



For Immediate Release

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Contact: Charles Pyle
Director of Communications
(804) 371-2420
Julie C. Grimes
Communications Manager
(804) 225-2775

Class of 2007 Meets Higher Diploma Standards

Advanced Diplomas Outnumber Standard Diplomas for Fourth Consecutive Year

The overall percentage of Virginia high school students who earned diplomas in 2007 was little changed from last year, despite an increase in rigor in the requirements for a Standard Diploma. Students in the class of 2007 were the first required to pass SOL tests in mathematics, history/social science and science — as well as the grade-level examinations in reading and writing required since 2004 — to earn a Standard Diploma.

For a fourth consecutive year, the percentage of Virginia students graduating with an Advanced Studies Diploma increased and the number of advanced diplomas awarded was greater than the number of Standard Diplomas. Students earned 40,200 Advanced Studies Diplomas, a number equal to 48.5 percent of high school seniors in 2007, compared with 48.2 percent in 2006 and 46.7 percent in 2005. Of the students awarded diplomas in 2007, 51.2 percent earned Advanced Studies Diplomas.

“The fact that a majority of our graduating seniors are earning a diploma originally intended for Virginia’s highest achieving students is another indication of the progress most of our high schools are making on the journey from competence to excellence,” said Governor Timothy M. Kaine.

“Virginia has raised the bar for graduation with diploma standards that provide an even firmer foundation for success at the post-secondary level and in the workplace,” said Superintendent of Public Instruction Billy K. Cannaday Jr. “Students have responded with higher levels of achievement.”

To receive an Advanced Studies Diploma, students must earn at least 24 standard credits by passing required courses and electives and also earn nine verified credits by passing end-of-course Standards of Learning (SOL) tests or substitute tests approved by the Board of Education, including tests in English reading and writing, two tests in mathematics, two tests in science, two tests in history and one test in a student-selected content area.

In 2007, 33,754, or 40.7 percent, of high school seniors earned a Standard Diploma, compared with 32,440, or 41.1 percent, in 2006. Students who sought a Standard Diploma during 2006-2007 were required to earn at least 22 credits by passing required courses and electives and pass SOL tests in reading and writing and at least one test in each of the other three content areas.

Career and technical students may earn two verified credits toward a Standard Diploma by completing a program sequence and passing a recognized certification or licensure examination. One of these may be substituted for a verified credit in either science or history and the other used as a student-selected verified credit.

(more)

Nearly 95 percent of the 82,901 seniors in the class of 2007 earned one of the five diplomas authorized by the Board of Education. The percentage earning a diploma in 2007, 94.6 percent, was little changed from last year's 94.9 percent. The number of students who earned diplomas in 2007 was equal to 73.5 percent of ninth-grade enrollment four years earlier, little changed from 73.8 percent in 2006.

"High schools across the state are implementing programs to engage students at risk of dropping out and not earning a diploma," said Board of Education President Mark E. Emblidge. "These programs will become even more important as the board amends the commonwealth's accreditation standards to hold high schools accountable for increasing graduation rates."

Commonwealth Scholars, Early College Scholars and Project Graduation

Commonwealth Scholars recognitions were earned by 870 students in 2007. Governor Kaine's Commonwealth Scholars program enlists business leaders to encourage students to exceed the minimum requirements for a Standard Diploma by completing the Commonwealth Scholars Core Course of Study. The program, which is coordinated by the Virginia Career Education Foundation, was launched in April 2006 as a pilot in 11 school divisions and has since expanded to include 14 divisions.

School divisions report that 8,157, or 20.3 percent, of the students who earned Advanced Studies Diplomas also qualified as Early College Scholars. The commonwealth's Early College Scholars program encourages students to earn up to a full semester of transferable college credit during high school while maintaining at least a "B" average and completing the requirements for an Advanced Studies Diploma.

Project Graduation, a General Assembly-funded initiative to assist students at risk of not meeting the commonwealth's diploma requirements, assisted 8,210 students in grades 9-12 last year through remedial academies and online tutorials in reading and algebra. School divisions report that 3,225 graduates earned diplomas in 2007 as a result of participating in Project Graduation.

More Students with Disabilities Earn Modified Standard Diplomas

For a third consecutive year, the number of students with disabilities earning a Special Diploma declined while the number of students with disabilities who earned the more rigorous Modified Standard Diploma increased. In 2007, 2,434, or 2.9 percent, of seniors earned a Special Diploma, compared with 2,501, or 3.2 percent, in 2006. Modified Standard Diplomas were earned by 2,065, or 2.5 percent of seniors, compared with 1,905, or 2.4 percent, in 2006. The Modified Standard Diploma was created by the Board of Education as a challenging alternative for students with disabilities. Students must earn 20 credits by successfully completing required courses and electives and pass tests in reading and mathematics.

Four General Achievement Diplomas were awarded in 2007, compared with 34 in 2006. Individuals who leave high school without earning a diploma and subsequently pass the GED examination receive General Achievement Diplomas. In addition to passing the GED, individuals receiving a General Achievement Diploma must be at least 18 years old and have earned a minimum of 20 credits while in high school, including four in English, three in mathematics, two in science and two in history. GEDs also were earned by 3,013 other students, and 432 students finished high school with a certificate of completion.

Graduation Rates and Online Report Cards

Estimated four-year graduation rates on the annual online report cards on the VDOE Web site are calculated using a federally prescribed formula that recognizes only Standard Diplomas and Advanced Studies Diplomas. Rates for the class of 2007 will be posted once all the data needed to calculate these rates are available.