



#067-21

Commonwealth of Virginia
Virginia Department of Education
Superintendent's Memo #067-21

DATE: March 19, 2021
TO: Division Superintendents
FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction
SUBJECT: **New Guidance Regarding the Sequential Elective Graduation Requirement**

The purpose of this memorandum is to inform school divisions of recently approved flexibilities for meeting the sequential elective graduation requirement. Specifically, the Board of Education, at its March 18, 2021 meeting, revised guidance regarding the sequential elective requirement in its [Guidance Document Governing Certain Provisions of the Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia \(8VAC20-131\)](#) (DOCX) (referred to as the "SOA guidance document"). In addition, due to COVID-19, the Superintendent of Public Instruction has issued a [waiver of the sequential elective graduation requirement for students graduating in 2020-2021](#) who meet certain conditions.

The following list is a summarization of the updates regarding the sequential elective graduation requirement. Additional details on each provision are provided in the subsequent sections of this memo.

- **For those students graduating in the 2020-2021 school year**, a waiver of the sequential elective graduation requirement is available under certain conditions.
- **For those students graduating in the 2021-2022 or 2022-2023 school years**, a World Language course may be used to partially satisfy the sequential elective requirement (i.e. may be used as one of the two required sequential electives) while also being used as one of the courses to meet the World Language requirement for the Advanced Studies diploma or the World Language/Fine Arts/CTE requirement for the Standard diploma.

- **For all students**, a fine arts or career and technical education (CTE) course may be used to partially satisfy the sequential elective requirement (i.e. may be used as one of the two required sequential electives) while also being used as one of the courses to meet the Fine Arts/CTE requirement for the Advanced Studies diploma or the World Language/Fine Arts/CTE requirement for the Standard diploma. This reincorporates CTE courses as an option for partial satisfaction.
- **For all students**, certain two-credit courses can fulfill the sequential elective requirement.

To read the full text of the Board-approved guidance on the sequential elective graduation requirement, please see the [Guidance Document Governing Certain Provisions of the Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia](#) (DOCX):

- Sequential elective guidance for those students graduating under [8VAC20-131-50](#) (who entered ninth grade in prior to the 2018-2019 school year) is found on **pages 19-20**.
- Sequential elective guidance for those students graduating under [8VAC20-131-51](#) (who entered ninth grade in the 2018-2019 school year and thereafter) is found on **pages 41-42**.

On the [Virginia Department of Education website](#), the SOA guidance document is linked on the [Standards of Accreditation webpage](#), as well as the graduation requirements webpage for both the [Standard diploma](#) and the [Advanced Studies diploma](#).

Statutory and Regulatory Authority

Section [22.1-253.13:4\(D\)\(5\)](#) of the *Code of Virginia* (i.e. Standard 4 of the Standards of Quality) directs the Board of Education, in establishing graduation requirements, to **require all students** to complete two sequential elective courses. Accordingly, the Board of Education has incorporated this requirement into its graduation requirements in section [8VAC20-131-51](#) of its [Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia](#) (referred to as the [Standards of Accreditation](#)), effective with students who enter the ninth grade in the 2018-2019 school year and thereafter, for both the Standard and Advanced Studies diplomas.

It should be noted that, for those students who entered ninth grade prior to the 2018-2019 school year, the sequential elective is only a requirement for the Standard diploma, in accordance with [8VAC20-131-50](#) of the Standards of Accreditation.

Waiver of Sequential Elective Available for 2020-2021 Graduates

Due to the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in recognition of the impact the pandemic has had on course offerings, a waiver of the sequential elective graduation requirement for certain students graduating in the 2020-2021 cohort has been issued by the Superintendent of Public Instruction, in accordance with authority provided in [Item 143.I](#) of the Appropriation Act ([Chapter 1289](#)), and approved by the Secretary of Education. This waiver, along with other policy waivers related to COVID-19, is available on the [School State Policy Waivers webpage](#).

A waiver of the sequential elective graduation requirement is available to students who meet the following conditions:

- a. is graduating during the 2020-2021 school year, regardless of when they first entered high school;
- b. whose course of study was negatively impacted by school closures or the move to virtual instruction; and
- c. who has met all other graduation requirements including the number of credits required for each discipline area.

To the best of their ability, school divisions should work to provide opportunities for students to meet the sequential elective requirement. After consultation with the student and their parent/guardian, this waiver can be applied on a case-by-case basis.

Amendments to Board Guidance on Sequential Electives

On March 18, 2021, the Board of Education updated its guidance on the sequential elective graduation requirement in the [SOA guidance document](#). These changes include: (1) temporary flexibility to use a world language course in partial satisfaction; (2) the addition of CTE courses to the provision regarding partial satisfaction; and (3) clarification that two-credit courses can meet the requirement.

Temporary Flexibility for World Language as Partial Satisfaction

Sequential courses used to fulfill credits for graduation in other required discipline areas (e.g. World Language for the Advanced Studies diploma) cannot also be used to satisfy the sequential elective requirement. It recently came to the attention of VDOE staff that this principle was not widely understood. In response, the Board has amended its sequential elective guidance to provide temporary flexibility for those students who are most immediately at risk of being affected by this issue.

Accordingly, those students graduating in the 2021-2022 or 2022-2023 school years are now permitted to use a World Language course credit to partially satisfy the sequential elective requirement. Partial satisfaction is clarified in the SOA guidance document to mean that one course credit in World Language could be used to meet the discipline area requirement while also being used as one of the two required sequential electives. A student would still require an additional elective beyond the required discipline area courses to fully satisfy the sequential elective requirement. Examples are provided below:

- If using World Language courses to meet the sequential elective graduation requirement for the **Advanced Studies diploma**, per the new temporary flexibility:
 - students taking three credits of one language would need a total of four credits in World Language to meet both the sequential elective requirement and the World Language graduation requirement;
 - students taking two credits of two languages would require a third year of one of the languages to fulfill both the sequential elective requirement and the World Language requirement.
- If using World Language courses to meet the sequential elective graduation requirement for the **Standard diploma**, per the new temporary flexibility:
 - students would need a total of two credits in World Language, as well as one credit in fine or performing arts or career and technical education, to meet both the sequential elective requirement and the World Language, Fine Arts, or Career and Technical Education requirement.

Please note that World Language courses may not be used to partially satisfy the sequential elective requirement for those students graduating in the 2023-2024 school year and thereafter.

CTE Courses Added to Provision Regarding Partial Satisfaction

The updated SOA guidance document now states that either a fine arts or CTE course used to satisfy the World Language/Fine Arts/CTE graduation requirement for the Standard Diploma, or the Fine Arts/CTE requirement for the Advanced Studies Diploma may be used to partially satisfy the sequential elective requirement.

As used in this provision in the SOA guidance document, “partial satisfaction” refers to one course credit being permitted to count as one of the two required sequential elective course credits while also being used as one of the required Fine Arts/CTE course credits for the Standard diploma or World Language/Fine Arts/CTE course credits for the Advanced Studies diploma.

Previously, the SOA guidance document specified that only a fine arts course could be used in this way. The provision was amended to include CTE courses, as well.

Two-Credit Courses Permitted to Satisfy the Sequential Elective Requirement

Lastly, in response to frequent questions from school divisions, the updated guidance now includes a statement that a two credit course may be used to fulfill the sequential elective requirement.

Specifically, the guidance states that a two-credit course, regardless of content and as long as the courses are not specifically required for graduation, can fulfill the sequential elective graduation requirement if course content builds on itself and creates a foundation for further education or training or preparation for employment.

For more information

Please contact the Policy Office with any questions regarding this information at policy@doe.virginia.gov for more information at (804) 225-2092.