



For Immediate Release
February 19, 2009

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

Board of Education Adds Graduation Benchmark to High School Accreditation Standards

New Accountability Requirement Effective in 2011-2012 School Year

The Board of Education today revised the commonwealth's accreditation standards to require high schools to meet an annual benchmark for graduation. The new accountability requirement — and others approved as part of a revision of the Standards of Accreditation (SOA) — will be phased in, beginning with accreditation ratings for the 2011-2012 school year.

“The measure of a high school includes its success in engaging students and keeping them on track for earning a diploma,” Board of Education President Mark E. Emblidge said. “The board's action today represents a significant enhancement of the commonwealth's accountability system.”

The board revised the commonwealth's accreditation standards to create a “graduation and completion index” that requires schools to meet a minimum benchmark to be fully accredited. The index awards:

- 100 points for students who graduate with a diploma;
- 75 points for students who earn a GED;
- 70 points for students who were in school for four or more years, did not earn a credential, and remain enrolled at the end of the year; and
- 25 points for students who finish high school with a certificate of program completion.

The weighted index points are totaled and then divided by the total number of students who earned a credential or stayed in school, plus all students in the adjusted cohort who dropped out or left school without earning a credential.

“The graduation and completion index holds schools accountable for all students and recognizes successful efforts to prevent students from dropping out,” Superintendent of Public Instruction Patricia I Wright said. “In today's economy, it is critical that young people complete high school with the knowledge and skills needed for success in college and the workplace.”

Beginning with accreditation ratings announced in the fall of 2011, high schools must earn a minimum of 85 points on the graduation and completion index — as well as achieve the required pass rates on state tests in English, history/social science, mathematics and science — for full accreditation. High schools that do not attain the minimum graduation benchmark, but meet all other requirements, can earn provisional accreditation until 2015 by achieving interim graduation benchmarks.

High schools that achieve the required pass rates but do not meet the provisional benchmarks for graduation and completion will be rated as accredited with warning.

(more)

The revision of the Standards of Accreditation incorporates several key elements of Governor Timothy M. Kaine's "competence to excellence" education agenda for public education into the regulations that define the commonwealth's accountability program for schools and students, including:

- Requiring schools to develop an Academic and Career Plan for every middle and high school student, beginning with students entering the seventh grade during the 2010-2011 school year;
- Prescribing rigorous requirements for the new Standard Technical Diploma and the new Advanced Technical Diploma; and
- Requiring students, beginning with students entering the ninth grade in 2010, to successfully complete a one credit course in economics and personal finance to earn the Standard, Advanced Studies, Standard Technical or Advanced Technical Diploma.

The revised accreditation regulations also delay by one year scheduled increases in rigor that were already in the regulations, including boosting the required pass rate in English for all grades from 70 to 75 percent.

Beginning with the 2011-2012 accreditation ratings (based on achievement during 2010-2011), a school will be rated fully accredited when students achieve a pass rate of 75 percent in English and 70 percent in history/social science, mathematics and science. A 75-percent pass rate already is required for accreditation for elementary schools.

"The board is sensitive to the budgetary challenges school divisions are facing," Dr. Emblidge said. "Delaying the implementation of new accountability measures gives school divisions additional time to develop plans and strategies for implementing new instructional requirements and meeting higher benchmarks."

###