

# Virginia Board of Education Agenda Item



Agenda Item: G

Date: September 27, 2012

<b>Title</b>	Final Review of a Request for Increased Graduation Requirements from Suffolk City Public Schools		
<b>Presenter</b>	Ms. Anne D. Wescott, Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communications Dr. Deran R. Whitney, Superintendent, Suffolk City Public Schools		
<b>E-mail</b>	<a href="mailto:Anne.Wescott@doe.virginia.gov">Anne.Wescott@doe.virginia.gov</a>	<b>Phone</b>	(804) 225-2403

**Purpose of Presentation:**

Action required by Board of Education regulation.

**Previous Review or Action:**

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

Date: July 26, 2012.

Action: First review.

**Action Requested:**

Final review: Action requested at this meeting.

**Alignment with Board of Education Goals: Please indicate (X) all that apply:**

	Goal 1: Expanded Opportunities to Learn
	Goal 2: Accountability of Student Learning
	Goal 3: Nurturing Young Learners
	Goal 4: Strong Literacy and Mathematics Skills
	Goal 5: Highly Qualified and Effective Teachers and Administrators
X	Goal 6: Sound Policies for Student Success
	Goal 7: Safe and Secure Schools
	Other Priority or Initiative. Specify:

**Background Information and Statutory Authority:**

Goal 6: In reviewing this request for additional graduation requirements, the Board is making the determination that these additional requirements are sound policies to help students succeed in college and their careers.

The Standards of Quality, in § 22.1-253.13:4, authorizes the Board of Education to prescribe graduation requirements and to approve any other graduation requirements prescribed by local school boards:

§ [22.1-253.13:4](#). Standard 4. Student achievement and graduation requirements.

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 earn the units of credit prescribed by the Board of Education, pass the prescribed tests, and meet such other requirements as may be prescribed by the local school board and approved by the Board of Education....

The *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia (SOA)*, in 8 VAC 20-131-50, include a provision that requires Board of Education approval of all additional requirements above those prescribed in the standards.

8 VAC 20-131-50. Requirements for graduation.

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

The following requirements shall be the only requirements for a diploma, unless a local school board has prescribed additional requirements that have been approved by the Board of Education. All additional requirements prescribed by local school boards that have been approved by the Board of Education remain in effect until such time as the local school board submits a request to the board to amend or discontinue them....

On October 26, 2006, the Board adopted *Guidelines Governing Certain Provisions of the Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*, which includes guidance about additional graduation requirements prescribed by local school boards, including the following guidance:

**Standard Diploma:** Generally, the Board will approve requests from local school divisions to require up to two additional local credits to obtain the Standard Diploma, up to a 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 science). 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. 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 Standards of Learning tests.

**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 standards if the credits are in the discipline areas of English, mathematics, science, history/social studies, fine arts (including performing arts), career and technical education, or foreign language. The Board will consider credits outside these disciplines on a case-by-case basis.

**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 standards, if the transfer student can only meet the division's requirements by taking a heavier than normal course load in any semester, by taking summer school, or by taking courses after the time when he or she otherwise would have graduated.

**Prospective Application / Advance Notice:** A local school division's additional credit requirements should apply only to students who have not yet entered ninth grade at the time the additional credits are approved.

**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 the 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.

For the Advanced Studies Diploma, generally the Board will approve allocations of electives to prescribed credits in the discipline areas of English, mathematics, science, history/social studies, fine arts (including performing arts) or career and technical education, or foreign language. Requests to allocate electives for prescribed credits outside of these 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, career and technical 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.

### **Summary of Important Issues:**

Suffolk City Public Schools is requesting that the Board of Education approve an additional graduation requirement for the Standard and Advanced Studies Diplomas. This is proposed to become effective for first-time 9<sup>th</sup>-grade students in the 2013-2014 school year. Students would be required to complete 50 hours of voluntary participation in community service or extracurricular activities. Activities that would satisfy this requirement would include

- Volunteering for a charitable or religious organization that provides services to the poor, sick or less fortunate;
- Participating in Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, or similar youth organizations;
- Participating in JROTC;
- Participating in political campaigns or government internships, or Boys State, Girls State, or Model General Assembly; or
- Participating in school-sponsored extracurricular activities that have a civics focus.

The Suffolk School Board made several changes to the request following the Board of Education’s first review of the request on July 26, 2012:

- The requirement would be effective for first-time 9<sup>th</sup>-grade students in school year 2013-2012. The original request would have been effective in school year 2012-2013.
- The revised proposal clarifies that students could volunteer for a charitable or a religious organization that provides services to the poor, sick, or less fortunate. The original request did not specify religious organizations, although the school board intended for the term “charitable organizations” to include religious organizations.
- The requirement for transfer students would be revised. Students who transfer to Suffolk City Public Schools in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade would be required to have 35 hours of for community service. Students who transfer in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade would be required to have 20 hours of service. Students who transfer in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade would be required to have 10 hours of service.
- The revised proposal also clarifies that the time frames for students to meet this requirement (at least 16 hours of community service by the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, an additional 17 hours of community service by the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and an additional 17 hours of community service by the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade) are expectations to ensure that the students are making good progress, but students are not mandated to meet these time frames. Students may elect to earn the 50 hours of community service in varying combinations of hours of service each year.

For the 2011-2012 school year, the Virginia On-Time Graduation Rate for Suffolk Public Schools was 81.2 percent, and the dropout rate was 10.8 percent. For the three high schools, the ratings were as follows:

High School	Accreditation Rating	Graduation and Completion Index	Virginia On-Time Graduation Rate	Dropout Rate
King’s Fork	Provisionally Accredited – Graduation Rate	82	78.6	13.4
Lakeland	Provisionally Accredited – Graduation Rate	83	78.3	12.5
Nansemond River	Fully Accredited	92	87.7	5.3

**Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources:**

The administrative impact of this action is minimal and will be absorbed within existing resources.

**Timetable for Further Review/Action:**

Following the September 27, 2012, meeting, Department of Education staff will notify the School Board and the Superintendent of Suffolk City Public Schools of the decision of the Board of Education.

**Superintendent's Recommendation:**

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education approve the request for the additional graduation requirement of 50 hours of community service or extracurricular activities for first-time 9<sup>th</sup>-graders, beginning in school year 2013-2014, from Suffolk City Public Schools.



September 4, 2012

Deran R. Whitney, Ed.D.  
*Superintendent*

Mrs. Anne Wescott  
Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communications  
Virginia Department of Education  
P.O. Box 2120  
Richmond, VA 23218-2120

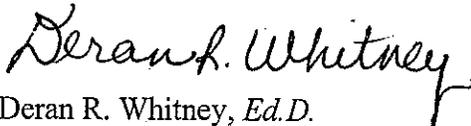
Dear Mrs. Wescott:

At its meeting on August 9, 2012, the Suffolk Public School Board, at the recommendation of the Virginia State Board of Education, unanimously approved the delay of the implementation of the community service requirement of the proposed changes to graduation regulations until the 2013-14 school year. The board also approved the following amendments;

- that students be allowed to complete the required hours by volunteering for a charitable and/or religious organization, if they so choose; and
- that students transferring into Suffolk Public Schools be required to complete a number of assigned hours that take into consideration the time remaining before graduation; and
- that the hours identified at each grade level to be completed by the end of each year serve as a recommended number of hours in order to ensure student success in meeting the requirement.

We respect and value the guidance provided by the Virginia State Board of Education and appreciate the assistance you have provided throughout the process.

Sincerely,

  
Deran R. Whitney, Ed.D.  
*Superintendent*

Enclosure

**Section 6-22.6 Community Service Requirement; Board of Education Excellence in Civics Seal; Verification of Participation in Activities; Monitoring by School Counselor; Extenuating Circumstances.** — A. Students enrolled in 9<sup>th</sup> grade 2012-2013 2013-2014 and beyond will be required to complete 50 hours of community service such as: volunteering for charitable or religious organization that provide services to the poor, sick or less fortunate; participating in Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts or similar youth organizations; student led participation in political campaigns, government internships, and participating in school-sponsored extracurricular activities that have a civics focus:

Recommended Number of Community Service Hours per Year

Grade 9	at least 16 hours
Grade 10	at least 17 hours
Grade 11	at least 17 hours

Students transferring into Suffolk Public Schools will be required to complete the following hours of community service:

Entering in grade 10 at least 35 hours (recommend at least 18 hours per year)

Entering in grade 11 at least 20 hours (recommend at least 18 hours per year)

Entering in grade 12 at least 10 hours

Student may elect to earn the 50 hours in varying combinations such as beginning as a rising freshman, earning all hours in one (1) year, two (2) years, three (3) years, or four (4) years.

B. Students completing this requirement with a B or better average in Virginia & United States History and Virginia & United States Government with good attendance and no disciplinary referral will be eligible for the Board of Education's Excellence in Civics Education Seal.

C. Parent(s) and a representative from the non-profit organization/person receiving the service must verify the student's participation in the activities. Hours will not be counted for activities that involve pay for services or that a family member is the recipient of the service.

D. School counselors will annually monitor the students' progress towards meeting the 50 hour requirement. Students will submit the Community Service Verification Form, which includes a reflective summary, to the counselor each year until the students have completed the 50 hours of service. Community Verification Summary form is available at [www.spsk12.net](http://www.spsk12.net) (parent and student pages).

E. The school superintendent may waive the community service requirement when there are extenuating circumstances. *Extenuating circumstances* shall mean student illness, death of a family member, student transfer to Suffolk Public Schools during their junior or senior year, homelessness, natural disaster, injury, or disability, which impacts the student's ability to reasonably satisfy the community service requirement.

(Issued: \_\_\_\_\_)

Legal Authority — School Board Policy Section 8-34.1

**Section 6-22.7 Fine Arts and Career and Technical Education.** – The Standard, Advanced Studies, and Modified Standard Diplomas each contain a requirement for one standard unit of credit in Fine Arts or Career and Technical Education. The Standards of Accreditation do not require that courses used to satisfy the requirement of Fine Arts or Career and Technical Education be approved by the Board. Therefore, local school officials should use their own judgment in determining which courses students must take to satisfy the requirement of a unit of credit in Fine Arts or Career and Technical Education for the Standard, Advanced Studies, and Modified Standard Diplomas.

**Legal Authority** — School Board Policy Section 8-34.1



September 4, 2012

Deran R. Whitney, Ed.D.  
*Superintendent*

Mrs. Anne Wescott  
Assistant Superintendent for Policy and Communications  
Virginia Department of Education  
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Richmond, VA 23218-2120

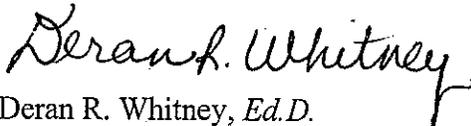
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