

Effective Advocacy and Special Permission Credit Accommodation

By Rachna Sizemore Heizer, J.D.

Virginia Autism Project

Fairfax County Special Education PTA

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Rachna@electrachna.com

Special Permission Credit Accommodation

- ▶ The VDOE received notification that the Virginia Substitute Evaluation Program (VSEP) would no longer be permissible for use in Virginia's federal accountability system.
 - ▶ Due to this new interpretation, the Board of Education approved the use of Special Permission Credit Accommodations to provide those students with disabilities who previously might have used the VSEP with a pathway to earn the necessary locally awarded verified credits to obtain a standard diploma.
- ▶ What does this mean?

What are Verified Credits?

- ▶ To Graduate with a Standard Diploma, a student 10th grade or above must earn 6 verified credits. A student 9th grade or below must earn 5 verified credits. These are required for reading, writing, math, science and history in high school.
- ▶ A verified credit means the student has passed the required class AND the SOL or alternative assessment related to that class. For example, a student must pass an English class AND the English SOL.
- ▶ Without this, a student receives an Applied Studies Diploma. This means even failing just ONE SOL results in an Applied Studies Diploma
- ▶ An Applied Studies diploma is not accepted at NOVA, most colleges and postsecondary programs.
- ▶ An Applied Studies Diploma means a student is ineligible for federal student aid.
- ▶ Keep in mind students cannot access the Pulley or Davis or STEP post-graduate programs with a Standard Diploma BUT they CAN be working towards a Standard Diploma in these programs. So students can always defer a class or two needed towards graduation with a standard diploma and take that class or classes while accessing the post-graduate programs.

Special Permission Credit Accommodation is a New Path to Verified Credits

The special permission credit accommodation permits local school boards to award locally awarded verified credits in reading, writing, mathematics, science and history, to certain students with disabilities. This is RETROACTIVE to anyone currently in high school - meaning it applies to any SOL taken for any qualifying student who is still in high school.

Eligible students must:

- ▶ pass the high school course based on a non-modified curriculum (i.e. Grade Level);
- ▶ score **below** 375 on the SOL test;
- ▶ have a documented disability that presents a unique or significant challenge to the degree that the student is unable to demonstrate knowledge of the course content on the SOL test using available accommodations; and
- ▶ demonstrate achievement in the academic content through an appeal process administered at the local level.

Steps in the Process - Approval

- ▶ The decision to consider a special permission credit accommodation should be made through the IEP and/or 504 review process.
- ▶ School divisions must submit a Special Permission Locally Awarded Verified Credit Accommodation form to the VDOE for each student being considered for a locally awarded verified credit with a SOL scaled score below 375.
- ▶ Documentation regarding the disability that prevents the student from fully demonstrating his/her knowledge of the course content on the SOL test even with accommodations must be included on the form.
- ▶ This documentation should include evidence of the use or consideration of other credit accommodations and other substitute assessment options.
- ▶ The VDOE staff will review the submitted documentation and will return the results of the review to the school division representative.
- ▶ VDOE must approve USE of the accommodation, not the materials used to demonstrate competency to verify the credit

What does this mean?

This is available for students:

- ▶ Might have previously qualified for VSEP
- ▶ Are taking and passing a class on the SOL/non modified curriculum (CAT A, team taught, gen ed etc)
- ▶ Have a documented disability that prevents them from demonstrating knowledge on an SOL even with current accommodations and alternatives
- ▶ Taken and failed the SOL exam
- ▶ Demonstrating content knowledge in other ways, for example through classwork, papers, projects, class assessments, written questions, and participation in class (the video even says that a teacher can verify that the student has been able to verbally answer the question)

VDOE is asking the schools to fill out an excel spreadsheet for each student explaining the justification for allowing them to have the accommodation. The spreadsheet must be done per class/subject. VDOE must approve the use of the accommodation. The School system then puts a system in place to verify the credit through other means (ie classwork etc)

Process to get Verified Credit

It is now up to each school division to figure alternative methods of demonstrating competency.

VDOE simply approves the form, not the materials. Less burdensome than VSEP because VDOE does not need to review the materials or approve them. They simply approve the form.

The form is a fillable PDF that simply documents WHY this is necessary and certifies that the student has demonstrated competency in other ways.

Each school system figures out its internal process verifying the credit - for determining whether the student demonstrates competency. There is already a process in place for those scoring 375-400 (locally verified credit).

FCPS/PWCS/Loudoun have not released their regs! We need to keep pressure on them to release this. School staff don't seem to understand it or even be aware it exists.

- ▶ My interpretation is that the documentation for the verified credit should be similar to the requirements to receive the current already existing locally verified credit process for students who score above 375. But other than that they don't give much guidance.
- ▶ I've suggested to FCPS that it not be burdensome to the teachers and allow them to use current course work and also a variety of course work/ways to demonstrate competency.

Next Steps and Links

- ▶ Here is the link from VDOE with more information.

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/graduation/credit_accommodations.shtml

NEXT STEPS - Let your schools/IEP teams know this exists and pressure your school systems to use it. It is applicable NOW and retroactive for anyone currently in high school.

Effective Advocacy

How to become an effective advocate for your child

Two types of advocacy

Individual versus Collective

- ▶ **For your child** - school, community - doctors, therapists, extracurricular activities
- ▶ **Collective/Political** - advocating for policies, whether at school or in community
- ▶ Schools are often more willing to help you if they see you are willing to help others. Schools will help your child if you think you will help them improve education for all and if they see you as a team player.

Two types of problems in advocating:

- ▶ Complaining too much without offering solutions
- ▶ Thinking you need to be everyone's friend.
- ▶ You are not there to make friends but you are there to be part of a team. Do your part. Be passionate about your child but not emotional.

First Questions - what type of problem is it and where does that problem get solved?

- ▶ What type of problem is it? Is it a problem with the law or policy or a problem with implementation of a law or policy (ie the policy itself is causing the problem or the person/school implementing the policy is the problem)
 - ▶ If the policy, then you need to reach out to the people in charge of making law/policy (ie school board, FCPS leadership, VDOE, state or federal legislators) to try to change the law or policy
 - ▶ Make sure you get the right level. Is it school policy? If so, reach out to school leadership and school board. State policy - VDOE and state legislators. Federal - federal legislators
 - ▶ If implementation - then you need to reach out to the people who are implementing the policy (ie teacher, principal, FCPS admin). If you don't get anywhere with them, then go above their head. Let them know the policy is not being implemented properly.

Don't ask people to fix things out of their control - take it to the person who actually has the ability to fix the problem

Effective Advocacy for your child

- ▶ **ABILITY focused LONG TERM thinking:** Be honest about your child's needs but keep the conversation ability focused first. Think about the skills they will need for long term success and independence
- ▶ **Knowledge is power** - learn the law, school policies, FCPS regs and strategic plans, know your child's rights, know the verbiage, know the diagnosis and therapies and goals. Check out the resources and trainings from Parent Resource Center and PEATC and Wright's Law
- ▶ **Be empowered but be respectful. Be professional.** Don't be afraid. You are the expert: You know your child the best. Trust your gut. You are the most knowledgeable person when it comes to your child's needs but respect others knowledge. Don't believe authorities just because they tell you. Ask for documentation of policies. But also use team oriented language and be willing to do your part.
- ▶ **Know your listener, their goals and priorities.** Speak to what matters to them as much as you do as to what matters to you. Use their own goals to achieve your goals.
- ▶ **Numbers speak louder than words.** Use statistics in your argument.
- ▶ **Be firm but pick your battles.** Be firm in your child's legal rights. Understand IDEA and use it. Don't let them sway you with lack of resources etc. BUT also be reasonable and pick your battles wisely.

Make sure to point out the positive!

- ▶ If you know of a teacher, administrator or school doing things RIGHT or going above and beyond, TELL the WORLD!
- ▶ Email them, their superiors, Assistant Superintendents, Superintendent, School Board members, FCPS Cares
- ▶ Our good teachers/staff deserve recognition and too often don't get it
- ▶ If they know you are willing to point out the good, you will get much more respect and traction when you point out the bad
- ▶ Make sure your school, teachers, and staff know you are willing to be a collaborative part of the team and will advocate for them.
- ▶ Advocating FOR your school/teachers will get you far
- ▶ Ask the school and teachers how you can help advocate for what they need

Taking it to the top

If you are not getting the results you feel you need, go above your teacher/admins head. BUT again, pick your battles and only do this if you need to.

- ▶ Keep going up the chain of command but be careful in picking your battles. DON'T ASSUME WHEN SOMEONE TELLS YOU THEY CAN'T, IT TRULY MEANS THEY CAN'T.
- ▶ **Be passionate but also be logical.** Take the time to write and think through your case. Approach from a logical and reasonable stance rather than just pure emotion. But don't forget to bring in the personal story about your child. Tie it to greater benefits (ie people are much more willing to listen if you also describe how the change you want will benefit others). Show how you are willing to help.
- ▶ **Cc everyone!** If you email the principal and do not get a response, go up the chain while simultaneously cc'ing up the chain when following up again with the principal or teacher.
- ▶ **Retaliation:** Once they know people above them are on notice, risk of retaliation drops. It's those who they think won't go beyond the school that they are more willing to retaliate against. If you feel retaliation is happening, call it out immediately to people beyond the school building

Where to get help – School Hierarchy

- ▶ School Hierarchy: Regions: Above your school's principal is the Executive Principal, who works with his/her boss – the Regional Assistant Superintendent. FCPS is split into 5 Regions, each with their own Executive Principal and Regional Assistant Superintendent. Reach out to them if you can resolve issues at the school level. Simultaneously, you can reach out to your school board member. Follow up if you don't get an immediate response – these are busy people.
 - ▶ Region 1: <https://www.fcps.edu/department/region-1>
 - ▶ Region 2: <https://www.fcps.edu/department/region-2>
 - ▶ Region 3: <https://www.fcps.edu/department/region-3>
 - ▶ Region 4: <https://www.fcps.edu/department/region-4>
 - ▶ Region 5: <https://www.fcps.edu/department/region-5>
- ▶ Department of Special Services (DSS) - <https://www.fcps.edu/department/department-special-services> Jane Lipp Asst. Superintendent. OSEI – Office of Special Education Instruction – FCPS Special Ed Central office staff. Can call them to come help with issues at a school. Irene Meier, Director. <https://www.fcps.edu/academics/academic-overview/special-education-instruction> and <https://www.fcps.edu/academics/academic-overview/special-education-instruction/special-education-instruction-contact>
- ▶ Instructional Services Department – (ISD) in charge of gen ed instruction. <https://www.fcps.edu/department/instructional-service-department>
- ▶ Chief Academic officer – above both the Regions and DSS (and responsible for coordinating between ISD and DSS) <https://www.fcps.edu/department/chief-academic-officer>
- ▶ NEW Ombudsman – cc him always on communication of issues. Armando Peri
- ▶ Procedural Support Liaisons support schools – under DSS (Department of Procedural support – Jane Strong director). Can help with IEPs.

Advocating for change of policies - school or community

- ▶ Combination of asking for broader change framed by your personal story and statistics. Make it easy for them to understand the broader problem and solution for many.
- ▶ Always provide a solution. Don't just give them the problem
- ▶ Personal stories are key. It is what catches attention. But be careful to not go on and on about your story. Don't ask them to fix your personal issue. This is not the forum for that. This is about the broader issue. Do not ramble about your personal story. It is just a conduit. Don't keep going back to more personal stories
- ▶ Transition quickly from your story to the policy change or regulation you are asking for. Be clear and succinct. Speak with passion and conviction but not anger or frustration
- ▶ Explain how this policy change or regulation will help more than just your child. Numbers speak volumes. Back up your story/ask with statistics and numbers to make your case for why this policy change etc is necessary. (EX of Advocacy day \$4000/\$2000 waivers. Also listening tour where mentioned job statistics of FCPS grads and then compared that to those on the spectrum (78% versus 29 %. Got her attention). Researched links always help!
- ▶ Make the case your listener wants, not the case you want to make. Does it save \$\$? Does it speak to what they care about? "It's the right thing to do" doesn't always work. Tie it to THEIR priorities. Inclusion story - been advocating for it for years. Especially social inclusion. Tied it to their own portrait of a graduate and student achievement goals and the fact the FCPS has failed Indicator 5 8 years in row. Then it got traction (FCPS Inclusion workgroup to ACSD charge on inclusion).
- ▶ ALWAYS OFFER TO HELP!

Where to do you advocate

- ▶ Find all the local elected officials and follow them on FB/Subscribe to their emails. Then find out when they are holding town halls/office hours and go
- ▶ Town halls
- ▶ Sign up to speak at school board meetings, board of supervisors meetings, ACSD meeting (Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities). Many meetings have room for public comment.
- ▶ You can contact your representative in Richmond or Congress and set up a meeting there or at their home office.
- ▶ If you are not comfortable face-to-face, write an email. Same rules from previous slide apply.
 - ▶ Proofread that email!
- ▶ Always follow up face to face with a thank you email summarizing your points.
- ▶ Provide documentation and/or copies of your remarks.

Resources

- ▶ Wright's law - Great website with lots of free information and (pay) trainings.
- ▶ PEATC - Parent Education Advocacy Training Center - help parents advocate for themselves
- ▶ Fairfax County Public Schools Parent Resource Center - often hold free seminars and trainings and lots of resources to loan. Lots of great sessions to learn how to work with your child and gain expertise in a variety of areas
- ▶ FCPS Special Education Conference - free. Lots of great sessions to learn how to work with your child and gain expertise in a variety of areas. April 6
- ▶ ARC of Northern Virginia - advocates for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities.
- ▶ Autism Society of Northern Virginia - programs for people with autism and caregivers. Some advocacy

IDEA

IDEA: Section 300.347(a)(4): Least Restrictive Environment: IDEA regulations for inclusion: The following regulations from IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Act) are helpful in IEP meetings.

▶ “An explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with nondisabled children in the regular class and in [extracurricular and other nonacademic] activities * * *”
This is consistent with the least restrictive environment (LRE) provisions at Secs. 300.550-300.553, which include requirements that:

- ▶ (1) each child with a disability be educated with nondisabled children to the maximum extent appropriate (Sec. 300.550(b)(1));
- ▶ (2) each child with a disability be removed from the regular educational environment only when the nature or severity of the child’s disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Sec. 300.550(b)(1)); and
- ▶ (3) to the maximum extent appropriate to the child’s needs, each child with a disability participates with nondisabled children in nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities (Sec. 300.553).”
- ▶ <http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/iep.law.appendixa.htm>

FCPS Portrait of a graduate: Tie your ask to FCPS' larger goals

- ▶ <https://www.fcps.edu/about-fcps/portrait-graduate>
- ▶ In 2014, FCPS adopted the Portrait of a Graduate to answer this question: What are the skills necessary for success for all children in this rapidly changing, increasingly diverse, and interconnected world? Portrait of a Graduate moves FCPS students and staff members to look beyond the high-stakes testing environment and to help our students develop skills so they can be successful in the workforce of the future.
- ▶ What skills does a student need to become a successful Portrait of a Graduate?
- ▶ Communicator
- ▶ Collaborator
- ▶ Ethical and Global Citizen
- ▶ Goal-Directed and Resilient Individual

FCPS Strategic Plan: Ignite. Four Goals (under revision) Tie your ask to FCPS larger goals

- ▶ <https://www.fcps.edu/about-fcps/strategic-plan>
- ▶ “Ignite, our Strategic Plan, and four goals define the role of all FCPS staff members in living the commitment to our staff, students, and community. Each year, the School Board is updated on the four Ignite goals, which include:
- ▶ **Student Success** We commit to reaching, challenging, and preparing every student for success in school and life.
- ▶ **Caring Culture** We commit to fostering a responsive, caring, and inclusive culture where all feel valued, supported, and hopeful.
- ▶ **Premier Workforce** We commit to investing in our employees, encouraging innovation, and celebrating success.
- ▶ **Resource Stewardship** We commit to championing the needs of our school communities and being responsible stewards of the public's investment.
- ▶ **Mission Statement** Fairfax County Public Schools inspires and empowers students to meet high academic standards; lead healthy, ethical lives; and be responsible and innovative global citizens.”

FCPS School Board Student Achievement Goals: Tie your ask to FCPS' larger goals

- ▶ Goal 1. Pursue Academic Excellence
- ▶ Goal 2. Develop Essential Life Skills
- ▶ Goal 3. Demonstrate Responsibility to the Community and the World

<http://www2.fcps.edu/schlbd/monitoringreports/monitoring.shtml>