



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Office of the Governor

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Governor

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**GOVERNOR WARNER ANNOUNCES FINAL GRADUATION RATE FOR
CLASS OF 2004 AND RESULTS OF *PROJECT GRADUATION***

~2004 graduation requirement is first consequences milestone since SOLs adopted in 1995~

HENRICO COUNTY – Governor Mark R. Warner today announced that 72,115, or 94.3 percent, of the high school seniors who made up the class of 2004 graduated this year. Members of the class of 2004 were the first students required to pass Standards of Learning (SOL) tests to earn a diploma. The Governor made the announcement at Highland Springs High School in Henrico County.

The percentage of seniors who earned a diploma in 2004 is only two-tenths of a percentage point less than the previous five years' average of 94.5 percent. In 2003, 95.2 percent of the students in the senior class earned a diploma. In 2002, 94.3 percent of seniors earned a diploma – the same percentage as 2004, when the new graduation requirements took effect.

“These results show it is possible to now require achievement on the SOL tests to earn a high school diploma and not face a graduation crisis,” Governor Warner said. “Without our Project Graduation program, this percentage could have been much lower, and thousands of our seniors could have simply given up on a high school diploma.”

Looked at over the four years of high school, the percent of students enrolled in the 9th grade and graduating in 2004 was 73.5 percent. The average over the previous five years was 74.7 percent. The Virginia Department of Education (DOE) has contracted with the Commonwealth Education Policy Institute of Virginia Commonwealth University for a detailed analysis of the class of 2004.

PROJECT GRADUATION MADE A DIFFERENCE

In the spring of 2003, Governor Warner launched Project Graduation, an aggressive effort to identify and assist students at risk of not meeting the diploma requirements that became effective with the graduating class of 2004. “Project Graduation harnessed the best ideas from the field and put them to work for students across the state,” said Governor Warner.

- Pilot academies in reading, writing, and algebra -- modeled on a successful program in Chesterfield County -- were conducted in three Southside communities during the summer of 2003. The Virginia Department of Education then provided regional grants to partnerships of school divisions which conducted similar **Project Graduation Regional Academies** in the spring and summer of 2004.
- The department, in collaboration with Chesterfield County and the Princeton Review, also developed the **Project Graduation Online Tutorial** to prepare students for retakes of the SOL reading test, which most students take during their junior year. The tutorial was unveiled in February 2004, in time to help 1,077 seniors improve their reading skills and pass the test. Ninety-three percent of the students who used the online reading program passed the SOL reading test.

Students are required to pass SOL tests in reading and writing and earn four verified credits in subjects of their own choosing to receive a Standard Diploma. All told, **2,178 members of the class of 2004 earned Standard Diplomas after participating in one or more Project Graduation activities.**

SCHOOL DIVISIONS SERVE AS MODELS

Governor Warner also praised the efforts of school divisions who worked independent of Project Graduation to provide additional instruction and remediation for members of the class of 2004. School divisions such as Arlington County and Henrico County identified at-risk students during their junior years, and developed plans for each of these students to earn a diploma.

“The success of the class of 2004 demonstrates the wisdom of Governor Warner, the General Assembly, and the Board of Education in staying the course with the Standards of Learning, while providing flexibility for those students who need it,” said Board of Education President Thomas M. Jackson, Jr. “But also, Virginia’s teachers and local schools have put their hearts and souls into helping our young people meet these standards.”

MAJORITY EARN ADVANCED STUDIES DIPLOMAS

Another significant achievement of the Class of 2004 is that, for the first time since 2002 when Virginia began phasing-in higher graduation standards that include more rigorous course work, more students earned an Advanced Studies Diploma than a Standard Diploma. In 2004, 34,242 students earned Advanced Studies Diplomas and 33,809 students earned Standard Diplomas.

To earn an Advanced Studies Diploma, students must pass the required courses and pass a total of nine SOL tests (or substitute tests approved by the Board of Education), including two in English reading and writing, two in mathematics, two in science, and two in history. Students seeking a Standard Diploma must pass two tests in reading and writing, and earn four additional verified credits in subjects of their own choosing.

“The fact that more students graduated with advanced diplomas shows that higher academic standards are encouraging the development of a culture of achievement in Virginia’s high schools,” said Superintendent of Public Instruction Jo Lynne DeMary. “The increase in advanced diplomas corresponds with a sharp rise in the number of Virginia high school students taking Advanced Placement and other college-level courses.”

A FINAL OPTION TO GET A DIPLOMA

Project Graduation also offers regional “continuation academies” for students who do not get a diploma with their class, and desire to upgrade their ‘certificate of completion’ to a Standard Diploma. The academies offer additional instruction and tutorials to prepare students for retesting. Regional continuation academies conducted this summer enabled 114 students to earn Standard Diplomas.

The Department of Education, as part of Governor Warner’s Education for a Lifetime initiative, is working with school divisions and community colleges to establish “continuation high schools” to provide opportunities beyond the 12th grade for students to complete their diploma requirements and receive training toward an industry certification or other postsecondary credential.

“We are not only helping students through Project Graduation who otherwise might have called it quits during their junior or senior year,” said Secretary of Education Belle S. Wheelan. “We also are providing opportunities for students to complete their diploma requirements after they leave high school.”

PROJECT GRADUATION CONTINUES

The 2004 General Assembly approved funding for continuing Project Graduation to assist students in the graduating classes of 2005 and 2006. More than 900 students in this year’s senior and junior classes are currently receiving instruction and improving their reading skills with the Project Graduation Online Reading Tutorial. At Governor Warner’s direction, DOE is developing a companion online algebra tutorial to provide remedial instruction for students preparing for retakes of the Algebra I SOL test. The new online tutorial will be available next month.

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