

EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION

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GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND TYPES OF DIPLOMAS

Legislation signed on June 20, 2014 by the Governor significantly changed the diploma options for students with disabilities. The new legislation in Senate Bill 850 eliminates special diploma options and develops pathways to a standard diploma for all students with disabilities. This legislation is specific regarding the special diploma option. As of June 20, 2014, the special diploma option is available **ONLY** to students who enrolled in grade nine (9) or higher prior to the 2014-15 school year and the student's Individual Education Plan indicated a selection of special diploma. Students with disabilities who entered the 9th grade before the 2014-2015 school year cannot be switched to special diploma after June 20, 2014.

In compliance with SBER 6A-1.095, FAC (Requirements for High School Diploma) and SBER 61-1.0996, FAC (Graduation Requirements for Certain Exceptional Students), a student with disabilities may exit high school with a special diploma only if this option is specified on the Individual Education Plan prior to the 2014-15 school year.

If a student with disabilities does not fulfill criteria for a diploma, he/she may exit high school with one of the following certificates:

- Certificate of Completion
- Special Certificate of Completion

The selection of a diploma option must take place at an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) meeting during the student's eighth grade school year or during the school year prior to the student becoming age 14, whichever comes first. Since the selection of a diploma option will have a significant impact upon the student's high school curriculum, the IEP team will collaborate with the student's parents/guardians to select the most appropriate diploma option. The IEP team will discuss specific course and credit requirements for each diploma option in order to make an informed decision. The diploma option selected at the IEP meeting is noted on the IEP. At each annual IEP meeting thereafter, the academic performance of the student in relation to the diploma option selected shall be addressed and the diploma recommendation reviewed. If, at any time, a change to the diploma option is recommended or requested, the change must be approved by the parent and is subject to verification of appropriateness by an independent reviewer. Copies of each IEP shall be given to the parents.

STANDARD DIPLOMA

Eligibility

All students with disabilities who entered 9th grade in 2014-15 must meet the requirements for a standard diploma in order to graduate. Note: Only students with disabilities who enrolled in grade nine (9) or higher prior to the 2014-15 school year and had an Individual Education Plan indicating a selection of special diploma may earn a special diploma rather than a standard diploma. **Students with disabilities exclusively in programs for students with Visual and Speech Impairments, Gifted or Homebound or Hospitalized must pursue a standard diploma.**

Requirements for General Standard Diplomas

The standard diploma will be awarded to any student who has satisfactorily completed the high school program and has met all local and state requirements for graduation. The standard diploma will be awarded to students who:

- Earn a passing grade on the required statewide assessment(s) or meet the waiver requirements.
- Successfully complete the required credits in grades 9-12. Students with disabilities must earn required credits in district approved education courses listed in the Course Code Directory in order to meet the credit requirements for a standard diploma. Students with disabilities may meet the elective credit requirements by earning credits in basic, vocational or exceptional student education courses as allowed by the standard diploma option selected.
- Attain the same cumulative grade point average required in the general education section of Student Progression Plan.

Waiver of Statewide, Standardized Assessment Results for Students with Disabilities

Section 1008.22(3)(c)1., Florida Statutes (F.S.), requires that school districts provide instruction to prepare students with disabilities to demonstrate satisfactory performance in the core content knowledge and skills necessary for successful grade-to-grade progression and high school graduation. Assessment results may be waived under specific circumstances for students with disabilities for the purpose of receiving a course grade and a standard high school diploma.

To be considered for a statewide, standardized assessment results waiver, the following criteria must be met:

1. The student must be identified as a student with a disability, as defined in s. 1007.02, F.S.: The term “student with a disability” means a student who is documented as having an intellectual disability; a hearing impairment, including deafness; a speech or language impairment; a visual impairment, including blindness; an emotional or behavioral disability; an orthopedic or other health impairment; an autism spectrum disorder; a traumatic brain injury; or a specific learning disability, including, but not limited to, dyslexia, dyscalculia, or developmental aphasia.
2. The student must have an individual educational plan (IEP).
3. The student must have taken the statewide, standardized assessment with appropriate allowable accommodations at least once.
4. In accordance with s. 1008.22(3)(c)2., F.S., the IEP team must make a determination of whether a statewide, standardized assessment accurately measures the student’s abilities, taking into consideration all allowable accommodations for students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities who chooses to pursue the 18-credit, Academically Challenging Curriculum to Enhance Learning (ACCEL) option, may be eligible for a waiver of statewide, standardized assessment results as long as they meet all of the waiver requirements and the requirements for the ACCEL option.

Students pursuing a standard diploma with a scholar diploma designation are not eligible for a waiver. In order for a student to earn a scholar diploma designation, a student must meet the requirements of s. 1003.4285, F.S.

Requirements for Specific Standard Diplomas

For those who have selected a General Standard Diploma, the following additional options may be discussed at an IEP team meeting and selected if appropriate.

Standard Diploma via Access Courses: This diploma is ONLY available to students with significant cognitive disabilities who are enrolled in access courses. The following may considered:

- Substitution of eligible Career Technical Education (CTE) courses for required access courses. Eligible CTE courses are noted in the state course code directory.
- Modified expectations or outcomes to the CTE curriculum if CTE substitutions have been selected in lieu of required access courses.

- Waiver of the Florida Standards Alternate Assessment for the purpose of receiving a course grade and a standard high school diploma. If this option is recommended by the IEP team, the parent must approve it. In addition, a Graduation Portfolio must be developed in the area (reading, math, science) in which the waiver is granted.

Standard Diploma via Academic Courses and Employment Competencies: This may be considered when the IEP team has determined that mastery of both academic and employment competencies are the most appropriate way for the student to demonstrate skills. If this option is selected, an appropriate and signed Employment Transition Plan must be in place and separate from the IEP. Also, in addition to meeting the requirements noted for the general standard diploma, the IEP team may discuss and opt to substitute eligible Career Technical Education (CTE) courses for required core academic courses. Eligible CTE courses are noted in the state course code directory.

Standard Diploma Merit Designation, Standard Diploma Scholar Designation, Advanced International Certificate of Education, State of Florida High School Performance-Based Diploma, State of Florida High School Diploma, International Baccalaureate, Standard Diploma ACCEL 18 Credit Option: Specific requirements for each of these diploma types can be found in the Secondary Education section of this manual.

Deferral of Graduation/Receipt of Standard High School Diploma – This applies only to students with disabilities pursuing a standard diploma during the school year in which the student is expected to graduate. [Students who receive a special diploma or a certificate of completion do NOT need to defer receipt of the special diploma or certificate in order to continue to receive FAPE.] The IEP team must review the benefits of deferring and describe in writing the services and programs available to the student who wishes to defer. The decision is made by the parent or the student if over age 18 during the year the student is expected to meet all of the requirements for a standard diploma, which is the senior year. Additionally, the decision to defer must be made by May 15 of the senior year. A student with a disability may only defer receipt of a standard diploma if:

- The IEP includes special education, transition planning, transition services, or related services through age 21 AND
- The student is enrolled in one or more of the following:
 - Accelerated college credit instruction (dual enrollment and early admission, advanced placement, and credit by examination)
 - Industry certification courses that lead to college credit (check with the Career-Technical Education department for courses that apply)
 - Collegiate high school program (International Baccalaureate program, or Advanced International Certificate of Education program)

- Courses necessary to satisfy the Scholar designation requirements (the scholar designation requires satisfactory completion of additional academic courses and assessments; see fldoe.org for additional information)
- A structured work-study program (any program that is designed to prepare the student for employment), internship, or pre-apprenticeship program (for students who are at least 16 years old).

SPECIAL DIPLOMA OVERVIEW

Eligibility

The following students with disabilities may be given the opportunity to seek a special diploma if the student enrolled in grade nine (9) or higher prior to the 2014-15 school year and the student's Individual Education Plan indicated a selection of special diploma as of June 20, 2014:

- Intellectual Disabilities (Independent, Supported and Participatory Level)
- Specific Learning Disabled
- Orthopedic Impairment, Other Health Impairment and Traumatic Brain Injury
- Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing
- Language Impaired
- Emotional or Behavioral Disabilities
- Dual Sensory-Impaired
- Autism Spectrum Disorder

Students with disabilities exclusively in programs for students with Visual and Speech Impairments, Gifted or Homebound or Hospitalized must pursue a standard diploma.

Credit Requirements

To be awarded a special diploma upon graduation from high school, the student with disabilities must complete the course/credit requirements and demonstrate mastery of the applicable ESE student performance standards by either:

- Completion of the credit requirements for a standard diploma prescribed in this document, or
- Completion of the credit requirements for a special diploma as prescribed in this document. Exact credit requirements applicable to a standard shall be determined by the student's IEP Committee.

Modified Occupational Completion Points (MOCPs) may be used for students working toward a special diploma. When MOCPs are selected for Career

Technical Education courses, the particular outcomes and student performance standards which a student must master to earn credit must be specified on the student's IEP.

OPTION I: SPECIAL DIPLOMA REQUIREMENTS

Specific Learning Disabled, Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing, Emotional or Behavioral Disabilities, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Other Health Impairment (OHI), Orthopedic Impairment (OI), Language Impaired, selected Intellectual Disabilities and any other handicapped condition as stated by SBER 6A-1.0996, FAC (Graduation Requirements for Certain Exceptional Students) and determined by IEP Committee:

English	3	Credits
Mathematics	3	Credits
Social Studies	1	Credit
Science/Health	1	Credit
Physical Education	1	Credit
Electives/CTE	9	Credits
TOTAL =	18	Credits

Note: Access courses can **only** be used for students with significant cognitive disabilities who are eligible for alternate assessment.

Credit requirements in any subject area may be waived in order to allow more credits to be earned in any other subject area as determined by the IEP Committee. **The student must be at least 17 years of age and have participated in at least 4 years of high school prior to graduation.**

The specific set of requirements applicable to the student shall be designated by the IEP Committee. Credit requirements in any subject area may be waived in order to allow more credits to be earned in any other subject area.

An increase or decrease in instructional time may be considered (i.e., student may be enrolled in a course for more than one period and more than one year provided the content and standards represent different student outcomes as specified on the IEP).

Performance Standard Requirements:

All Florida students participate in the state's assessment and accountability system. The Florida Standards Alternate Assessment (FSAA) is designed for students whose participation in the general statewide assessment program (Florida

Standards Assessments, Statewide Science Assessment, Next Generation Sunshine State Standards End-of-Course Assessments) is not appropriate, even with accommodations. The FSAA measures student academic performance on the Access Points in Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science. Access Points reflect the essence or core intent of the standards that apply to all students in the same grade, but at reduced levels of complexity. Student performance is assessed at three levels of complexity.

The three performance/functional levels are:

- **Independent Level**
- **Supported Level**
- **Participatory Level**

Students' achievement is reported through performance levels described as emergent, achieved and commended. Access Points are academic expectations written specifically for students with significant cognitive disabilities. It is expected that only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are eligible under IDEA will participate in the FSAA.

NOTE: Access courses can **only** be used for students with significant cognitive disabilities who are eligible for alternate assessment. Determining the specific benchmarks within each strand and the functional level(s) applicable to a student shall be the responsibility of the IEP Committee.

OPTION II: SPECIAL DIPLOMA REQUIREMENTS

The following specific course/credit requirements must be met by any student with one of the following disabilities: Intellectual Disabilities, Specific Learning Disabled, Emotional/Behavioral Disabilities, Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing, Other Health Impairment, Orthopedic Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury, Language Impaired, Autism Spectrum Disorder or Dual Sensory Impaired, and any other handicapping condition as stated by SBER 6A-1.0996 FAC.

- A minimum of 12 high school credits be determined by the IEP Committee.
Note: Access courses can **only** be used for students with significant cognitive disabilities who are eligible for alternate assessment.

In addition to course/credit requirements noted above, the following requirements must also be met, in lieu of Student Performance Standards mastery, by a

student with disabilities seeking a Special Diploma under Option II:

- The student must be at least 17 years of age at the time the Diploma is granted.
- The student must be satisfactorily employed full-time in the same community-based job for at least one semester during his/her senior year.

OR

- The student must be placed in supported competitive employment for at least 12 hours per week and paid a minimum wage in compliance with the requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act for at least one semester during his/her senior year.

The student has achieved all the annual goals and short-term objectives which were specified on the IEP related to the employment and community competencies.

- The student has mastered the employment and community competencies specified in a training plan. The training plan shall be developed and signed by the student, parent, teacher and employer prior to placement in employment and shall identify the following:
 - the expected employment and community competencies; the criteria for determining and certifying mastery of the competencies;
 - the work schedule and the minimum number of hours to be worked per week;a description of the supervision to be provided by school district staff.

TYPES OF CERTIFICATES: OVERVIEW

For students with disabilities who have meet some, but not all, of the requirements for the specified diploma option on the IEP, a certificate is awarded in lieu of a diploma.

Certificate of Completion

According to statute, a Certificate of Completion is awarded to any a student with disabilities who has met all requirements for graduation with a standard diploma, except for passing the Statewide Assessment Program.

Special Certificate of Completion

The special certificate of completion is awarded to students with disabilities who meet the annual credit requirements as specified for a special diploma (Option I or II), but fails to master the specified state minimum student performance standards appropriate to the student's exceptionality or fails to display mastery of employment and community competencies (Option II).

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The awarding of a special diploma or certificate of completion to students with disabilities does not prevent a student with a disability from pursuing a standard diploma. A student with disabilities may continue to pursue a standard diploma until his/her 22nd birthday.

A. CLASSROOM ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodation to basic education courses and to Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses and programs of study shall be made as needed to assure students the opportunity to meet requirements for course completion and high school graduation requirements for a standard diploma. The appropriate accommodations shall be determined on the basis of the assessed needs of the student and shall be reflected in his/her IEP. Accommodations to these courses shall not include modifications to the student performance standards.

B. DISTRICT AND STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT ACCOMMODATIONS

Allowable district and state standardized assessment accommodations should be considered by the IEP team at annual IEP reviews. Note that only allowable accommodations approved by any specified standardized assessments are permissible. Parents and students should be made aware that there may be accommodations used in the classroom that are not permissible on standardized assessments.

Teachers are to use appropriate testing accommodations, identified on the IEP, for a student with disabilities in all situations.

C. ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

Participation Guidelines:

The Florida Standards Alternate Assessment is an alternate achievement standards-based assessment designed specifically for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Individual Education Plan (IEP) teams are responsible for determining whether students with disabilities will participate in alternate assessment. The IEP team should consider the student's present level of educational performance in reference to the *Florida Standards Assessments and Next Generation Sunshine State Standards Assessments*. In order to facilitate informed and equitable decision making, IEP teams should answer each of the following questions when determining whether or not a student should participate in the Florida Standards Alternate Assessment:

Questions to Guide the Decision-Making Process to Determine How a Student with Disabilities will Participate in the Statewide Assessment Program	YES	NO
1. Does the student have a significant cognitive disability?		
2. Even with appropriate and allowable instructional accommodations, assistive technology, or accessible instructional materials, does the student require modifications to the grade level general state content standards?		
3. Does the student require direct instruction in academics areas of English language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science based on access points in order to acquire, generalize, and transfer skills across settings?		

If the IEP team determines that all three of the questions accurately characterize a student's current educational situation, then the student should be enrolled in access courses and the Florida Standards Alternate Assessment should be used to provide a meaningful evaluation of the student's current academic achievement. If "yes" is not indicated in all three areas, then the student should be instructed in the general education courses and participate in the general statewide standardized assessments with or without accommodations as appropriate.

ELECTIVE CREDITS

For a Special Diploma, students may earn any number of elective credits for remedial course work in an appropriate ESE course.

REPORT CARDS

Students in Kindergarten – Second grade with significant cognitive disabilities and working on the Participatory or Supported Level *Access Points* will be evaluated with a modified report card.

All other students will be evaluated with the standard grade level report card.

PROMOTION

Credit and Promotional Requirements, outlined under Promotion and Placement in Senior High School (Basic Education), do not apply to students seeking a Special Diploma. The student's IEP Committee will provide input regarding the student's promotion. Promotion is based upon the student's ability to earn the required number of credits for each grade level.

1. Special Diploma Option I

18 credits are the minimum number required to graduate

- 5 credits to be promoted to 10th grade - No specific grade point average
- 10 credits to be promoted to 11th grade - No specific grade point average
- 14 credits to be promoted to 12th grade - No specific grade point average
- 18 credits to graduate - No specific grade point average

All other requirements for Special Diploma Option I must also be met as delineated in the Pupil Progression Plan

2. Special Diploma Option II

12 credits are the minimum number required to graduate

- 3 credits to be promoted to 10th grade - No specific grade point average
- 6 credits to be promoted to 11th grade - No specific grade point average
- 9 credits to be promoted to 12th grade - No specific grade point average
- 12 credits to graduate - No specific grade point average

All other requirements for a Special Diploma Option II must also be met.