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

## Date: June 28, 2018

### Title: First Review of a Request for Increased Graduation Requirements from Buena Vista City Public Schools

#### Presenter: Mr. Zachary Robbins, Director of Policy

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## Purpose of Presentation:

Action required by state or federal law or regulation.

## Executive Summary:

Buena Vista City Public Schools (BVCPS) requests Board of Education approval of an additional local graduation requirement, to require all freshmen to take the Information Technology Fundamentals (IT Fundamentals) course beginning in the 2019-2020 school year.

BVCPS proposes requiring all ninth-graders to take this career and technical education (CTE) course to support implementation of the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate* and the 2017 Computer Science Standards of Learning (SOL), unless an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determines otherwise. Through discussions and surveys with local industries and students, BVCPS identified that students were not developing adequate technology skills that are needed for the workplace, such as problem solving, communication, and collaboration. BVCPS proposes this graduation requirement to address the need for these skills by providing all students with computer literacy skills needed for academic and career success.

This request supports several of the goals identified in the Board of Education’s Comprehensive Plan, including the promotion of educational equity for all students, and successful implementation of the Profile of a Virginia Graduate. Specifically, the Plan guides the Board to

“[a]dvance policies that expand equitable learning opportunities” and “reduce barriers to technology access.” The Plan also directs the Board to “[e]nsure rigorous standards to promote college, career, and civic readiness” and to “[r]eview and identify best practices, and promising approaches that would benefit local school divisions.” BVCPS suggests in its proposal that the additional graduation requirement will “level the digital playing field for all students” and further a “student culture of equality and inclusion.”

Additionally, the request is consistent with relevant state law and Board of Education regulations and guidance.

## Action Requested:

Action will be requested at a future meeting. Specify anticipated date below:

July 26, 2018

## Superintendent’s Recommendation:

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends the Board of Education receive this request for first review.

## Previous Review or Action:

No previous review or action.

## Background Information and Statutory Authority:

Section 22.1-253.13:4 of the *Code* (Standard Two of the *SOQ*), authorizes the Board of Education to prescribe graduation requirements and to approve any other graduation requirements prescribed by local school boards:

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 *Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia,* or *Standards of**Accreditation (SOA)*, in 8 VAC20-131-50, include a provision that requires Board of Education approval of all additional graduation requirements above those prescribed in the standards.

A. The requirements for a student to earn a diploma and graduate from a Virginia high school shall be those in effect when that student enters the ninth grade for the first time. Students shall be awarded a diploma upon graduation from a Virginia high school…

The following requirements shall be the only requirements for a diploma, unless a local school board has prescribed additional requirements that have been approved by the Board of Education. All additional requirements prescribed by local school boards that have been approved by the Board of Education remain in effect until such time as the local school board submits a request to the board to amend or discontinue them…

On October 26, 2006, the Board adopted *Guidelines Governing Certain Provisions of the Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*, which includes guidance about additional graduation requirements prescribed by local school boards, including the following guidance:

**Standard Diploma:** Generally, the Board will approve requests from local school divisions to require up to two additional local credits to obtain the Standard Diploma, up to a maximum of 24 required credits.

Generally, the Board will approve local requests for additional graduation credit requirements in the core discipline areas of the Standards of Learning (English, mathematics, science or history/social science). For example, a local request to add one additional credit requirement in history and one in science would generally be approved, because that would not exceed a total graduation credit requirement of 24 and those credits are in the core disciplines.

Requests for additional local credits in disciplines outside the core discipline areas will be considered on a case-by-case basis. In evaluating requests for additional local graduation credits outside the core discipline areas, the Board generally may consider, among other criteria, a local school division's graduation and dropout rates and its students’ performance on the Standards of Learning tests.

**Advanced Studies Diploma:** Generally, the Board will approve requests from local school divisions for local additional credits required for the Advanced Studies Diploma above the 24 contained in the standards if the credits are in the discipline areas of English, mathematics, science, history/social studies, fine arts (including performing arts), career and technical education, or foreign language. The Board will consider credits outside these disciplines on a case-by-case basis.

**Transfer Students:** Any local school division receiving approval to increase its course credit requirements may not deny either the Standard or Advanced Studies Diploma to any transfer student who has otherwise met the requirements contained in the standards, if the transfer student can only meet the division's requirements by taking a heavier than normal course load in any semester, by taking summer school, or by taking courses after the time when he or she otherwise would have graduated.

**Prospective Application/Advance Notice:** A local school division’s additional credit requirements should apply only to students who have not yet entered ninth grade at the time the additional credits are approved.

**Allocation of Electives:** Generally, the Board will approve requests from local school divisions to allocate elective credits for local prescribed course requirements, while reducing the number of electives by an equal amount so that the total number of graduation credit requirements remains unchanged.

For the Standard Diploma, generally the Board will approve allocations of electives to prescribed credits in the core discipline areas of English, mathematics, science, or history/social studies. Requests to allocate electives for prescribed credits outside of the core disciplines will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

For the Advanced Studies Diploma, generally the Board will approve allocations of electives to prescribed credits in the discipline areas of English, mathematics, science, history/social studies, fine arts (including performing arts) or career and technical education, or foreign language. Requests to allocate electives for prescribed credits outside of these disciplines will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Generally, in addition, a local school division may offer, as an option to students, the opportunity to pursue concentrated courses of study by taking related courses in a specialty area (for example, career and technical education, fine or performing arts), or to choose to take a variety of elective courses. Offering such options shall not require Board approval so long as choosing a particular concentration of elective courses is not mandatory for graduation.

The attached request from BVCPS describes how the proposed new graduation requirement aligns with the Board’s guidance for approving additional graduation requirements, specifically:

* The number of credits required to graduate will remain unchanged, because the IT Fundamentals course would count toward one of the four elective credits required for a Standard diploma or the three elective credits required for an Advanced Studies diploma.
* The requirement would only be applicable to incoming ninth graders in the 2019-2020 school year and beyond.
* Transfer students would not be required to take the course if they transfer during or after the ninth-grade year.

Timetable for Further Review/Action:   
This item will be presented to the Board of Education for final review on July 26, 2018.

## Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources:

The administrative impact of this request is expected to be minimal.