| **Virginia Board of Education Agenda Item** | **Seal of the Commonwealth of Virginia** |
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# Agenda Item: G

## Date: November 19, 2020

### Title: Final Review of Revisions to the Emergency Guidelines for Locally Awarded Verified Credits Due to COVID-19

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## Purpose of Presentation:

Action required by Board of Education regulation.

Executive Summary:  
Many of Virginia’s local school divisions have begun their 2020-2021 academic year remotely, whether entirely or in part, to help maintain the health and safety of their school communities amid ongoing pandemic conditions. Regardless of modality, divisions are still responsible for providing new instruction to their students and many statutory and regulatory requirements, including assessments, remain in place for the 2020-2021 school year in order to maintain consistent and quality standards of education across the Commonwealth.

Students continue to adapt to new and evolving instructional models but there remains concern about the impact this type of instructional change may have on Standards of Learning (SOL) end-of-course assessment performance this fall. For high school students, assessment performance also becomes a potential impediment to earning a verified credit needed for graduation.

As currently in effect, the Board of Education’s *Emergency Guidelines for Locally Awarded Verified Credits* remove some of the barriers to accessing a locally-awarded verified credit (LAVC) for those students directly impacted by the extended school closures in the spring and summer of 2020. The proposed *Emergency Guidelines*, presented below, extend some of the same flexibilities to certain students who continue to be impacted by ongoing pandemic conditions in the fall of 2020.

Further, the proposed *Emergency Guidelines* create an additional pathway to the award of LAVCs in history and social science for those school divisions with the capacity to administer local performance assessments. This option encourages school divisions to build and/or grow their capacity to administer performance assessments in history and social science, allows teachers to assess in dynamic ways, and creates a foundation for the use of this type of assessment model in the future.

The proposed *Emergency Guidelines* are a companion to the Board’s *Regulations Establishing Standards for the Accreditation of Public Schools –* or Standards of Accreditation – and supplement the *Guidance Document Governing Certain Provisions of the Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia.* The latter document as well as the Standards of Accreditationremain in effect for the purpose of awarding locally-awarded verified credits for students who do not meet the exemption criteria.

## Action Requested:

Final review: Action requested at this meeting.

Superintendent’s Recommendation:   
The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education waive first review and approve the revised *Emergency Guidelines for Locally Awarded Verified Credits* for immediate implementation.

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## Rationale for Action:

By adopting the revised *Emergency Guidelines: Locally-Awarded Verified Credits*, the Board offers support to students whose ability to earn a verified credit through existing pathways may be hindered by the unique and ongoing impact of COVID-19 in fall of 2020. Additionally, the *Emergency Guidelines* promote the strengthening of local capacity in the administration of performance assessments in history and social science.

## Previous Review or Action:

Previous review and action. Specify date and action taken below:

Date: June 18, 2020

Action: Final Review of E*mergency Guidelines for Locally Awarded Verified Credits* due to COVID-19.

Background Information and Statutory Authority:   
The *Code of Virginia* establishes the Board of Education’s authority to prescribe graduation requirements.

§ [22.1-253.13:4](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title22.1/chapter13.2/section22.1-253.13:4/) of the *Code of Virginia*:

A. Each local school board shall award diplomas to all secondary school students, including students who transfer from nonpublic schools or from home instruction, who meet the requirements prescribed by the Board of Education and meet such other requirements as may be prescribed by the local school board and approved by the Board of Education. …

The Standards of Accreditation set out the number of verified credits a high school student needs to earn for either a Standard or Advanced Diploma ([8VAC20-131-50](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter131/section50/) and [8VAC20-131-51](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter131/section51/)). For students entering high school prior to 2018-2019, students must earn either 6 or 9 verified credits, depending on diploma type. For student entering high school after 2018-2019, students must earn 5 verified credits for either diploma.

Verified credits can be earned through one of three pathways (or four pathways for writing). [8VAC20-131-110](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter131/section110/) states, in part:

8VAC131-20-110

B. A "verified unit of credit" or "verified credit" is a credit awarded for a course in which a student earns a standard unit of credit and completes one of the following:

1. Achieves a passing score on a corresponding end-of-course SOL test. In accordance with the provisions of the Standards of Quality, students may earn a standard and verified unit of credit for any elective course in which the core academic Standards of Learning course content has been integrated and the student passes the related end-of-course SOL test. Such course and test combinations must be approved by the board.

Upon waiver of the 140-clock-hour requirement according to board guidelines, qualified students who have received a standard unit of credit shall be permitted to sit for the relevant SOL test to earn a verified credit without having to meet the 140-clock-hour requirement.

2. Achieves a passing score on an additional test, as defined in 8VAC20-131-5, as a part of the Virginia Assessment Program.

3. Meets the criteria for the receipt of a locally awarded verified credit when the student has not passed a corresponding SOL test.

a. Students who enter the ninth grade for the first time prior to the 2018-2019 school year and do not pass SOL tests in science or history and social science may receive locally awarded verified credits from the local school board in accordance with criteria established in guidelines adopted by the board. Credit accommodations for students with disabilities may be used to confer locally awarded verified credits as provided in 8VAC20-131-50 B 3.

b. Students who enter the ninth grade for the first time in the 2018-2019 school year or thereafter and do not pass SOL tests in English, mathematics, laboratory science, or history and social science may receive locally awarded verified credits from the local school board in accordance with criteria established in guidelines adopted by the board. No more than one locally awarded verified credit may be used to satisfy graduation requirements, except as provided in 8VAC20-131-51 B 3 for students with disabilities seeking a standard diploma.

4. Meets the criteria for the receipt of a verified credit in English (writing) by demonstrating mastery of the content of the associated course on an authentic performance assessment, that complies with guidelines adopted by the board. Such students shall not also be required to take the corresponding SOL test in English (writing).

The Board of Education’s *Guidance Document Governing Certain Provisions of the Regulations Establishing Standards For Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* clarify these regulatory requirements. Among the relevant clarifications are that students must attempt, unsuccessfully, the corresponding SOL test at least twice and score within the 375-399 range in order to be eligible for a locally-awarded verified credit. Students under graduation requirements in 8VAC20-131-50 may earn no more than three locally-awarded verified credits which may only be applied towards a Standard Diploma.

Section 8VAC20-131-51 establishes the cap of one locally-awarded verified credit for students beginning ninth grade in 2018-2019 or beyond.

8VAC20-131-51

B. Requirements for a Standard Diploma.

…

2. Credits required for graduation with a Standard Diploma.

…

No more than one locally awarded verified credit may be used to satisfy these requirements, except as provided in subdivision 3 of this subsection for credit accommodations for students with disabilities.

C. Requirements for an Advanced Studies Diploma.

…

No more than one locally awarded verified credit may be used to satisfy these requirements.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction and Virginia Board of Education have established clear expectations that new instruction resume in 2020-2021 (in addition to recovering any content lost in the spring) and that many statutory and regulatory requirements related to instruction, including assessments, will remain in place. The proposed *Emergency Guidelines* align with the intent of these expectations; they maintain the division’s accountability in providing new instruction, require students to attempt the SOL end-of-course test in certain subject areas, and ensure a measure of student mastery of the content before awarding a verified credit.

The proposed *Emergency Guidelines* also recognize that students may have difficulty adapting to new and evolving instructional modalities and therefore, may not be able to perform as well on assessments this fall as they may have in other conditions. With the *Emergency Guidelines*, certain students enrolled in a high-school credit bearing course that is eligible for a verified credit in fall 2020 may access the same flexible LAVC process made available in earlier iterations of the document. To be eligible, students must have passed the course, have attempted the associated SOL end-of-course assessment at least once, and scored within a modified range (between 350 and 399).

For students seeking a verified credit in history and social science, divisions may offer two pathways to earning an LAVC based on the division’s local capacity to offer local performance assessments. For those divisions unable to offer local performance assessments in history and social science, students are still required to attempt the associated SOL end-of-course assessment at least once and score within a modified range (between 350 and 399) to use the revised LAVC process. For divisions able to incorporate history and social science local performance assessments as part of the revised LAVC process, students are not required to attempt the associated SOL end-of-course assessment. By incentivizing the use of history and social science local performance assessments, teachers are able to assess more dynamically, and divisions are encouraged to build and/or grow their capacity in the administration of performance assessments, both of which help to establish a foundation for the use of this type of assessment model in the future.

For all eligible students, the locally-awarded verified credits earned via these guidelines would not be applied towards the cap as set out in 8VAC20-131-51, 8VAC20-131-110, or in the *Guidance Document Governing Certain Provisions of the Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia* as it applies to students under graduation requirements in 8VAC20-131-50.

This document is a supplement to the Board’s *Guidance Document Governing Certain Provisions of the Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia.* The latter document as well as the Standards of Accreditationremain in effect for the purpose of awarding locally-awarded verified credits for students not meeting the eligibility criteria as enumerated in the emergency guidelines. Additionally, assuming Board approval, the Superintendent of Public Instruction will issue waivers related to the award of verified credits, and conditions on local performance assessments in history and social science to allow for the implementation of the *Emergency Guidelines*.

Timetable for Further Review/Action:  
Upon Board approval, and any technical or editorial edits by Department staff, the *Emergency Guidelines* will be posted to Town Hall and become available to local school divisions for determining the award of verified credits for students in the 2020-2021 graduating cohort and beyond.

## Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources:

There are no costs associated with the development and dissemination of the *Emergency Guidelines*.