



# What's a Modified Standard Diploma?

By Melanie G. Snyder

If you have a child with special needs in eighth grade or beyond in a Virginia public school, you, your child and your child's IEP team will need to determine the most appropriate high school diploma for your child to pursue, based on your child's unique abilities and needs.

### Types of Diplomas in Virginia

Virginia has four diploma levels. Each requires a different combination of standard credits and verified credits. A standard credit is given when the student has completed 140 hours of instruction and has completed the requirements of the course. Verified credits are given when the student has earned a standard credit and has passed an end-of-course SOL test or a substitute assessment test approved by the state Board of Education.

- The Advanced Diploma is the most academically rigorous diploma, requiring 24 standard credits and 9 verified credits.
- The Standard Diploma is slightly less rigorous than the Advanced, requiring 22 standard credits and 6 verified credits.
- The Modified Standard Diploma is the next level diploma, requiring 20 standard credits. No verified credits are required for the Modified Standard Diploma.
- The Special Diploma is awarded to those students with special needs who have completed the requirements of their IEP. No specific credit requirements are attached to the Special Diploma.

### Purpose of the Modified Standard Diploma

The Modified Standard Diploma was created by the Virginia Department of Education in the year 2000 to provide an alternative for students with special needs between the Standard Diploma and the Special Diploma.

"The Board of Education had a great deal of concern about how students with special needs were fitting in with our standards-based accountability system," says H. Douglas Cox, Assistant Superintendent in the VDOE Division of Special Education and Student Services. "The board saw that there were students who were not quite able to achieve the standard diploma, but could meet prescribed standards." The Modified Standard Diploma provides those students with a viable alternative.

### Modified Standard Diploma Requirements

The Modified Standard Diploma requires students to demonstrate basic numeracy and literacy skills. In order to achieve this, the student is required to earn four standard units of credit in English and three standard units of credit in math. In addition, students need to earn two credits each in science, history/social studies and health/PE. One credit is required in fine or practical arts and the remaining six of the required total of 20 credits may come from a variety of electives. (see Resources for more information about approved courses for the Modified Standard Diploma)

While the Modified Standard Diploma does not require any verified credits, if a student takes a course for which there is an end-of-course test, the student must take the test, either with or without standard or non-standard accommodation. However, the student does not have to pass the end-of-course test in order to graduate.

The school is held accountable for the performance of students pursuing the Modified Standard Diploma, which gives added incentive for the school to help ensure that the student pursuing this diploma is successful.

### Diplomas and Post-Graduation Employment

As for what the Modified Standard Diploma may mean for students after graduation, Cox points out that student transcripts do not indicate the type of diploma earned by the student. Employers reviewing a student's high school transcript and qualifications for employment will not know what type of diploma the student earned. "The Modified Standard Diploma should not be a barrier to employment in any way for an otherwise qualified student," says Cox.

### Making the Decision

It is ultimately up to the student's IEP team to determine the most appropriate curriculum for the student, how the student's performance will be assessed and the best diploma option for the student to pursue. As critical members of that IEP team, both you and your child will want to carefully consider the options and play a role in making this decision.

This decision can be made any time after your stu-

