

Decision Brief: Categorize Diploma Expectations as “Standard Credits,” “Verified Competencies,” or “Requirements”

Background

The current diploma requirements include standard credits and verified credits as well as some additional requirements that are neither standard nor verified credits. The current *Standards of Accreditation (SOA)* define a standard credit as a “credit awarded for a course in which the student successfully completes 140 clock hours of instruction and the requirements of the course.” Local school boards may also develop alternatives to the requirement for 140 clock hours of instruction according to the Board guidelines adopted in October 2015.

The SOA defines a verified credit as “credit awarded for a course in which a student earns a standard unit of credit and achieves a passing score on a corresponding end-of-course SOL test or an additional test approved by the Board of Education as part of the Virginia assessment program.” The SOA also permits school divisions to award “locally awarded verified credits” according to [Board guidance](#) approved in 2006 and amended in 2011 (the locally awarded verified credit guidelines are in the comprehensive guidance document for the SOA).

In addition to standard and verified credits, the SOA currently includes certain diploma requirements that fall into neither the standard nor the verified credit category. For example, to earn either a standard or an advanced studies diploma, a student must also complete one virtual course that may be non-credit bearing and must be trained in emergency first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and the use of automated external defibrillators. Additionally, students who are pursuing a standard diploma are expected to earn a career and technical education credential. However, because these expectations do not have a “category label,” it has sometimes been unclear that there were diploma requirements outside the standard and verified credits.

Proposal for Consideration

As the Board proposes amendments to the graduation requirements, the Board is asked to consider adding a “requirements” category to the current structure of “standard credits” and “verified competencies” used in the strawman Virginia Diploma to describe the new diploma expectations. Standard credits would be earned through coursework completion, including integrated coursework, or through some other type of competency assessment, such as waiver of the 140 clock hours of seat time in order for a student to participate in a work experience resulting in specified outcomes for credit. Verified competencies would continue to require an additional “external” assessment, such as an SOL test, or documentation but the type of required “verification” might be expanded. The addition of the “requirements” category would clarify that some of the diploma expectations fall into neither the standard credit category nor the verified competency category. Diploma expectations categorized as “requirements” would be certified as having been met by the local school division.

Explanation

The Board is considering revising the standard credits and verified competencies required for students to earn a diploma. However, some of the other changes the Board is considering are neither standard credits nor verified competencies. For example, ensuring that students are

exposed to additional career exploration and planning, that they demonstrate proficiency in the “5 Cs” (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creative thinking, and citizenship), and that they complete a capstone project during their high school career might best be considered diploma “requirements” rather than standard credits or verified competencies.

Advantages of Action

- Categorizing the revised diploma expectations as standard credits, verified competencies, and other requirements will continue a structure that is familiar to school divisions. However, adding the category of “requirements” will serve to clarify that there are certain diploma expectations that are neither standard credits nor verified competencies.

Considerations

- School divisions may be concerned that the Board is adding requirements that have not previously been present. In explaining the new diploma structure to school divisions it may be helpful to point out that there are diploma requirements currently that are neither standard nor verified credits (e.g., completion of a virtual course, training in emergency first aid). However, because these expectations do not have a “category label,” it has sometimes been unclear that there were diploma requirements outside the standard and verified credits.

Legislation/SOL Innovations Committee Recommendations to Consider

The 2016 General Assembly passed and the Governor approved legislation (HB 895) which removes existing provisions related to standard and advanced studies diplomas and standard and verified units of credit, to provide flexibility to the Board of Education.

Stakeholder Summary

- Educators generally expressed support for moving from seat time requirements to competency in order to receive credits.
- Principals and teachers noted a desire to move away from the traditional method in which students earn standard and verified credits, but noted the challenge for some educators to adjust as the culture of testing and standard credits (140 clock hours) has been engrained for so long.

NEXT STEP

- Accept for Immediate Inclusion (First Review in June)
- Approve, but Not Ready for the Initial Phase
- Reject