



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Office of the Governor

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Governor

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GOVERNOR WARNER ANNOUNCES GRADUATION RATE FOR CLASS OF 2005

*~ Nearly half of graduates earn Advanced Studies diplomas ~
~ 2,639 benefit from Governor's Project Graduation initiative ~*

RICHMOND -- Governor Mark R. Warner today announced that 73,735, or 94.6 percent, of the high school seniors who made up the class of 2005 graduated this year. The class of 2005 was the second class of seniors required to pass Standards of Learning (SOL) tests to earn a standard or advanced diploma.

The percentage of seniors who earned a diploma in 2005 was slightly higher than the percentage for last year, when 94.2 percent of the seniors in the class of 2004 earned a diploma. The percentage of seniors who graduated with a diploma in 2005 was nearly identical to the average for the previous five years (94.5 percent).

Project Graduation, Governor Warner's aggressive initiative to help struggling students meet the Commonwealth's diploma standards, provided the extra instruction 2,639 students needed to earn a Standard Diploma. Project Graduation includes remedial academies during the school year and summer, and online tutorials to help students master the content needed to pass SOL tests in reading and Algebra I. The initiative's summer program expanded this year to include 22 regional academies offering remedial instruction in reading, writing, and algebra at 57 main and satellite sites across the state.

"Project Graduation has been essential to the success of the SOL reform," said Governor Warner. "By walking the extra mile with every student willing to put forth the effort required to earn a diploma, we have been able to maintain high standards and resist calls to retreat from accountability." The General Assembly has provided funding for Project Graduation through 2006.

"Project Graduation is an example of how educators are focused as never before on meeting the instructional needs of individual students," said Board of Education President Thomas M. Jackson, Jr. "Teachers and principals are tracking progress, assessing needs, and creating tailored programs for learning and success."

For a second consecutive year, more students graduated with an **Advanced Studies Diploma** than a Standard Diploma and the number of advanced diplomas issued rose by 2,142, or 6.3 percent. Advanced diplomas were earned by 36,380, or 46.7 percent, of last year's high school seniors, compared with 44.8 percent in 2004. Of the seniors who earned diplomas in 2005, 49.3 percent, earned advanced diplomas.

"The growing number of advanced diplomas reflects the increasing rigor of Virginia's high schools," said Governor Warner. "We are building on the foundation laid by the SOLs and challenging students through efforts such as the Early College Scholars program to achieve at even higher levels."

Early College Scholars is a component of Governor Warner's Education for a Lifetime initiative that 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. The graduating class of 2005 included 6,177 students who earned the Early College Scholars distinction.

To receive an Advanced Studies Diploma, students must earn at least 24 credits by passing the required courses and electives and pass nine 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, and two tests in history.

The increase in the number of Advanced Studies Diplomas awarded was accompanied by a decline in the number of **Standard Diplomas**. Students seeking a Standard Diploma must earn at least 22 credits by passing required courses and electives and pass tests in reading and writing, and four tests in subjects of their own choosing. In 2005, 33,049, or 42.4 percent, of high school seniors earned a Standard Diploma, compared with 33,707, or 44.1 percent, in 2004.

Advanced or standard diplomas were earned by 89.1 percent of last year's seniors, compared with 88.9 percent in 2004.

"The success of the class of 2005 demonstrates that Virginia's rigorous diploma requirements are sustainable," said Superintendent of Public Instruction Jo Lynne DeMary. "I congratulate every student in the class of 2005 who earned a diploma as well as the dedicated educators and parents who helped them achieve their goals."

The number of students with disabilities earning a **Special Diploma** declined in 2005 while the number of students with disabilities who earned the more rigorous Modified Standard Diploma increased. In 2005, 2,589, or 3.3 percent, of seniors earned a Special Diploma, compared with 2,620, or 3.4 percent, in 2004. **Modified Standard Diplomas** were earned by 1,701, or 2.2 percent, of high school seniors, compared with 1,435, or 1.9 percent, in 2004.

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. The requirements for a Modified Standard Diploma are more rigorous than those for the pre-SOL

Standard Diploma. The Modified Standard Diploma requires three credits in mathematics while the pre-SOL Standard Diploma required only two. The pre-SOL Standard Diploma also required students to pass the grade 6-level Literacy Passport Test while students must pass grade-8 SOL tests in reading and mathematics to earn a Modified Standard Diploma.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams decide whether a Modified Standard Diploma is an appropriate goal for a student with disabilities. The decision must include the written consent of the parent or guardian. A disabled student may decide at anytime before graduation to seek a standard or advanced diploma instead, and students seeking a Modified Standard Diploma may not be excluded from courses and tests needed to earn a standard or advanced diploma. A Special Diploma is awarded to students with disabilities who meet the objectives of their IEP.

Sixteen **General Achievement Diplomas** were awarded in 2005. Individuals who leave high school without earning a diploma and subsequently pass the GED examination receive General Achievement Diplomas. The General Achievement Diploma is not intended as a first option for high school students. In addition to passing the GED, individuals must be at least 18 years old and have earned a minimum of 20 credits while in high school, including 4 in English, 3 in mathematics, 2 in science, and 2 in history.

The number of students who earned diplomas in 2005 was equal to 73.6 percent of ninth-grade enrollment four years earlier, compared with 73.4 percent in 2004. Ninth-grade enrollment includes students who are retained in grade, or who are still classified as freshmen after completing one year of high school. On average, ninth-grade enrollment is about 10,850 students larger than grade-8 enrollment and about 14,080 students larger than enrollment in grade 10. This pattern is not unique to Virginia and predates SOL testing.

Virginia is one of ten states to receive \$2 million high school reform grants from the National Governors Association (NGA). The two-year grant, which must be matched with state funds, will allow Virginia and the other states to continue the work of Governor Warner's Redesigning the American High School Initiative. The initiative, launched by Governor Warner during his term as chairman of the NGA, lays out a 10-point agenda for reducing retention and dropout rates, increasing the rigor of high school, coordinating secondary and post-secondary education, and expanding opportunities for career and technical education students to earn industry certifications.

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