

EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EDUCATION

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GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS FOR EXCEPTIONAL STUDENTS & TYPES OF DIPLOMAS

Legislation recently signed by the Governor significantly changed the diploma options for students with disabilities. The new legislation eliminates the option for a special diploma, instead, developing pathways to a standard diploma for all students with disabilities. Technical Assistance is being developed by the Department of Education and the Pupil Progression Plan will be amended as soon as it is available.

In the interim, students in grades 9 – 12 whose IEP specifies special diploma will be permitted to continue to pursue that path, if desired. All other students will follow a path towards a standard diploma.

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), an exceptional student may exit high school with one of the following diplomas:

- Standard Diploma
- Special Diploma

If an exceptional student 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) conference during the student's eighth grade school year or during the school year prior to the student's becoming age 14, whichever comes first. Since the selection of a diploma option will have a significant impact upon the exceptional student's high school curriculum, parents must be provided an opportunity to be involved in the decision-making process. Parents must be informed about course/credit requirements and other requirements for each diploma option. The diploma option selected at the IEP conference must be noted on the IEP. At each annual IEP conference thereafter, the academic performance of the student in relation to the diploma option selected shall be addressed and the diploma recommendation reviewed. Copies of each IEP shall be given to the parents.

The diploma option decision is not irrevocable. Any exceptional student shall, upon written request, be afforded the opportunity to meet all requirements for a standard high school diploma. Following such written request, an IEP review must be scheduled and parents must be informed of the impact of this decision on courses, credits, student performance standards, the general statewide assessment Program, and the time required to complete the requirements. The parents' written request must be dated and maintained in the student's cumulative file and noted on the IEP. Additionally, school

personnel may recommend a change in the student's diploma option, based on documentation of the student's progress and status in his present course of study. In this case, parents must be informed, via the IEP review process, of the reasons for and impact of the proposed changes. Any changes in the diploma option shall be indicated on the IEP, a copy of which shall be provided to the parents.

STANDARD DIPLOMA

Eligibility

All exceptional students **should** be given the opportunity to meet the requirements for a standard diploma. **Exceptional students exclusively in programs for the Visually-Impaired, Speech Impaired, Gifted or Homebound or Hospitalized must pursue a standard diploma.**

Requirements

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 have:

- Earned a passing grade on the required statewide assessment(s) or met the waiver requirements.
- Successfully completed the required credits in grades 9-12. Exceptional students must earn required credits in district approved basic education courses listed in the Course Code Directory in order to meet the credit requirements for a standard diploma. Exceptional students may meet the elective credit requirements by earning credits in basic, vocational or exceptional student education courses.
- Attain the same cumulative grade point average required in the regular education section of Student Progression Plan.

Elective credit toward a standard diploma may be earned in any Level 1 /Fundamental Courses as noted in the Exceptional Student Education section in the current Course Code Directory.

Accommodations

Accommodation to basic education courses shall be made as needed to assure students the opportunity to meet high school graduation requirements for a standard diploma. Accommodations to these courses shall not include modifications to the student performance standards.

Accommodations to Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses and programs of study shall be made to assure exceptional students the opportunity to meet requirements for completion of the course(s). Modified Occupational Completion Points (MOCPs) may be used for students working toward a special diploma. When MOCPs are selected for CTE courses, the particular outcomes and student performance standards which a student must master to earn credit must be specified on the student's IEP.

For basic courses, either of the following strategies shall be used in implementing this requirement:

- Assignment of the exceptional student to an exceptional education class for instruction in a basic course with the same student performance standards as those required of non-exceptional Clay County students pursuant to this Student Progression Plan; or
- Assignment of the exceptional student to a basic education class for instruction in which accommodations are made for the student's exceptionality.

The appropriate accommodations shall be determined on the basis of the assessed needs of the student and shall be reflected in his/her IEP.

Any or all of the following accommodations to the basic or CTE courses are authorized as appropriate for exceptional students who are pursuing standard diploma credit:

- Variations in instructional methodology;
- Accommodations to test administration as provided in State Board Rule;
- Use of special communication systems;
- An increase or decrease in instructional time (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.)

SPECIAL DIPLOMA OVERVIEW

Eligibility

The following exceptional students may be given the opportunity to seek a special diploma:

- 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

If an exceptional student is pursuing a special diploma, it must be indicated on the current IEP.

Exceptional students enrolled exclusively in programs for the Visually-Impaired, Speech Impaired, Gifted or Homebound or Hospitalized are not eligible for a special diploma.

Credit Requirements

To be awarded a special diploma upon graduation from high school, the exceptional student 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 as 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.

OPTION I: SPECIAL DIPLOMA REQUIREMENTS

Mild to Moderate

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, or be age 19 prior to the beginning of the next school year.**

Moderate to Severe

Intellectual Disabilities, and any other handicapping 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
Science	1	Credits
Social Studies	1	Credit
Physical Education	1	Credit
Electives	9	Credits
TOTAL =	18	Credits

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.

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

Performance Standard Requirements:

The *Next Generation Sunshine State Standards Access Points* went into effect for students with significant cognitive disabilities during the 2007-2008 school year. The Access Points consist of subject, strands, standards, benchmarks, sample performance objectives, correlation to Standards, and performance/ functional level.

The Standards are divided into four content areas:

- **English**
- **Mathematics**
- **Science**
- **Social Studies**

Within these content areas there are three performance/functional levels:

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

Determining the specific benchmarks within each strand and the functional level(s) applicable to a student shall be the responsibility of the IEP Committee.

Students who are not eligible for *Next Generation Sunshine State Standards Access Points* will master the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma and/or the standards for regular diploma. The Florida Course Descriptions for Grades 6-12, Exceptional Student Education, 1999, may be used if applicable.

OPTION II: SPECIAL DIPLOMA REQUIREMENTS

The following specific course/credit requirements must be met by any 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 student, and any other handicapping condition as stated by SBER 6A-1.0996 FAC.

ESE students seeking an Option II Special Diploma must meet the following requirements:

A minimum of 12 high school credits, types of courses to be decided upon by the IEP Committee.

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

Certificate of Completion

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

Special Certificate of Completion

The special certificate of completion is awarded to the exceptional student who meets 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 any eligible exceptional education student does not prevent a student with disabilities from pursuing a regular diploma. A student with disabilities may continue to pursue a regular diploma until his/her 22nd birthday.

NOTE: This includes the opportunity to participate in the general statewide assessments as well as courses to assist with skill acquisition necessary for the general statewide assessments. In this instance, an IEP/staffing committee would need to convene to determine eligibility for readmission (if a student had been dismissed) into ESE and/or to develop an IEP.

A. CLASSROOM, DISTRICT AND STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT ACCOMMODATIONS

Classroom and Formal Test Accommodations for Exceptional Students State Board Rule 6A-6.0312(d) authorizes all of the following procedures for classroom, district, and statewide test administration. Note that only accommodations approved by the Florida Department of Education is permissible on standardized assessments.

Teachers are to use appropriate testing accommodations, identified on the IEP, for an exceptional education student in all situations.

B. ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

Participation Guidelines:

The Florida 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 *CCSS and Supplemental NGSSS Aligned to FCAT 2.0 and EOC's*. 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 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. Is the student unable to master the grade-level, general state content standards even with appropriate and allowable instructional accommodations, assistive technology, or accessible instructional materials?		
3. Is the student participating in a curriculum based on Sunshine State Standards Access Points for all academic areas?		
4. Does the student require extensive direct instruction in academics based on access points in order to acquire, generalize, and transfer skills across settings?		

If the IEP team determines that all four of the questions accurately characterize a student’s current educational situation, then the Florida Alternate Assessment should be used to provide a meaningful evaluation of the student’s current academic achievement. If “yes” is not indicated in all four areas, then the student should participate in the general statewide assessments with or without accommodations.

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