

Date: October 18, 2017
From: Albemarle County Public Schools
To: Virginia Department of Education
Subject: Waiver from 8VAC20-160-50. Weight of Advanced-Level Courses

Request

Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS) seeks a waiver from administering the following Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) regulation beginning with students in the graduating class of 2026 (current fourth-graders).

8VAC20-160-50. Weight of Advanced-Level Courses.

Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses shall be weighted. Local school boards shall determine which other courses/programs are to receive weighted credits, the amount of weight such courses shall receive, and how those weighted credits will be used in the determination of grade point averages in the school or school division.

Rationale

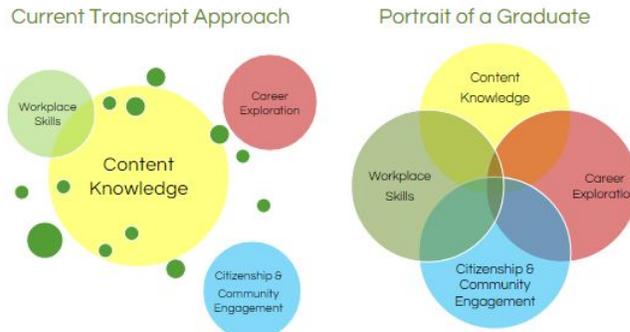
ACPS will implement *High School 2022* starting in the 2018-19 school year, a strategy we developed that aligns with the *Virginia Profile of a Graduate*. We have engaged in more than a year of planning with stakeholder groups, developing a draft program guide (attached) and communications brochure (attached) that was disseminated to all middle school families on Friday, September 29, 2017. We have also developed a web page for community information.

High School 2022 will begin a shift in programming for our students, starting with the entering class of 2018-19 (next year's freshmen). The primary goals of high school 2022 are aligned with those of *Virginia's Profile of a Graduate*:

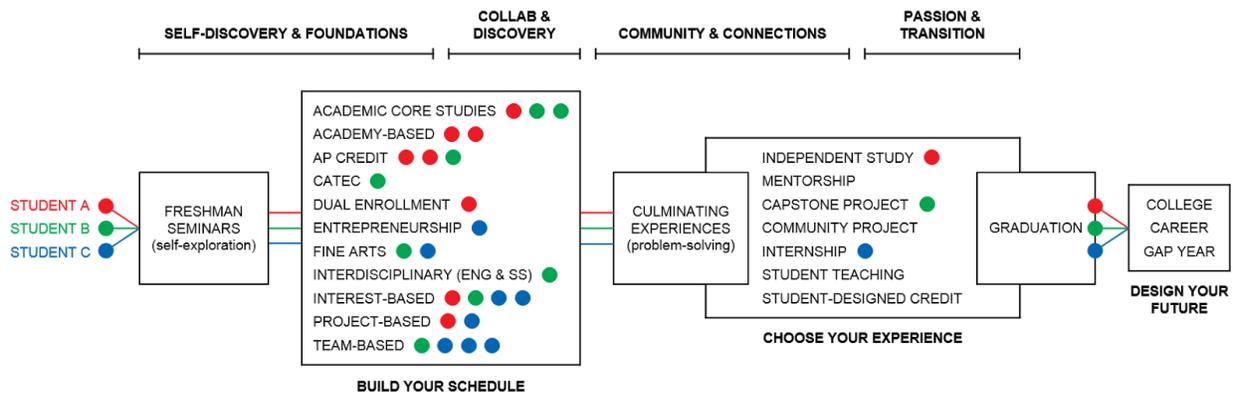
Students must attain knowledge, skills, experiences and attributes to be successful in college and/or the workforce and to be "life ready" in an economy and a world characterized by rapid change. The board has determined that a life-ready Virginia graduate must:

- Achieve and apply appropriate academic and technical knowledge (content knowledge);
- Demonstrate productive workplace skills, qualities, and behaviors (workplace skills);
- Build connections and value interactions with others as a responsible and responsive citizen (community engagement and civic responsibility); and
- Align knowledge, skills and personal interests with career opportunities (career exploration).

In our Board work sessions, planning meetings, and community events, we depict this shift in programming as a change of emphasis so that rather than content knowledge taking up the lion's share of a student's efforts in high school as it does currently, all four areas we want to grow in our students are emphasized and integrated in a more balanced manner.



We are building in a required freshman seminar course for 9th graders beginning with the entering class of 2018-19. This course will emphasize social emotional learning as well as self-assessment for skills, interests, and career development. It will have a mentoring component that will extend into 10th through 12th grade. The graphic below is from our High School 2022 Draft Program Guide and depicts a “trail map” approach for students’ to explore and map out their experiences.



The weight we add to honors and college level courses is a distinct disincentive for students when choosing courses. Students are more inclined to take a study hall that is unweighted instead of a course based on developing work-skills and a possible career path. This statement is supported by data from parent surveys and focus group meetings with students that we collected during a recent program evaluation of our AP and Dual-Enrollment courses. Many students choose to take only weighted classes or study halls to boost their grade point averages. They avoid electives- even those they are interested in taking. They continue to do this in spite of the fact that we no longer report class rank on student transcripts. Students

self-report that removing weight from Advanced Placement classes will reduce stress levels and competition among peers.

Internally, we may eliminate weighting of all honors level courses; however, without a waiver from the VDOE, we cannot do so for our AP offerings. This will likely only place a greater premium on these classes for competitive students; hence, we would prefer to eliminate all weighting at once.

In addition, based on the findings of our program evaluation, we plan to place a cap on the number of AP courses students may take while exploring ways to increase our Dual Enrollment course offerings. Stakeholders wish to maintain rigorous instruction, to remain competitive for admission to elite colleges, and to maximize earnings for college credit. By defining a limit on AP courses, students will not be penalized by colleges for not taking the most rigorous course load and students will feel more freedom to choose electives based on passion, personal interest, or career readiness.

Metrics

We plan to use this year as a baseline year, looking at enrollment in each and every course we offer in our high school program. As the elimination of weighted grades takes effect, we will analyze enrollment patterns and plan for next steps in fostering a high school model in which students are guided by their personal interests.

For more information about Albemarle County's High School 2022 project, please visit our web page: [ACPS High School 2022](#)