

ALTERNATE DIPLOMA FOR EDUCATORS

SPECIAL EDUCATION - GUIDANCE BRIEF



Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the obligation to make available a free appropriate public education (FAPE) continues beyond high school if the student has not graduated from high school with a regular high school diploma as defined by the IDEA and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). To be treated as a "regular high school diploma" federal law requires that it be fully aligned with the State's standards. *"The term regular high school diploma means the standard high school diploma awarded to the preponderance of students in the State that is fully aligned with State standards, or a higher diploma, except that a regular high school diploma shall not be aligned to the alternate academic achievement standards described in section 1111(b)(1)(E) of the ESEA."*

§300.102 (a)(3)

Therefore, students assessed through the Oklahoma Alternate Assessment Program (OAAP) are NOT eligible for a regular high school diploma since the OAAP is aligned to alternate academic achievement standards. House Bill 1041 amended 70 O.S. § 11-103.6 to create a new graduation pathway for the 1% of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who participate in the Oklahoma Alternate Assessment Program (OAAP) aligned to alternate academic achievement standards. For the 2022-2023 school year, the district had a one-time option to provide a regular high school diploma to students participating in the OAAP since the alternate diploma was not available until May 2024. Importantly, this regular diploma did not cease a FAPE and counted as "not graduated" for accountability purposes.

All students with disabilities are assigned and belong to a cohort year, regardless of their diploma pathway. Procedures for adjusted/extended cohorts, that apply to all students not completing graduation requirements with their cohort year, also apply to students with disabilities pursuing a standard diploma. However, students pursuing an alternate diploma have the opportunity for an alternate diploma cohort adjustment if they did not graduate with their four-year cohort, if they are continuously enrolled from the previous school year to the current school year, and if they were not counted as a dropout for the previous school year. A cohort adjustment means their cohort year rolls forward, if the student is continuously enrolled and actively working toward an alternate diploma, in which case the student will not be counted against the school district's graduation rate as a non-graduate. For students pursuing the alternate diploma, the year they graduate (or drop out) is their cohort year.

IDEA Documents for Compliance

The following information outlines the special education procedures for students participating in the OAAP who are eligible for the alternate diploma. It includes documentation for Written Notice, a Summary of Performance, and IEPs.

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IDEA Documents 2023-24 School Year and Beyond			
Student Description	IEP	Written Notice	Summary of Performance
Student Reaching Maximum Age for Services	A subsequent IEP or an amendment is not necessary unless the IEP is due, or the team needs to meet prior to the end of the school year	Document Student has reached the maximum age	Complete SOP at the time of Exit
Student Returning for Alternate High School Diploma and/or a FAPE	Amendment or Subsequent as needed	(At the time of annual IEP or when the decision for continued enrollment is made) Document the district's offer of - continued enrollment and FAPE through the school year in which the student turns 22. Document the team's decisions regarding - continued enrollment - continued services	Not required to complete at this time
Student Graduating with an Alternate High School Diploma, Returning for a FAPE	Amendment or Subsequent as needed	Document the district's offer of - continued enrollment and FAPE through the school year in which the student turns 22. Document the team's decisions regarding - continued enrollment - continued services	Not required to complete at this time
Student Not Yet Graduating With an Alternate High School Diploma, Returning to earn a diploma and/or FAPE	Amendment or Subsequent as needed.	Document the district's offer of - continued enrollment and FAPE through the school year in which the student turns 22. Document the team's decisions regarding - continued enrollment - continued services	Not required to complete at this time

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Student Previously Graduated with Diploma, Not Returning for a Subsequent Year	A subsequent IEP or an amendment is not necessary unless the IEP is due, or the team needs to meet prior to the end of the school year	Document the district's offer of - continued enrollment and FAPE through the school year in which the student turns 22. Document the team's decisions regarding - continued enrollment	Complete SOP at the time of Exit
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For students planning to return to continue services, create a Subsequent IEP or IEP Amendment (Consider and revise the following sections as appropriate)

Overall Objective Statement: Indicate the student will return for the next school year to receive services.

Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance: Consider if new assessments are needed to review progress and/or develop new goals.

Parent Concerns: Consider any parent concerns and address how the district will resolve the parent's concerns in writing within the IEP or within the Written Notice.

Special Factors: Consider if there are any special factors that need to be addressed including communication, behavior, and assistive technology no matter the category of disability.

Annual Goals: Review annual goals and determine which goals will be continued. Consider if new goals need to be developed based on the results from new assessment data.

Transition Services Plan: Consider if additional transition assessments are necessary to develop post-secondary goals, annual transition goals, course of study, and transition services. If yes, administer assessments and use the results to develop/revise the postsecondary goals, annual transition goals, course of study, and transition services. Transition assessments are required annually from 8th grade or on or before the student turning 15, whichever comes first.

- Curriculum Participation: Update the curriculum participation to Alternate Standards/Essential Elements.
- Participation in Assessments: Continue to indicate the student participates in OAAP (required for calculation of Adjusted/Extended Cohort Graduation rates).
- Projected Date of Graduation: Update the projected date of graduation.
- Program Completion and Type: If the student will be graduating with an Alternate Diploma, select Alternate Diploma.
- Courses of Study: Update the transition courses of study.

Special Education Services and Related Services: Review and update the services if needed.



IEP Changes in EDPlan

The following changes to EDPlan were released in July 2023.

1. In the Curriculum Participation section, Alternate Standards/Essential Elements was added along with the College Preparatory/Work Ready and Core Curriculum options.
2. In the Program Completion and Type section, there will now be two options - Alternate Diploma, and Standard Diploma.
3. In the Course of Study section, a Transition Course of Study panel is available to list the courses beyond 12th grade. This panel will appear beginning the student's senior year, if the IEP indicates the student participates in the OAAP.

Alternate Diploma Resources

Companion guidance documents were developed specifically for parents and one for district administrators. To access these documents and other Alternate Diploma resources, visit the [Alternate Diploma Collaborative](#).

Resources

- [OK Policies and Procedures, Chapter 5, Secondary Transition Planning, p. 229](#)
- [Summary Of Performance: 34 CFR §300.305 \(e\)\(3\)](#)
- [House Bill 1041](#)

The contents of this handout were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government. Oklahoma State Department of Education, Special Education Services (405) 521-3351 | <http://sde.ok.gov/sde/special-education>

