WEST VIRGINIA CODE: §18-2-6

§18-2-6. Classification and standardization of schools; standards for degrees and diplomas; certificates of proficiency; establishment of alternative education programs.

(a) The state board shall promulgate rules for the accreditation, classification, and standardization of all schools in the state, except institutions of higher education, and shall determine the minimum standards for granting diplomas, advanced certifications, and certificates of proficiency by those schools.

(1) The certificates of proficiency shall include specific information regarding the graduate's skills, competence, and readiness for employment, or honors and advanced education and shall be granted, along with the diploma, to every eligible high school graduate.

(2) The certificate of proficiency shall include the program of study major completed by the student only for those students who have completed the required major courses, or higher level courses, advanced placement courses, college courses, or other more rigorous substitutes related to the major, and the recommended electives.

(3) Students who have completed a secondary education program in a public, private, or home school and have continued to be enrolled in a program leading to an advanced certification or an advanced career education program shall be considered adults enrolled in regular secondary programs in accordance with §18-9A-2(i) of this code: Provided, That the State Superintendent of Schools, the Chancellor for the Council for Community and Technical College Education, the Chancellor of the Higher Education Policy Commission, and the Secretary of the Department of Commerce may designate additional programs that provide valuable workplace credentials and students enrolled in such programs shall also be considered adults enrolled in regular secondary programs in accordance with §18-9A-2(i) of this code.

(b) An institution of less than collegiate or university status may not grant any diploma or certificate of proficiency on any basis of work or merit below the minimum standards prescribed by the state board.

(c) A charter or other instrument containing the right to issue diplomas or certificates of proficiency may not be granted by the State of West Virginia to any institution or other associations or organizations of less than collegiate or university status within the state until the condition of granting or issuing the diplomas or other certificates of proficiency has first been approved in writing by the state board.

(d) The state board shall promulgate a rule for the approval of alternative education programs for disruptive students who are at risk of not succeeding in the traditional school structure.

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(1) This rule may provide for the waiver of other policies of the state board, the establishment and delivery of a nontraditional curriculum, the establishment of licensure requirements for alternative education program teachers, and the establishment of performance measures for school accreditation.

(2) This rule shall provide uniform definitions of disruptive student behavior and uniform standards for the placement of students in alternative settings or providing other interventions including referrals to local juvenile courts to correct student behavior so that they can return to a regular classroom without engaging in further disruptive behavior.

(e) The state board shall establish up to five pilot projects at the elementary or middle school levels, or both, that employ alternative schools or other placements for disruptive students to learn appropriate behaviors so they can return to the regular classroom without further disrupting the learning environment. The state board shall report to the Legislative Oversight Commission on Education Accountability by December 1, 2010, on its progress in establishing the pilot projects and by December 1 in each year after that for the duration of the pilot projects on the effect of the projects on maintaining student discipline.

(f) If a student attends an approved alternative education program or the Mountaineer Challenge Academy, which is designated as a special alternative education program pursuant to §15-1B-24 of this code, and the student graduates or passes the high school equivalency tests within five years of beginning ninth grade, that student shall be considered graduated for the purposes of calculating the high school graduation rate used for school accreditation and school system approval, subject to the following:

(1) The student shall be considered graduated only to the extent that this is not in conflict with any provision of federal law relating to graduation rates;

(2) If the state board determines that this is in conflict with a provision of federal law relating to graduation rates, the state board shall request a waiver from the United States Department of Education; and

(3) If the waiver is granted, notwithstanding the provisions of §18-2-6(f)(1) of this code, the student graduating or passing the high school equivalency tests within five years shall be considered graduated.

(g) The state board shall promulgate a rule to support the operation of the National Guard Youth Challenge Program operated by the Adjutant General and known as the Mountaineer Challenge Academy which is designated as a special alternative education program pursuant to §15-1B-24 of this code for students who are at risk of not succeeding in the traditional school structure. The rule shall set forth policies and procedures applicable only to the Mountaineer Challenge Academy that provide for, but are not limited to, the following:

(1) Implementation of provisions set forth in §15-1B-24 of this code;

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(2) Precedence of the policies and procedures designated by the National Guard Bureau for the operation of the Mountaineer Challenge Academy special alternative education program;

(3) Consideration of a student participating in the Mountaineer Challenge Academy special alternative education program at full enrollment status in the referring county for the purposes of funding and calculating attendance and graduation rates, subject to the following:

(A) The student shall be considered at full enrollment status only for the purposes of calculating attendance and graduation rates to the extent that this is not in conflict with any provision of federal law relating to attendance or graduation rates;

(B) If the state board determines that this is in conflict with a provision of federal law relating to attendance or graduation rates, the state board shall request a waiver from the United States Department of Education;

(C) If the waiver is granted, notwithstanding the provisions of §18-2-6(g)(3)(A) of this code, the student shall be considered at full enrollment status in the referring county for the purposes of calculating attendance and graduation rates; and

(D) Consideration of the student at full enrollment status in the referring county is for the purposes of funding and calculating attendance and graduation rates only. For any other purpose, a student participating in the academy is considered withdrawn from the public school system;

(4) Articulation of the knowledge, skills, and competencies gained through alternative education so that students who return to regular education may proceed toward attainment or may attain the standards for graduation without duplication;

(5) Consideration of eligibility to take the high school equivalency tests by qualifying within the extraordinary circumstances provisions established by state board rule for a student participating in the Mountaineer Challenge Academy special alternative education program who does not meet any other criteria for eligibility; and

(6) Payment of tuition by a county board to the Mountaineer Challenge Academy for each student graduating from the academy with a high school diploma that resides in that county board’s school district. For purposes of this subdivision, "tuition" means an amount equal to 75 percent of the amount allotted per pupil under the school aid formula.

(h) Nothing in this section or the rules promulgated under this section compels the Mountaineer Challenge Academy to be operated as a special alternative education program or to be subject to any other laws governing the public schools except by its consent.

(i) The Legislature makes the following findings regarding students at risk:

(1) Defeated and discouraged learners. —

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(A) Any child who is unlikely to graduate on schedule with both the skills and self-esteem necessary to exercise meaningful options in the areas of work, leisure, culture, civic affairs, and personal relationships may be defined as being an at-risk student;

(B) Problems associated with students at risk often begin for them in the early grades as they gradually fall further behind in the essential skills of reading, writing, and math;

(C) These problems may be accompanied by such behavior patterns as poor attendance, inattentiveness, negative attitudes, and acting out in class. These patterns are both symptoms of and added catalysts for students to become increasingly defeated and discouraged learners;

(D) By the middle grades, students with growing skill deficits usually know they are behind other students and have good reason to feel discouraged. A growing lack of self-confidence and self-worth, limited optimism for the future, avoidance of school and adults, and a dimming view of the relationship between effort and achievement are among the characteristics of defeated and discouraged learners;

(E) Public schools are expected to address the needs of all students, minimizing the likelihood that they will become at risk and giving additional attention to those who do; however, the circumstances involved with a becoming at risk often are complex and may include influences both within and outside of the school environment; and

(F) In fragile homes, a child who is at risk and is becoming a discouraged and defeated learner often lacks adequate support and may develop peer relationships that further exacerbate the difficulty of reengaging him or her in learning, school, and responsible social behavior.

(2) The Legislature further finds that the public schools should not be deterred from seeking and assisting with enrollment of students in an alternative program that helps remedy the discouragement, lessens skill deficits, and facilitates a successful return to public school.

(j) For this purpose, subject to approval of the county superintendent, a student enrolled in the public schools of the county may continue to be enrolled while also enrolled in an alternative program subject to the following conditions:

(1) The alternative program is approved by the state board;

(2) The student meets the general description of an at-risk student and exhibits behaviors and characteristics associated with a discouraged and defeated learner;

(3) The alternative program complies with all requests of the county superintendent for information on the educational program and progress of the student;

(4) The alternative program includes a family involvement component in its program. This component shall include, but is not limited to, providing for student and parent participation

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in activities that help address the challenging issues that have hindered the student's engagement and progress in learning;

(5) The alternative program includes an on-site boarding option for students;

(6) The alternative program provides an individualized education program for students that is designed to prepare them for a successful transition back into the public schools; and

(7) The parents or legal guardian of the student make application for enrollment of the student in the alternative program, agree to the terms and conditions for enrollment, and enroll the student in the program.

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