

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (VSDB) Frequently Asked Questions

For more information, please contact the VSDB Admissions Office at (540)332-9004.

Who can consider enrollment at VSDB?

VSDB serves students within the state of Virginia who qualify for special education services under any of the following categories: deaf, hard of hearing, blind, vision impaired, or deafblind. Students may also have disabilities in addition to their hearing or vision loss. Students must have been found eligible for Special Education Services at their local school systems prior to enrolling in VSDB.

What age students can attend VSDB?

Students can enroll at VSDB starting at age 2 and may continue to receive Special Education services until they legally age out at 21 years old.

Does it cost to attend VSDB?

There is no cost for tuition, meals, residential services, transportation, or educational programs and services. Students may be responsible for paying for any special events they would like to attend off campus in the evenings.

Is VSDB a public school?

VSDB is not a public school but rather, it is a state agency funded by the General Assembly. VSDB collaborates closely with the Virginia Department of Education to ensure compliance with federal and state regulations regarding the provision of Special Education Services.

Can my child earn a diploma at VSDB?

Yes, VSDB aligns its curriculum and educational program with the Virginia Department of Education. VSDB students participate in the Virginia State Assessment Program (Standards of Learning/SOLs) and offers all the same diploma options as public schools.

What transition services does VSDB offer?

VSDB provides an array of transition services to prepare students for life after graduation. VSDB offers fully accessible transition programs that are unique to Virginia. Programs include but are not limited to:

- **Supported academic experiences** online and in the post-secondary setting to prepare students for continued post-secondary education after graduation.
- The **Achieve Work Experience Program** provides on and off campus work experiences.
- **VSDB Independent Living Apartments** provides a supervised independent living experience.
- The **CROPS Horticulture and Agriculture Program** occurs on the largest educational urban farm in the state.
- The **18+ Residential Program** provides increased independence in a supervised setting empowering young adults to demonstrate increased responsibility in preparation for life outside of VSDB.

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How many students are in the typical classroom?

A typical classroom size consists of approximately five students. Depending on specific student and/or classroom needs, there may also be a teacher aide to support instruction.

How do students enroll at VSDB?

Families are welcome to contact VSDB if they are interested in their student attending. VSDB will work with families to obtain a required referral through their local school systems. Once a referral is made, VSDB works closely with the school division and family to complete the admissions process. Upon receipt of a completed application packet, VSDB will schedule an admissions interview with the family, the student, and any other interested parties to gather information and answer any questions in order to ensure that VSDB is the most appropriate educational placement for the student.

How does the Special Education process work at VSDB?

When a student first enrolls, the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) from the local school system is transferred and implemented at VSDB. Within 30 days of enrollment to VSDB, the IEP team, including the local school division, meets and VSDB will establish a new VSDB annual IEP. VSDB strives to maintain a high level of engagement with parents and their local school systems. We work collaboratively with the referring school system to ensure that the needs of the student and the family are met. Participation in meetings may occur in person, by video phone, or conference call.

Do students stay at VSDB all year long?

VSDB follows a regular school calendar similar to public schools. The VSDB calendar includes holiday breaks as well as summer vacation. Students go home every weekend, leaving Friday at noon, and returning on Sunday in order to prepare for the upcoming school week.

Are students required to live on campus?

Student may choose to enroll as day or residential students.

How are students transported to and from VSDB?

VSDB provides all transportation for **residential students** weekly at no cost to families or to school systems. VSDB delivers students to established "hubs" throughout the state, per a predetermined schedule on Friday where parents or school systems pick them up and head home. On Sunday, VSDB picks the students back up at their assigned hub locations and times and transports them back to VSDB in preparation for the following school week. Depending on the length of the route, students are accompanied by VSDB staff in chartered busses, VSDB busses, or state vehicles. **Day students** are transported daily by their local school division or parents/guardians.

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How can parents keep in touch with their child during the week?

VSDB strives to support family engagement while students are enrolled at VSDB. Parents may call at any time to speak to their child whether during school or after school hours. Deaf students have access to videophones to support communication and both school and residential staff will assist students in making and receiving calls as necessary.

How do parents keep updated on what is occurring during the week in school or in the residential halls?

Parents/guardians keep in close contact with teachers through email, video phone, and/or phone calls. Residential reports go home weekly informing parents/guardians of good news from the week or any concerns that may arise. Both school and residential staff will communicate immediately with parents/guardians and/or the local school division should concerns arise. If the need arises, an IEP meeting will be called to address specific concerns.

What do residential students need to pack to stay on campus?

VSDB supplies towels, sheets, and pillows for all residential students. Beyond that, students may bring approved items to personalize their rooms. The Residential Program will provide a list of suggested items once a student is accepted to VSDB. Personal technology devices are allowed as long as students comply with the rules and expectations outlined in the VSDB Student Code of Conduct Handbook.

Are residential students required to have a roommate?

VSDB strives to meet the needs of individual students. Although the bedrooms are designed for a maximum of two people per room, a student may request a single room based on individual needs. The Residential Program Director will consider all requests based on room availability.

How are students supervised overnight in the residential halls?

VSDB provides supervision around the clock. Overnight staff perform bed checks every 30 minutes. Day staff arrive in the morning to ensure a successful transition to the school day.

How are students supervised while travelling on the VSDB campus?

Elementary students are always under close supervision when travelling around campus. Middle school students are required to be within eyesight of staff when travelling outside of the classroom or residential halls. High School students travel independently on campus and are expected to follow the rules and expectations outlined in the VSDB Student Code of Conduct Handbook. Should a student not adhere to the rules, the privilege to travel independently may be suspended. For high school students who still need supervision when traveling, staff remains with them, providing support as needed in order for each student to achieve his/her greatest amount of personal independence.

How does orientation and mobility instruction support independent travel for blind students in high school?

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Students in the Blind Department work with orientation and mobility specialists to learn the layout of VSDB's campus. As students demonstrate the ability to safely navigate campus both within the school buildings and outside, they earn clearance to travel independently.

How does VSDB maintain student safety?

Safety is of the utmost importance to VSDB. We conduct background checks for all employees working on our campus. Additionally, campus security is present 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to maintain a secure environment.

Does VSDB have students who are oral, wear cochlear implants, and or hearing aids?

VSDB supports effective communication skills for all students who are deaf/hard of hearing, including those who communicate through speech and/or American Sign Language. We have many students and employees who utilize assistive technology to enhance communication skills and who serve as role models for others. VSDB supports the needs of all students with a full-time audiologist and speech therapists.

Are there special services offered for students who are deafblind?

VSDB is proud to offer support services for deafblind students by nationally credentialed Interveners. VSDB's Interveners are experienced in providing this unique support that facilitates communication, learning and independence. There are also students who are deafblind that are able to access instruction without the use of an intervener. Every student is assessed on an individual basis to determine what is most educationally appropriate. All students, particularly those who are deafblind, have regular access to specialists in deafness and/or blindness who are able to provide assessments and consultative services as needed.

Can students obtain help with homework or have opportunities for tutoring?

All students have access to support services, such as tutoring if needed. Typically, tutoring occurs during after school hours either in the school or residential hall.

Are students allowed to have cell phones at VSDB?

Students are allowed to have cell phones but must adhere to the rules and expectations outlined in the VSDB Student Code of Conduct Handbook. VSDB does not take responsibility for personal technology devices.

Does VSDB have sports?

VSDB students have opportunities to participate in a variety of sports and activities to include but not limited to basketball, volleyball, goalball, track, cross country, and the walking/running club.

Will my child have role models and friends?

VSDB offers a unique educational setting where many of the staff share the same life experiences as the students. Students enjoy the opportunity to interact with adults who are successful and independent in

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their own communities and can share valuable insight and experiences with students. For many students, VSDB provides their first opportunity to interact with adults who share the same day to day real world experiences and challenges. At VSDB, no student is “the only one” but is “one of many” and is able to interact in a fully accessible educational setting with same age peers fostering friendships that last a lifetime!

How do students access health services?

VSDB has a fully staffed Student Health Department to address injuries, illness, and medication management. Additionally, a physician is available 24 hours a day while the students are in residence. Nursing staff is on duty from 7:00am until 12:00am with the Director of Student Health on call overnight. VSDB works collaboratively with the contract physicians, local hospital and other health care providers in order to address emergency situations.

What type of after school activities are available?

The School and the Residential program work collaboratively to promote many activities during and after school hours. At VSDB, learning extends beyond the classroom into the residential program with educationally based field trips that support the development of independent living, social, communication, and functional life skills. Students enjoy sports, game tournaments, dances, holiday parties and programs, guest speakers, cultural programs, and community events. All activities are designed with age appropriate goals in mind. Students also enjoy our Student Center including a snack bar, pool and air hockey tables, televisions, and board games.

Thank you for your interest in VSDB.

Please do not hesitate to contact the VSDB Office of Admissions should you have further questions!

VSDB Admissions Office

(540)332-9004

Virginia Department of Education Resources for Serving Student with Sensory Disabilities

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) provides information on educational services and resources to support students who are deaf and hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired, or deaf-blind at its website. The following links to information and resources are excerpted from the VDOE's Special Education-Specific Disabilities-Sensory Disabilities webpage:

Guidance Documents

Deaf and Hard of Hearing

- Guidelines for Working With Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing in Virginia Public Schools (Revised September 2019)
- Virginia Communication Plan for a Student Who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing (Revised September 2019)

Blindness and Visual Impairment

- Guidelines for Working With Students Who are Blind or Visually Impaired in Virginia Public Schools (Revised December 2017)
- Unified English Braille Implementation Plan for Virginia Public Schools (Updated September 2019)

State Agencies

- Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (VSDB) - The VSDB is located in Staunton, Virginia and provides a Kindergarten (K) -12 educational day program, outreach services, and residential services exclusively for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or visually impaired, or deaf-blind. The VSDB Outreach Services assist early intervention providers, local school divisions, and families in meeting the needs of children with sensory disabilities across the Commonwealth. The VSDB's admissions policy is available at its website.
 - Contact: Pat Trice, Superintendent at (540) 332-9000
- Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) - The DBVI's education services program provides services to early intervention providers, school personnel, and families to help children to be successful in school and the community, and to prepare for the future. The Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired offers training in the skills of blindness. The Library and Resource Center provides services to local school divisions to support the education of children who are blind or visually impaired and persons who are print disabled.
 - Contact: Caren Phipps, Director of Services for Children and Youth at (804) 625-3972
- Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) - The VDDHH provides standards for educational interpreting services and other services to reduce the

communication barriers between persons who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families and the professionals who serve them.

Contact: Eric Raff, Director at (800) 552-7917 V/TTY

Technical Assistance Centers and Training Programs

- Accessible Instructional Materials Center-Virginia (AIM-VA) - The AIM-VA's extensive library has developed an alternative system for providing accessible educational media under standards set by federal law to students who meet the federal requirements for print disabilities and who are eligible for accessing educational media through an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The AIM-VA, in conjunction with partnering agencies, provides required accessible educational materials to students and training for school division staff, at no cost to Local Educational Agencies.
 - Contact: AIM-VA Help Desk at (866) 926-1879
- Center for Family Involvement at the Partnership for People with Disabilities-Virginia Commonwealth University (CFI) - The CFI provides information and training to support children with disabilities, their families and professionals.
 - Contact: CFI Office at (877) 567-1122 or TTY relay; (800) 828-1120
- Radford University Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program - Radford University offers Virginia's only academic program leading to Virginia teacher licensure with an endorsement in Special Education-Deaf and Hard of Hearing PreK-12. Courses are taught through combined on-campus, distance education, and varied educational field experiences. The comprehensive program teaches all communication/instructional approaches used with students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Tuition assistance is available for qualified Virginia teachers.
 - Contact: Karen Stinson, Graduate Advisor at (540) 831-5549
- Technical Assistance Center for Children Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (TAC-DHH) - The TAC-DHH provides information, training and technical assistance pertaining to children who are deaf and hard of hearing. Assistance is available to Virginia public school divisions, including early childhood special education and early intervention programs, through the Virginia Network of Consultants for Professionals Working with Children Who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VNOC).
 - Contact: Tracey Yurechko, Project Director at (804) 828-1342
- Virginia Consortium for Teacher Preparation in Visual Impairment (VI Consortium) - The VI Consortium is the only academic program in Virginia for teacher preparation leading to Virginia teacher licensure with an endorsement in Special Education-Visual Impairment PreK-12. Classes are offered through combined on-campus, video, and web conferencing through four universities: George Mason; Norfolk State; Old Dominion; and Radford. Tuition assistance is available for qualified Virginia teachers.
 - Contact: Kimberly Avila, Coordinator at (703) 993-5625
- Virginia Hearing Aid Loan Bank (HALB) - The HALB provides hearing aids and FM systems for children in Virginia under age 18 whose hearing loss is confirmed by an audiologist. Devices are loaned for free for up to six months while families/school divisions are waiting for a permanent device to arrive.
 - Contact: Lisa Powley at (866) 596-9367

- Virginia Project for Children and Young Adults with Deaf-Blindness (VDBP) - The VDBP provides technical assistance, training, distance education, and networking information to service providers and families of children with deaf-blindness/dual sensory disabilities.
 - Contact: Julie Durando, Project Director at (804) 828-8252

- Professional Development for Educational Interpreters - The VDOE provides grant funding to assist Virginia educational interpreters and cued language transliterators with acquiring and maintaining the skills and qualifications that are required to work with children who are deaf and hard of hearing in Virginia public schools. Free regional workshops and 1:1 mentoring support are available.

American Sign Language-English Interpretation programs/courses are offered at the following Virginia colleges and universities:

- Liberty University Telephone: (434) 582-2064
- Northern Virginia Community College Telephone: (703) 323-3192
- Radford University Telephone: (540) 831-5549
- Reynolds Community College Telephone: (804) 523-5604
- Tidewater Community College Telephone: (757) 214-6157

For additional information, please contact Wanda Council, Education Specialist, Virginia Department of Education at (804) 371-4059.

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