GOVERNOR WARNER EXPANDS ONLINE SOL HELP FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
~Eight Project Graduation Regional Academies to open next month~

PETERSBURG – Governor Mark R. Warner today announced a significant expansion of his Project Graduation initiative to help students meet the Commonwealth's requirements for a high school diploma. The expansion includes statewide access to an online tutorial for high school seniors who have yet to pass the Standards of Learning (SOL) English reading test required for graduation, and replication statewide of last summer's successful regional academies. Governor Warner made the announcement at Petersburg High School, where eight of the 12 students who participated in a pilot of the online tutorial and subsequently took the SOL reading test passed.

"Project Graduation has put these students back on the path that leads to a high school diploma," said Governor Warner. "Our commitment to maintaining standards must be matched by a pledge to walk the extra mile with any student who is willing to do his or her part."

"Just as Virginia has led the way in raising standards for student achievement, the Commonwealth is now showing the nation how standards can be maintained by increasing opportunities for students," said Secretary of Education Belle S. Wheelan.

Chesterfield County Public Schools and the Princeton Review developed the Project Graduation Online Tutorial in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Education at the request of Governor Warner. After logging on to the tutorial through the Princeton Review's "homeroom.com" Web site, students take a diagnostic assessment that identifies their area or areas of instructional need. Students then are directed to appropriate online lessons and practice exercises. After successfully completing the tutorial and a post-tutorial readiness assessment, students retake the SOL reading test.

Enrollment in the tutorial for spring 2004 is open to all Virginia public school seniors scheduled to graduate in the spring or summer of 2004 who have not yet passed the English reading SOL assessment. The tutorial also will be open to qualifying rising seniors during the summer and fall 2004, based on spring SOL assessment results. Most students take the reading test during their junior year.

During the pilot of the online tutorial, 46 percent of the students who completed the tutorial and subsequently took the English reading SOL test passed the assessment.

"The results of the pilot demonstrate that the tailored remediation provided by the tutorial will enable a significant number of students to earn the verified units of credit in reading they need to graduate," said Superintendent of Public Instruction Jo Lynne DeMary. "We have learned that the tutorial is most effective when the progress of students is closely monitored by a trained facilitator. We also have added a readiness assessment to determine whether a student needs additional online instruction before retaking the English reading SOL test."

"Project Graduation recognizes that the needs of students vary," said Governor Warner. "Some students may require more than one session with the tutorial, while others may need more structured remediation through the academy approach pioneered last summer."

The expansion of Project Graduation includes the replication statewide this spring of last summer's successful Project Graduation regional academies in Lawrenceville, Farmville, and Charlotte Court House. Thirty-four of the 40 students who completed remedial courses in reading and algebra at the three pilot academies subsequently passed SOL tests in those subjects.

School divisions in each of the Commonwealth's eight educational regions formed partnerships to apply for Project Graduation grants of up to $75,000 to conduct the spring 2004 Project Graduation Academies. The eight academies will offer students remedial instruction in reading and algebra and multiple opportunities for retaking SOL tests in these subjects. School divisions are now enrolling students to participate in these programs.

School divisions also are in the process of preparing applications for grants to fund Project Graduation "Continuation Academies" this summer. These programs, if funded by the General Assembly, would provide remedial instruction and assessment opportunities for students who completed their senior year without earning standard or verified credits in reading, writing, or Algebra I.

"Any student who is willing to work over the summer and complete the requirements for a Standard Diploma should be able to do so," Governor Warner said. "The alternative is to sound the buzzer and tell these kids, 'Sorry, time's up.'"

Beginning with the class of 2004, students must earn at least six verified units of credit by passing SOL tests or other approved tests to graduate with a Standard Diploma. Two of the verified units of credit must be in English reading and writing. Students in the classes of 2004, 2005, and 2006 may lean on their strongest subjects, including career and technical education, in earning the other four verified units of credit. There is no limit on how many times a student may retake a test needed for graduation.

#