

Additional Guidance on Credit Accommodations for Students with Disabilities May, 2014

The 2012 General Assembly amended the *Code of Virginia* to emphasize college and workplace readiness for all students — including students with disabilities. The legislation eliminated the Modified Standard Diploma, effective with students entering the ninth grade for the first time in 2013-2014. The General Assembly also directed the Board of Education to make provisions for students with disabilities, who previously would have been candidates for the Modified Standard Diploma, to earn a Standard Diploma. The Board of Education responded to the legislature in June 2012 by amending the Standards of Accreditation (SOA) to permit credit accommodations for students with disabilities pursuing a Standard Diploma. The amendments to the SOA (8VAC 20-131) went into effect on June 5, 2013. Each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan determines whether credit accommodations are appropriate. In March 2013, the Board of Education approved guidelines for school divisions on allowable credit accommodations. The approved guidelines can be found on the Virginia Department of Education website at [Guidelines for Standard Diploma Credit Accommodations](#).

The following is a list of frequently asked questions and corresponding answers regarding the implementation of credit accommodations for students with disabilities.

Assessment/Locally Awarded Verified Credit

1. What is the maximum number of locally awarded verified credits that a student with a disability (IDEA/504) may earn towards a Standard Diploma?

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has set no maximum number of locally awarded verified credits that a student with a disability (IDEA/504) may earn towards a standard diploma. School divisions must ensure that locally awarded verified credits in English and mathematics are available only to students with disabilities (IDEA and 504) who are eligible for credit accommodations as stipulated in each student's IEP/504 plan. All students who meet certain criteria may be eligible for locally awarded verified credits in science and in history and social science.

2. Which criteria must be followed to grant locally awarded verified credits to a student with a disability (IDEA/504) who has been determined eligible for credit accommodations by his/her IEP Team/504 Committee?

To be eligible to earn locally awarded verified credits in English, mathematics, science and/or history and social science under the guidance, an eligible student must:

- Pass the high school course,

- Score within a 375-399 scale score range on any administration of the Standards of Learning Test after taking the test at least twice, or
- Earn a comparable Virginia Substitute Evaluation Program (VSEP) score of 95-123 on the end-of-course reading VSEP or 72-99 on the Algebra I VSEP participating in the assessment twice,
- Demonstrate achievement in the academic content through an appeal process administered at the local level.

The Board of Education's Amended *Guidance Document on Governing Certain Provisions of the Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia*, dated January 13, 2011, requires that school boards adopt policies to govern procedures used to award local verified credits. These procedures must include the following:

- The appointment by the local school board of a local review panel comprised of at least three educators. Different panels may be appointed for individual schools or groups of schools, at the school board's discretion.
- The local review panel will review information that provides evidence of the student's achievement of adequate knowledge of the Standards of Learning content. The panel shall have discretion in determining the information to be considered and may include, but not be limited to, results of classroom assessments, division wide exams, course grades, and additional academic assignments (e.g., papers, projects, essay or written questions) as deemed appropriate.
- Based on the evidence reviewed, the local review panel may award the verified credit, deny the verified credit, suggest participation in a remedial program and retesting, or make additional academic assignments as deemed appropriate prior to determining whether to award the verified credit.

The guidance document can be found at the following link: [Current Regulations Establishing the Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia](#).

3. What scores may be considered when determining if a student may receive a locally awarded verified credit?

Scaled scores from regular End-of-Course (EOC) Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments may be considered. Comparable VSEP scores may also be used since the VSEP is an alternative to the SOL test and covers the same content. Other alternate/substitute assessments, such as VMAST and WorkKeys Writing, may not be used to determine if a student may receive a locally awarded verified credit.

4. What should I do if I don't know my division's process for awarding locally awarded verified credits?

Contact your division's central office to learn about any additional local level policy regarding locally awarded verified credits.

5. When will the VMAST be available as a credit accommodation?

The VMAST will remain part of Virginia's accountability system through 2013-2014. The two percent cap and the participation criteria remain in effect. Beginning in 2014-2015, the VMAST assessments will no longer be part of Virginia's accountability system; however, End-of-Course (EOC) reading VMAST and Algebra I VMAST will continue to be available as a credit accommodation for eligible students with disabilities who pass the course and score 374 or below following two attempts at the corresponding SOL EOC test. The VMAST participation criteria must be met and supporting documentation must be completed. The passing score on the VMAST remains at 400; the score may not be used to determine if a student may receive a locally awarded verified credit.

6. May locally awarded credits be applied to students who need to meet literacy or numeracy assessment requirements for the Modified Standard Diploma?

No. Locally awarded verified credits, as credit accommodations, are allowable only for eligible students with disabilities pursuing a Standard Diploma. Students with disabilities pursuing a Modified Standard Diploma may not use locally awarded verified credits to satisfy the literacy and numeracy assessment requirements for the Modified Standard Diploma.

7. Are credit accommodations available to current students with disabilities who entered the ninth grade prior to 2013-2014 and who are pursuing a Standard Diploma?

Students with disabilities who entered the ninth grade prior to 2013-2014 (including graduates in 2012-2013) may take advantage of credit accommodations if they are found eligible.

An important reminder is that beginning with students entering ninth grade for the first time in 2013-2014, the Modified Standard Diploma will no longer be a diploma option. Thus, the implementation of credit accommodations may become of paramount importance for some students with disabilities to earn a Board-approved diploma in Virginia.

8. May we include the Plain English version of the Algebra I End-of-Course (EOC) Standards of Learning assessment as an assessment for the locally awarded verified credits? If so, what score does the student need to receive?

Yes. The Plain English version of the Algebra I End of Course (EOC) Standards of Learning assessment is a presentation accommodation, not an assessment. The EOC SOL content is not altered. The content is assessed with an accommodation called Plain English.

9. What scores will a student who takes the Virginia Substitute Evaluation Program (VSEP) need to earn in order to request a locally awarded verified credit (LAVC)?

A student found eligible for credit accommodations may be awarded a LAVC if their score on the Virginia Substitute Evaluation Program (VSEP) falls between 95 and 123 on the EOC Reading assessment and/or between 72 and 99 on the Algebra I assessment after two administrations. Remember, the student must meet eligibility criteria for the VSEP and for credit accommodations. The IEP team must document eligibility and obtain informed written consent from the parent or age of majority student.

Instruction/Courses

10. May IEP Teams/504 Committees choose one or more content areas for credit accommodations or must they use credit accommodations for all subjects?

Each IEP Team/504 Committee should determine the credit accommodations needed by the student on a subject-by-subject basis. A student might use credit accommodations for just one or two subjects or all subjects. The IEP team/504 committee is responsible for determining and documenting those determinations.

11. Which courses may be offered in a Part I/Part II format in order for each part to earn a standard credit toward the total number of standard credits required in the subject area?

School divisions may offer any course in a Part I/Part II format. However, eligible students with disabilities who have been approved for credit accommodations may use both parts of a two-part course to earn content area standard credits only in Algebra I, Geometry, Earth Science, Biology, Virginia and U.S. History, and Virginia and U.S. Government. Students must complete both parts of the course in order to earn the standard credits. They may earn no more than three content area standard credits by taking these two-part courses. The remaining credit could be used as an elective credit. For other courses approved to satisfy graduation requirements that are offered in a two-part format, students would earn an elective credit for Part I and would earn a standard credit in the content area upon successful completion of Part II (and take any associated SOL test, if there is one).

12. May eligible students with disabilities use courses other than those listed in the Board of Education's Credit Accommodations Guidelines to satisfy the course content requirements for the Standard Diploma?

Yes, in mathematics and science. In mathematics and science, students may select from the list of courses approved by the Board of Education to satisfy graduation requirements in those content areas. A link to this list is located at the end of this document.

No, in history and social science. To satisfy the history and social science graduation requirements, students must complete Virginia and U.S. History and Virginia and U.S. Government as the minimum content courses. It is the IEP Team/504 Committee's responsibility to determine the recommended coursework appropriate for each eligible student.

The Board of Education's Guidelines on Credit Accommodations allow Parts I and II of Algebra I, Geometry, Earth Science, and Biology to each earn a standard credit towards the total number required in the subject area for the Standard Diploma only. A student who chooses to earn standard credits by taking both Algebra I and Geometry in two parts or both Earth Science and Biology in two parts must complete both parts of both courses to meet the minimum course requirements, and would earn three standard credits in the content area plus one additional credit that could count as an elective credit. Two-part courses may also be combined with full-year courses to meet the requirements. See the next question for more information on offering two-part courses for standard credit.

Examples: (Note: Credit accommodations apply only for eligible students with disabilities and only for the Standard Diploma.)

- Mathematics:
 - An eligible student completing Algebra I, Parts I and II (3131/3132) and Geometry, Parts I and II (3144/3145) would earn three standard credits in mathematics and 1 additional credit that could count as an elective credit.
 - A student could take Algebra I, Parts I and II (3131/3132), and a full-year Geometry course (3143) to earn the required three standard credits in mathematics.
 - A sequence of Algebra I, Parts I and II (3131/3132) and Algebra, Functions, and Data Analysis (3134) could be used in place of an Algebra I (3130) and Geometry (3143) course sequence.
 - If a student chooses to take full-year courses in Algebra I (3130) and Geometry (3143), he/she would need to complete one additional approved course in mathematics to earn the third standard credit in mathematics, i.e., no mathematics credit accommodations have been exercised.
- Laboratory Science: Courses completed to satisfy this requirement must include course selections from at least two different science disciplines.
 - An eligible student completing Earth Science, Parts I and II (4200/4201) and Biology, Parts I and II (4300/4301) would earn three standard credits in science plus one additional credit that could count as an elective credit.
 - A student could take a full-year Earth Science course (4210) and Biology, Parts I and II (4300/4301) to earn the required three standard credits in science.

- A sequence of Earth Science, Parts I and II (4200/4201) and a full-year Physics course (4510) could be used in place of an Earth Science (4210) and Biology (4310) course sequence.
 - If a student chooses to take full-year courses in Earth Science (4210) and Biology (4310), he/she would need to complete one additional approved course in science to earn the third standard credit in science, i.e., no science credit accommodations have been exercised.
 - A student could take Earth Science, Parts I and II (4200/4201) and Principles of Technology I and II (9811/9812) to earn three standard credits in science and one elective credit. The sequence of Principles of Technology I and II (9811/9812) will satisfy one standard credit in science for Physics and one elective credit. Students who enroll in Principles of Technology courses for a Physics credit must have completed Algebra I and one other laboratory science course prior to enrolling in Principles of Technology.
- History and Social Science:
 - An eligible student completing Virginia (VA) and United States (U.S.) History, Parts I and II (2361/2362) and VA and U.S. Government, Parts I and II would earn three standard credits in history and social science plus one additional credit that could count as an elective credit.
 - A student could take VA and U.S. History, Parts I and II (2361/2362) and a full-year course in VA and U.S. Government (2440) to earn the required three standard credits in history and social science.
 - If a student chooses to take full-year courses in VA and U.S. History (2360) and VA and U.S. Government (2440), he/she would need to complete one additional approved course in history and social science to earn the third standard credit in history and social science, i.e., no history and social science accommodations have been exercised.

13. Do any options exist for meeting the graduation requirement in Economics and Personal Finance and the requirement to earn a Board-approved career and technical education credential?

A Personal Finance course (3120) was approved to satisfy a mathematics requirement for the Modified Standard Diploma. While this course alone may not meet the Economics and Personal Finance (6120) requirement for a Standard Diploma, if it is augmented to include the 21 Workplace Readiness Skills (WRS) for the Commonwealth, a student may use the augmented Personal Finance course to meet the Economics and Personal Finance requirement for a Standard Diploma if he/she has also earned at least three standard credits in history and social science. The economics strand in these courses would be deemed a credit accommodation. Upon completion of the augmented Personal Finance course, the student

may take the Workplace Readiness Skills (WRS) assessment to earn the Board-approved Workplace Readiness Skills credential. If the course and WRS assessment are passed, this approach would satisfy the graduation requirements for economics and personal finance, history and social science, and the industry credential.

Returning Students

14. May students with disabilities who previously graduated with a Modified Standard Diploma (MSD) return to earn a standard diploma?

Students with disabilities through the age of eligibility who received less than a Standard Diploma remain eligible for a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and therefore may return to work towards meeting the requirements of the Standard Diploma.

“**Age of eligibility**” means all eligible children with disabilities who have not graduated with a standard or advanced studies high school diploma who, because of such disabilities, are in need of special education and related services, and whose second birthday falls on or before September 30, and who have not reached their 22nd birthday on or before September 30 (two to 21, inclusive) in accordance with the *Code of Virginia*. A child with a disability whose 22nd birthday is after September 30 remains eligible for the remainder of the school year. (§ 22.1-213 of the *Code of Virginia*; 34 CFR 300.101(a) and 34 CFR 300.102(a) (3) (ii))

15. Are divisions required to contact students with remaining eligibility who previously graduated with a Modified Standard Diploma and inform them of their right to return to school and attempt to meet the requirements of a Standard Diploma?

Students who exited school with less than a Standard Diploma should have been informed of their right to continued FAPE through the Summary of Performance (SoP) and/or an exit IEP addendum; however, in light of the additional pathways to the Standard Diploma that are now available with credit accommodations, divisions are encouraged to contact recipients of the Modified Standard Diploma through the age of eligibility and inform them of the change in policy and remind them that they may return. How these students are contacted is a local decision.

Forms/Documentation/Procedures

16. What consent is required for credit accommodations?

Informed written consent of the parent or age of majority student is required for the use of credit accommodations. Although a 504 plan does not require consent, the eligibility form for credit accommodations does. Therefore, informed written parental/student consent for credit accommodations applies to 504 students as well.

17. What resources are available for school divisions in order to implement the use of credit accommodations for students with disabilities?

Links to resources found the VDOE website can be found at the end of this document.

A sample eligibility form to assist IEP Teams/504 Committees in documenting the eligibility process is available on the VDOE website. The signed eligibility form and supporting documentation must be maintained and made available upon request. In addition, a link to the updated sample transition IEP form that provides the minimum requirements to document credit accommodations on the IEP is also provided at the end of the document.

Until online IEP vendors produce the changes to local forms, procedures to document the use of credit accommodations in the IEP (i.e., present level of performance (PLOP), prior notice, accommodations page) will be left to individual divisions.

18. Must all credit accommodations be documented in the IEP or 504 plan?

Credit accommodations that are available exclusively to students with disabilities must be documented in accordance with the Board of Education approved guidelines for standard diploma credit accommodations for students with disabilities (i.e., locally awarded verified credit in the content areas of mathematics and English reading/writing).

19. What constitutes a standards-based goal and how can IEP Teams document that this requirement is met?

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEA 2004) and Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act* (504) emphasize the importance of providing access to the general curriculum, so that students with disabilities can meet the educational standards that apply to all children. There is no definition of ‘general education curriculum’ in IDEA 2004 or 504 nor what constitutes ‘access’ to it. In some cases, these terms are used to mean that academic content standards are discussed in the process of developing an IEP or 504 Plan, but not used specifically in the written content. In determining if this requirement is met, when designing the student’s current course of study and developing the IEP, IEP Teams should look for connections to grade level standards in the student’s present level of performance (PLOP), some of the annual goals, and/or transition activities. This creates a program that is aimed at getting the student to a proficient level on state standards in addition to addressing transition, functional and/or behavioral needs of the student, as needed. In addition, the 504 committee should make the connections between the recommended accommodations in the 504 Plan and access to the academic standards. Ultimately it is the discretion of the school division to determine how to document this requirement; however, a review of student records and a statement of the connections to the content standards should be considered and attached to the eligibility form.

20. May a division change the sample *Credit Accommodations for Students with Disabilities (IDEA and 504) Eligibility Form* to meet local needs?

Divisions may change the appearance, level of detail, or order of the information in the document, but the eligibility criteria must remain intact.

21. Must individual courses be listed on the credit accommodations eligibility form?

The level of detail required in the eligibility form is a local decision; however, the specificity must be sufficient for individuals responsible for implementation of the approved credit accommodations to proceed as the IEP Team intended.

22. Must a new credit accommodation eligibility form be completed for each core area considered?

An IEP Team/504 Committee may use one form to document all credit accommodations.

23. How often must the Credit Accommodations for SWD Eligibility Form be completed?

For IDEA eligible students at the secondary level the discussion must occur at the annual IEP meeting and more often if the need arises. The 504 committees should consider accommodations on an as needed basis.

Additional Resources

[Virginia Department of Education Graduation Requirements](#)

[Virginia Department of Education Credit Accommodations](#) – Includes Guidelines for Standard Diploma Credit Accommodations for Students with Disabilities, Sample Eligibility Form, and Sample Transition IEP.

List of courses approved by the Board of Education to satisfy graduation requirements:

[Effective for Students Who Entered Ninth Grade for the First Time in 2010-2011 and Beyond](#)

[Effective for Students Who Entered Ninth Grade for the First Time in 2003-2004 through 2009-2010](#)