

## Special Permission Credit Accommodations: A Path to the Standard Diploma for Students with Disabilities

### Traditional Path to Standard Diploma

For a number of years prior to 2019, to obtain a “Standard Diploma” that would be accepted at most post-secondary schools and programs and required for obtaining federal student aid, high school students would need to pass both their grade level class and the corresponding Standards of Learning (SOL) in order to get the required verified credits. This has been challenging for a number of students with disabilities who struggle with test taking or are otherwise not well suited to demonstrating their knowledge on a standardized test. 400 is considered a passing score on the SOL. If students were able to score 375-399, there was already an option for them to possibly get a credit for that particular SOL, but until 2019, students scoring below 375 were not able to stay on the path to a Standard Diploma.

### New Option and Eligibility

As of 2019, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) has allowed for a new path to the Standard Diploma. This is called the Special Permission Credit Accommodation. Similar to the existing path for students scoring 375-399 on the SOL, this option allows students with disabilities who have either an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan to pursue “verified credit” for the class that will keep them on the Standard Diploma track. This option can be used for as many verified credits/SOLs as needed.

To be eligible, students must:

1. Have a documented disability that presents challenges to the students ability to demonstrate their knowledge on an SOL, even with available accommodations
2. Score under 375 on a class SOL
3. Have either an IEP or 504 Plan
4. Be on grade level with their classroom work, regardless of setting (i.e., not possible for students with a modified curriculum)
5. Be able to demonstrate understanding of the academic content of the class
6. Be in high school or lower grade levels currently

### Understanding Verified Credits

“Verified Credits” are given when students passed a required class AND the SOL (or alternative assessment for that class). For example, to get a verified credit for 9<sup>th</sup> grade English, a student must pass the 9<sup>th</sup> Grade English Class and 9<sup>th</sup> Grade English SOL. Students in 9<sup>th</sup> grade need five verified credits to stay on the Standard Diploma path, while students in 10<sup>th</sup> grade or higher must have six verified credits. **Verified credits are required for reading, writing, math, science, and history.** To get a Standard Diploma, students must earn each of the grade level verified credits for that subject.

## Path to Request the Special Permission Credit Accommodation

If you think your child would benefit from the Special Permission Credit Accommodation option, work with your IEP or 504 Team. Your school division must submit a Special Permission Locally Awarded Verified Credit Accommodation form to the VDOE for the eligible student. This is a fast and simple request. Each time a class/subject will require a credit accommodation, the request form must be filled out. This request must show how the disability prevents the student from fully demonstrating his/her knowledge of the course content on the SOL test, as well as evidence of/consideration of other accommodations you may have tried. VDOE will review the request and return their findings to the school division. *VDOE is only approving permission to use this accommodation, not the actual materials used to show the student is competent in the subject area.* VDOE will not deny the option to take this path. They will either approve the request or ask for additional information to be submitted.

Next, each school division will determine an alternative method to allow the student to show subject competency. This can be done through submission of materials such as classwork, papers, projects, class assessments, write questions, and teachers verifying that students can verbally answer class questions.

In Fairfax, each school will have a committee for locally verified credits to see if content knowledge is demonstrated. Their decision will be a yes, no, or request for more information. This decision cannot be appealed.

So the steps are:

1. Ask VDOE for permission to use this option and get approval OR submit additional info as needed
2. Work with your school division on showing subject competency in one of a variety of ways.

## Tips

Once a student is off the SOL track, it is hard to get back on. If you want your child to have a Standard Diploma, keep them on the SOL track.

VDOE says that the Virginia Alternative Assessment Program (VAAP) is really for the 1% of students with the most significant disabilities. The aim is for most students with disabilities to pursue Standard Diplomas, using the Special Permission Credit Accommodation as needed.

You do not need to ask for this option in your IEP, but it is a good idea to include in the IEP plans to pursue the Special Permission Credit Accommodation if a student is not able to pass their SOL tests.

## Resources

1. Information on this option from VDOE- <https://www.doe.virginia.gov/parents-students/for-students/graduation/graduation-requirement-resources/credit-accommodations>
2. For more general information on Special Education, visit <https://thearcofnova.org/programs/transition/getting-special-education/>.
3. To watch recorded on this and other topics, visit <https://www.youtube.com/user/VideosatTheArcofNoVA>