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As winter turns to spring, so do schools turn their thoughts toward graduation! This spring, some Virginia students will be among the first to receive the [Applied Studies Diploma](#). Like the "Special Diploma", the newly named Applied Studies diploma will be awarded to 2016 graduates with disabilities who complete the requirements of their Individualized Education Program (IEP) and do not meet the requirements for other diplomas. This diploma option provides for curriculum enhancement and is NOT a replacement for statewide assessment.

In order for students receiving the Applied Studies diploma to be **READY for post-secondary engagement:**

* Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) Training and Technical Assistance Centers (TTACs) organized work groups made up of content related stakeholders to create a curriculum map to guide instruction of essential life skills. Drawing upon national resources and combined expertise, a hierarchic structure of domains (English, mathematics, science, social science, independent living and employment), competencies and skills was drafted and internally reviewed by VDOE content specialists. The curriculum map is not an exhaustive list, but a comprehensive framework to guide life skills instruction.

Virginia middle and high school teachers are helping to **SET the course by piloting the framework:**

* Twenty classrooms across fifteen school divisions are currently using the curriculum map for unit and lesson planning, project-based learning activities and IEP development. These teachers are recording their comments, and sharing their ideas for authentic performance assessment, supplementary curricula and other resources. The draft framework and pilot feedback will be reviewed by a large statewide stakeholder group, including educators, employers, community members and parents.

To learn more about the Applied Studies Diploma **GO** to:

* [VDOE Applied Studies Diploma Bulletins](#)

To learn more about evidence-based practices for the framework, **GO** to:

* National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT)
[Evidence-Based Practices and Predictors](#)

* [The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder: Evidence-Based Practices](#)

References and Resources

* LIS: Virginia's Legislative Information System, *SB 1236 Special diplomas: eliminates the term.* <http://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?ses=151&typ=bil&val=sb1236>

* National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT): Evidence-Based Practices and Predictors <http://transitionta.org/evidencepractices>

* The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder: Evidence-Based Practices <http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/evidence-based-practices>

* Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). *Graduation Requirements: Other Diplomas & Certificates. Applied Studies Diploma Bulletins.* http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/graduation/other_diploma.shtml

This news brief is a collaborative effort of the Virginia Department of Education Training and Technical Assistance Centers at George Mason University and James Madison University. This issue was prepared by the staff of the VDOE TTAC at George Mason University. For questions about content, please contact Karen Berlin at kberlin@gmu.edu or Geoffrey Weber at gweber3@gmu.edu or call 703-993-4496.

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