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1 **HOUSE BILL NO. 428**

2 Offered January 14, 2026

3 Prefiled January 12, 2026

4 *A BILL to amend and reenact § 22.1-253.13:4 of the Code of Virginia, relating to high school graduation*  
5 *requirements; alternative pathway to standard diploma established; report.*

6 Patron—LeVere Bolling

7 Committee Referral Pending

8 **Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**9 **1. That § 22.1-253.13:4 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:**10 **§ 22.1-253.13:4. Standard 4. Student achievement and graduation requirements.**11 A. Each local school board shall award diplomas to all secondary school students, including students who  
12 transfer from nonpublic schools or from home instruction, who meet the requirements prescribed by the  
13 Board and meet such other requirements as may be prescribed by the local school board and approved by the  
14 Board. Provisions shall be made to facilitate the transfer and appropriate grade placement of students from  
15 other public secondary schools, from nonpublic schools, or from home instruction as outlined in the standards  
16 for accreditation. The standards for accreditation shall include provisions relating to the completion of  
17 graduation requirements through Virtual Virginia. Further, reasonable accommodation to meet the  
18 requirements for diplomas shall be provided for otherwise qualified students with disabilities as needed.19 In addition, each local school board may devise, vis-a-vis the award of diplomas to secondary school  
20 students, a mechanism for calculating class rankings that takes into consideration whether the student has  
21 taken a required class more than one time and has had any prior earned grade for such required class  
22 expunged.23 Each local school board shall notify the parents of rising eleventh and twelfth grade students of (i) the  
24 requirements for graduation pursuant to the standards for accreditation and (ii) the requirements that have yet  
25 to be completed by the individual student.

## 26 B. Students identified as disabled who:

27 1. Complete alternative requirements, in the form of credit accommodations specified in their  
28 individualized education programs, to earn required standard and verified credits shall be awarded standard  
29 diplomas by local school boards. Such credit accommodations may include (i) approval of alternative courses  
30 to meet standard credit requirements, (ii) modifications to the requirements for local school divisions to  
31 award locally awarded verified credits, (iii) approval of additional tests to earn verified credits, (iv) adjusted  
32 cut scores required to earn verified credits, (v) allowance of work-based learning experiences, and (vi) special  
33 permission credit accommodations for locally awarded verified credits; and34 2. Complete the requirements of their individualized education programs and meet certain requirements  
35 prescribed by the Board pursuant to regulations but do not meet the requirements for any named diploma  
36 shall be awarded Applied Studies diplomas by local school boards. The Board shall develop and implement  
37 statewide requirements for earning an Applied Studies diploma for implementation at the beginning of the  
38 2022-2023 school year.39 The Department shall develop guidance, in multiple languages, for students and parents (i) informing  
40 them of the alternative path to earn a standard diploma through credit accommodations, including special  
41 permission credit accommodations for locally awarded verified credits; (ii) conveying (a) the limitations of  
42 the applied studies diploma, (b) key curriculum and testing decisions that reduce the likelihood that a student  
43 will be able to obtain a standard diploma, and (c) a statement that the pursuit of an applied studies diploma  
44 may preclude a student's ability to pursue a standard diploma; and (iii) supporting them to discuss these  
45 diploma options at the student's individualized education program meetings.46 Each local school board shall develop a process for awarding locally verified credits to students with  
47 disabilities, require individualized education program teams to consider credit accommodations, including  
48 locally awarded verified credits, for students with disabilities to enable them to earn a standard diploma, and  
49 provide guidance from the Department to parents of students with disabilities regarding the availability of  
50 credit accommodations to earn a standard diploma and the limitations of the Applied Studies diploma at a  
51 student's annual individualized education program meeting corresponding to grades three through 12 when  
52 curriculum or statewide assessment decisions are being made that impact the type of diploma for which the  
53 student can qualify.54 Each local school board shall notify the parent of such students with disabilities who have an  
55 individualized education program and who fail to meet the graduation requirements of the student's right to a  
56 free and appropriate education to age 21, inclusive, pursuant to Article 2 (§ 22.1-213 et seq.) of Chapter 13.

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59       C. Students who have completed a prescribed course of study as defined by the local school board shall be  
60       awarded certificates of program completion by local school boards if they are not eligible to receive a Board-  
61       approved diploma.

62       Each local school board shall provide notification of the right to a free public education for students who  
63       have not reached 20 years of age on or before August 1 of the school year, pursuant to Chapter 1 (§ 22.1-1 et  
64       seq.), to the parent of students who fail to graduate or who have failed to achieve graduation requirements as  
65       provided in the standards for accreditation. If such student who does not graduate or complete such  
66       requirements is a student for whom English is a second language, the local school board shall notify the  
67       parent of the student's opportunity for a free public education in accordance with § 22.1-5.

68       D. In establishing graduation requirements, the Board shall:

69       1. Develop and implement, in consultation with stakeholders representing elementary and secondary  
70       education, higher education, and business and industry in the Commonwealth and including parents,  
71       policymakers, and community leaders in the Commonwealth, a Profile of a Virginia Graduate that identifies  
72       the knowledge and skills that students should attain during high school in order to be successful contributors  
73       to the economy of the Commonwealth, giving due consideration to critical thinking, creative thinking,  
74       collaboration, communication, and citizenship.

75       2. Emphasize the development of core skill sets in the early years of high school.

76       3. Establish multiple paths toward college and career readiness for students to follow in the later years of  
77       high school. Each such pathway shall include opportunities for internships, externships, and credentialing.

78       4. Provide for the selection of integrated learning courses meeting the Standards of Learning and approved  
79       by the Board to satisfy graduation requirements, which shall include Standards of Learning testing, as  
80       necessary.

81       5. Require students to complete at least one course in fine or performing arts or career and technical  
82       education, one course in United States and Virginia history, and two sequential elective courses chosen from  
83       a concentration of courses selected from a variety of options that may be planned to ensure the completion of  
84       a focused sequence of elective courses that provides a foundation for further education or training or  
85       preparation for employment.

86       6. Require that students (i) complete an Advanced Placement, honors, International Baccalaureate, or dual  
87       enrollment course; (ii) complete a high-quality work-based learning experience, as defined by the Board; or  
88       (iii) earn a career and technical education credential that has been approved by the Board, including its  
89       diploma seal of biliteracy established pursuant to subdivision E 4, except when a career and technical  
90       education credential in a particular subject area is not readily available or appropriate or does not adequately  
91       measure student competency, in which case the student shall receive satisfactory competency-based  
92       instruction in the subject area to earn credit. The career and technical education credential, when required,  
93       could include the successful completion of an industry certification, a state licensure examination, a national  
94       occupational competency assessment, the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, the Virginia  
95       workplace readiness skills assessment, or, in the case of the diploma seal of biliteracy, any examination set  
96       forth in subdivision E 4. The Department shall develop, maintain, and make available to each local school  
97       board a catalogue of the testing accommodations available to English language learners for each such  
98       certification, examination, assessment, and battery. Each local school board shall develop and implement  
99       policies to require each high school principal or his designee to notify each English language learner of the  
100       availability of such testing accommodations prior to the student's participation in any such certification,  
101       examination, assessment, or battery.

102       7. Require students to be trained in emergency first aid, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, and the use of  
103       automated external defibrillators, including hands-on practice of the skills necessary to perform  
104       cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

105       8. Make provision in its regulations for students with disabilities to earn a diploma.

106       9. Require students to complete one virtual course, which may be a noncredit-bearing course.

107       10. Provide that students who complete elective classes into which the Standards of Learning for any  
108       required course have been integrated and achieve a passing score on the relevant Standards of Learning test  
109       for the relevant required course receive credit for such elective class.

110       11. Establish a procedure to facilitate the acceleration of students that allows qualified students, with the  
111       recommendation of the division superintendent, without completing the 140-hour class, to obtain credit for  
112       such class upon demonstrating mastery of the course content and objectives and receiving a passing score on  
113       the relevant Standards of Learning assessment. Nothing in this section shall preclude relevant school division  
114       personnel from enforcing compulsory attendance in public schools.

115       12. Provide for the award of credit for passing scores on industry certifications, state licensure  
116       examinations, and national occupational competency assessments approved by the Board.

117       School boards shall report annually to the Board the number of Board-approved industry certifications  
118       obtained, state licensure examinations passed, national occupational competency assessments passed, Armed  
119       Services Vocational Aptitude Battery assessments passed, and Virginia workplace readiness skills

120 assessments passed, and the number of career and technical education completers who graduated. These  
 121 numbers shall be reported as separate categories on the School Performance Report Card.

122 For the purposes of this subdivision, "career and technical education completer" means a student who has  
 123 met the requirements for a career and technical concentration or specialization and all requirements for high  
 124 school graduation or an approved alternative education program.

125 In addition, the Board may:

126 a. For the purpose of awarding credit, approve the use of additional or substitute tests for the correlated  
 127 Standards of Learning assessment, such as academic achievement tests, industry certifications, or state  
 128 licensure examinations; and

129 b. Permit students completing career and technical education programs designed to enable such students  
 130 to pass such industry certification examinations or state licensure examinations to be awarded, upon obtaining  
 131 satisfactory scores on such industry certification or licensure examinations, appropriate credit for one or more  
 132 career and technical education classes into which relevant Standards of Learning for various classes taught at  
 133 the same level have been integrated. Such industry certification and state licensure examinations may cover  
 134 relevant Standards of Learning for various required classes and may, at the discretion of the Board, address  
 135 some Standards of Learning for several required classes.

136 13. Provide for the waiver of certain graduation requirements and the subsequent award of a high school  
 137 diploma (i) upon the Board's initiative, (ii) at the request of a local school board, or (iii) upon the request of  
 138 the parent of any high school senior who died in good standing prior to graduation during the student's senior  
 139 year. Such waivers shall be granted only for good cause and shall be considered on a case-by-case basis.

140 14. Consider all computer science course credits earned by students to be science course credits,  
 141 mathematics course credits, or career and technical education credits. The Board shall develop guidelines  
 142 addressing how computer science courses can satisfy graduation requirements.

143 15. Permit local school divisions to waive the requirement for students to receive 140 clock hours of  
 144 instruction upon providing the Board with satisfactory proof, based on Board guidelines, that the students for  
 145 whom such requirements are waived have learned the content and skills included in the relevant Standards of  
 146 Learning.

147 16. Provide for the award of verified units of credit for a satisfactory score, as determined by the Board,  
 148 on the Preliminary ACT (PreACT) or Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test  
 149 (PSAT/NMSQT) examination.

150 17. Permit students to exceed a full course load in order to participate in courses offered by an institution  
 151 of higher education that lead to a degree, certificate, or credential at such institution.

152 18. Permit local school divisions to waive the requirement for students to receive 140 clock hours of  
 153 instruction after the student has completed the course curriculum and relevant Standards of Learning end-of-  
 154 course assessment, or Board-approved substitute, provided that such student subsequently receives  
 155 instruction, coursework, or study toward an industry certification approved by the local school board.

156 19. Permit any English language learner who previously earned a sufficient score on an Advanced  
 157 Placement or International Baccalaureate foreign language examination or an SAT II Subject Test in a  
 158 foreign language to substitute computer coding course credit for any foreign language course credit required  
 159 to graduate, except in cases in which such foreign language course credit is required to earn an advanced  
 160 diploma offered by a nationally recognized provider of college-level courses.

161 20. Permit a student who is pursuing an advanced diploma and whose individualized education program  
 162 specifies a credit accommodation for world language to substitute two standard units of credit in computer  
 163 science for two standard units of credit in a world language. For any student that elects to substitute a credit  
 164 in computer science for credit in world language, his or her school counselor must provide notice to the  
 165 student and parent or guardian of possible impacts related to college entrance requirements.

166 21. Permit any student to substitute elective credits for completion of any industry-approved workforce  
 167 credential, provided that such credential is included on the list of credentials that are uniformly accepted as  
 168 substitutes for such required credits developed and maintained by the Board pursuant to subsection F of  
 169 § 22.1-253.13:1.

170 E. In the exercise of its authority to recognize exemplary performance by providing for diploma seals:

171 1. The Board shall develop criteria for recognizing exemplary performance in career and technical  
 172 education programs by students who have completed the requirements for a Board of Education-approved  
 173 diploma and shall award seals on the diplomas of students meeting such criteria.

174 2. The Board shall establish criteria for awarding a diploma seal for science, technology, engineering, and  
 175 mathematics (STEM) for the Board-approved diplomas. The Board shall consider including criteria for (i)  
 176 relevant coursework; (ii) technical writing, reading, and oral communication skills; (iii) relevant training; and  
 177 (iv) industry, professional, and trade association national certifications.

178 3. The Board shall establish criteria for awarding a diploma seal for excellence in civics education and  
 179 understanding of our state and federal constitutions and the democratic model of government for the Board-  
 180 approved diplomas. The Board shall consider including criteria for (i) successful completion of history,

181 government, and civics courses, including courses that incorporate character education; (ii) voluntary  
182 participation in community service or extracurricular activities that includes the types of activities that shall  
183 qualify as community service and the number of hours required; and (iii) related requirements as it deems  
184 appropriate.

185 4. The Board shall establish criteria for awarding a diploma seal of biliteracy to any student who  
186 demonstrates proficiency in English and at least one other language for the Board-approved diplomas. The  
187 Board shall consider criteria including the student's (i) score on a College Board Advanced Placement foreign  
188 language examination, (ii) score on an SAT II Subject Test in a foreign language, (iii) proficiency level on an  
189 ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) measure or another  
190 nationally or internationally recognized language proficiency test, or (iv) cumulative grade point average in a  
191 sequence of foreign language courses approved by the Board.

192 F. The Board shall establish, by regulation, requirements for the award of a general achievement adult  
193 high school diploma for those persons who are not subject to the compulsory school attendance requirements  
194 of § 22.1-254 and have (i) achieved a passing score on a high school equivalency examination approved by  
195 the Board; (ii) successfully completed an education and training program designated by the Board; (iii)  
196 earned a Board-approved career and technical education credential such as the successful completion of an  
197 industry certification, a state licensure examination, a national occupational competency assessment, the  
198 Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, or the Virginia workplace readiness skills assessment; and (iv)  
199 satisfied other requirements as may be established by the Board for the award of such diploma.

200 G. To ensure the uniform assessment of high school graduation rates, the Board shall collect, analyze,  
201 report, and make available to the public high school graduation and dropout data using a formula prescribed  
202 by the Board.

203 H. The Board shall also collect, analyze, report, and make available to the public high school graduation  
204 and dropout data using a formula that excludes any student who fails to graduate because such student is in  
205 the custody of the Department of Corrections, the Department of Juvenile Justice, or local law enforcement.  
206 For the purposes of the Standards of Accreditation, the Board shall use the graduation rate required by this  
207 subsection.

208 I. The Board may promulgate such regulations as may be necessary and appropriate for the collection,  
209 analysis, and reporting of such data required by subsections G and H.

210 *J. In addition to the options set forth in subsections A, B, and D for students with disabilities to earn a  
211 diploma, the Board shall establish pursuant to regulation an alternative pathway to the standard diploma for  
212 any such student whose individualized education program indicates that the student demonstrates the  
213 knowledge and skills necessary to achieve the standard diploma but requires significant instructional, course  
214 sequencing, or assessment accommodations or modifications in order to do so. Such regulations shall include  
215 criteria and documentation required for eligibility and shall require the successful completion of a  
216 prescribed sequence of courses with modifications as documented in the student's individualized education  
217 program; demonstrated proficiency in alignment with the Standards of Learning as determined by  
218 assessments, portfolios, performance tasks, or other means that incorporate appropriate accommodations  
219 and modifications; and fulfillment of the credit requirements necessary for a standard diploma with  
220 modifications as permitted or prescribed by the Board. The Board shall also take all steps necessary to  
221 ensure that such pathway and the Applied Studies diploma are, to the maximum extent practicable, treated as  
222 a standard diploma for the purpose of eligibility for enrollment at an institution of higher education in the  
223 Commonwealth, eligibility for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and federal financial  
224 aid programs, consideration for military service enlistment opportunities, and consideration for state  
225 employment opportunities that require a standard diploma. The Department shall report annually to the  
226 Governor and the General Assembly on the implementation of such alternative pathway to the standard  
227 diploma, including the number of students utilizing such alternative pathway and the postsecondary outcomes  
228 of such students.*