

**State Operated Programs
Administrative Manual
2026-2027**

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PREFACE

In this manual, State Operated Programs (SOPs) refers to education programs in specialized children's hospitals, mental health facilities, and regional and local juvenile detention homes. These programs are supervised by the Virginia Department of Education. Local school divisions serve as the fiscal and human resource agent for the programs. As support services in these facilities, the State Operated Programs' mission is to provide appropriate education services to enrolled students. This manual incorporates the mandates of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA); its federal implementing regulations; and the *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia* (the Virginia Regulations), effective January 2010; the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA 2015) and the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*. It is the responsibility of each employee in State Operated Programs to read and review this manual yearly.

I. Regulations Governing State Operated Programs

A. Federal

1. As required by the provisions of IDEA and its implementing regulations, the VDOE must ensure that all persons with disabilities, ages two to 21 inclusive, are provided a free appropriate public education (FAPE). (§ 22.1-214 of the *Code of Virginia*)

Web link: [Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia](#)

2. IDEA requires that a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) be provided to all eligible children, ages two to 21, inclusive, with disabilities in Virginia. A Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) includes special education and related services required to meet the individual educational needs of children with disabilities and ensure that their parents are protected under due process procedures.

Web link: [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#)

3. Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* provides that "no otherwise qualified handicapped individual...shall, solely by reason of his/her handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." Programs operating in existing facilities must be constructed so as to be readily accessible to the disabled. Additional information on Section 504 requirements can be found at the following web link: [SECTION 504: Keys to Implementation](#).

B. State

1. Section 22.1-7 of the *Code of Virginia* addresses the educational responsibility for children in residence or in the custody of state agencies. "Each state board,

agency, and institution having children in residence or in custody shall provide education and training to such children which are at least comparable to that which would be provided to such children in the public school system.”

- a. Instructional Programs – The instructional program must be designed to provide a continuum of program alternatives to meet the needs of each student and may include, if appropriate, the following:
 - i. instruction in basic educational skills;
 - ii. prevocational, vocational, and career education;
 - iii. preparation for high school graduation;
 - iv. affective educational skills;
 - v. self-help skills; and
 - vi. preparation for the General Educational Development (GED®) examination; [“GED is a registered trademark of the American Council on Education and may not be used or reproduced without the express written permission of the American Council on Education.”].
 - b. A minimum of 5 ½ hours per day or 27 ½ hours per week of instructional time is available for each student. To document a modification to or waiver from the 5 ½ hour requirement, the State Operated Programs director or principal will complete the Waiver/Modification form with appropriate facility staff and place the statement in the student file of enrolled, school-aged students.
2. The *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia* (the Virginia Regulations) at 8VAC20-81-10 et seq. further explain the responsibilities of State Operated Programs to eligible enrolled students. The regulations can be found at the following web link: [Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia](#).

II. Functions of Agencies

A. Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) –

Authorization has been granted by statute 22.1-209.2, 22.1-214.2, and 22.1-7 to the Virginia Board of Education (Board) for the establishment, operation, and supervision of State Operated Programs (SOPs). State funds are provided for general education, special education, and related services in the state appropriation. The VDOE:

1. provides annual funding for SOP staff, materials and supplies, equipment, travel, and in-service training;
2. contracts with school divisions to provide for the fiscal management of the program;
3. provides direct supervision of the SOP instructional program;

4. monitors, enforces, and provides technical assistance and consultative services in the interpretation and implementation of state and federal laws and regulations pertaining to the education of children with disabilities;
5. reviews and evaluates State Operated Programs' compliance with state and federal regulations;
6. disseminates significant information derived from research, demonstration programs, and projects involving best instructional and behavioral strategies;
7. determines job qualifications and assists in developing job descriptions; and
8. provides input into the hiring of administrative personnel.

B. Facilities with State Operated Programs (SOP) –

According to the *Additional Responsibilities of State Boards, Agencies, and Institutions for Education and Training of Children with Disabilities in Residence or Custody* (8VAC20-81-320), specialized State Operated Programs shall provide an education program for school-age children. Specific functions include:

1. providing adequate and appropriate classroom space and a library which meets minimum educational standards that may be established by state law and all maintenance needs of this space; and
2. providing a procedural manual for all SOP employees who work within the facility.

C. Local School Divisions (*Code of Virginia* § 22.1-209.2) –

In accordance with the annual Commonwealth of Virginia cooperative agreements between the VDOE and school divisions related to services for children served in State Operated Programs, it is the responsibility of the school division to:

1. administer the SOP budget for employee salaries, materials and supplies, equipment, travel, and in-service training;
2. employ administrative personnel, teachers, and support staff;
3. establish the general policies of personnel administration as detailed in a policy and regulations manual;
4. provide for the evaluation of instructional and administrative personnel; and
5. establish the contractual calendar for SOP staff.

D. State Operated Programs (SOP)

1. Vision and Mission –

Vision: State Operated Programs is a collaborative community that empowers each child academically, socially, and emotionally.

Mission: A highly effective group of educators will provide safe, innovative, and individualized instruction to a unique group of students to encourage, support, inspire, and prepare them as confident, successful, global citizens.

2. Educational Objectives –

The fundamental goal of public schools across the Commonwealth is to enable each student, to the full extent of his/her abilities, to develop and apply the skills that are necessary for success in school, preparation for life, and reaching his/her full potential. In keeping with the Standards of Quality articulated by the Board, the Standards of Learning form the core of State Operated Programs educational programming.

3. Achievement and Assessment of Objectives –

Ongoing contacts with home-school personnel assist SOP staff in the planning and implementation of instruction in specific academic areas such that, to the extent of a student's abilities, skill acquisition is coordinated with that of the student's peer group and aligned with the appropriate SOL instruction. The SOP personnel may make accommodations or modifications in instruction as necessary to meet the needs of individual students. Assessment strategies may include written tests, reports, teacher observations, checklists, project-based learning, and/or other appropriate assessment tools. In addition, students enrolled in an SOP participate in the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP) as appropriate. The performance of individual students on these assessments measures their academic achievement and functional performance and serves as indicators of achievement of program objectives.

An organized program of professional development also contributes to the achievement of educational objectives. New requirements and procedures that impact program effectiveness are addressed through various offerings, including training to increase the proficiency of SOP staff in the administration and interpretation of standardized tests; training to enhance the knowledge, skills abilities, and performance of SOP staff, i.e., presentations on current content and teaching practices in core curriculum areas; and programs focused on the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge gained through educational research and other sources.

4. Program Description –

Criteria for admission to and discharge from facilities are not established by educational authority nor are such facilities instituted for elementary and secondary purposes. Youth are admitted to these facilities for various lengths of time and with various instructional needs and abilities. The instructional program for each student will be tailored to fit his/her individual needs. Education staff assigned to State Operated Programs will work collaboratively with local school authorities of each student's home school division in an effort to support an effective educational transition. The SOP staff will provide a comparable education to the extent possible within the facility. Credits and diplomas are awarded by the school division of legal residence.

When students are admitted to a facility designated as a HIPAA protected entity (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), education staff are required to obtain informed written consent from the parent, guardian, or adult student before contacting the student's home school and then enrolling the student in the SOP academic program.

5. Provision of Services –

The State Operated Programs provide a full educational opportunity goal to children with disabilities from two through 21 and for general education students in grades K-12. For a specific provision of services exception, refer to Appendix I.

- a. **Preschool** – Daily individual and/or group preschool sessions are provided for children two years through kindergarten age who have been identified as a student with a disability and are receiving special education services in their school division. These programs focus on the major areas of child development: language/communication skills, fine and gross motor skills, self-help skills, and cognitive and social development.
- b. **School Age** – Education services that are comparable to public school students are offered to school aged students in SOP academic programs.
- c. **Post-secondary** – Post-secondary services are offered in State Operated Programs based on need, facility size and policies, and educational staffing.
- d. **Home-School Communication** – Ongoing contact with the home school must be initiated and maintained in order to determine the appropriate grade level for instruction; obtain additional assignments, if needed; keep the child on track with peers; and ascertain the child's progress in relation to his/her peers. The State Operated Programs shall issue report cards to the parent or guardian on the same schedule as the employing school division.

- e. Transfer Summaries are sent to the receiving local educational agency (LEA) within two business days after the student's release from the facility unless there are extenuating circumstances.
- f. Instruction
 - i. Enrolled students are assigned a school schedule that closely follows the one the student was assigned from the home school division. Any changes to following the employing school division's primary school calendar must be approved by the VDOE.
 - ii. For a student identified as needing special education and related services, the appropriate SOP staff requests the home school individualized education program (IEP). Upon receipt of the IEP, the education leader or designee is notified so that a meeting can be scheduled to review, modify (as deemed appropriate by the IEP Team), and facilitate the implementation of the student's IEP in a timely manner.
 - iii. When appropriate, the teacher discusses the instructional program with the student and encourages student participation in program planning.
 - iv. Programs for remediation of academic problems are designed when necessary.
 - v. When appropriate, computer-based instruction will be used for students taking advanced level courses; otherwise, curriculum options are comparable to those provided in public schools.
- g. Long-term Placement at Children's Hospital of Richmond at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) – This term refers to an admission whereby children are placed long-term in an SOP for non-educational reasons. For these children, the individual child's LEA of residence continues to be responsible for the provision of FAPE in the least restrictive environment (LRE) according to 8VAC20-81-30. The SOP is required to notify the appropriate LEA of the admission and status of long-term students as well as any meetings associated with the child. (Refer to Appendix I)
- h. Expressive Arts – Art and music staff work for the SOP within the facility in which the program resides. Art and music staff must hold either a valid Virginia teaching license, a certification, or a credential in their respective field. Music Therapists must be board certified (MT-BC) and art therapists must hold a credential as a registered art therapist (ATR). As faculty members of public school programs, art and music staff are required to offer a free education to all students. SOP Leaders must obtain VDOE permission before hiring an art or music therapist.

Art and music instruction and enrichment are made available to students based on program staffing and the school schedule. Students who need individual

counseling will be referred to the appropriate facility staff. Art and music staff in State Operated Programs will use the provided State Operated Programs curriculum. Art and music staff will parallel teacher routines for planning, working with students, and receiving performance evaluations.

- i. Other Services – Appropriate career objectives are infused into the curriculum. Where physical education instruction is offered, students with disabilities participate with general education peers and with specially designed instruction and/or modifications, if needed. All students have access to nonacademic activities when available, including: special assemblies, community related projects, or guest speakers. The SOP staff will arrange and help supervise nonacademic activities.

III. Conditions of Employment

A. Certification/Endorsement –

Each state board, agency, or institution shall assign personnel to the educational program as follows: administrative, supervisory, instructional, support, and ancillary personnel holding valid professional licenses, certificates, and endorsements as appropriate in the area of assignment (national standards may apply in the absence of state licensure or certification requirements). It follows that the State Operated Programs shall ensure that special education personnel, including paraprofessionals, have the content knowledge and skills to serve children. To achieve this objective, the State Operated Programs take measurable steps to recruit, hire, train, and retain qualified personnel to provide education and related services to students with disabilities. It follows that all paraprofessionals must hold a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent and meet the employing school division's hiring requirements. When related services are required, the State Operated Programs will contract with providers who hold valid professional licenses, certificates, and/or endorsements.

B. Contracts –

Teaching contracts are issued by the employing school division and shall be drawn up in compliance with the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia and requirements of the Board. They may include any special provisions approved by the employing school board in conjunction with the annual cooperative agreement between the school division and VDOE.

C. Personnel Actions –

Any personnel actions that include accusations made by a student against a teacher will be investigated in accordance with facility and responsible LEA policies and

procedures. All allegations must be reported to VDOE as soon as possible, but not later than the morning of the next business day.

D. Dismissal –

According to the *Code of Virginia* (§ 22.1-307), any teacher may be dismissed or placed on probation for incompetency, immorality, noncompliance, conviction of a felony, or other good and just cause. Local policies may specifically delineate other causes for dismissal. Appeal and notification procedures are determined locally.

E. Evaluation –

Per the Commonwealth of Virginia Board of Education Guidelines, each school division is required to establish and maintain procedures for the evaluation of all employees. The purpose of such evaluation and assistance shall be to raise the quality of instruction and educational services and aid the individual employee to grow and improve. Because the SOP professional staff and paraprofessionals are employed through local school divisions, evaluation shall be a cooperative and continuing process with periodic formal appraisals according to the procedures delineated by the school division. Input on staff performance as it relates to the SOP programming will be provided to the responsible LEA by VDOE staff upon request.

The VDOE staff members will monitor, evaluate, and provide feedback to all SOP staff serving in leadership positions. The VDOE will provide appropriate information to the responsible LEA upon request.

F. Grievance Procedure –

The SOP personnel will follow the grievance procedure of the employing school division. The full text of the grievance procedure can be found in the school board policy manual of the employing school division.

G. Hours and Lengths of Contracts –

The SOP employees adhere to the length of the contractual day and hours established by the school division. If the school division utilizes an alternate work week schedule outside of the instructional school year, the SOP staff will follow the school division's established policy and procedure for the alternate work week schedule. The VDOE reserves the right to adjust the school calendar and contracts to accommodate the needs of the state department and the facility in which the SOP is located.

Each program shall have a method for tracking daily arrivals and departures of individual staff members.

H. Inclement Weather –

All SOP staff employed by the local school division and assigned to an SOP shall follow the inclement weather procedure developed by the employing school division. If there is an SOP meeting or training scheduled and the employing school division is closed, the SOP staff members should adhere to the school division's closure.

I. Professional Development/Staff Development/Conferences –

For SOP personnel, this policy supersedes all local school division policies regarding attendance at in-services and conferences.

Each SOP, in conjunction with VDOE, shall provide an ongoing staff development program for all staff. The SOP should plan and implement in-service training aimed at addressing the needs of children in residence and increasing student achievement. It follows that SOP staff are expected to attend those in-services organized by the SOP and/or the VDOE for SOP personnel. All VDOE sponsored meetings, in-services, and staff development workshops are mandatory for SOP staff.

The State Operated Programs encourage the participation of staff in job-related professional programs and activities which support the improvement of the education program. If schedules allow, SOP personnel may participate in workshops or in-services offered by the school division.

Opportunities to attend in-services, workshops, or conferences focused on job-related topics are made available to individual staff upon request. Recognizing that the mission of the State Operated Programs is to provide direct service to children and that resources are limited, a maximum of two individuals from any one SOP may attend a particular in-service, workshop, or conference at the same time. Also, each staff member may be approved to attend one in-service workshop or conference per school year. Any exceptions must be approved by the education leader and VDOE.

The SOP staff members must follow the state travel regulations when state monies are involved. When traveling for SOP purposes, state rates and restrictions apply. Any exceptions must be pre-approved by the local school division and VDOE. While leave time may be granted to attend an in-service workshop or conference, such approval in no way obligates the SOP or VDOE to defray the costs of attendance and participation. In many cases, it may be necessary for the individual participant to pay for all or part of the expenses.

No SOP funds will be used for out-of-state in-services, workshops, or conferences for SOP teachers with the exception of the Washington, D.C. area. Permission to attend an in-service workshop or conference in Washington, D.C. or the surrounding area

must be granted by VDOE before the participant registers and attends. Requests for out-of-state conference travel for SOP administrators will be reviewed by VDOE on a case-by-case basis.

Before submitting a proposal to present at an in-service workshop or conference, any SOP teacher, consultant, or therapist must obtain prior permission from the Educational Leader. If the proposal is accepted, the final presentation must be approved, in advance, by the education leader. The leader will review the presentation to ensure accuracy of information and that confidentiality of student information is maintained. Any SOP education leader who wishes to submit a proposal to present at an in-service workshop or conference must obtain permission from VDOE before submitting the proposal. While individuals planning to make presentations at in-services, workshops, or conferences will be given priority, it should be understood that they will not automatically be granted permission to attend.

The SOP education leaders will keep all documentation of staff attendance and participation at all professional development (in-services, workshops, and conferences). The documentation should reflect any staff development activities provided by the leader, other SOP personnel, the local school division, VDOE, or other organization. It is required that all staff share with their site peers the acquired learning from each conference attended. Education leaders will maintain documentation of this sharing, as well.

J. Lesson Plans –

All teachers are expected to have daily lesson plans. They should include, but are not limited to, curriculum objectives, activities, and materials as they relate to the Standards of Learning (SOL) and/or the IEPs of students with disabilities. The education leader will regularly monitor lesson plans and provide feedback to the teacher.

K. Personnel Policies –

All personnel employed by LEAs and assigned to the State Operated Programs are responsible for adhering to all rules, regulations, and statutes pertaining to facility policies and to those of the school division unless otherwise stated in this manual. The SOP employees are expected to abide by the specific rules and regulations of the facility relative to student interaction as outlined in the facility's personnel procedure manual. (Exception: During an investigation, the education staff member may be temporarily reassigned to a position outside of the facility by the school division and/or the VDOE in lieu of suspension until the investigation is completed.)

The Educational Leader shall maintain a staff procedural manual that is provided to all staff. The manual should encompass, but not be limited to, policies related to the

employing school division, facility, and State Operated Programs. The manual should be reviewed with all staff and submitted electronically to VDOE on an annual basis.

L. Reduction in Force (RIF) –

The termination or reduction of state funding for State Operated Programs may entitle the school division to terminate the contracts of the administrative and teaching personnel for insufficient funds, subject to the specific agreement made between the school board and the employee of the school board. Furthermore, the termination or reduction in local funding for the school division may not entitle the school board to terminate the contracts of the SOP personnel, subject to the specific agreement made between the school board and the employee of the school board.

M. Staff and Student Relationships –

Staff and student relationships are to be professional and not personal. Staff members shall address students with courtesy and respect. When a student asks a question or makes requests that the staff member cannot answer or grant within his/her job description, a referral to the education leader or facility staff shall be made.

- 1. Financial Transactions** – The SOP employees are prohibited from selling any items to students. Employees may only purchase goods from students as part of an SOP or facility approved activity, such as an arts and crafts show or bake sale. The SOP employees may never gamble with, bet with, borrow from, or loan money to a student.
- 2. Gift Giving and Receiving** – Gifts to students are prohibited. Gifts from students and their families must be reported to the education leader to determine what action should be taken. The receipt of money from a student or family is prohibited. Gifts of material value should be donated to volunteer services.
- 3. Personal Relationships** – Developing personal relationships with students and/or parents and guardians that are not considered professional is prohibited. Unless exceptional circumstances exist, phone or email contact with parents or guardians regarding their child's educational progress shall be conducted during school hours. Personal phone and email contacts, as well as social media contacts with current or former students, are prohibited.
- 4. Staff Visitation and Outside Activities** – During off-work hours, SOP employees are prohibited from engaging with students in any visitation or activities that are not part of an established or special programmatic function.

N. Reporting Suspected Abuse, Neglect, and Misconduct –

In cases of observed or suspected physical abuse, neglect, and misconduct in which a student or family member is involved; all incidents should be reported to the education leader. Likewise, complaints from students or family made to an SOP staff member should be reported to the education leader, who, in turn, shall inform the

appropriate facility staff. If an investigation is warranted, the investigation will be conducted in coordination with the facility and the employing school division.

O. Student-Teacher Ratios –

All facilities are required to staff the educational programs as specified by state regulations.

P. Travel –

All approved SOP travel is reimbursed according to the state reimbursement rate for lodging and meals.

Q. Use of Substitutes –

Consistency in treatment and delivery of educational services for students residing in special facilities is a major objective for State Operated Programs. In light of the nature of SOP settings and the SOP staff's familiarity with the programs and students, classroom coverage in most cases of short-term absences and leaves will be handled by the SOP staff if staffing and student census allow. Education personnel shall follow their State Operated Programs policy in regard to notification of absences/leaves. Substitutes will be used in cases of long-term (a week or longer) absences/leaves or possible multiple absences within the school program. The use of substitutes in the above situation will be at the discretion of the SOP education leader. Exceptions to this policy will be reviewed by the SOP education leader and the VDOE.

The priority of each SOP academic staff member is the SOP academic program to which s/he is assigned. While some SOP employees may also serve roles in the employing school division after the instructional day is over (e.g., athletic coaching, tutoring, club sponsor), SOP funds cannot be used for substitutes to cover non-SOP related absences if the employee missed instructional time due to these other obligations. The SOP employees may not serve in additional capacities for the employing school division during contracted instructional hours.

R. Media Requests –

If a media request is made to the SOP academic program, the leader should contact the VDOE SOP Coordinator. The request will be forwarded to the appropriate office at the VDOE and the SOP Coordinator will work with the VDOE and the education leader to handle the request appropriately.

S. Reimbursement for Lesson Planning Materials –

SOP funds cannot be used to purchase, or reimburse staff for purchasing, pre-made lesson plans, unit plans, worksheets, or other materials from web-based sources that are not research-based (e.g., Teachers Pay Teachers, Pinterest).

T. Use of Instructional Books, Textbooks, Videos, and Movies –

The use of books, textbooks, videos, movies, and other multimedia in the classroom must comply with any policy of the employing school division. The Educational Leader shall work with teaching staff to ensure that all curriculum materials are aligned with content standards. Each program shall have a movie-request policy for the Educational Leader to review and approve the use of movies in the classroom.

IV. General Student Related Policies

A. Students Who Require a General Program of Studies –

When students who are enrolled in general academic programs in elementary or secondary schools transfer to the SOP academic program, they are afforded similar or modified educational opportunities. Upon a student's enrollment, it is the responsibility of the SOP staff to contact appropriate home-school personnel to request information about the student's academic program.

When creating an academic schedule for these students during their enrollment in the SOP academic program, modifications to the home school academic program may be required because of the student's current status.

Students may not be placed on an Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) without involvement from the student's home school.

When the student is released/discharged from the facility, correspondence is sent to the appropriate LEA personnel and the student's parent or guardian. The release/discharge correspondence provides data regarding attendance, grades, and other pertinent school-related information.

Education leaders in detention centers will follow the established VDOE's re-enrollment regulations. Those regulations can be found at the following web link: [Re-enrollment after Juvenile Justice](#).

B. McKinney-Vento Act –

The State Operated Programs are committed to educating children and youth, including those who are considered homeless as defined by the *McKinney-Vento Act*. All students, including those identified as homeless, are enrolled according to the State Operated Programs policy, and are not refused or delayed enrollment due to a lack of educational records and/or immunization records. It should be noted that students who are enrolled in an SOP are in residence and, therefore, cannot attend a school of origin as specified in the *McKinney-Vento Act*.

Although unique in its role related to the *McKinney-Vento Act*, the State Operated Programs recognize the impact of homelessness on students and remain committed to providing a full and equal opportunity for academic success and achievement to all students.

C. Student Home Language Survey –

Under provisions of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, each student's dominant language must be identified. This information is essential in order for schools to provide meaningful instruction. It follows that a Home Language Survey must be completed for all students.

The SOP staff should review the Home Language Survey and records received from the student's home school. If the student has previously been identified as an English Learner (EL), the SOP should obtain information about the services and accommodations the student currently receives.

If the student's first language is not English and the student has never been assessed to determine if she/he is EL, the SOP staff should administer the WIDA Screener™. If the student's first language is not English and records indicate the student previously received EL services and was dismissed from those services; the SOP staff does not have to administer the WIDA Screener™.

If a student's EL status is unknown or cannot be determined by the results of the WIDA Screener™, the student should be classified as Level 1 for reporting purposes.

D. Minute of Silence –

In order for every student's right to the free exercise of religion be guaranteed within the schools and that the freedom of each individual student be subject to the least possible pressure from the Commonwealth either to engage in or refrain from religious observation on school grounds, State Operated Programs shall establish the daily observance of one minute of silence.

Each SOP teacher shall observe daily the one-minute period of silence during his/her first class. The teacher shall take care that students remain silent and make no distracting display to the end that each student may, in the exercise of his/her individual choice, meditate, pray, or engage in any other silent activity, which does not interfere with, distract, or impede other students in the like exercise of individual choice.

E. Network/Internet Acceptable Use –

The SOP electronic devices are intended to facilitate learning as well as personal and professional growth. The use of technology allows students to learn new skills, do homework, explore career development, conduct research, and, if required, participate in computer-based instruction. It is the responsibility of the SOP teachers to orient new students to all aspects of security and ethics involved in using the Internet, per the SOP Program Network/Internet Acceptable Use Policy and to review it with each student periodically (at least quarterly) throughout their time spent in the SOP. Students must sign this policy each time that they have reviewed the policy, indicating that they understand its contents and agree to abide by its guidelines before accessing the Internet.

Access to Internet resources is available with the understanding that some material may be inaccurate. Student use of the Internet for educational purposes may include: academic research, career development, or computer-based instruction. All users are expected to demonstrate ethical behavior, individual integrity and honesty, and respect for self and others and their confidentiality. Teacher use of Internet resources during school hours should be consistent with the educational mission of the State Operated Programs.

Unacceptable use of Internet resources is prohibited. Unacceptable use of Internet resources include but not limited to: using the network for illegal, inappropriate, obscene, pornographic, or harmful purposes or in support of such activities, using inappropriate material or profane, abusive, or impolite language to communicate, accessing materials that are not in line with the rules of school behavior, infringing upon copyright laws, software piracy, or plagiarism, using the network for commercial use or monetary gain, and engaging in any activity that is harmful to the institution's devices. Harmful activity includes the creation or propagation of computer viruses, corrupting, copying, or manipulating computer data (hacking), disrupting the use of the network by other users, mass mailing (spamming), and sharing or exchanging passwords.

Any observation of violations or other suspected incidents of noncompliance are to be reported immediately to the education leader. Violation of the guidelines as articulated in the State Operated Programs Network/Internet Acceptable Use Policy will result in appropriate disciplinary action to be determined by the SOP education leader.

F. Social Media –

All State Operated Programs are committed to providing a safe and secure learning and working environment for students and staff. Positive and professional relationships between students and staff are encouraged. There is, however, a distinction between being supportive of students and the real or perceived breach of confidentiality or professional boundaries. All SOP staff are expected to follow the appropriate school division policies when using social media as a form of communication. The purpose of these policies is to provide guidelines for social media communications between employees, students, and parents; to prevent unauthorized access and other inappropriate activities by SOP users online; to prevent unauthorized disclosure of or access to sensitive information, and to comply with the *Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)* and/or other applicable laws. While it is recognized that during non-work hours, employees and/or students may participate in online social media, blogs, and other online tools, SOP staff members should keep in mind that information produced, shared, and retrieved may be subject to school division policies and is a reflection of the school community.

Social media has many educational benefits, but when social media postings violate the law or school division policies or create a substantial disruption to the school/work environment, the education leader may have an obligation to respond and take appropriate action, including but not limited to investigation, removal of

posts, discipline, and/or referral to law enforcement. Under certain circumstances, school divisions have jurisdiction to discipline employees who violate rules of appropriate conduct, which includes but is not limited to, the use of social networking sites during or outside of work hours. Additionally, employing school divisions may not be able to protect or represent employees who incur legal action from a second party in response to the employee's behavior on a social networking site. In response to violations of rules of appropriate conduct, school divisions may also restrict access to students and employees.

SOP teachers and administrators cannot communicate with a student or his or her parent/guardian via social media. Education employees also cannot mention, discuss, or reference the State Board of Education (BOE), their employing school division, individual schools, programs, or teams on social networking sites unless they state that such communication is a personal opinion and not representative of the views of the division or the BOE. It should be understood that education personnel may be sued by other employees, parents/guardians, or other individuals who consider an employee's social media communication to be defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous, or "creating a hostile work environment."

The SOP employees may not use social media fundraising sites (e.g., GoFundMe, Donors Choose) to solicit money or donations for classroom use.

G. Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools –

All State Operated Programs personnel are expected to use generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools responsibly and in a professionally appropriate manner. Appropriate uses include brainstorming and generating ideas for lesson planning, drafting and editing documents containing public information only, summarizing public information for presentations and reports, and supporting personal professional learning. All AI-generated content must be reviewed and validated by staff for accuracy, appropriateness, and relevance before use.

The use of AI tools does not transfer or reduce staff accountability for work quality. SOP staff remain fully responsible for the accuracy and appropriateness of all work products, regardless of whether AI tools were **used** in their development.

SOP staff must also comply with any AI-related policies established by their employing school division. This includes using only those generative AI tools that have been approved or authorized by their employing school division, in cases where the division maintains such a list. Where division policies are more restrictive than this guidance, staff shall follow the more restrictive standard. This guidance applies to external generative AI tools and does not apply to AI-assisted features integrated directly into VDOE-approved or division-approved platforms, provided those features operate within the platform's existing data privacy and security protections.

Student personally identifiable information (PII) shall not be entered into, uploaded to, or processed by any external generative AI tool under any circumstances.

Questions about the application of this guidance should be directed to the SOP education leader, who may consult with VDOE SOP staff as needed.

H. High School Credit –

Credit should be granted toward promotion and graduation from a secondary school for subjects taught by a teacher endorsed in a specific area of education or related subject for which he or she is employed, in accordance with Virginia Board of Education regulations. A standard unit of credit is awarded based on successful completion of the requirements of the course. A verified unit of credit may be awarded when a student earns a standard unit of credit and satisfies an approved verification method established by the Virginia Board of Education.

Credit may be earned in increments of less than whole units and may be recorded as such, depending on local school division policy. Under no circumstances shall a unit of credit be awarded for completion of a course that is the same, or essentially the same, as a course for which the student has already earned credit.

The student's home school division superintendent, not the SOP, is responsible for granting credit.

I. State Testing Identifiers (STI) –

All students enrolled in Virginia schools are assigned a ten-digit State Testing Identifier (STI). It is the responsibility of the SOP to obtain student identification numbers from the home school. In cases where a student's SOP enrollment is also the student's initial enrollment in a Virginia school, the SOP administrative assistants request an STI from the VDOE.

All discharge correspondence with home schools is to include the STI number of the student.

J. Virginia Assessment Program (VAP) –

All State Operated Programs will follow the SOL testing window as determined by VDOE and the SOP Division Director of Testing (DDOT). Students participating in an alternate or alternative assessment shall continue to do so while enrolled in an SOP.

K. Requests for Research –

Permission to participate in educational research must be granted by the SOP office at VDOE.

V. Record Keeping and Confidentiality of Information

A. Student Enrollment –

All State Operated Programs are expected to maintain student enrollment and attendance information according to the requirements specified by the VDOE in the

Student Information System (SIS). This includes daily data entry so that school rosters are accurate and up to date. (Refer to the SIS Manual for further instructions.)

B. Education Records/Student Files –

An individual student file is to be maintained for each student enrolled in an SOP. All records shall be maintained in a confidential manner in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the Code of Virginia, and the Virginia Board of Education's regulations governing the management of student scholastic records.

In accordance with the FERPA definition of "education record," student files include electronic communications and other records that contain personally identifiable information and are maintained by the school or a party acting on behalf of the school regarding matters associated with the student's educational program. These matters may include records pertaining to IEP meetings, disciplinary actions, evaluations, progress monitoring, service delivery, and communications with parents/guardians.

Pursuant to FERPA, Code of Virginia § 22.1-289, and applicable Virginia Board of Education regulations, educational records may be exchanged between local educational agencies (LEAs) and State Operated Programs without parental consent when such disclosure is authorized for enrollment, placement, educational service delivery, or other legitimate educational purposes. Educational records, including grades and transcripts, shall be forwarded to the receiving educational agency when a student is released, transferred, or discharged.

1. Parent/Guardian and Eligible Student Rights

The State Operated Programs ensure parents/guardians and eligible students have access to their rights regarding inspection and review of student files.

The FERPA defines "parent" as a parent of a student and includes a natural parent, a guardian, custodial stepparents, or an individual acting as a parent in the absence of a parent or guardian. As specified by section 20-124.6 of the *Code of Virginia* and FERPA, the State Operated Programs give full rights to either parent unless the institution has been provided a copy of a judicial order or decree or other legally binding documentation revoking these rights.

A stepparent has the same right under FERPA as a natural parent provided the stepparent is present on a day-to-day basis with the natural parent and child, and the other parent is absent from the home. Conversely, a stepparent who is not present on a day-to-day basis in the home of the child does not have rights under FERPA with respect to the child's student file.

"Eligible student" means a student who has reached 18 years of age (age of majority) or is attending an institution of postsecondary education. Parents lose

their FERPA rights when their child turns 18 years of age. A parent/guardian of a child with a disability who is 18 or older may retain his/her rights provided that the child has been determined to be legally incompetent or legally incapacitated.

The State Operated Programs distribute Notification of Rights Regarding Student Files annually to parents and eligible students alerting them to their rights under FERPA. Interpreter services and audiotapes of the annual notice are available to those who are unable to access printed English.

2. Inspection and Review – The State Operated Programs provide the parent/guardian and eligible student the following access rights:

- a. the right to inspect and review any education records relating to the student that are collected, maintained, or used. When a record pertains to more than one student, the parent has the right to inspect and review or be informed only on that part of the record that relates to his/her child. An eligible student also has the right to inspect and review his/her student file. The State Operated Programs comply with a request to inspect or review a student's file within a reasonable period of time;
- b. the right to inspect or review the student's file without unnecessary delay and before any meeting regarding an IEP or any hearing or resolution session. It also allows the parent to have a representative inspect and review the records;
- c. the right to (1) a hearing to challenge the content of a record to ensure it is not inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise in violation of the privacy rights of the student, (2) an opportunity to correct or delete inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise inappropriate data, and (3) insert a written explanation regarding the contents of the record;
- d. the right to annual public notice of parent rights and designated categories of directory information and a reasonable time period (not to exceed 45 days) during which to refuse to allow the release of directory information without prior consent;
- e. the right to a copy of the student file if circumstances effectively prevent the parent or eligible student from exercising the right to inspect and review it. In addition, the parent is entitled to receive copies, upon request, of records that are disclosed to another school that his/her child is attending or plans to attend; and
- f. the right to a response to reasonable requests for explanations and interpretations of the record. In responding, the SOP arranges to meet with the parent or eligible student at a mutually convenient time. The teacher and education leader or designees are to be available to answer any questions or explain the information included.

3. Disclosure

Before personally identifiable information is disclosed from a student's file, the parent or eligible student shall provide a signed and dated written consent. Notably, signed and dated written consent may include a record and signature in electronic form. The written consent must specify the records to be disclosed, the purpose of the disclosure, and the party to whom disclosure may be made. However, there are parties to whom data may be disclosed without prior written consent of the parent or eligible student. It is the responsibility of the State Operated Programs to ensure that no personally identifiable information is disclosed to any parties without prior written consent other than those authorized by FERPA. The disclosure must meet one or more conditions for an SOP to disclose personally identifiable information from a student file without the consent of a parent or eligible student.

The State Operated Programs maintain a record of each request for access to and each disclosure of personally identifiable information from student files. This record shall be maintained in the individual student's file as long as the files are maintained. Those individuals with legitimate educational interest in the content of a student's file are not required to sign the Record Data Disclosure Form.

4. Fees

The SOP may charge a reasonable fee for copies of educational records unless imposition of such a charge would prevent a parent/guardian from exercising his/her right to inspect and review his/her child's student file. The fee may include costs associated with reproduction, secretarial or administrative time, and postage. The SOP may not charge a fee to search for and retrieve information. Additionally, the SOP may not charge for a copy of the current IEP.

5. Amendment

If the parent/guardian or eligible student believes the student's file contains information that is inaccurate, misleading, or in violation of the student's right to privacy, the parent or eligible student may ask the SOP to amend the record. The SOP shall decide whether to amend the information as requested within a reasonable time after the request is received. If the SOP decides not to amend the information as requested, it shall inform the parent/guardian or eligible student of its decision and of his/her right to a hearing.

6. Hearings

Upon request, the SOP shall provide the parent or eligible student with an opportunity for a hearing, in accordance with the procedures outlined in the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (FERPA) regulations, at 34 CFR 99.22, to challenge information in the student file to ensure that it is not inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise in violation of the privacy or other rights of the student. The SOP/LEA may either: (i) develop local procedures for conducting of such hearings; or (ii) obtain a hearing officer from the Supreme

Court of Virginia's special education hearing officer's list in accordance with the Virginia Regulations, at 8VAC20-81-210.H. If, as a result of the hearing, the SOP decides that the information in the student file is inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise in violation of the privacy or other rights of the student, it shall amend the information and so inform the parent/guardian or eligible student in writing. If, as a result of the hearing, the SOP decides that the information is not inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise in violation of the privacy or other rights of the student, it shall inform the parent/guardian or eligible student of the right to place a statement in the student's file commenting on the information or stating why she/he disagrees with the State Operated Programs decision. Any explanation placed in the files shall be maintained by the SOP as part of the records of the student as long as the student's file is maintained. And, should the records of the student be disclosed by the SOP, the explanation shall also be disclosed by the SOP and the explanation shall also be disclosed to the party.

7. Consent

Parental consent shall be obtained before personally identifiable information is disclosed to anyone other than officials of the SOP unless the information is contained in the student file and the disclosure is authorized under FERPA. Parental consent is not required before personally identifiable information is disclosed to officials of the SOP collecting, maintaining, or using personally identifiable information, except that:

- a. parental consent or the consent of a student who has reached the age of majority shall be obtained before personally identifiable information is released to officials of any agency or institution providing or paying for transition services; and
- b. if a student is enrolled or is going to enroll in a private school that is not located in the LEA where the parent resides, parental consent shall be obtained before any personally identifiable information about the student is released between officials in the LEA where the private school is located and LEA officials where the parent resides.

8. Safeguards

There are specific safeguards to protect the confidentiality of students' educational records. Each SOP shall:

- a. protect the confidentiality of personally identifiable information at collection, storage, disclosure, and destruction stages;
- b. ensure that electronic communication via email or facsimiles regarding any matter associated with the student, including matters related to IEP meetings, disciplinary actions, or service delivery, is a part of the student's file;
- c. designate one official to assume responsibility for ensuring the confidentiality of any personally identifiable information;

- d. provide training or instruction on the management of student files and procedures for assuring confidentiality of information to all persons collecting, maintaining, or using personally identifiable information; and
- e. maintain for public inspection a current listing of the names and positions of the SOP employees who may have access to personally identifiable information.

9. Destruction

The Records Retention and Disposition Schedule (General Schedule No. GS-21) of the Library of Virginia addresses public school records for all public school systems in the Commonwealth.

When students in State Operated Programs are withdrawn, documentation, which may include assessments, behavioral reports, grades, coursework, test scores, and IEP's, is transferred to the student's home school. Because the SOP student files are not cumulative records containing long-term documentation, they may be destroyed five years after students are withdrawn.

In keeping with the Library of Virginia directives, destruction of confidential or privacy-protected records is done by shredding or pulping. "Deletion" of confidential or privacy-protected records in computer files or other electronic storage media is not acceptable. Electronic records are either "wiped" clean or the storage media is physically destroyed.

10. Electronic Mail and Signature

If the SOP makes the option available, the parent(s) or guardian(s) of a child with a disability may elect to receive prior written notice, the procedural safeguards notice, and the notice of a request for due process by electronic mail. However, posting the procedural safeguards on the SOP website does not satisfy the requirements related to providing parent(s) or guardian(s) with prior written notice.

If an electronically filed document contains an electronic signature, the electronic signature has the legal effect and enforceability of an original signature. An electronic signature is an electronic sound, symbol, or process attached to or logically associated with a record and executed or adopted by a person with the intent to sign the record.

11. Audio and Video Recording of Meetings

The SOP shall permit the use of audio recording devices at meetings convened to determine a student's eligibility; to develop, review, or revise the student's IEP; and to review discipline matters. It is the responsibility of the parent to inform the SOP before the meeting in writing, unless the parent cannot write in English, of his/her intent to record the meeting. If the parent does not inform the SOP, the parent must provide the SOP with a copy of the recording. If the SOP records

meetings or receives a copy of a recording from the parent(s), the recording becomes a part of the student's file.

The SOP may have policies that prohibit, limit, or otherwise regulate the use of audio recording devices at meetings other than those meetings identified in the above paragraph and that limit the use of video recording devices in all instances. Such policies shall:

- a. stipulate that the recordings become part of the student's file;
- b. ensure the policy is uniformly applied; and
- c. if the policy prohibits the use of the devices, provide for exceptions if they are necessary to ensure that the parent(s)/guardian(s) understands the IEP and the special education process or to implement other guaranteed parental rights.

C. Inventories –

Current inventories of materials and equipment must be maintained according to the source of funding. Software licenses should also be a part of the inventory to ensure current and active licenses. The Educational Leader shall verify their program's inventory at least annually and document that they have done so. Any discrepancies must be reported to VDOE.

D. Reports –

Required Documentation

1. The SOP

- a. Part B Flow-Through Application for mental health and hospital programs, if applicable
- b. Site inventories
- c. End-of-Year Student Information System (SIS) report
- d. United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (OCR) site data at designated sites
- e. The SOP SIS Quarterly QA Report
- f. Documentation of Graduates, GED[®] completers, Postgraduates served, and Certificates earned

2. The VDOE

- a. December 1 Special Education Child Count
- b. Title I Count and Application
- c. United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (OCR) final submission

VI. Appendix

Children's Hospital of Richmond

The Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia establish the responsibilities of Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) regarding students placed in certain State Operated Programs (SOPs).

Section 8VAC20-81-30.H of the Virginia Administrative Code (VAC) specifies that:

“H. Each state-operated program shall ensure that the requirements in this chapter are applied to children with disabilities, aged two to 21, inclusive, in that institution. (§ 22.1.7 of the Code of Virginia)

1. For children with disabilities who are placed in a state-operated program as a long-term placement, the local educational agency of the parent's residence remains responsible for ensuring that the child receives a free appropriate public education.
2. The state-operated program shall ensure that the local educational agency of the parent's residence is advised of the child's admission, status, and meetings associated with the child receiving a free and appropriate public education.”

Children's Hospital of Richmond/Brook Road Campus has been identified as a long-term nursing care facility and meets the definition as stated in these regulations.

Additionally, the VAC regulations under 8VAC20-81-30.E.3, states that:

“3. If placed in a nursing facility, a long stay hospital, or an intermediate care facility for people with intellectual disabilities under funding from the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services, the child is a resident of the division where the parent(s) resides.”

Long-term placement has been defined: “Long-term placement” if used in reference to state-operated programs as outlined in 8VAC20-81-30.H means those hospital placements that are not expected to change in status or condition because of the child's medical needs.

Therefore, placements into the Richmond Hospital Education Program (RHEP) at Children's Hospital of Richmond/Brook Road Campus now require the LEA to be responsible for a free and appropriate public education. This indicates that the LEA is now responsible for holding and attending all Individualized Educational Program meetings. The LEA is responsible for contacting all parties related to these meetings, setting up and coordinating them, and making any and all decisions regarding placement, services, and instruction.

Teachers and staff from the RHEP will be available to attend meetings coordinated and held by the LEA and provide goals and objectives for those students placed within the RHEP, if the LEA determines that the placement in the RHEP represents the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The RHEP, as mandated by the current Virginia Regulations, will make the LEA aware of the

child's admission, medical status, and any medical or other changes in status that might affect the child receiving a free and appropriate public education.

Under applicable Virginia Regulations, the RHEP will no longer maintain or store cumulative folders within the program. The RHEP will receive and maintain a copy of the current IEP that has been developed by the LEA in cooperation with the representatives from the RHEP for students placed within the program. If the LEA determines that the LRE is the RHEP at Children's Hospital/Brook Road Campus, instruction, related services, and other costs associated with the placement will be covered by the RHEP as it functions as an SOP.

For those students residing at Children's Hospital/Brook Road Campus but being placed outside the RHEP as the LRE, any associated costs related to providing FAPE for these students outside the SOP will fall to the LEA. These include transportation costs, nursing support, and bus aides in order to transport students out of Children's Hospital and provide instruction and service in a local school division.

With regard to State Testing under the Virginia Assessment Program, federal and state regulations governing special education require that the VDOE ensure that the LEA includes children with disabilities in the state's accountability system (8VAC20-81-20 #4). Federal and state regulations governing special education require that the LEA address the child's participation in the state's accountability system in each child's IEP (8VAC20-81-110 G.6).

As a provision of FAPE, the LEA is responsible for providing any and all needed materials, forms, and tests to be administered to students in long term placements at the RHEP. The RHEP will administer any and all tests to students in long term placements and ship completed tests, forms, and binders back to the LEA. The LEA will be responsible for submitting the completed tests, forms, and/or binders through their Office of Assessment and Accountability for scoring and reporting. This will include registering students for testing, shipping any and all materials to appropriate testing locations as directed by the VDOE Office of Student Assessment and School Improvement, receiving any score reports, and providing copies to students and/or parents.

As with cumulative folders, copies of completed binders, test reports, and other materials should be maintained by the LEA in accordance with the Virginia Regulations. The RHEP does not maintain assessment score reports, binders, or other materials as a part of any long term placed students' special education cumulative folders. Cumulative folders are maintained by the LEA in accordance with the Virginia Regulations.