

Virginia Department of Education

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### Highly Qualified Special Education Teachers

On April 20, 2005, the Board of Education adopted a proposal to implement the requirements for highly qualified special education teachers. The proposal outlined the application of the highly qualified designation for special education teachers and revisions to the High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE). The following information responds to frequently asked questions about the implementation requirements.

**1. What does “highly qualified” mean for special education teachers in Virginia?**

The federal law requires that all special education teachers must meet the requirements that they hold a bachelor’s degree and a license in special education. The meaning of highly qualified depends on the category and the role the special education teacher assumes in the school. Please review the *Virginia Requirements to be a Highly Qualified Special Education Teacher* adopted by the Board of Education on April 20, 2005.

**2. Will the special education conditional license meet the federal requirement of holding a license in special education?**

Yes, the special education conditional license will meet this requirement; however, the individual must make satisfactory progress toward full licensure by completing a minimum of six to nine semester hours each year and all requirements for full licensure within the three years of the conditional license.

**3. How is a consultative special education teacher defined in Virginia?**

A special education consultative teacher works collaboratively with a general education teacher designated as highly qualified under the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*, or assists the students with their special education needs. The consultative teacher is not the teacher of record for the core content. A special education teacher who works solely in a **consultative** role by providing adjustments to the learning environment, modifications of instructional methods, adaptation of curricula and/or the use of appropriate accommodations to meet the needs of individual children may be designated highly qualified by holding a valid Virginia license with the endorsement in the special education category assigned.

**4. What is Virginia’s High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) approved by the Board of Education?**

The Board of Education has approved multiple avenues for special education teachers to demonstrate subject area competency. The HOUSSE options applicable for eligible special education teachers are outlined in the *Virginia Requirements for Teachers Not New to the Teaching Profession to Meet the Definition of Highly Qualified in the Federal Core Academic Areas and Special Education*.

**5. If a special education teacher chooses to demonstrate subject area competency by passing a rigorous state-approved test, what test or tests would the individual need to pass?**

The rigorous state-approved test at the elementary level is Praxis II (0014-Elementary Content Knowledge Test). The passing cut-score for the elementary assessment is 143.

The rigorous state-approved test at the middle and secondary levels is Praxis II Middle School Content Test for each subject area listed below.

<b>Test</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Required Score</b>
Middle School English/Language Arts	0049	164
Middle School Mathematics	0069	163
Middle School Science	0439	162
Middle School Social Studies	0089	160

**6. Among several options for special education teachers to demonstrate subject matter competence in Virginia’s HOUSSE provisions are the content knowledge institutes in core academic areas. What institutes satisfy the requirements for elementary content areas? What institutes satisfy the requirements for middle and secondary content areas?**

Elementary special education teachers who are eligible to use the institute as an option to demonstrate subject matter competence are required to complete an institute in each of the core subject areas they teach. Therefore, an institute would be required in each of the core areas of reading/language arts/English, mathematics, science, and social studies to demonstrate subject matter competence in those four areas.

Middle and secondary special education teachers who are eligible to use the institute as an option may complete an institute in each of the subjects they teach. Therefore, one institute would be required in each of the following subject areas: mathematics; reading/language arts/English; and social studies.

Middle and secondary special education teachers of science who are eligible to use the institute are required to take an institute in each content area of science (biology, chemistry, earth science, and physics) they teach.

Note: Institutes must meet the Department of Education requirements for high quality professional development outlined in SUPTS. MEMO NO. 82, dated April 16, 2004.

**7. Do institutes need to be approved through the Virginia Department of Education before they can be used by teachers to demonstrate subject area competency?**

No, the institute does not need to be pre-approved by the Virginia Department of Education. However, all institutes must meet the requirements for high quality professional development as approved by the Virginia Board of Education and outlined in SUPTS. MEMO NO. 82, dated April 16, 2004.

**8. If a teacher chooses the HOUSSE option of accruing 180 professional development points to demonstrate subject matter competency, how far back may the activities/coursework count toward the highly qualified designation?**

This option requires that the professional development activities or coursework be completed within the most recent five-year license renewal period. Coursework being considered for an option focusing on an equivalent major or minor may be included without regard to the date of completion.

**9. How often must a special education teacher be designated as highly qualified?**

The highly qualified designation for special education is a one-time requirement. It is only necessary to repeat the designation if the special education teacher's assignment changes. For example, if the special education teacher meets highly qualified requirements for elementary school instruction and continues to work at the elementary level, the highly qualified designation is permanent; however, if the special education teacher moves to a middle or high school setting, then the individual would have to meet the highly qualified requirements for those levels of instruction and content areas.

**10. If a special education teacher collaborates with a highly qualified content teacher does the special education teacher need to meet the highly qualified requirement in the content area?**

If the teacher of record is a highly qualified content teacher, the special education teacher would need to hold only a valid Virginia license with an endorsement in special education.

**11. What is meant by “new to the profession?”**

A teacher is considered new to the profession if the individual has less than one full year (at least 160 teaching days the first year of employment) of teaching experience in a public or accredited nonpublic school.

**12. What is the “highly qualified” requirement for special education teachers who are teaching core content to students above the elementary level with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are participating in the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP)?**

Special education teachers who are teaching core content subjects to students with significant cognitive disabilities who are participating in the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP), including those teaching above the elementary level, are required to meet the highly qualified requirements for special education teachers at the elementary level.

**13. Will the designation of highly qualified teacher be included on a teacher’s license?**

No, such a designation will not appear on the teacher’s license. However, the *No Child Left Behind Act* requires school divisions to maintain a database of highly qualified teachers and report selected data to the Virginia Department of Education. The Virginia Department of Education will continue to collect data pertaining to the highly qualified requirements for each school division.

**14. If a special education teacher becomes highly qualified as required through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004, does this make the teacher highly qualified to teach students without disabilities in the subject area?**

No, the IDEA 2004 law specifically addresses the requirements for highly qualified special education teachers. Individuals teaching students without disabilities must meet the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act* to become highly qualified.

**15. When a teacher licensed with a special education endorsement becomes highly qualified in a content area under Virginia’s HOUSSE, does the individual receive an endorsement in the content area?**

No, the individual does not receive an endorsement in the content area.

**16. Does the highly qualified designation extend to nonpublic schools, including nonpublic special education schools serving publicly placed students?**

No, the requirements of the *No Child Left Behind Act* do not apply to teachers hired by private elementary and secondary schools.

**17. Will the Virginia Department of Education sponsor and/or fund institutes?**

The Virginia Department of Education is sponsoring summer 2005 content academies and is planning to fund regional institutes through the special education State Improvement Grant. The Virginia Department of Education will continue to explore other means of assistance for local educational agencies (LEAs) in this area. Also, LEAs may use federal funds to assist teachers in receiving the designation of highly qualified by July 1, 2006.

**18. When are special education teachers required to meet the highly qualified requirements?**

The NCLB Act requires that all special education teachers who teach core academic subjects employed in Title I schools must be highly qualified when employed for the 2005-06 school year. All other special education teachers of core academic subjects must be highly qualified by July 1, 2006. However, new special education teachers who teach two or more academic subjects who are highly qualified in mathematics, language arts, science, or social studies have two years after the date of employment to be highly qualified in the other core academic subject areas, which may be met through HOUSSE.