



**#252-22**

**Commonwealth of Virginia  
Virginia Department of Education  
Superintendent's Memo #252-22**

DATE: October 28, 2022  
TO: Division Superintendents  
FROM: Jillian Balow, Superintendent of Public Instruction  
SUBJECT: **Alternative Accreditation Plan Applications for Special Purpose Schools**

This memorandum provides information on the application process for submission of an alternative accreditation plan application for special purpose schools. 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](#).*

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 1) 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 is found in the current state accreditation system or, 2) have an on-time graduation cohort less than or equal to 50 students. It will be the responsibility of the division, through the application, to clearly describe why the school qualifies for an alternative accreditation plan. It is anticipated that there will be very few schools who qualify.

The current application cycle will create plans that will be effective beginning in the 2023-2024 accreditation year using data from the 2022-2023 school year. If a school has had a previously approved alternate accreditation plan, the division will need to submit a new application for Virginia Board of Education (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.

If a school division is seeking a waiver of accreditation requirements, as outlined in A, B, and C of [8VAC20-131-420](#), please contact the Office of Accountability at [Accountability@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:Accountability@doe.virginia.gov) to discuss the application process.

### **Timeline for 2023-2024 accreditation year applications**

- **November 3, 2022.** A virtual webinar for schools submitting a plan will be held at 10:00 a.m. Registration is required.
- **January 6, 2023.** Applications are due to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). Applications should be submitted via email to [Accountability@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:Accountability@doe.virginia.gov).
- **February 8, 2023.** Feedback will be sent to divisions if additional information or clarifications are needed prior to presentation to the Board.

- **February 17, 2023.** Submission of final alternative accreditation plan to VDOE prior to this date. The plan must be approved by the local school board prior to submission.
- **March 23, 2023.** Virginia Board of Education reviews applications for the 2023-2024 accreditation year for the first time.
- **March 24 - March 29, 2023.** The division/school may need to revise the plan based on Board feedback. The updated plan is due back to VDOE by March 29, 2023.
- **April 20, 2023.** Virginia Board of Education reviews for the second time and approves/denies applications for the 2023-2024 accreditation year (the division superintendent and a school representative may be required to appear before the Board at this meeting).
- **September 8, 2023.** Data to support the approved alternative accreditation plan are due to the VDOE for verification. It is the responsibility of the division/school to submit alternative accreditation data in accordance with their plan.

### For more information

If you have questions, please contact Amy Siepka, Director of Accountability, at [Accountability@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:Accountability@doe.virginia.gov).

JB/ABS/as

- A. Attachment: [Alternative Accreditation Request - Special Purpose Schools for 2023-2024](#)  
(DOCX)
- B. Attachment: [Alternative Accreditation Request - Graduation Cohort for 2023-2024](#)  
(DOCX)