

ALTERNATIVE PATHS TO ATTAINING STANDARD UNITS OF CREDIT

In order to be awarded a diploma, secondary school students are required to earn standard and verified units of credit as specified in the regulations of the Board of Education. A “standard unit of credit” or “standard credit” is a credit awarded for a course in which the student successfully completes 140 clock hours of instruction and the requirements of the course. The Westmoreland 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 below. The total number of standard credits that can be achieved via the waiver option is eight (8). Students may earn fractional credits via waiver.

Waivers are available for all 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; and
- 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

Criteria for awarding a waiver of the 140 clock hour requirement for the course 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 approval from the division's Waiver Review Panel (comprised of at least three educators) before pursuing the work, task or assessment that is required to meet the waiver criteria.

Students who meet the following criteria are eligible to seek standard units of credit via waiver of the 140 clock hour requirement

- 1) Current and prior academic performance;
- 2) Student demonstrated readiness; and
- 3) Cooperation of the student and his/her parent or guardian.

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 grade for the course.

The fact that a student has received credit via waiver will not 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 two 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 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 may also be used for this purpose.

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. Different panels may be appointed for individual schools or groups of schools.

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 Superintendent. Any appeal must be filed within five (5) 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 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.

Adopted: October 19, 2020

Amended: April 17, 2023

Legal Refs: 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 Refs:	IAA	Notification of Learning Objectives
	IGBG	Homebound, Correspondence and Alternative Means of Instruction
	IGBGA	On Line Courses and Virtual School Programs
	IGBF	English Learners
	IKEB	Acceleration
	IKF	The Virginia Assessment Program and Graduation Requirements
	IKFA	Locally Awarded Verified Credits
	JO	Student Records
	LEB	Advanced/Alternative Courses for Credit