

ALTERNATIVE PATHS TO ATTAINING STANDARD UNITS OF CREDIT

Students who enroll in high school as freshmen before July 1, 2018, as sophomores before July 1, 2019, as juniors before July 1, 2020 or as seniors before July 1, 2021 are required to earn standard and verified units of credit as specified in the regulations of the Board of Education. The standard unit of credit is based on a minimum of 140-clock hours of instruction and successful completion of the requirements of the course. The Gloucester County School Board recognizes that instruction, learning, and outcomes equivalent to those achieved in 140 clock hours of instruction can be attained in a variety of ways. Therefore, the School Board waives the requirement that a student receive 140 clock hours of instruction to earn a standard unit of credit as provided herein. The total number of standard credits that a student may earn via the waiver option is eight (8) during an academic year. Fractional credits, if applicable, may be earned with the approval of the school principal.

Waivers may be approved only for non-weighted secondary courses including Board of Education approved courses, Career and Technical education courses, and local elective courses. Elective courses must be approved by the School Board, be explicitly described in the division's secondary course of study, and have clearly defined and publicly available learning objectives commensurate in scope and detail with state learning standards and competencies.

In order to attain a standard unit of credit by means of a waiver of the 140-clock-hour requirement

- the outcomes of the work for which standard credit is awarded must be equal to progress and learning achieved in 140 clock hours of instruction;
- upon completion of the assigned work for the course, a student must have demonstrated mastery by meeting specific objectives and performance requirements of the course that match or exceed the expectations of students who have received 140 clock hours of instruction with similar standards, competencies or objectives;
- the evidence of mastery of the pertinent content and skills for a student receiving a waiver must be fully documented, retained securely by the school division and available for review by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) on request.

Procedures

The school principal or designee, in consultation with school counselors, Director of Student Services, content-area teachers, and/or Virtual Learning supervisor will establish an Initial Waiver Committee to review criteria for considering and awarding a waiver of the 140-clock-hour requirement. Criteria must be clear, objective, and clearly communicated to the student and the student's parents prior to a student embarking on the effort.

The consequences of standard credits achieved by waiver with regard to class rank, grade point average and extracurricular eligibility must also be clearly defined and communicated to students and parents before a student embarks on the effort.

A student must receive prior approval from the school principal before pursuing the work, task, or assessment that is required to meet the waiver criteria. Student requests for waiver of the 140-clock-hour requirement must be received in writing prior to the beginning of the semester in which the effort occurs. Requests for waivers of the 140-clock-hour requirement may not be made retroactively. The school principal ultimately is responsible for all decisions regarding pre-approval, collection of achievement evidence, and final waiver approval.

The principal's Initial Waiver Committee shall consider the following eligibility criteria for students seeking standard units of credit via waiver of the 140-clock-hour requirement:

1. Evidence of readiness and ability - the student demonstrates aptitude, responsibility, and maturity commensurate with independent study and self-regulation.
2. Prior academic achievement - the student's achievement history and school attendance record demonstrate capability and commitment to maintaining adequate progress at designated intervals, consistent application of effort for the duration of the endeavor, and appropriate academic success.
3. Cooperation of student and/or parent/guardian - the student and parent/guardian are committed to meeting performance, progress, and participation expectations, as well as timelines for satisfactory progress established by the Initial Waiver Committee. A student's failure to meet performance, progress, participation, or attendance expectations may be subject to denial of the waiver.

Miscellaneous

The superintendent will identify a process for developing accommodations for students with limited English proficiency.

Pursuit of credit by waiver by students with disabilities will be prescribed by the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan.

Students who attain credit by waiver of the 140-clock-hour requirement will receive a letter grade or Pass/Fail grade for the course as determined by the Initial Waiver Committee. Credits earned via waiver will be reflected on the student's transcript.

A student who is pursuing credit via waiver is enrolled in the relevant course for purposes of determining eligibility for extracurricular activities.

Waiver Pathway Options

Waivers are available by three pathways:

1. Courses that award a standard credit and have less than 140 clock hours of instruction:

For students attaining standard units of credit by this waiver method, the school division maintains documentation based on this policy that defines its rationale for the reduction of instructional time and substantive evidence that it provides equivalent instruction with equivalent outcomes in the reduced clock hours.

2. Independent study, work sample portfolio, demonstrated performance, and locally developed or Standards of Learning assessment:

Evidence of the student's learning must encompass a comprehensive assemblage of media products, artifacts, and performance that demonstrates the student has mastered academically rigorous material and meets or exceeds approved learning standards, competencies or objectives for the course.

The required content and evaluative criteria for the products must be defined prior to the advent of student work and based on the same objectives as the standard course.

The assemblage of evidence and overall process must be managed by a licensed and endorsed teacher in the area of the coursework with a series of program checkpoints throughout a specified timeline for the study. The checkpoints and timeline must be clearly articulated and communicated to the student.

The managing teacher and/or Virtual Learning Administrator must determine whether the work is of commensurate depth and quality as work performed in the traditional secondary classroom and meets predefined evaluative criteria communicated to the student.

The student must meet a predefined performance level on a locally-developed assessment for the coursework. This may be an oral examination, performance (e.g., recital/concert), written test or some other objective tool or process developed by the school division. Applicable Standards of Learning assessments also may be used for this purpose.

3. Demonstrated achievement via substitute assessments approved by the Virginia Department of Education, or other national or international comprehensive assessment pre-approved by the principal or school division that:

- has a standardized administration;
- is determined to be valid and reliable by an external body;
- is used in other states or internationally; and
- is scored independently of the school division.

Before a waiver may be granted under this option, the division must have completed a rigorous review of the assessment, in accordance with this policy, and determined that it is aligned with the course objectives for which the waiver is being requested. The division determines a qualifying score for awarding a standard credit that equates with mastery of the course content and skills and communicates that score to the student.

The student must provide evidence to the school principal, through performance, product, interview and/or school staff professional judgment that the student has some command of the course content and should be allowed to demonstrate mastery-level performance for a standard credit.

The superintendent will develop a process for determining a qualifying score for awarding a standard credit that equates with mastery of the course content and skills.

Appeal Process

The superintendent shall appoint a review panel comprised of at least three educators to resolve disputes regarding the attainment of standard units of credit via waivers in accordance with this policy. The Review Panel shall consist of the Assistant Superintendent, school administrator, school counselor and/or content area teacher who were not members of the initial Waiver Committee.

The panel may review whether a student was properly denied permission to seek a standard unit of credit via waiver and whether a student was properly denied a standard unit of credit after having been determined to be eligible to seek the standard unit of credit via waiver.

Based on the evidence it reviews, the review panel may:

- award the standard credit
- deny the standard credit
- make additional assignments prior to determining whether to award the standard credit.

The decision of the review panel may be appealed to the Division Superintendent. Any appeal must be filed within ten (10) days of the decision of the review panel. The appeal will be decided within ten (10) days from the time it is filed.

Continuing Role of State Assessments

While the division may use the Standards of Learning assessments as part of the criteria used for awarding a standard credit as outlined above, the Standards of Learning assessments will continue to be used in their traditional role as determiners of awarding verified credits.

The superintendent may recommend revisions to this policy as needed.

ADOPTED: March 14, 2017

LEGAL REFERENCES: Code of Virginia, 1950, as amended, § 22.1-253.13:4.

8 VAC 20-131-110.

Guidelines for Graduation Requirements; Local Alternative Paths to Standard Units of Credit, Virginia Board of Education (Oct. 2015).

CROSS REFERENCES:

IAA	Notification of Learning Objectives
IGBG	Homebound, Correspondence and Alternative Means of Instruction
IGBGA	On Line Courses and Virtual School Programs
IGBF	Limited English Proficient Students
IKA	Grading
IKEB	Acceleration
IKF	Standards of Learning Tests and Graduation Requirements
IKFA	Locally Awarded Verified Credits
JO	Student Records