
Alternative Pathways to Diploma

Critical Issues Conference
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CA Alternative Pathways Workgroup

Background

- ▶ Authorized by Budget Act of 2020 (SB 74)
- ▶ Workgroup met from Dec. 2020 to July 2021 to make recommendations to the state for additional potential pathways to a high school diploma,

The Problem

- ▶ Students with disabilities → lowest high school graduation rate compared to all other student groups.
- ▶ Historically, students with significant cognitive disabilities have received a high school certificate of completion in lieu of a high school diploma.
 - ▶ Challenging to gain employment and access to postsecondary opportunities.

New Law



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The Vision

- ▶ All students with disabilities, including students with significant cognitive disabilities, should enter high school knowing they have the opportunity to earn a high school diploma.
- ▶ Every student with a disability should have an opportunity to earn a high school diploma that allows them to access
 - ▶ postsecondary college,
 - ▶ training,
 - ▶ employment options,
 - ▶ and meaningfully and fully participate in their community.
- ▶ The expectation under the IDEA is that every student receives the support and services they need in order to access the same opportunities as their peers without disabilities. This includes a high school diploma.

New pathway to a diploma opens doors for students with disabilities



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Education Code Section 51225.31

- ▶ LEAs **must** exempt qualifying students from local diploma requirements that are additional to state requirements.
- ▶ Qualifying students:
 - ▶ do not have a pathway to a diploma;
 - ▶ take the California Alternate Assessments (“CAA”);
 - ▶ meet the state’s minimum coursework requirements (based on the alternate achievement standards);
 - ▶ may obtain a diploma of graduation from high school.

Statewide Coursework Requirements

HIGH SCHOOL SUBJECT AREA	STATE MANDATE REQUIREMENTS (EC 51225.3)
English	3 Years
Math	Two Years
Social Studies/Science	3 Years of history/social studied (including one year us US History/Geography)
Science	Two Years
Foreign Language	One Year either visual & performing Art or Foreign Language
Visual & Performing Arts	One Year either visual & performing Art or Foreign Language
PE	Two Years
Electives	Not Applicable
TOTAL	13

► <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/hsgtable.asp>

New Pathway Eligibility

IEP must provide:

- ▶ Student is required to take the California Alternate Assessment (CAA) aligned to the alternate achievement standards in grade 11;

AND

- ▶ Student is required to complete state standards aligned coursework to meet the statewide coursework requirements specified in Section 51225.3.

(EC § 51225.31(b)(2).)



CA Alternate Assessments (CAAs)

- ▶ Based on Alternate Achievement Standards.
- ▶ Developed specifically for students with significant cognitive disabilities to be able to access the State Standards in a modified format.
- ▶ These students typically require extensive support to achieve measurable gains in grade-level standards.
- ▶ Federal law permits states to use the alternate assessment for approximately 1% of all students in the state.

(Educ. Code §60640(k).)



Standards Aligned Coursework

“The pupil is required to complete state standards aligned coursework to meet the statewide coursework requirements specified in Section 51225.3.”

(EC § 51225.31(b)(2).)

Questions:

- ▶ What courses must a student complete?
- ▶ How to align courses utilizing alternate standards? (Core Connect Connectors and Essential Understandings)

FAPE Obligation

- ▶ Diploma pursuant to new alternative pathway does not constitute a change in placement.
- ▶ Does not change LEA's obligation to provide FAPE until age 22.
- ▶ Students must be permitted to participate in graduation ceremonies and activities, but their right to FAPE does not end.

(Educ. Code § 51225.31(a)(2).)

Diploma of Graduation is NOT a regular diploma

“**Regular high school diploma** means the standard high school diploma...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. A regular high school diploma does not include a recognized equivalent of a diploma, such as a general equivalency diploma, certificate of completion, certificate of attendance, or similar lesser credential.”

(34 C.F.R. § 300.102(3).)

Federal Law: FAPE obligation ends when –

- ▶ Children with disabilities who have graduated from high school with a regular high school diploma.
 - ▶ Does not apply to children who have graduated from high school but have not been awarded a regular high school diploma.
- ▶ Graduation from high school with a regular high school diploma constitutes a change in placement, requiring written prior notice in accordance with § 300.503.

(34 C.F.R. § 300.102(3).)



Issues to consider

- ▶ What does this require? Classes for 13 courses to meet minimum requirements for severely disabled students.
- ▶ Should any students remain on a certificate of completion? (Note: Workgroup recommended phasing out the certificate of completion option entirely.)
- ▶ What should transition programs look like for students who receive a diploma pursuant to the new alternative pathway?
- ▶ How to begin implementation? What steps to take?

Immediate Steps

- ▶ Notify the student's parent or guardian whether the student may be eligible to graduate with a high school diploma under Section 51225.31.
- ▶ Identify students in 10th and 11th grade who are or may be eligible to take the CAA in 11th grade (or students in 12th grade who took the CAA in 11th grade).
- ▶ Convene IEP meetings for these students (or amend IEPs with parent agreement) to document their participation in the CAA in 11th grade, if appropriate; reflect that the student will complete state standards-aligned coursework meeting the California statewide minimum coursework requirements, if appropriate.

Policy Recommendations

Access to alternatives for ALL students

Alternative Workgroup Recommendations:

- ▶ Provide better access to existing diploma-pathway option that only requires meeting the minimum state standards for graduation and not additional local requirements.
- ▶ Allow greater access for students with disabilities to all existing traditional high school courses and pathways, with the expectation that most students will meet all state and local high school graduation requirements.

For All Students With Disabilities...

- ▶ Nothing in state or federal law which prohibits an IEP team from planning and allowing a student with a disability to only be expected to meet minimum state graduation requirements.
- ▶ Education Code Section 51225.3:
 - ▶ Permits LEAs to adopt local graduation requirements that exceed the state minimum requirements; and
 - ▶ Requires LEAs to adopt alternate means for students to complete the prescribed course of study.

What alternative pathway options are available for students in your district?

Mild/Moderate vs. Moderate/Severe

- ▶ How are disability classifications changing?
- ▶ How are credentials changing?
- ▶ Why does this matter?
 - ▶ Elementary feeder districts
 - ▶ Education Code - Course of study (7th grade)
 - ▶ IDEA calls for course of study in 10th grade

Recommendations

- ▶ Start transition planning early.
- ▶ Align high school graduation requirements with post-secondary goals.
- ▶ Define the course of study related to post-secondary goals and include dual enrollment classes.
- ▶ Define annual goals that are standards based and aligned with student's post-secondary employment goals.
- ▶ Align transition services in IEP to Pre-Employment Transition Services.
- ▶ List support services available for credit recovery, and accommodations for remediation and/or access to courses available on the internet.
- ▶ Identify support services that include transition support services that are available after students leave high school.

Q&A

Thank you for participating.

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