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SENATE BILL NO. 724

AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE

(Proposed by the Senate Committee on Education and Health
on February 5, 2026)

(Patron Prior to Substitute—Senator Head)

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

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

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

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

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 and meet such other requirements as may be prescribed by the local school board and approved by the Board. Provisions shall be made to facilitate the transfer and appropriate grade placement of students from other public secondary schools, from nonpublic schools, or from home instruction as outlined in the standards for accreditation. The standards for accreditation shall include provisions relating to the completion of graduation requirements through Virtual Virginia. Further, reasonable accommodation to meet the requirements for diplomas shall be provided for otherwise qualified students with disabilities as needed.

In addition, each local school board may devise, vis-a-vis the award of diplomas to secondary school students, a mechanism for calculating class rankings that takes into consideration whether the student has taken a required class more than one time and has had any prior earned grade for such required class expunged.

Each local school board shall notify the parents of rising eleventh and twelfth grade students of (i) the requirements for graduation pursuant to the standards for accreditation and (ii) the requirements that have yet to be completed by the individual student.

B. Students identified as disabled who:

1. Complete alternative requirements, in the form of credit accommodations specified in their individualized education programs, to earn required standard and verified credits shall be awarded standard diplomas by local school boards. Such credit accommodations may include (i) approval of alternative courses to meet standard credit requirements, (ii) modifications to the requirements for local school divisions to award locally awarded verified credits, (iii) approval of additional tests to earn verified credits, (iv) adjusted cut scores required to earn verified credits, (v) allowance of work-based learning experiences, and (vi) special permission credit accommodations for locally awarded verified credits; and

2. Complete the requirements of their individualized education programs and meet certain requirements prescribed by the Board pursuant to regulations but do not meet the requirements for any named diploma shall be awarded Applied Studies diplomas by local school boards. The Board shall develop and implement statewide requirements for earning an Applied Studies diploma for implementation at the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year.

The Department shall develop guidance, in multiple languages, for students and parents (i) informing them of the alternative path to earn a standard diploma through credit accommodations, including special permission credit accommodations for locally awarded verified credits; (ii) conveying (a) the limitations of the applied studies diploma, (b) key curriculum and testing decisions that reduce the likelihood that a student will be able to obtain a standard diploma, and (c) a statement that the pursuit of an applied studies diploma may preclude a student's ability to pursue a standard diploma; and (iii) supporting them to discuss these diploma options at the student's individualized education program meetings.

Each local school board shall develop a process for awarding locally verified credits to students with disabilities, require individualized education program teams to consider credit accommodations, including locally awarded verified credits, for students with disabilities to enable them to earn a standard diploma, and provide guidance from the Department to parents of students with disabilities regarding the availability of credit accommodations to earn a standard diploma and the limitations of the Applied Studies diploma at a student's annual individualized education program meeting corresponding to grades three through 12 when curriculum or statewide assessment decisions are being made that impact the type of diploma for which the student can qualify.

Each local school board shall notify the parent of such students with disabilities who have an individualized education program and who fail to meet the graduation requirements of the student's right to a free and appropriate education to age 21, inclusive, pursuant to Article 2 (§ 22.1-213 et seq.) of Chapter 13.

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

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

D. In establishing graduation requirements, the Board shall:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

School boards shall report annually to the Board the number of Board-approved industry certifications obtained, state licensure examinations passed, national occupational competency assessments passed, Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery assessments passed, and Virginia workplace readiness skills assessments passed, and the number of career and technical education completers who graduated. These numbers shall be reported as separate categories on the School Performance Report Card.

For the purposes of this subdivision, "career and technical education completer" means a student who has

met the requirements for a career and technical concentration or specialization and all requirements for high school graduation or an approved alternative education program.

In addition, the Board may:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. The Board shall establish criteria for awarding a diploma seal for excellence in civics education and understanding of our state and federal constitutions and the democratic model of government for the Board-approved diplomas. The Board shall consider including criteria for (i) successful completion of history, government, and civics courses, including courses that incorporate character education; (ii) voluntary participation in community service or extracurricular activities that includes the types of activities that shall 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.**