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| **Virginia Board of Education Agenda Item** | **Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia** |

# Agenda Item: H

## Date: September 23, 2021

### Title: First Review of Recommendations for School Division of Innovation (SDI) Designation

#### Presenter: Dr. Brendon Albon, Director of STEM and Innovation Michael Bolling, Assistant Superintendent for Learning and Innovation

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## Purpose of Presentation:

Action required by state or federal law or regulation.

**Executive Summary:**The 2017 Virginia General Assembly approved [House Bill 1981](https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?ses=171&typ=bil&val=hb1981) (Greason), directing the Virginia Board of Education (Board) to develop regulations for the designation of School Division of Innovation (SDI). To be eligible for designation, a local school board would submit a plan of innovation according to Board criteria as presented in the regulations. The legislation defined “innovation” as a new or creative alternative to existing instructional or innovative practices or school structures that evidence-based practice suggests will be effective in improving student learning and educational performance. A SDI is defined as a school division in which the local school board has developed and for which the Board has approved a plan of innovation to improve student learning; educational performance; and college, career, and citizenship readiness skills in one or more schools for the benefit of all schools in the school division.

Per this directive, the Board initiated the regulatory review process beginning on September 28, 2017. The proposed regulations went through a two-year regulatory process and the *Regulations Governing the Designation of School Divisions of Innovation*, [8VAC20-760](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter760/), went into effect on September 19, 2019.

The regulations established the procedure and criteria for the designation of a SDI and provided that the Superintendent of Public Instruction establish a format and timelines for local school boards to submit plans of innovation. The regulations included provisions to evaluate the performance of a SDI including revocation in the event that performance expectations, as included in the Goals and Performance Measures and Timeline sections, are not met.

The intent of the SDI designation is to encourage public school divisions to develop a divisionwide plan of action to challenge current methods and strategies in order to support the academic success of all students and educators. The plan for transformation may be small steps leading to larger changes or may be a complete overhaul of current structures and practices.

**Application Components**

School division applications for the SDI designation included the following components:

* Rationale for Change;
* Description of Innovations;
* Goals and Measurement;
* Training and Support;
* Collaboration and Strategic Partnerships;
* Communication;
* Evaluation and Reflection; and
* Timeline and Plan for Sustainability.

**Evaluation**

Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) staff members served on teams that provided multiple evaluations of school division applications using a rubric.

**School Divisions Recommended for the School Division of Innovation Designation**

The following school divisions are recommended for the School Divisions of Innovation Designation (SDI):

* Bristol City Public Schools
* Dinwiddie County Public Schools
* Fairfax County Public Schools
* Fauquier County Public Schools
* Frederick County Public Schools

As established in the regulations, SDI are required to submit to the VDOE an annual report that provides information demonstrating progress toward meeting the goals and performance targets included in the approved plan of innovation. SDI will maintain their designation for three years.

**Requests for Flexibilities or Waivers of Regulatory Provisions**

Pursuant to the regulation, a “SDI shall be exempted from selected regulatory provisions and permitted to adopt alternative policies for school administrators, teachers, and staff to meet the diverse needs of students.” The regulations prohibited any exemptions to regulations that are mandated by state or federal law or are designed to promote health or safety, special education regulations, and certain provisions in the Standards of Accreditation. Areas in which flexibility were requested include:

* teacher licensure requirements;
* graduation requirements; and
* use of performances assessments in lieu of SOL assessments.

Included in the request for flexibilities is a specific request from three SDI – one designated previously in 2020 and two divisions pending designation in 2021 per Board approval. Staunton City Public Schools (2020 designation), Fairfax County Public Schools (2021–pending designation), and Fauquier County Public Schools (2021–pending designation) request authorization to apply certain alternative policies under the Regulations for Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia (8VAC20-131) for the years that the division is identified as a SDI. Specifically, the three SDI are requesting flexibility regarding the requirement that students take the SOL test in Virginia Studies, Civics and Economics, and Grade 8 Writing, as required in 8VAC20-131-30 such that the local alternative assessments (LAA) including performance assessments may be used in lieu of the SOL test in each of these content areas.

A final request for flexibility comes from Fairfax County Public Schools (2021–pending designation) and Fauquier County Public Schools (2021–pending designation) in the area of locally awarded verified credits in history/social science. The revisions to the Locally Awarded Verified Credit Guidelines, pending approval by the Board at the September 23, 2021, meeting, allow school divisions the option of using performance assessments for locally awarded verified credit in history/social science. School divisions pursuing this option must administer state-developed performance tasks and score the resulting student responses using a state-developed rubric. At this time, there are no state-developed tasks available for World History to 1500, World History: 1500 to the Present or World Geography. However, state-developed tasks for these courses are being piloted during the 2021-2022 school year. Fairfax County Public Schools and Fauquier County Public Schools are asking for flexibility to pilot state-developed tasks and use student responses to these state-developed tasks as part of the evidence considered in granting locally awarded verified credit in these courses. As a condition of this flexibility, Fairfax and Fauquier agree to administer a minimum number of state-developed tasks and to submit a minimum number of student samples to VDOE to be used in developing training materials for school divisions and to comply with other requirements as determined by VDOE. Failure to comply with these conditions will result in the loss of the flexibility to use the piloted state-developed performance tasks in World History to 1500, World History: 1500 to the Present or World Geography to grant locally awarded verified credits in history/social science.

**Action Requested:**

Other. Specify below:

The Board is requested to waive first review and approve the designation of School Division of Innovation to the recommended school divisions. In addition, the Board is requested to approve the requested specific flexibilities for three SDI, as indicated in the item.   
  
**Superintendent’s Recommendation:**   
The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education waive first review and approve the designation of School Division of Innovation to recommended school divisions. In addition, the Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends approval of the requested specific flexibilities for three SDI, as indicated in the item.

## Rationale for Action:

School division applications were evaluated using a common rubric by teams of internal staff reviewers with oversight and review. Specific flexibilities have been reviewed by internal staff.

## Previous Review or Action:

No previous review or action.

**Background Information and Statutory Authority:**   
Pursuant to [Chapter 760 of the 2017 Acts of Assembly](https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?171+ful+CHAP0760), the Board was directed to develop the Regulations Governing the Designation of School Divisions of Innovation. The Board initiated the regulatory review process beginning on September 28, 2017. The proposed regulations went through a two-year regulatory process and the *Regulations Governing the Designation of School Divisions of Innovation*, [8VAC20-760](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter760/), went into effect on September 19, 2019.

[8VAC20-760-20](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter760/section20/) of the *Regulations Governing the Designation of School Divisions of Innovation* outlines the process for school divisions to apply for this designation.

**8VAC20-760-20. School Division of Innovation Designation.**

A. Any local school board may apply to the board for the local school division to be designated as an SDI.

B. Pursuant to a plan of innovation, an SDI shall be exempted from selected regulatory provisions and permitted to adopt alternative policies for school administrators, teachers, and staff to meet the diverse needs of students.

C. An application for an SDI designation shall consist of a plan of innovation for the local school division, following a format prescribed by the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The plan of innovation shall include:

1. Goals and performance targets that may include:

a. Reducing achievement and opportunity gaps among groups of public school students by expanding the range of engaging and relevant learning experiences for students who are identified as academically low-achieving;

b. Increasing student learning through the implementation of high, rigorous standards for student performance and balanced assessments that measure both student growth and achievement;

c. Creating opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery of learning at different points in the learning process based on readiness;

d. Increasing student participation in opportunities that enhance students' preparation for college, career, and citizenship;

e. Increasing the number of students who are college, career, and citizenship ready;

f. Increasing opportunities for students to learn from content experts through integrated course opportunities; or

g. Motivating students at all levels by offering additional curricular choices, personalized learning opportunities, and relevant student learning experiences such as community service projects, internship opportunities, and job shadowing;

2. Divisionwide and school-level policies that will lead students to be better prepared for success in work and life;

3. A description of the ways in which designatedschools will incorporate innovative practices;

4. A description of how schools in the division will benefit from innovative practices and share experiences and practices for application in other schools;

5. The incorporation of relevant professional development;

6. Evidence of collaboration, support, and shared leadership among teachers in the school division;

7. Evidence of the support and engagement of educators, parents, the local community, and the local business community in the development of the plan of innovation and of the capacity of such individuals and entities to support the implementation of innovation;

8. Any requests for exemptions from regulatory provisions as provided in [8VAC20-760-30](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter760/section30/), including the rationale for such exemptions and alternative policies; and

9. Specific measures of student success that may include alternate assessments or approved substitute tests that will be used to determine if students have met graduation requirements, as applicable.

D. Applications for SDI designation shall conform to a format and timeline prescribed by the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Thetimeline shall include deadlines for (i) a preapplication conference to be held with staff if any exemptions are requested and (ii) submission for consideration by the board.

The regulations established the procedure and criteria for the designation of a SDI and provided that the Superintendent of Public Instruction establish a format and timelines for local school boards to submit plans of innovation. The regulations included provisions to evaluate the performance of a SDI including revocation in the event that performance expectations, as included in the Goals and Performance Measures and Timeline sections, are not met.

The intent of the SDI designation is to encourage public school divisions to develop a divisionwide plan of action to challenge current methods and strategies in order to support the academic success of all students and educators. The plan for transformation may be small steps leading to larger changes or may be a complete overhaul of current structures and practices.

**Application Components**

School division applications for the SDI designation included the following components:

* Rationale for Change;
* Description of Innovations;
* Goals and Measurement;
* Training and Support;
* Collaboration and Strategic Partnerships;
* Communication;
* Evaluation and Reflection; and
* Timeline and Plan for Sustainability.

**Evaluation**

Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) staff members served on teams that provided multiple evaluations of school division applications using a rubric that included the following components:

* Strength of evidence presented to support the rationale for change and the alignment to the innovations proposed;
* Alignment of goals and performance outcomes to the practices, strategies, and innovations proposed in the application and include how the innovations will meet the requirements established by legislation;
* Demonstrated understanding of necessary components (communication, professional learning, partnerships, and resources) that must function together as a system to bring about the innovation;
* Description of a comprehensive evaluation to assess effectiveness of goals and performance outcomes for innovations;
* Extent to which the application meets the definition and intent of an innovative school division; and
* Extent to which the innovative school/division model or practices are inclusive to all students and is able to be replicated and sustained over time.

**School Divisions Recommended for the School Division of Innovation Designation**

The following list highlights selected initiatives from each of the five school divisions recommended for designation as a SDI.

* **Bristol City Public Schools**
  + Implementing “Bearcat Bridge” a divisionwide initiative that supports students as they prepare for life after high school starting in elementary school through high school. The notable outcome of the program being that every graduating senior will have a post-high school designation: college, military, or workforce assignment.
  + Developing Multiple arms of “Bearcat Bridge:”
    - *Chamber Seal of Excellence* – a workforce ready diploma that indicates to potential future employers a student has attributes of a successful employee (strong leadership skills, industry credentials, strong attendance, etc.)
    - *Bearcat Bridge Advisory* – monthly meeting for all high school students to build skills to enter the workforce such as résumé building, interview skills
    - *Senior Mentorships* – mentorship program for seniors to help with post-high school life
    - *Career Café* – work-based learning opportunities to bring like-minded students sharing similar career interests to hear from a representative in the field
    - *Career Launch* – increasing opportunities for job shadowing and internships
    - *Cars for Careers* – increasing access to transportation for employment opportunities
* **Dinwiddie County Public Schools**
  + Designing an innovative Workforce Ready Diploma Seal that provides a model and pathway to ensure students are competitive and can access high-quality employment beyond high school. Through the workforce-ready program, the students will earn a diploma seal that will signify to partnering businesses and industries that Dinwiddie County High School students have the skills needed to enter the workforce.
  + Engaging student and school staff in progressing toward the attainment of the Workforce Ready Diploma. Students earn points across multiple standards: absence, advanced coursework, attendance, career and technical education coursework, career and technical student organization competition, discipline, drug-free, industry awareness, industry certification, overall grade point average, tardiness, work-based learning and workplace experience.
  + Engaging students, staff, parents, and other community stakeholders in the success of the Workforce Ready Diploma through an array of settings to communicate information and opportunities related to the Workforce Ready Diploma.
* **Fairfax County Public Schools**
  + Implementing Fairfax County Public Schools Portrait of a Graduate (POG) that strives to support equity in access, opportunity, and outcomes for ***all*** students, and not just “pockets of excellence” in the county.
  + Measuring performance on end-of-year POG Presentations of Learning that require students to curate evidence of learning and growth in POG attributes over time in a portfolio, engage in feedback processes, share learning experiences and goals with an authentic audience (e.g., teachers, families, peers, and community members), andengage students in the assessment process leading to achievement.
* **Fauquier County Public Schools**
  + Empowering Learners by shifting to a more interdisciplinary learning approach that builds on the traditional Project-Based Learning approach and incorporates a new level of application of learning and concentrates on competency-based learning opportunities that foster creativity, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and citizenship.
    - Freshman Experience will provide opportunities for students to meet state requirements in English, History and Social Science, Math and Science by integrating courses and providing more space in their schedules for more authentic learning experiences in their junior and senior years.
    - Expanding Project Empower to all three high schools. Through Empower, teachers have been trained in implementing standards-based grading, which will continue to showcase student mastery in all subject areas, reformulating how we assess our students. Students will have the opportunity to share their favorite learning experience from the year in a student-led professional conference.
  + Achieving career readiness through creating a program that will immerse students in job opportunities to help them create greater connection with how their education will prepare them and motivate them to accomplish their education and life goals.
* **Frederick County Public Schools**
  + Developing and implementing a pilot Self-Determined Learning (SDL) program in one elementary, one middle, and one high school.
    - Elementary School: self-determination will be facilitated through student voice and choice (autonomy), authenticity (relatedness), and greater application to student learning (competence). Additionally, extend our focus on Social/Emotional Learning that is already being implemented in 2020-2021 to encourage the importance of self-care, taking risks in the classroom, and being comfortable with FAILing (First Attempt In Learning).
    - Middle School will implement an innovative instructional model that focuses on self-regulated and self-determined learning. This experience will be called The NEXT Project (**N**ext Gen **E**ducational e**X**periential **T**eam). This team of scholars and teachers will take an interdisciplinary problem solving approach to learning that promotes the development of the self-regulated learning skills scholars need to learn how to learn.
    - High School will pilot a new and exciting instructional model named RISE (**R**esearch, **I**ndependent **S**tudy, and **E**xploration), will provide an independent learning experience where students blended across grades 10-12, will conduct research and engage in independent studies and exploration in cross-curricular classes.

The ultimate goal is to have students motivated, more autonomous, and engaged in the learning process through increased learning opportunities for all participating students in the Fauquier’s Portrait of a Graduate competencies (communication, collaboration, critical thinking & problem-solving, creativity & innovation, flexibility adaptability & resilience, learning how to learn, and social & cultural empathy).

As established in the regulations, SDI are required to submit to the VDOE an annual report that provides information demonstrating progress toward meeting the goals and performance targets included in the approved plan of innovation. SDI will maintain their designation for three years.

**Requests for Flexibilities or Waivers of Regulatory Provisions**

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**Timetable for Further Review/Action:**  
Following Board approval, VDOE staff will notify local school divisions of the status of their application to be designated a School Division of Innovation.

## Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources:

No fiscal or human resource impact.