Changes to Virginia’s Diploma Options
What Parents Need to Know

For Virginia’s special education students, diploma options are changing. The Modified Standard diploma is no longer an option for students entering the ninth grade (or younger) in the 2013-2014 school year. If your son or daughter will be a ninth grader (or younger) this fall, and was aiming for a Modified Standard diploma, he or she will now be working toward a Standard diploma.

The General Assembly amendment to the Code of Virginia raises expectations for students with disabilities. It emphasizes the development of college and workplace readiness skills for ALL students. When our children with special needs graduate with Standard diplomas they will have more opportunities for additional education and for employment.

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) is writing guidance documents for local school systems and developing FAQs, webinars and other informational materials to assist school division personnel, parents, and students better understand the new diploma requirements and credit accommodations. We will post them on the PEATC website as we receive them at www.peatc.org

The Basics

* Students enrolled in 9th grade prior to 2013-2014 who were seeking a Modified Standard diploma will complete their current course of study unless they opt for a Standard diploma.

* Ninth graders and younger students who were aiming for the Modified Standard diploma will be offered ‘credit accommodations” to assist them in meeting the requirements for a Standard diploma.

* The IEP team or 504 plan committee (including parents) will decide what credit accommodations are a match to the student’s learning strengths and needs.

* The Virginia Department of Education will provide intensive technical assistance to Virginia teachers and special education coordinators so they will know which students are eligible for the Standard diploma and the range of credit accommodation options that will be available.

* Special education students who can earn a Standard diploma without credit accommodations should be encouraged to do so.

* The Special diploma will remain available to students with disabilities who complete the requirements of their Individualized Education Program (IEP) and do not meet the requirements for a Standard diploma.
What are Credit Accommodations?

Credit accommodations are adjustments provided to students with disabilities so they can meet the requirements for earning a Standard Diploma. Credit accommodations for the Standard Diploma will be determined by the student’s IEP team or 504 plan committee, including the student where appropriate, at any point after the student’s eighth-grade year. The parent/guardian, and the student, as appropriate, MUST give informed, written consent to the credit accommodations selected only **after** the IEP team or 504 plan committee reviews the student’s academic history and fully explains all of the student’s options.

The student must meet the following criteria to be eligible to receive credit accommodations for the Standard Diploma:

1. Student must have a current IEP or 504 plan with standards-based content goals.
2. Student has a disability that precludes him or her from achieving and progressing commensurate with grade level expectations, but is learning on grade level content.
3. Student needs significant instructional supports to access grade level Standards of Learning (SOL) content and to show progress.
4. Based on multiple objective measures of past performance, student might not be expected to achieve the required standard and verified units of credit within the standard time frame.

**Possible Credit Accommodations**

- Substitute Assessments
- Locally Awarded Verified Credit
- VMAST
- Determination of Minimum Coursework

**Actions Parents Can Take Today**

- Do not panic – we are all on this learning curve together!
- Verify the type of diploma your child is scheduled to receive. Find out AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. Ask your child’s teacher or see if it is identified on his current IEP.
- Stay tuned to PEATC’s website, list serve and Facebook page. We will provide frequent issue briefs to keep you informed of emerging details regarding the Standard diploma for students in special education.
- Visit the VDOE website to learn more about standard diplomas for students with disabilities at [www.doe.virginia.gov](http://www.doe.virginia.gov)