

1 SENATE BILL NO. 724
23 AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE
4(Proposed by the Senate Committee on Education and Health
5

on February 5, 2026)

(Patron Prior to Substitute—Senator Head)

6 *A BILL to amend and reenact § 22.1-253.13:4 of the Code of Virginia, relating to high school graduation
7 requirements and diploma pathways; implementation.*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; and

34 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

84 6. Require that students (i) complete an Advanced Placement, honors, International Baccalaureate, or dual
85 enrollment course; (ii) complete a high-quality work-based learning experience, as defined by the Board; or
86 (iii) earn a career and technical education credential that has been approved by the Board, including its
87 diploma seal of biliteracy established pursuant to subdivision E 4, except when a career and technical
88 education credential in a particular subject area is not readily available or appropriate or does not adequately

89 measure student competency, in which case the student shall receive satisfactory competency-based
90 instruction in the subject area to earn credit. The career and technical education credential, when required,
91 could include the successful completion of an industry certification, a state licensure examination, a national
92 occupational competency assessment, the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, the Virginia
93 workplace readiness skills assessment, or, in the case of the diploma seal of biliteracy, any examination set
94 forth in subdivision E 4. The Department shall develop, maintain, and make available to each local school
95 board a catalogue of the testing accommodations available to English language learners for each such
96 certification, examination, assessment, and battery. Each local school board shall develop and implement
97 policies to require each high school principal or his designee to notify each English language learner of the
98 availability of such testing accommodations prior to the student's participation in any such certification,
99 examination, assessment, or battery.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

123 In addition, the Board may:

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

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

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

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

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

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

147 (PSAT/NMSQT) examination.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

176 3. The Board shall establish criteria for awarding a diploma seal for excellence in civics education and
177 understanding of our state and federal constitutions and the democratic model of government for the Board-
178 approved diplomas. The Board shall consider including criteria for (i) successful completion of history,
179 government, and civics courses, including courses that incorporate character education; (ii) voluntary
180 participation in community service or extracurricular activities that includes the types of activities that shall
181 qualify as community service and the number of hours required; and (iii) related requirements as it deems
182 appropriate.

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

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

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

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

205 subsection.

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

208 *J. In the event that the Board establishes or modifies any graduation requirements or diploma pathways,
209 the Board shall:*

210 *1. Prior to the beginning of the first school year of implementation, post in a publicly accessible location
211 on its website notice of and up-to-date guidance materials on such graduation requirements or diploma
212 pathways that specify the date or school year of implementation;*

213 *2. Only apply such new or modified graduation requirements or diploma pathways to students who enter
214 ninth grade at the beginning of or after the first school year of implementation of such new or modified
215 graduation requirements or diploma pathways; and*

216 *3. Ensure that any student who entered ninth grade prior to the first school year of implementation of
217 such new or modified graduation requirements or diploma pathways is (i) not required to complete any such
218 graduation requirements or diploma pathways in order to satisfy verified credit requirements for graduation,
219 (ii) is permitted to satisfy the verified credit requirements for graduation through the completion of any
220 graduation requirements or diploma pathways that were in effect at the time such student entered ninth
221 grade; and (iii) is permitted, at request of such student, to complete any such graduation requirements or
222 diploma pathways without restricting, limiting, or invalidating such student's ability to complete any
223 graduation requirements or diploma pathways that were in effect at the time he entered ninth grade.*

224 **2. That the provisions of the first enactment of this act shall apply beginning with students who enter
225 the ninth grade on or after the beginning of the 2027–2028 school year.**

226 **3. That the Board of Education shall, by July 1, 2027, amend its regulations as necessary to implement
227 the provisions of the first enactment of this act.**