



## COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

### Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind

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#### **Document Title**

Annual Executive Summary- The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind- 2019

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#### **Enabling Authority**

§ 22.1-346.2 (E.7.)

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#### **Executive Summary**

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (VSDB) is a state agency located in Staunton, Virginia. Per the Code of Virginia (§22.1-346), VSDB is established as the only state school for students with sensory impairments in the Commonwealth. VSDB serves students who are visually impaired/blind, deaf/hard of hearing, deaf-blind, and/or sensory impaired with other disabilities.

As established by the Code of Virginia (§ 22.1-346.2.), the VSDB Board of Visitors provides oversight of the school and residential programs. The Board is comprised of eleven members including two senators and two delegates. The Board meets quarterly to review and approve the operations of the school and the residential programs. The Superintendent maintains direct management of the agency and is accountable to the Board of Visitors.

VSDB provides innovative educational programs to support those students with sensory impairments within the Commonwealth. VSDB works closely with the Virginia Department of Education to implement prescriptive programs to meet the needs of its student population and to ensure enhanced student outcomes.

## **Financial Report**

For fiscal year 2019:

Revenues equal \$615,377,73 and includes general fund and non-general fund (no federal grants or bond reimbursements). Expenses equal \$12,401,903.17 which includes general funds and non-general funds (including federal grants). These figures do not include any capital.

## **Licensure and Accreditation**

VSDB is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

## **Student Population**

VSDB serves approximately 90 students from across the Commonwealth. Per the Code of Virginia, students are referred to VSDB through their local school system and must have already been found eligible for Special Education Services through the disability categories of “Deafness” or “Hearing Impairment” or through the disability category of “Vision Impairment”. Students may also be served under the category of Deafblind. Over 80% of the student body is served for more than one disability with an increasing number being identified as multi-disabled. A student may enroll in VSDB as a residential or day student. Approximately two-thirds of VSDB's student body is residential. All students are served through the National School Meals Program.

## **Education/Residential/Recreational Programs**

VSDB operates all programs on a standard August-May school calendar. Beyond a student’s educational needs, VSDB addresses the needs of the whole child by providing opportunities for peer socialization and interactions within a fully accessible setting. At VSDB, in contrast to public schools, students are not “the only one, but one of many”. Students who are deaf/hard of hearing at VSDB interact with staff and peers who are fluent in American Sign Language providing direct access to language models and typical language development. Similarly, students who are blind/vision impaired have equal access to all programs and develop social skills in a setting where peers and staff provide natural opportunities for social interactions. Many of VSDB’s staff are themselves either deaf or visually impaired, providing positive role models for students in a “I can do anything” atmosphere. VSDB strives to empower students and to enable them to reach the highest level of independence for each individual student’s potential.

Students are on campus Sunday evening through Friday at noon and return home every weekend. For residential students, VSDB provides transportation weekly to and from designated “hubs” throughout Virginia. Day student transportation is provided in partnership with the local school division. At VSDB, learning never stops, with educational opportunities occurring both within the classroom as well as within the residential halls. The residential program supports essential life and academic skills taught in the classroom as well as independent living skills and skills related to the Expanded Core Curriculum.

The VSDB academic curriculum is based on the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) and is made accessible to all students with accommodations as deemed appropriate in each student's IEP. All students participate in the Virginia Assessment process according to their prescriptive Program of Studies. Students pursue various diploma options based on credits earned for an Advanced Studies Diploma, a

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Standard Diploma, or an Applied Studies Diploma. For an Advanced Studies Diploma, students may choose to take American Sign Language (ASL) as their foreign language option. VSDB utilizes on-line courses and courses offered at the local community college level in order to supplement course options for students.

VSDB provides special education services per each student's IEP, which may include speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, orientation and mobility training, and braille instruction. In addition, VSDB offers 24/7 nursing care that is accessible to all students as needed and/or prescribed.

Specialized assistive technology enhances communication and access to the curriculum per individual student needs. Specialized materials such as modified textbooks, subscriptions to supplemental instructional programs, software, and modified and brailled library books are essential to supplement the programs at VSDB. In addition, tutorial and remedial instructional support is provided by highly qualified personnel to students who demonstrate deficiencies in any core area. Tutoring occurs within the educational setting and also extends to after-hours in the residential halls.

During recreational time, students have full access to after school social activities, sports, and clubs. VSDB's sports program offers students the opportunity to be part of a team and to participate in a variety of sports such as soccer, basketball, goalball, track, cross country, and volleyball. During this 2019-20 school year, VSDB is a key leader in the establishment of a blind soccer team. As one of only two teams in the nation, VSDB is supporting the development of a Blind Soccer League in collaboration with Maryland School for the Blind. The first Blind Soccer game in the nation was played between the two schools in the fall of 2019. The sports program supports student participation with fully accessible activities with peers sharing many of the same challenges.

## **Services**

VSDB maintains compliance with all federal and state regulations for Special Education Services. It provides special education and related services, diagnostic evaluations, transportation, residential hall services, community experiences, vocational training, work experience, and other support services according to the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Nursing services are provided on a 24/7 basis to meet the needs of the residential program. Services are provided for children from birth to those who have not reached their 22nd birthday by September 30 of the current school year. All students are served through Special Education and have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). VSDB works in collaboration with the student's local school system to provide educational services that meet each student's individual needs.

VSDB is recognized as a leader in transition services and offers a multi-year high school program with innovative transition program options that encourage students to remain at VSDB until they "age out" and are no longer eligible for special education services. VSDB works closely with state agencies and organizations to connect students and families to transition services to support goals of independent living, post-secondary education, or employment. Through the IEP process, a transition plan is developed that is prescriptive to each student's individual needs and interests and outlines goals for life after graduation. VSDB maintains DOE indicator data, as required, related to graduation and student outcomes.

With innovative transition services, VSDB supports the development of essential workforce and independent living skills. Empowering each student to reach their highest potential of independence is a focus for both the school and the residential programs. Transition services for each student include workforce skill development through the VSDB ACHIEVE Program. The ACHIEVE program partners extensively within the community to provide students with hands-on on and off campus learning experiences that allow students to explore an array of career interest and options. These experiences are fully accessible and are a key element in Transition assessment and planning.

The Residential Program supports the development of independent living skills through innovative programs, such as the 18+ Residential Program. This program allows adult students the opportunity for increased independence while still under staff supervision. Students in the 18+ program are tasked with increased responsibility, opportunities to problem solve, and increased independence across campus. In addition, the 18+ program prepares students, during their last two years prior to graduation, for placement in the Independent Living Apartments (ILA) Program. The ILA Program is the only program of its kind in the Commonwealth and is designed to provide students a nine-weeks real-life experience within a supervised apartment setting. A VSDB designed curriculum provides prescriptive instruction to prepare the students for and to support them while in the ILA program. During the nine-weeks program, students experience the logistics of renting an apartment, expectations of apartment living, budgeting, meal planning, purchasing, and preparation, home and community safety, public transportation, self-care including medications, and other crucial aspects of living independently on one's own. Each nine-weeks is designed to meet the needs of each specific group of students and experiences are facilitated by well trained VSDB staff. At the end of each ILA session, students share their experiences at an ILA graduation ceremony.

At VSDB, learning extends beyond the classroom with the CROPS program located on the school's 73-acre campus. The CROPS program is comprised of the VSDB greenhouse and the VSDB Educational Urban Farm, the largest educational urban farm in the Commonwealth. The program is funded fully by the VSDB Foundation and provides full accessible agricultural and horticultural experiences to the students. Hands-on learning activities allow students to develop workforce skills in support of more effective transition planning as well as teach students the importance of healthy lifestyles choices. Students are involved in every aspect of the farm from the start of seedlings in the greenhouse to the harvesting of crops in the field to the preparation of fresh vegetables in the dining hall. The farm produces thousands of pounds of produce each year and provides fresh produce to VSDB's cafeteria. Students maintain a high level of engagement within the farm program and develop effective workforce skills to support employment upon graduation.

VSDB also provides workforce experiences through student-run businesses on campus. Students are facilitators in the operation of the VSDB School Store, Farmer's Market, and Student Center Snack Bar. These on-campus businesses provide skill development in the areas of customer service, inventory, financial management, and business organization.

### **Residential and School Staff**

The Principal oversees daily operations of the school program. All teachers and paraprofessionals must be highly qualified to maintain employment at VSDB with many being highly qualified in multiple areas. In both the Deaf and the Blind Departments, teachers instruct in multi-grade classrooms. In addition, at the

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high school level in both the Blind and the Deaf Departments, each core area is taught by a single teacher who is highly qualified in multiple SOL content areas. In the Deaf Department, to support reading and writing skill development, teachers are trained in a bilingual (American Sign Language/English) researched based instructional model.

The Director of Student Life manages all aspects of the Residential Program and works collaboratively with the Principal to ensure continuity of services and support of transition plans. Residential hall staff possesses unique skills that support a fully accessible program.

VSDB's unique programs and services offer students throughout Virginia, an opportunity to "Grow, Do, and Become". Enrollment in VSDB allows students to learn, to participate, and to succeed on equal ground as their peers. They are one of the same rather than the one who is different and for the first time, experience the opportunity to develop true friendships, to become leaders, and to gain the confidence needed that will enable them to reach their fullest potential. VSDB programs and services are crucial elements in preparing students for life after graduation as productive citizens of their community.