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## 1 SENATE BILL NO. 724

2 Offered January 15, 2026

3 A BILL to amend and reenact § 22.1-253.13:4 of the Code of Virginia, relating to high school graduation  
4 requirements; approved methods; consistency for cohorts of ninth grade students.

5 Patron—Head

6 Referred to Committee on Education and Health

## 7 Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

8 1. That § 22.1-253.13:4 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

## 9   § 22.1-253.13:4. Standard 4. Student achievement and graduation requirements.

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

## 25   B. Students identified as disabled who:

26   1. Complete alternative requirements, in the form of credit accommodations specified in their  
27 individualized education programs, to earn required standard and verified credits shall be awarded standard  
28 diplomas by local school boards. Such credit accommodations may include (i) approval of alternative courses  
29 to meet standard credit requirements, (ii) modifications to the requirements for local school divisions to  
30 award locally awarded verified credits, (iii) approval of additional tests to earn verified credits, (iv) adjusted  
31 cut scores required to earn verified credits, (v) allowance of work-based learning experiences, and (vi) special  
32 permission credit accommodations for locally awarded verified credits; and33   2. Complete the requirements of their individualized education programs and meet certain requirements  
34 prescribed by the Board pursuant to regulations but do not meet the requirements for any named diploma  
35 shall be awarded Applied Studies diplomas by local school boards. The Board shall develop and implement  
36 statewide requirements for earning an Applied Studies diploma for implementation at the beginning of the  
37 2022-2023 school year.38 The Department shall develop guidance, in multiple languages, for students and parents (i) informing  
39 them of the alternative path to earn a standard diploma through credit accommodations, including special  
40 permission credit accommodations for locally awarded verified credits; (ii) conveying (a) the limitations of  
41 the applied studies diploma, (b) key curriculum and testing decisions that reduce the likelihood that a student  
42 will be able to obtain a standard diploma, and (c) a statement that the pursuit of an applied studies diploma  
43 may preclude a student's ability to pursue a standard diploma; and (iii) supporting them to discuss these  
44 diploma options at the student's individualized education program meetings.45 Each local school board shall develop a process for awarding locally verified credits to students with  
46 disabilities, require individualized education program teams to consider credit accommodations, including  
47 locally awarded verified credits, for students with disabilities to enable them to earn a standard diploma, and  
48 provide guidance from the Department to parents of students with disabilities regarding the availability of  
49 credit accommodations to earn a standard diploma and the limitations of the Applied Studies diploma at a  
50 student's annual individualized education program meeting corresponding to grades three through 12 when  
51 curriculum or statewide assessment decisions are being made that impact the type of diploma for which the  
52 student can qualify.53 Each local school board shall notify the parent of such students with disabilities who have an  
54 individualized education program and who fail to meet the graduation requirements of the student's right to a  
55 free and appropriate education to age 21, inclusive, pursuant to Article 2 (§ 22.1-213 et seq.) of Chapter 13.

56   C. Students who have completed a prescribed course of study as defined by the local school board shall be

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59 awarded certificates of program completion by local school boards if they are not eligible to receive a Board-  
60 approved diploma.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

120 numbers shall be reported as separate categories on the School Performance Report Card.

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

124 In addition, the Board may:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

181 participation in community service or extracurricular activities that includes the types of activities that shall  
182 qualify as community service and the number of hours required; and (iii) related requirements as it deems  
183 appropriate.

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

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

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

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

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

209 *J. For each student who first enters the ninth grade in a given school year, the Board shall apply, for the  
210 duration of that student's high school enrollment, (i) the graduation requirements and (ii) all approved  
211 methods for satisfying such requirements that are in effect for that school year, except as otherwise provided  
212 in subsection L.*

213 *K. No change adopted by the Board or the Department to any graduation requirement or approved  
214 method shall apply to any student who has already entered the ninth grade prior to the effective date of such  
215 change. Any such change shall apply only to students who first enter the ninth grade subsequent to the  
216 effective date of such change. Neither the Board nor the Department shall retroactively remove, alter, or  
217 invalidate any approved method that is applicable to a cohort of ninth grade students.*

218 *L. Notwithstanding subsection K, a student may elect to utilize an approved method that is adopted after  
219 the student enters the ninth grade and a local school board may elect to permit a cohort of ninth grade  
220 students to utilize an approved method that is adopted after such cohort enters ninth grade, provided that  
221 such method constitutes an additional, optional means of satisfying a graduation requirement and does not  
222 eliminate, narrow, or invalidate any approved method previously available to such student or cohort. No  
223 student shall be required to utilize an approved method that is adopted after the student enters ninth grade.*

224 *M. The Board and the Department shall use only the approved methods that are applicable to each  
225 individual cohort of ninth grade students for the purpose of determining the accreditation, accountability, or  
226 performance of any high school or local school division.*

227 *N. Prior to the implementation of any change to any graduation requirement or approved method, the  
228 Department shall publicly post on its website updated and accurate guidance documents that clearly identify  
229 the change, specify its effective date, state whether the change is mandatory or optional, and identify the  
230 cohorts of ninth grade students to which the change applies. All such guidance shall be posted in a timely  
231 manner and shall accurately reflect all Board-approved requirements and approved methods.*

232 *O. Local school boards and school divisions shall implement the provisions of subsections J through N to  
233 ensure that each entering cohort of ninth grade students is provided stable, consistent, and predictable  
234 graduation requirements and approved methods for the duration of their high school program.*

235 *P. As used in this section, "approved method" means any Board-approved means, pathway, process,  
236 assessment, performance task, work-based learning option, set of criteria, or cut score by which a student  
237 may demonstrate completion of or proficiency in any graduation requirement, including any verified credit  
238 requirement. "Approved method" includes the manner in which graduation requirements may be completed,  
239 demonstrated, or satisfied and any interpretation of, guidance on, or implementation standard for graduation  
240 requirements that is issued by the Board or the Department.*

241 **2. That the provisions of this act shall apply beginning with students who enter the ninth grade on or  
242 after July 1, 2027. The Board of Education and the Department of Education shall, prior to July 1,**

243 2027, take all actions necessary to implement the provisions of this act, including updating public  
244 guidance documents.

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