



#082-21

**Commonwealth of Virginia
Virginia Department of Education
Superintendent's Memo #082-21**

DATE: March 26, 2021
TO: Division Superintendents
FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction
SUBJECT: **Alternative Accreditation Plan Applications for Special Purpose Schools**

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has modified the Alternative Accreditation Plan timeline and application for special purpose schools to more appropriately align with the Virginia Accreditation system. As a reminder: [8VAC20-131-420.D](#) of the Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia states (in part):

D. Alternative accreditation plans. Subject to the provisions of subsection B of this section, the governing school board of special purpose schools such as those provided for in §22.1-26 of the Code of Virginia, Governor's schools, special education schools, alternative schools, or career and technical schools that serve as the student's school of principal enrollment may seek approval of an alternative accreditation plan from the board. Schools offering alternative education programs, schools with a graduation cohort of 50 or fewer students as defined by the graduation rate formula adopted by the board may request that the board approve an alternative accreditation plan to meet the graduation and completion index benchmark. Special purpose schools with alternative accreditation plans shall be evaluated on standards appropriate to the programs offered in the school and approved by the board prior to August 1 of the school year for which approval is requested. Any student graduating from a special purpose school with a Standard Diploma or an Advanced Studies

Diploma must meet the requirements prescribed in 8VAC20-131-50 or 8VAC20-131-51.

In addition, pursuant to [§ 22.1-253.13:3.H](#) of the Code of Virginia, any school board, on behalf of one or more of its schools, may request the Board of Education for releases from state regulations and for approval of an Individual School Accreditation Plan for the evaluation of the performance of one or more of its schools as authorized for certain other schools by the Standards of Accreditation.

The Alternative Accreditation application process does not apply to schools or programs where the students' data are returned to other Virginia public schools for the purpose of accountability. This process should be limited to schools which have a very specific purpose and mission where there is a better method to calculate student performance on one or more school quality indicators than found in the current Virginia Accreditation system. It will be the responsibility of the division, through the application process, to clearly describe why this is the case. It is anticipated that there will be very few schools who qualify for an Alternative Accreditation process.

The current application cycle will create plans that will be effective beginning in the 2022-2023 accreditation year using data from the 2021-2022 school year. If a school has had a previously approved alternate accreditation plan, the division will need to submit a new application for Board approval.

The templates to request an approval of an alternative accreditation plan for special purpose schools and for graduation cohorts of fifty or fewer students are attached to this email.

Timeline for 2022-2023 accreditation year applications

Please note: The timeline for the 2022-2023 accreditation year submission has been extended due to the pandemic. In future years, applications will be due in April to allow for full Board approval prior to August 1 of the impacted school year:

- **June 30, 2021.** Applications are due to the VDOE. Applications should be submitted via email to Accountability@doe.virginia.gov. Local boards of education must approve the plan prior to submission.
- **July 30, 2021.** Feedback will be sent to divisions if additional information or clarifications are needed prior to presentation to the Virginia Board of Education.
- **September 23, 2021.** Virginia Board of Education reviews applications for the 2022-2023 accreditation year for the first time.
- **October 21, 2021.** Virginia Board of Education reviews for the second time and approves/denies applications for the 2022-2023 accreditation year (the division Superintendent and a school representative may be required to appear before the board at this meeting).
- **September 15, 2022.** Data to support the approved alternative accreditation plan review are due to the VDOE. Data are only required if the alternative accreditation data improves the preliminary accreditation data available at that time. It is the responsibility of the division/school to submit alternative accreditation data in accordance to the plan for consideration.

For more information

If you have questions, please contact Julie Molique, Director of Accountability, at Accountability@doe.virginia.gov. This information was previously released as a Superintendent's Email on March 24, 2021.

JFL/JAM/as

- A. Attachment: [Alternative Accreditation Request - Special Purpose Schools for 2022-2023](#)
(DOCX)
- B. Attachment: [Alternative Accreditation Request - Graduation Cohort for 2022-2023](#)
(DOCX)