

Planning for the Future—Choosing the Right Diploma Option for Your Child

A Resource Document

When you have a child with a disability, planning for the future is more complex. There are many things to think about as your child moves through school and life. It can be hard to think about the future and what will happen when your child leaves school. But planning is key. **Decisions made early on can influence your child’s future.** So, at PEATC, we encourage planning with ***The End in Mind***.

Author Steven Covey says that “to begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you’re going so that you better understand where you are now and so that the steps you take are always in the right direction.” This may seem a little pie in the sky because when you have an 8-year-old, how can you possibly know what he or she will do as an adult? But choosing a destination (an end) does not mean that destination will stay the same. Hardly any of us knew in elementary, middle, or even high school the exact path we would be taking. **Things will change, but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t start planning.** It’s never too early to have hope and dreams!

The decisions parents make about diplomas and what their child studies and learns can affect **long-term outcomes**. For example, if parents decide to remove their child from the Standards of Learning (SOL) curriculum, that child will not be able to graduate with a **Standard or Advanced Studies Diploma. This will affect future opportunities.** Sometimes families will be told they can change their mind later, but that really isn’t possible as the student will be **too far behind** because of modifying the educational program. That doesn’t mean that this choice is the wrong choice for that child. It means this choice needs careful thought and consideration, without any pressure and with understanding of what the choice means for that student’s future. VODE has developed a Guide on ***Critical Decision Points for Families of Children with Disabilities*** which addresses these important considerations. A link to the *Guide* is in the Resource section of this document.



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The chart below provides a quick snapshot of possible post-school outcomes and the **public-school** diploma(s) that will allow the student to achieve those outcomes. It should be reviewed every year at the annual Individualized Education Program (IEP) starting in elementary school. Going over this information and asking questions is very important. Remember, your child at 5, 6, and 7, is not the same child at 15, 16, 17 and beyond. Many children with significant disabilities can improve their skills and achieve far beyond what you might expect at an early age. So, **keeping that end in mind**, begin on a path to get there - knowing that path may go in different directions over time and the plan should be change as needed.

DESIRED POST-SCHOOL OUTCOME	DIPLOMA TYPE(S) NEEDED
Four-Year College or University	Advanced Studies Diploma or Standard Diploma
Two-Year (community) college	Standard Diploma
Military	Standard Diploma or GED
Trade School	Standard Diploma
Certification	Standard or Applied Studies Diploma based on what the certification is (most fields require Standard Diploma)
Post-secondary program for students with disabilities	Applied Studies Diploma
Apprenticeship	Standard Diploma but varies (some apprenticeships do not require a diploma)
Employment	Depends on the field or position. Students with an Applied Studies Diploma can be employed based on their skills and employer needs.

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The following list, excerpted from the Virginia Department of Education website, describes the diploma options in Virginia. It includes options available to students no longer in public school.

Advanced Studies Diploma To graduate with an Advanced Studies Diploma for students entering the ninth grade for the first time in 2018-2019 and beyond, a student must earn at least *26 standard units of credit and five verified units of credit*.

Standard Diploma: to graduate with a Standard Diploma for students entering the ninth grade for the first time in 2018-2019 and beyond, a student must earn at least *22 standard units of credit and five verified units of credit*.

Applied Studies Diploma: The Applied Studies Diploma is a diploma option available to students identified as having a disability who complete the requirements of their [individualized education programs \(IEPs\)](#) and meet certain requirements prescribed by the Board of Education pursuant to regulations, but do not meet the requirements for any named diploma.

General Achievement Adult High School Diploma (GAAHSD) Program: This diploma is intended for individuals who are at least 18 years of age and not enrolled in public school or not otherwise meeting the compulsory school attendance requirements set forth in the *Code of Virginia*. See [General Achievement Adult High School Diploma \(GAAHSD\) Program](#) for requirements.

General Education Development (GED) Certificate. Refer to Regulations Governing General Education Development Certificates (8 VAC 20-360-10, et. seq.) See [General Educational Development \(GED\) Certificate](#) for requirements.

Certificate of Program Completion. Available to students who complete prescribed programs of studies defined by a local school board but who do not qualify for diplomas.

Standard Credit: The student successfully completes the course with 140 clock hours of instruction. Some schools may have policies that in certain cases don't require the full 140-hours.

Verified Credit The student earns a standard credit AND passes the end of year Standards of Learning (SOL) test or a different test that has been approved by the Board of Education. In some cases, a school division may award verified credits for demonstrating mastery of course content on a performance assessment instead of end of course SOL tests.

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Resources

[Applied Studies Diploma \(peatc.org\)](http://peatc.org)

[Critical Decision Points for Families of Children with Disabilities - VDOE](#)

[Graduation Requirements \(peatc.org\)](http://peatc.org)

[Military Entrance after High School \(peatc.org\)](http://peatc.org)

[Transition Planning for the Future: Be Ready, Start Early \(peatc.org\)](http://peatc.org)

[Understanding the Applied Studies Diploma \(virginia.gov\)](http://virginia.gov)

[VDOE: Graduation Requirements \(virginia.gov\)](http://virginia.gov)



PEATC's mission focuses on building positive futures for Virginia's children by working collaboratively with families, schools, and communities to improve opportunities for excellence in education and success in school and community life.



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