

April 2013

## **Guidelines for Standard Diploma Credit Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

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.

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. 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 guidelines follow these frequently asked questions and corresponding answers.

### **What are credit accommodations?**

Credit accommodations provide alternatives for students with disabilities in earning the standard and verified credits required to graduate with a Standard Diploma. Credit accommodations for students with disabilities may include:

- Alternative courses to meet the standard credit requirements
- Modifications to the requirements for locally awarded verified credits
- Additional tests approved by the Board of Education for earning verified credits
- Adjusted cut scores on tests for earning verified credits
- Allowance of work-based learning experiences through career and technical education (CTE) courses

### **Do credit accommodations mean expectations are lower for students with disabilities?**

Most students with disabilities earn either a Standard Diploma or Advanced Studies Diploma by successfully completing the same courses and passing the same Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments as non-disabled students.

Credit accommodations are intended only for those students with disabilities who previously would have been candidates for the Modified Standard Diploma.

While credit accommodations provide alternate pathways and flexibility, students receiving accommodations must earn the 22 standard credits and six verified credits required to graduate with a Standard Diploma. In contrast, only 20 standard credits and 0 verified credits are required for the Modified Standard Diploma

Students granted credit accommodations are expected to complete the same rigorous course requirements — including earning an approved career or industry credential and completing a virtual course and a course in economics and personal finance — as students pursuing a Standard Diploma by traditional means.

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<b>Comparison of Credit Requirements: Standard Diploma vs. Modified Standard Diploma</b>				
	<b>Standard Diploma</b>		<b>Modified Standard Diploma</b>	
<b>Subject or Course</b>	<b>Standard Credits</b>	<b>Verified Credits</b>	<b>Standard Credits</b>	<b>Verified Credits</b>
English	4	2	4	0
Mathematics	3	1	3	0
Laboratory Science	3	1	2	0
History & Social Sciences	3	1	2	0
Health & Physical Education	2	0	2	0
Foreign Language, Fine Arts or Career & Technical Education	2	0	1	0
Economics and Personal Finance	1	0	0	0
Electives	4	0	6	0
Student-Selected Test	0	1	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>0</b>
Board-approved career or industry credential	<b>Required</b>		<b>Not Required</b>	
Virtual course	<b>Required</b>		<b>Not Required</b>	

**Who determines whether a student is eligible for credit accommodations?**

Credit accommodations are determined by the IEP team or 504 committee at any point after the student's eighth-grade year. The school must secure the informed written consent of the parent/guardian and the student to choose credit accommodations after a review of the student's academic record and full disclosure of the student's options. IEPs and 504 plans must specify which credit accommodations are allowed and under what circumstances.

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

- The student must have a current IEP or 504 plan with standards-based content goals.
- The student must have a disability that precludes him or her from meeting grade-level expectations but is learning on-grade-level content.
- The student must need significant instructional supports to access grade-level SOL content and to show progress.
- The student, based on multiple objective measures of past performance, might not be expected to achieve the required units of credit within the standard time frame.

**Does a student's transcript or diploma indicate that credit accommodations were utilized?**

A student's transcript would not reflect the use of credit accommodations for the Standard Diploma.

**Are credit accommodations available for students with disabilities currently pursuing a Modified Standard Diploma?**

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Students who entered the ninth grade before 2013-2014 may employ credit accommodations in transitioning from a Modified Standard Diploma to a Standard Diploma. Specific credit accommodations must be identified in students' IEPs or 504 plans.

**Under what circumstances may a student with disabilities receive a locally awarded credit as a credit accommodation in English or mathematics?**

Local school boards may grant locally awarded verified credits in mathematics and English to students with disabilities by following a procedure similar to the one described in the SOA for approving locally awarded verified credits in history and science for all students.

Under the guidelines approved by the Board of Education, a student with a disability must pass the course and take the corresponding SOL test twice and achieve a score of at least 375 before receiving this credit accommodation.

**Under what circumstances is a student with disabilities allowed to take the Virginia Modified Achievement Standards Test (VMAST) as a credit accommodation?**

The VMAST assessments will be available to eligible students with disabilities as a separate alternate assessment during the 2012-2013 and 2013-14 school years. Beginning in 2014-2015, the VMAST may be used as a credit accommodation for End-of-Course reading and Algebra I for students scoring 374 or below following two attempts at the corresponding SOL End-of-Course test. Participation criteria must be met and supporting documentation must be completed.

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