



Division for Special Education Services and Supports

Understanding the State-Defined Alternate Diploma

April 2021

What are the Diploma types available to students with disabilities?

There are four diplomas available to students with disabilities:

1. The High School Diploma
2. The Special Education Diploma
3. The Certificate of Attendance
4. The State-Defined Alternate Diploma

Only the high school diploma is a full credential. The other available credentials (the special education diploma, the certificate of attendance and the state defined alternate) are not full credentials and allow a student with an IEP the right to return to school until such time as his eligibility for FAPE ends, which in Ga is the 22nd birthday.

Which students are eligible for the State-Defined Alternate Diploma?

The State Defined Alternate Diploma is a credential that is available to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are assessed during middle and high school through the Georgia Alternate Assessment, (GAA 2.0) and entered 9th grade for the first time in Fall 2020 or later.

What should districts call the State-Defined Alternate Diploma?

Each district will need to decide on the appropriate terminology, keeping in mind that it cannot indicate that the student receiving the diploma is a student with a disability. If you have referred to it as the alternate diploma in student specific documents, as long as the documents are confidential (such as an IEP), you do not need to amend those documents.

Are there special courses that students need to take?

All state approved courses can be found here: [State-Funded-List-of-Subjects-and-Courses-Supported-by-SBOE-Rule-160-4-2-20.pdf \(gadoe.org\)](#) The high school diploma does have some required courses, but there are many course offerings. Course sequence is a local decision. Typically, course selection and aligned instruction for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities has mirrored that of typical peers. (Some examples that may be appropriate can be found on pages 25-27 and 82.)

Where do we find the extended standards?

The extended standards are available here: [GAA 2.0 2020-2021 GSE Extended Content Standards \(gadoe.org\)](#)

Will employers accept the State-Defined Alternate Diploma?

The alternate diploma is not the same credential as the high school diploma. The State-Defined Alternate Diploma may or may not be accepted by employers, but it is up to the employer to make the determination.



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What post-secondary options are available?

Since every institution has different requirements, the student would need to go directly to the institution to determine which credential and other admissions requirements are needed for each program of interest.

Can you clarify the requirement in the graduation rule that discusses transition as a part of the State-Defined Alternate Diploma?

Our current board rule does indicate the need for transition to another setting. Main point of consideration is allowing the student time to reach their educational goals (academic, life skills and transition) that include effective transition to post-school training and/or employment. Student should transition to employment, education or training with an entity other than the school or just going home. Training, education and employment can all “look” very different based on the individual needs of the student. It could even involve volunteer work for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

When will we get information about how to report students as graduating with the State-Defined Alternate Diploma?

Since the earliest that students will be eligible to receive the State-Defined Alternate Diploma will be in the Spring of 2024, districts will receive information about reporting procedures in time to report these graduates appropriately. Updates will also be made to GO-IEP as needed.

Where can we find information to give to parents?

There is a FAQ specifically developed for parents that can be found here: [ESSA Alternate Diploma FAQ for Families.pdf \(gadoe.org\)](#)

Additionally there is a description and chart of diplomas available to students with disabilities that can be found here: [Family Guidance Georgia Diploma Options 3 15 21 Final.pdf \(gadoe.org\)](#)

