



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind

P.O. Box 2069, Staunton, VA 24402  
(540)332-9000 Fax (540)332-9042  
<https://vsdb.k12.va.us>

### Document Title

Annual Executive Summary - Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind - 2026

### Author

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind

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### Contact Information

Charity Reedy Warigon, Superintendent (540) 332-9000  
[Charity.warigon@vsdb.k12.va.us](mailto:Charity.warigon@vsdb.k12.va.us)

### Executive Summary

For 187 years, the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (VSDB) has served as Virginia's statewide public school for students who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Blind, Vision Impaired, DeafBlind, and students with multiple disabilities involving hearing or vision loss. Founded in 1839, VSDB remains committed to preparing students for successful futures through academic excellence, communication access, independence, leadership, and lifelong learning.

As Virginia's statewide school and resource center, VSDB serves students from across the Commonwealth through comprehensive educational, residential, and outreach services designed to meet each student's unique needs. Working collaboratively with families, local school divisions, institutions of higher education, state agencies, and community partners, VSDB provides specialized educational opportunities that support student success while strengthening services for children with sensory disabilities throughout Virginia.

The 2025–2026 school year represented another year of significant progress for the agency. VSDB experienced its third consecutive year of enrollment growth, reflecting increasing confidence among families and local school divisions seeking specialized educational opportunities for students with sensory disabilities. The school also achieved **Full Accreditation** through the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD), reaffirming its commitment to educational excellence, continuous improvement, and accountability.

Throughout the year, VSDB continued implementing strategic initiatives that strengthen both student outcomes and organizational capacity. Investments in staffing, educational programming, communication access, transition services, workforce development, and campus planning position the school to meet the evolving needs of students while preserving its rich history and preparing for future growth. Partnerships with public schools, colleges and universities, state agencies, and community organizations further expanded educational opportunities and reinforced VSDB's role as a statewide leader in specialized education.

At the center of every initiative is a simple but enduring purpose: **preparing students for life**. Academic achievement is only one component of a successful education. Students also develop communication skills, self-advocacy, leadership, independence, career readiness, and the confidence necessary to participate fully in their communities. Through high-quality accessible academics, residential programming, transition planning, career exploration, and meaningful community experiences, VSDB prepares students to pursue postsecondary education, competitive integrated employment, independent living, and lifelong success.

As the school looks to the future, VSDB remains committed to strengthening educational excellence, expanding statewide partnerships, increasing enrollment, supporting workforce development, preserving its historic campus while modernizing learning environments, and ensuring every student has access to the specialized instruction, communication, and opportunities needed to achieve their fullest potential. Through innovation, collaboration, and a steadfast commitment to student success, VSDB continues to fulfill its mission of serving students, families, and communities across the Commonwealth of Virginia.

## **Agency Overview**

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (VSDB) is Virginia's statewide public school serving students with hearing and/or vision loss, including students who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Blind, Vision Impaired, DeafBlind, and students with multiple disabilities involving hearing and/or vision loss. **As the Commonwealth's only statewide public school dedicated exclusively to serving students with hearing and/or vision loss, VSDB provides specialized educational programs, residential services, and statewide expertise that support students, families, and local school divisions throughout Virginia.** Since its founding in 1839, VSDB has provided specialized educational programs that ensure students have equitable access to communication, instruction, and opportunities that prepare them for successful adult lives.

As both a school and a statewide educational resource, VSDB partners with families, local school divisions, institutions of higher education, state agencies, and community organizations to support students from early childhood through high school graduation. The school recognizes that students with hearing and/or vision loss often require specialized instruction, accessible communication, assistive technology, and individualized support that may not be available in every educational setting. Through these partnerships, VSDB helps ensure students receive educational services that meet their unique strengths, needs, and aspirations.

VSDB provides comprehensive educational, residential, and student support services through its Deaf Department and Blind Department. Students receive academic instruction aligned

with the Virginia Standards of Learning while also benefiting from specialized services that may include communication access, Braille literacy, Orientation and Mobility instruction, the Expanded Core Curriculum, assistive technology, related services, transition planning, career readiness experiences, athletics, extracurricular activities, and residential programming. These services are designed to promote academic achievement, communication, independence, self-advocacy, leadership, and lifelong success.

The school is governed by the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind Board of Visitors (BOVs), whose members are appointed in accordance with the Code of Virginia. The Board provides strategic governance, policy oversight, and stewardship of the Commonwealth's only public school dedicated exclusively to serving students with hearing and/or vision loss. Working in partnership with school leadership, the Board establishes policy, oversees agency performance, supports long-range planning, and ensures responsible stewardship of public resources.

As a state agency, VSDB remains committed to continuous improvement, innovation, and collaboration while honoring its long tradition of educational excellence. Every decision is guided by the belief that every student deserves full access to language, communication, literacy, mobility, high-quality instruction, meaningful experiences, and opportunities that prepare them for postsecondary education, competitive integrated employment, independent living, and active participation in their communities.

## **Student Population**

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind serves students with hearing and/or vision loss from across the Commonwealth of Virginia. Students enrolled at VSDB represent diverse backgrounds, abilities, communication preferences, and educational needs. The school provides individualized educational programs designed to ensure every student has equitable access to instruction, communication, and opportunities that foster academic achievement, personal growth, and lifelong success.

Students served by VSDB include those who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Blind, Vision Impaired, DeafBlind, and students with multiple disabilities involving hearing and/or vision loss. Educational programming is individualized through each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and is delivered by multidisciplinary teams that collaborate with families, local school divisions, and related service providers to address each student's unique strengths, needs, and future goals.

Recognizing that hearing and vision are primary avenues through which children naturally learn about the world, VSDB intentionally provides learning environments that ensure students have meaningful access to information, language, and experiences. Students who are Deaf, Blind, or DeafBlind may have reduced access to the incidental learning opportunities that many hearing and sighted children acquire through everyday observation, conversation, and environmental experiences. As a result, VSDB intentionally incorporates structured opportunities that promote communication, concept development, social interaction, problem-solving, self-advocacy, and independent decision-making throughout the educational day. Because students with low-incidence sensory disabilities have unique educational needs,

this specialized model provides the individualized instruction and accessible learning environments essential for full participation in and access to the curriculum.

Students receive individualized instruction that supports not only academic achievement but also communication development, literacy, orientation and mobility, independent living skills, assistive technology, self-determination, career awareness, and social-emotional growth. Instruction is designed to prepare students for successful transitions to postsecondary education, competitive integrated employment, independent living, and meaningful participation in their communities.

VSDB recognizes that successful outcomes are achieved through strong partnerships among students, families, educators, local school divisions, and community agencies. By creating language-rich, accessible, and inclusive learning environments, the school empowers students to develop the knowledge, confidence, resilience, and leadership skills necessary to achieve their individual goals and become active, contributing members of society.

### **Strategic Priorities & Major Accomplishments**

During the 2025–2026 school year, the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind continued to build upon its longstanding tradition of educational excellence through strategic initiatives that strengthened student outcomes, expanded educational opportunities, enhanced organizational effectiveness, and reinforced its role as Virginia’s statewide leader in specialized education for students with hearing and/or vision loss.

#### **Enrollment Growth**

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (VSDB) continues to experience its strongest period of sustained enrollment growth in recent years. Official enrollment ***reached 81 students as of August 31, 2026***, representing three consecutive years of enrollment growth and a 45 percent increase since August 2023. Enrollment increased from 56 students in August 2023 to 65 students in August 2024, 75 students in August 2025, and 81 students in August 2026.

During the 2025–2026 school year, VSDB enrolled 25 new students, reflecting increased demand for the school’s specialized educational, residential, and statewide outreach services. This growth occurred while the school also experienced its normal student transitions, including graduates and students who exited or transferred, demonstrating that new enrollments continued to outpace student departures throughout the year.

The sustained upward enrollment trend reflects the positive impact of strategic initiatives focused on student success, family engagement, statewide outreach, and strong partnerships with local school divisions across the Commonwealth. This continued growth demonstrates the confidence that families and local school divisions place in VSDB’s ability to provide high-quality educational programming, individualized support services, comprehensive residential services, and statewide outreach for students who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Blind, Visually Impaired, and DeafBlind.

## **Student Success**

Preparing students for life remained the foundation of every educational decision. Students participated in academic instruction while developing communication, literacy, self-advocacy, career awareness, independent living, leadership, and workplace readiness skills. Transition planning continued to emphasize successful movement to postsecondary education, competitive integrated employment, and meaningful community participation.

## **Accreditation & Continuous Improvement**

During the reporting year, VSDB achieved **Full Accreditation** through the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD), recognizing the quality of educational programs, leadership, and continuous improvement efforts within the Deaf Department. The school also continued planning and strengthening programs supporting future accreditation efforts for the Blind Department while maintaining a culture of continuous quality improvement across the agency.

## **Legislative Support & Organizational Growth**

The Virginia General Assembly demonstrated its continued commitment to VSDB through targeted investments supporting enrollment growth, staffing, and agency operations. These investments strengthen the school's ability to expand educational opportunities, improve student services, recruit and retain qualified professionals, and meet the evolving needs of students and families across Virginia.

## **Workforce Development**

Recognizing that exceptional educational programs depend upon exceptional professionals, VSDB continued investing in workforce recruitment, professional learning, leadership development, and employee retention. The school also advanced initiatives designed to strengthen communication access and foster collaborative, language-rich learning environments that support students with diverse communication needs.

## **Campus Development**

Planning continued for the future restoration and redevelopment of **Main Hall**, preserving one of Virginia's historic educational landmarks while reimagining its role in supporting future generations of students and families. Long-range planning includes opportunities for admissions and family engagement, educational outreach, historical preservation, conference and meeting space, student workforce development, and community partnerships that celebrate the school's heritage while preparing students for the future.

## **Partnerships**

VSDB continued expanding partnerships with local school divisions, institutions of higher education, state agencies, businesses, community organizations, alumni, and families. These collaborations strengthened educational programming, transition services, educator preparation, workforce development, and postsecondary opportunities while reinforcing VSDB's role as a statewide educational resource serving

students with hearing and/or vision loss throughout the Commonwealth.

## **Admissions**

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind is committed to ensuring that students with hearing and/or vision loss have access to educational programs and services that best meet their individual strengths and needs. Admissions are guided by state and federal requirements and are centered on collaboration with families, local school divisions, and multidisciplinary educational teams to determine the most appropriate educational placement for each student.

VSDB serves students from early childhood through high school graduation whose educational needs require specialized instruction and services related to hearing and/or vision loss. The admissions process is individualized, ensuring that each student's educational, communication, social-emotional, residential, and transition needs are carefully reviewed. Placement decisions are based on comprehensive evaluation data, educational records, and recommendations developed through collaboration with families and local school divisions.

As Virginia's statewide school, VSDB recognizes that educational placement exists along a continuum of services. The school works collaboratively with local school divisions to support informed decision-making and to identify the educational environment that provides each student with meaningful access to instruction, communication, specialized services, and opportunities for success. For many students, VSDB serves as an essential educational option within Virginia's continuum of special education services, with placement determined through each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) process in accordance with applicable federal and state laws. In accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), each student's placement is determined based on their unique educational needs. Virginia law further recognizes that, for some students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind **may be the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)** when determined appropriate by the student's IEP Team in accordance with the Code of Virginia (§ 22.1-217.02).

The school offers both day and residential educational programs designed to meet the diverse needs of students with hearing and/or vision loss. Residential services provide additional opportunities for communication development, independent living, social engagement, leadership, and participation in extracurricular and community-based experiences that extend learning beyond the traditional school day.

VSDB also has a Temporary Enrollment and Monitoring Period (TEMP) Program, which provides short-term educational placements for students requiring intensive assessment, specialized instruction, or targeted intervention. The TEMP Program allows multidisciplinary teams to evaluate student needs, identify effective educational strategies, and provide recommendations that support long-term educational planning for students, families, and local school divisions.

Throughout the admissions process, families are recognized as essential partners. Admissions staff work closely with parents and guardians to provide information, answer questions, coordinate visits, and support informed educational decisions. This collaborative approach helps

ensure that students and families experience a smooth transition into the VSDB community while establishing strong partnerships that support student success.

## **Programs & Services**

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind provides comprehensive educational programs and specialized services that address the unique academic, communication, social-emotional, transition, and independent living needs of students with hearing and/or vision loss. Through individualized programming, interdisciplinary collaboration, and accessible learning environments, VSDB prepares students for successful futures in postsecondary education, employment, independent living, and active participation in their communities.

### **Academic Achievement**

VSDB provides individualized, standards-based educational programs that recognize the diverse strengths, abilities, and aspirations of every student. Instruction is aligned with the Virginia Standards of Learning and individualized through each student's educational program to ensure meaningful access to learning and opportunities for achievement. Students work toward diploma pathways that best reflect their individual educational goals and abilities, including the **Advanced Studies Diploma, Standard Diploma, and Applied Studies Diploma**. Through specialized instruction, accessible educational materials, assistive technology, and individualized supports, students develop academic knowledge, communication, literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills necessary for lifelong success.

### **Communication & Accessibility**

Communication and accessibility are fundamental to student success. VSDB provides language-rich educational environments that support each student's individualized communication needs. Depending upon the student's educational program, communication may include American Sign Language (ASL), spoken English, Braille, tactile communication, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), assistive listening technology, and other accessible communication systems identified through the Individualized Education Program (IEP). Students also benefit from accessible instructional materials, educational technology, and learning environments designed to ensure equitable participation in all aspects of school life.

### **Specialized Educational Services**

Students receive specialized instruction and related services designed to maximize educational access and independence. Services may include the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC), Orientation & Mobility (O&M), Braille literacy and tactile learning, low vision services, audiological services, assistive technology, speech-language services, occupational and physical therapy, counseling, psychological services, school nursing, and other related services identified through each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

### **Transition Services & Career Readiness**

Preparing students for life beyond graduation is an integral component of the educational

program. Beginning at age 13 and continuing throughout high school, students participate in individualized transition planning that emphasizes career exploration, work-based learning experiences, workplace readiness, self-advocacy, independent living, postsecondary education, and competitive integrated employment. Transition services are developed collaboratively with students, families, local school divisions, employers, and state agencies to support successful adult outcomes.

### **Student Enrichment**

VSDB believes learning extends well beyond the classroom. Students participate in a wide range of enrichment opportunities that support creativity, communication, leadership, teamwork, and personal growth. Programs may include athletics, goalball, fine arts, music, performing arts, student organizations, leadership development, clubs, community-based instruction, educational travel, service-learning, recreational activities, and residential programming. These experiences foster confidence, resilience, self-determination, and meaningful participation in school and community life.

### **Family Engagement**

Families are valued as essential partners throughout a student's educational journey. VSDB promotes meaningful collaboration through ongoing communication, educational planning, family conferences, transition meetings, outreach activities, and opportunities for active participation in the educational process. Strong partnerships between families and educators contribute to improved student outcomes and successful transitions.

### **Continuous Improvement**

VSDB remains committed to continuous improvement by evaluating programs, measuring student outcomes, investing in professional learning, and implementing evidence-based educational practices. Through innovation, collaboration, and accountability, the school continually strengthens programs and services to meet the evolving needs of students with hearing and/or vision loss while remaining focused on its mission of **preparing students for life**.

## **Educational Program**

The educational program at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind is designed to provide equitable access to learning while recognizing the unique strengths, abilities, accessibility and communication needs, and educational goals of each student. Through individualized instruction, accessible educational practices, and high expectations, VSDB prepares students with hearing and/or vision loss to become lifelong learners, productive citizens, and active participants in their communities.

Instruction is aligned with the Virginia Standards of Learning and individualized through each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Educational teams use evidence-based instructional strategies, ongoing assessment, and collaborative planning to ensure students receive meaningful access to academic content while developing the communication, literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills necessary for future success.

Recognizing that students with hearing and/or vision loss often experience barriers to incidental learning, VSDB intentionally creates language-rich and experience-rich learning environments where communication, exploration, and real-world experiences become essential components of instruction. Students are encouraged to develop curiosity, confidence, independence, self-advocacy, and decision-making skills through meaningful educational experiences both inside and outside the classroom.

Communication is embedded throughout every aspect of the educational program. Instruction is delivered using each student's individualized communication approach, which may include American Sign Language (ASL), spoken English, Braille, tactile communication, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), assistive listening technology, and other accessible communication systems. Educational materials, technology, and learning environments are designed to ensure equitable participation and meaningful access for every student.

Technology plays an increasingly important role in supporting student learning and independence. Students have access to assistive technology, accessible instructional materials, Braille technology, screen-access software, hearing assistive technology, digital accessibility tools, and emerging educational technologies that enhance learning, communication, and future career readiness.

The educational program extends beyond academic instruction through community-based learning, career exploration, transition activities, fine arts, music, physical education, athletics, leadership opportunities, service learning, and extracurricular experiences. These opportunities reinforce classroom instruction while helping students develop interpersonal skills, resilience, independence, and a sense of belonging.

VSDB is committed to fostering a culture of continuous improvement through collaboration among educators, families, related service providers, and community partners. Professional learning, instructional innovation, data-informed decision-making, and ongoing program evaluation ensure that educational practices continue to evolve in response to the changing needs of students and the best available educational research.

## **Residential Program**

The Residential Program is an integral extension of the educational experience at the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. More than a place where students reside during the school week, the residential program provides a structured, language-rich, and accessible environment where students apply the knowledge and skills learned during the school day while developing the confidence, independence, and personal responsibility necessary for adult life.

Working collaboratively with instructional staff, residential personnel reinforce each student's educational goals, communication needs, transition objectives, and Individualized Education Program (IEP). This seamless partnership between the classroom and residence hall provides continuity of learning while helping students apply academic concepts and develop the

practical skills needed for success beyond graduation.

The residential setting is also where many of the most meaningful opportunities for **incidental learning** to occur. Through everyday routines, conversations, peer interactions, recreational activities, community experiences, and shared responsibilities, students gain knowledge and experiences that many hearing and sighted children naturally acquire through observation and daily life. Residential staff intentionally create opportunities that strengthen communication, concept development, problem-solving, decision-making, and social understanding in authentic, real-world situations.

Equally important, the Residential Program provides daily opportunities for students to develop and practice the **soft skills** essential for success in college, employment, independent living, and community participation. Students strengthen communication, teamwork, adaptability, responsibility, leadership, time management, conflict resolution, self-advocacy, executive functioning, and interpersonal skills while learning to live and work alongside others in a supportive community.

Students also participate in recreational, cultural, athletic, leadership, fine arts, music, and community-based activities that enrich the educational experience and promote confidence, resilience, creativity, and personal growth. These experiences foster lasting friendships and meaningful connections with peers who share similar lived experiences, creating a strong sense of belonging and community that often extends well beyond graduation.

Safety, health, wellness, and belonging remain central to the residential experience. Through individualized support, accessible communication, positive relationships, and meaningful daily experiences, the Residential Program empowers students to become confident, capable, and independent individuals who are prepared for postsecondary education, competitive integrated employment, independent living, and active participation in their communities.

## **Statewide Partnerships & Outreach**

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind extends its mission beyond the campus by collaborating with families, local school divisions, institutions of higher education, state agencies, community organizations, and professional partners throughout the Commonwealth. These partnerships expand educational opportunities, strengthen specialized services, support personnel preparation, and improve outcomes for students with hearing and/or vision loss across Virginia.

### **Public School Partnerships**

Public School Partnerships, a grant funded project from the Virginia Department of Education, continued to expand VSDB's statewide outreach by strengthening relationships with all 131 local school divisions, families, and state partners through professional development, technical assistance, conference presentations, and the development of a statewide admissions roadmap. These efforts increased awareness of VSDB services, improved outcomes for students with sensory disabilities across the state

and supported consideration of students who may benefit from the specialized educational opportunities available at VSDB.

### **Higher Education Partnerships**

VSDB partners with colleges and universities to strengthen educator preparation, personnel development, internships, clinical experiences, research, and postsecondary opportunities that benefit students with hearing and/or vision loss while helping address workforce needs throughout Virginia.

Current partnerships include:

- **Blue Ridge Community College** – Through the **VSDB Scholars Program**, eligible students participate in postsecondary coursework and campus experiences while still enrolled at VSDB, supporting transition planning, college readiness, self-advocacy, and successful movement to postsecondary education and employment.
- **Rochester Institute of Technology/National Technical Institute for the Deaf (RIT/NTID)** – Collaboration in teacher preparation, educational leadership, internships, and professional development supporting Deaf and DeafBlind education.
- **McDaniel College** – Partnership supporting graduate preparation of Teachers of the Deaf and DeafBlind through clinical experiences and personnel development.
- **George Mason University** – Collaboration supporting the preparation of Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVIs) and Orientation & Mobility (O&M) Specialists through graduate education and clinical experiences.

### **State Agency Partnerships**

VSDB collaborates closely with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI), Virginia Department of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) and other state agencies to improve educational access, transition planning, career readiness, and postsecondary outcomes for students with hearing and/or vision loss.

### **Community Partnerships & Outreach**

VSDB values partnerships with families, alumni, businesses, nonprofit organizations, civic groups, and community partners that enrich student learning and strengthen connections between the school and the communities it serves. Through educational outreach, professional learning, consultation, and collaborative initiatives, VSDB shares specialized expertise while promoting greater awareness, accessibility, and opportunities for individuals with hearing and/or vision loss throughout the Commonwealth.

### **Financial Report**

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind remains committed to the responsible stewardship of public resources in support of its mission and strategic priorities. For Fiscal Year 2026, **revenues totaled \$270,542.62** and include both general fund and non-general

fund revenues. These figures do **not** include federal grants or bond reimbursements. **Expenses totaled \$17,877,085.97** and include both general fund and non-general fund expenditures, including federal grants. These figures do **not** include any capital project expenses. VSDB continues to manage its financial resources responsibly to support high-quality educational programs, specialized services, residential programming, campus operations, and statewide initiatives that prepare students with hearing and/or vision loss for successful futures.

### **Accreditation & Quality Assurance**

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind is committed to continuous improvement through ongoing evaluation, professional learning, strategic planning, and accreditation. These efforts ensure that educational programs and services remain aligned with best practices while meeting the evolving needs of students with hearing and/or vision loss.

During the 2025–2026 school year, the Deaf Department achieved Full Accreditation through the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD), recognizing the quality of its educational programs and commitment to continuous improvement. Building upon this success, the Blind Department is exploring accreditation through the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) as part of its ongoing commitment to program excellence.

VSDB remains dedicated to evaluating programs, strengthening instructional practices, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement to ensure every student receives a high-quality education that prepares them for success in postsecondary education, employment, independent living, and community life.