Blankenship. "By the last day, it was like we were part of a family. It was so much fun."

But the project was a lot of work, too, said 16-year-old Bassett junior Chris Custin, son of Jay and Kim Custin. He was a part of a team that developed a Web site for the Free Clinic. Make that two Web sites.

Though Custin and his teammates were computer-savvy, none had taken on such a large project. In part due to that inexperience, after finishing the site in one format, they had to rebuild it from the ground up after deciding to switch to a more user-friendly program that helped them give the site a sleeker look.

Knowing that their site — along with an informational pamphlet produced by another group — would help the clinic in its attempts to reach out to potential patients, volunteers and donors, though, made it worthwhile, said Custin.

"It feels like we did something important," he said.

Custin will get no argument from Barbara Jackman, executive director of the Martinsville-Henry County Coalition for Health and Wellness, which operates the Free Clinic.

Already, the Governor's School students' efforts have brought nearly a dozen much-needed volunteers to the clinic and three area medical specialists have agreed to fur-

ther investigate the possibility of taking referrals from the clinic.

"I think they (the students) brought a new level of awareness to our current activities and have stimulated some interest in volunteering," said Jackman.

"I just want to say thank you," she added. "It was a learning experience to them and of great help to us."

Their work, however, is not done. While the students' work aimed to help the community, it also was meant to give them hands-on experience in the process of scientific inquiry.

And as with any proper research project, this one will end with a presentation. Over the past few weeks, the stu-

dents have been compiling their findings and working them into an hour-long slide show presentation they will share with the board of supervisors and city council as well as friends and family.

But though the needs and benefits of the Free Clinic obviously will be front and center Tuesday morning, so, said Huff, will a group of dedicated students and a project that took their knowledge and skills from the classroom to the community.

"It started out as 'we have to do this project,'" said Huff, "and ended up 'we got (were allowed) to do this project.' That's pretty cool."