


Utah State Board of Education, Special Education Services



Graduation Guidelines for Students with Disabilities

Updated Fall 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Utah State Board of Education (USBE), Special Education Services (SES), formed a committee to develop the USBE Graduation Guidelines for Students with Disabilities for local Education agency (LEA) use when developing and implementing their graduation procedures.

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FOREWORD

Graduation with a high school diploma is a goal of virtually all students and families of students enrolled in Utah’s high school programs. While the process of earning a diploma and participating in the high school graduation ceremony may be clear for most students, it is sometimes unclear to Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams, including parents and students, what graduation options are available and potential unintended consequences of the selected option.

The purpose of these USBE Graduation Guidelines for Students with Disabilities is to assist IEP teams to make informed decisions about graduation options for students with disabilities.

Graduation Guidelines for Students with DisabilitiesIDEA requirements

The Individuals with Disability Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) addresses graduation as follows:

- The obligation to make a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) available to all students with disabilities does not apply with respect to students with disabilities who have graduated from high school with a regular high school diploma.
- Graduation from high school with a regular high school diploma constitutes a change in placement, requiring written prior notice.
- The term regular high school diploma does not include an alternative degree that is not fully aligned with the state’s academic standards, such as a certificate of attendance/completion or a General Educational Development Test (GED).

- An evaluation is not required before the termination of a student’s eligibility due to graduation from secondary school with a regular diploma, or due to exceeding the age eligibility for FAPE under State law.

The federal government has traditionally given states the authority to develop specific educational programs, including curriculum and graduation requirements. The Utah State Board of Education (USBE), through administrative rules, has set minimum requirements that students must complete in order to earn a high school diploma; these requirements apply to all Utah students, regardless of disability or English language acquisition status. While Local Education Agencies (LEAs) may set additional requirements, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination in the implementation of grading policies, setting of graduation requirements, and awarding diplomas. Additionally, the student’s transcript must not identify Special Education classes, although the LEA can identify modified classes with an asterisk or other symbol provided that the grades and courses of all students are treated in a like manner (Letter to Runkel, OCR, 1996).

USBE Administrative Rule R277-705, contains criteria that LEAs and students must follow to earn a diploma or a certificate of completion: [R277-705-4. Diplomas and Certificates of Completion.](#)

1. LEAs shall award diplomas and certificates of completion.
2. LEAs shall establish criteria for students to earn a certificate of completion that may be awarded to students who have completed their senior year, are exiting the school system, and have not met all state or LEA requirements for a diploma.

This rule also addresses graduation requirements for students with disabilities:

3. [R277-705-4](#)A student with disabilities served by Special Education programs shall satisfy high school completion or graduation criteria, consistent with state and federal law and the student's IEP.
4. An LEA may award a student a certificate of completion consistent with state and federal law and the student’s IEP or Section 504 Plan.

This rule also includes information about the Alternate Diploma for students with a significant cognitive disability (SWSCD).

[R277-705-5 Alternate Diploma.](#)

1. A SWSCD can earn the Alternate Diploma consistent with state and federal law and the student’s IEP.

IEP teams may determine that a SWSCD will receive their grade level instruction in the Utah Core Standards through the support of the Utah Alternate Achievement Standards (i.e., The Essential Elements) for English Language Arts, Mathematics and Science. These students may participate in Utah’s state-wide alternate assessment Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) instead of the regular state-wide assessments Utah Aspire Plus and/or ACT. Students whose IEP team has determined that his/her participation in the state-wide assessment is through the alternate assessment, DLM, may earn a regular

high school diploma or the Alternate Diploma if all graduation [requirements](#) are met at the time of graduation. Participation in Graduation Ceremonies

As noted in R277-705-4, school districts or schools are given the responsibility to award diplomas or certificates of completion. Students who meet graduation criteria are entitled to the same treatment as the nondisabled population, and this means that they have the same rights to participate in graduation ceremonies as any other nondisabled student of the same age would have (Letter to Runkle, OCR 1996).

- School districts or schools are responsible for determining how students with or without disabilities who have not met graduation requirements participate in ceremonies where diplomas or Certificates of Completion may be awarded.
- The USBE SES recommends that LEAs clearly define in LEA policies or procedures the criteria for participation in graduation ceremonies by students who have not met graduation requirements. The USBE also recommends that the criteria for participation in graduation ceremonies be established district-wide, rather than at the individual school level.
- LEAs should make these policies and/or procedures available to students, parents, and LEA staff. This information should also be made available to the public prior to graduation dates.

Modifying Graduation Requirements

R277-705-5(1) requires students with disabilities served by Special Education programs to satisfy high school completion or graduation requirements, consistent with state and federal law and the students' IEPs. The USBE Special Education Rules VII.C.2 allows the IEP team to modify graduation requirements.

R277-700.6(22) allows graduation requirements modifications to meet the unique educational needs of a student if:

- (i) the student has a disability; and
- (ii) the modifications to the student's graduation requirements are made through the student's individual IEP.

The rule goes on to require that the LEA shall document the nature and extent of the modification, substitution, or exemption made to a student's graduation requirements in the student's IEP.

R277-700.6(24) offers further guidance regarding substitutions in graduation requirements:

An LEA may modify graduation requirements for an individual student to achieve an appropriate route to student success if the modification:

- (a) is consistent with:
 - (i) the student's IEP; or
 - (ii) SEOP/Plan for College and Career Readiness.
- (b) is maintained in the student's file;
- (c) includes the parent's signature; and
- (d) maintains the integrity and rigor expected for high school graduation, as

determined by the Board.

While the USBE does not define “modifications, substitutions, and/or exemptions,” IEP teams should consider the following guidelines:

- Documentation of any amendments should be cumulative in nature so that the IEP team is able to review previous amendments and accurately discuss the student’s progress toward earning a diploma. A best practice would include the date of the amendment and the parent’s or adult student’s signature.
- Documentation of amendments should be shared with the school counselor/registrar for inclusion in the student’s high school transcript.
- Amendment of graduation requirements through course substitutions should be made only for courses other than RISE-, Utah Aspire Plus-, ACT-, or DLM-, producing mathematics, English language arts, or science courses. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has determined that “access to the general curriculum” means the state academic standards at the grade level in which the student is enrolled (See OSEP Dear Colleague letter 11/16/2015). The USBE-SES considers that the rigor requirement described in R277-700.6(24) is met when the student is instructed in the student’s grade appropriate standards for mathematics, English language arts, and science.
- When making amendments, the team should consider unintended consequences for the student’s post-school activities. Exempting a student from world language classes may negatively affect college admission, for example.
- When amending graduation requirements, the IEP team should consider the effect on the student’s progress toward achieving his/her measurable postsecondary goals. For example, it may be beneficial to substitute a foods and nutrition class for an arts credit if a student’s career goal is in the culinary arts. The same substitution may not be appropriate for a student who is interested in a career that would require a knowledge base in arts, such as graphic design.
- Exemptions to graduation requirements may occasionally be determined necessary by the IEP team. The IEP team should be cautious in recommending exemptions, as the outcome may not be beneficial to students.

Civics Education Initiative

The American Civics Education Initiative, introduced and passed in the Utah State Legislature during the 2015 general session, requires all Utah students graduating on or after January 1, 2016 to pass a basic civics test, or an alternate assessment, as a condition for receiving a high school diploma or adult Education secondary diploma (UCA 53A-13-109.5).

Students who pass the test in one LEA and transfer to another LEA are not required to retake the test in the new LEA. Students may take either the Standard Test or an Alternate Test, as determined appropriate by the student's IEP team (consistent with Board Rule [R277-700-8](#)) and documented within the IEP.

Two versions of the test are available:

The Standard Test

The USBE-created sample basic civics test is a multiple-choice test; an LEA can determine the test format which must include 50 of the 100 questions used by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services as part of that agency's determination that an applicant for U.S. citizenship meets the basic citizenship skills specified in 8 U.S.C. Sec. 1423. Students must correctly answer a minimum of 35 of the 50 questions in order to pass the test. **Students may take the test at any grade level and as many times as is needed in order to pass the test.**

The Alternate Test

A student may qualify for an alternate assessment if the student has a disability, and the alternate assessment is consistent with the student's IEP or if the student is within six months of intended graduation and has not yet passed the basic civics test. To pass the alternate assessment, the student must pass six of ten questions selected from the civics test item pool of 100 questions. The assessment is an oral exam; however, the administration method may be modified for a student with a disability in accordance with the student's IEP. IEP forms should be updated to include discussion of the newly required civics test and allow IEP teams to determine participation options.

Please see [Technical Assistance on the Civics Test Requirements and Options for Students with Disabilities \(Civics Test Requirements\)](#) for additional information and resources.

Adult Education Programs

Adult Education programs are available to out-of-school youth 16 years of age and older who are Utah residents, legal residents of the United States, are no longer enrolled in public Education programs, or whose high school class has graduated and who do not have a high school diploma. These programs are available through Utah school districts as well as several community/faith-based organizations. Program and contact information is available at [Adult Education Program Directory](#).

Programs may emphasize: English language acquisition and competency; basic skills in reading, writing, mathematics and problem solving; and academic/credit courses leading to an adult secondary diploma. Students who have not met high school

graduation requirements and wish to earn a high school diploma might consider enrolling in an Adult High School Completion program; students whose literacy and numeracy skills are below the ninth-grade level and who wish to improve those skills might consider enrolling in an Adult Basic Education program ([Adult Basic Education program](#)). Students who would like additional instruction in English language acquisition might consider enrolling in the English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program through Adult Education.

Students with disabilities may enroll in Adult Education programs; students who do not have a high school diploma are still eligible for a FAPE (appropriate Special Education and related services) while in Adult Education until they reach maximum age (22) or receive a Utah Adult Secondary Diploma. The Utah Adult Education Policies and Procedures Guide, Tab E ([Utah Adult Education Policies and Procedures Guide](#)) requires the following:

- The adult Education program will notify the LEA (district or charter school) Special Education department of a student who may be eligible for Special Education services.
- The LEA Special Education department will facilitate and determine Special Education eligibility.
- Special Education and related services will be determined by an IEP team which will include an adult Education representative.
- The LEA is responsible to assist the adult Education program in selecting the most appropriate strategies and Educational materials to meet the student's needs.
- The LEA is responsible to ensure that the student participating in an adult Education program receives Special Education services through a recognized K-12 school, including a school post-high program.
- Funding for Special Education services will be as follows:
 - LEAs providing Special Education services will receive state and IDEA Special Education funding for the amount of time the student is receiving services as reported to the USBE on SCRAM.
 - The adult Education program will receive, from the LEA, the regular WPU for the time the student is enrolled and engaged in the adult Education program up to 990 hours of instruction per fiscal/program year.

General Educational Development (GED) /High School Equivalency (HSE)

GED testing is open to individuals who are at least 16 years of age and not enrolled in any K-12 school; students aged 16-18 must submit an application completed by the school stating that the student is not enrolled in a school and understands the possible consequences of withdrawing from school. Additionally, the application must be signed by representatives from an Adult Education program stating that the youth

demonstrates the academic competencies required for passing the GED Tests and by the youth's parents stating that the parents and youth understand the possible consequences of withdrawing from school. More information may be found at [Adult Education: High School Equivalency \(HSE\) GED.](#)

The GED Test is composed of five subtests: Language Arts/Writing Skills, Language Arts/Reading, Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics. Youth who pass all subtests with a standard score of at least 410 on each of the subtests and an overall average standard score of at least 450 on the five subtests combined will be awarded a HSE.

Students with disabilities who earn a HSE are eligible to return to the school system as this type of diploma does not qualify as a "regular high school diploma" and does not end the LEA's (both district and charter school) responsibility to provide a FAPE to eligible students (IDEA §300.102(a)(3)(i-iv).

Federal Adjusted Four- and Five-Year Cohort Graduation Rate Calculations

Effective with the graduating Class of 2008, the USBE modified graduation calculations to meet new federal requirements. Effective in 2018 USBE added the Alternate Diploma for SWSCD, as authorized in ESSA¹. Students who meet eligibility requirements for the Alternate Diploma can count as graduates in the four- and five-year cohort graduation rates. A student can only be included once in a four- and five-year cohort graduation rate. They can continue to enroll (if eligible) and be counted in indicator 1 and 2 rates each year but will not be included in another cohort rate.

The calculation is as follows:

1. Graduate
 - a. Basic high school diploma (earned on-time in 4 years including: (GM GR, GQ)
 - b. Utah Adult Secondary Diploma (Carnegie units: GC)
 - c. Alternate Diploma (for SWSCD: GA)
2. Other Completer
 - a. GED/HSE (GG)
 - b. Certificate of Completion (CT)

¹ See "[Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\) High School Graduation Rate Non-Regulatory Guidance](#)" and "[Federal Graduation and Dropout Codes Reference](#)" at <https://schools.utah.gov/data/reports?mid=1424&tid=5>

- c. Aged out (reached maximum age for IDEA eligibility: AO)
- 3. Continuing student
 - a. Retained Senior (RT)
 - b. Transferred to Higher Education (HE)
 - c. Transferred to UTech (UC)
- 4. Dropout
 - a. Withdrew (WD)
 - b. Unknown status (UN)
 - c. Transferred to Adult Education (AE)
 - d. Exited to take the GED (if not updated by September 30) (GE)
 - e. Expelled (EX)
 - f. Graduation pending (if not updated by September 30) (GP)
 - g. Dropped out (DO)
 - h. Summer dropouts (treated as unknown – student was expected to return to school after last enrollment but did not return by October 1)
 - i. Retained Senior on path to the Alternate Diploma code (RA) - If this was the last code submitted for the student but the student did not return to school or was not eligible to have their cohort year reassigned they will be treated as a dropout

OSEP Indicator 1 High School Regular Diploma Completion Rate Calculation

Effective in FFY2020 the OSEP indicator 1 calculation follows new calculation requirements. Each year, students age 14-21 who exit Special Education are identified. Only a subset of exiter types is included in the indicator 1 denominator (see list below). Students who earn a basic high school diploma or Utah Adult Secondary Diploma are included in the indicator 1 numerator. A student will be included in the indicator 1 denominator for every school year that they exit as one of the eligible exiter types (see a-f below).

The calculation is as follows:

1. Exiters (denominator)
 - a. Basic high school diploma (earned on-time in 4 years including: GM GR,GQ)
 - b. Utah Adult Secondary Diploma (Carnegie units: GC)
 - c. Alternate Diploma (for students with a significant cognitive disability: GA)
 - d. Dropout (Dropped out (AE,DO,EX,GE,GG,GP,UN,WD, and Summer Dropouts)
 - e. Reached Maximum Age (AO or Scram Exit Reason D)
 - f. Received a Certificate of Diploma (CT)
2. Regular Diploma Completers (numerator)
 - a. Basic high school diploma (including: GM GR, GQ)
 - b. Utah Adult Secondary Diploma (Carnegie units: GC)

High School Completion Codes

Using the correct codes will improve the accuracy of the graduation rate data by correctly coding the student as a graduate or non-graduate (i.e., other completer, continuing student, or dropout). The following scenarios may help clarify the use of high school completion status codes and exitcodes.

1. Graduate (four-year cohort rate) – GR

Johnny completed his high graduation requirements prior to the end of his four-year cohort. Johnny did not complete a fourth year of math. Johnny was coded as a GR (or the equivalent for military children – GM) and was considered a graduate in the four-year graduation rate.

- Cohort graduation rate outcome: included in numerator
- Indicator 1 outcome: included in numerator

2. Graduate with fourth year of math (four-year cohort rate) – GQ

Taylor completed their high school graduation requirements, including a 4th year of math, prior to the end of their 4-year cohort. Taylor was considered a graduate in the four-year graduation rate.

- Cohort graduation rate outcome: included in numerator
- Indicator 1 outcome: included in numerator

3. Graduate (five-year cohort rate) – GR

Jennie did not complete her high graduation requirements prior to the end of her four-year cohort (she was coded as RT and was a Continuing Student in the four-year cohort rate). Jennie completed her high graduation requirements prior to the end of her five-year cohort and was coded as GR. She was considered a graduate in the five-year graduation rate.

- Cohort graduation rate outcome: included in numerator
- Indicator 1 outcome: included in numerator

4. Met requirements for the Alternate Diploma for students with significant disabilities – GA

Alice's IEP team determined she had a significant cognitive disability which required intensive support and significant modifications to access grade level instruction and curriculum. They also determined that she would participate in the state-wide alternate assessment (DLM). Her IEP team carefully planned her courses of study during high school and Alice earned the Alternate Diploma for students with a significant cognitive disability by meeting graduation requirements with course modifications. Alice is coded "Graduate Alternate Diploma" (GA). The Alternate Diploma can be treated as a graduate in the federal four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (if requirements are met). The Alternate

Diploma does not end FAPE; Alice can continue to enroll in her LEA for post-high transition services as determined by the IEP team.

- Cohort graduation rate outcome: included in numerator
- Indicator 1 outcome: included in denominator only

5. Retained Senior – RT

Juan was a student with a disability who did not complete his high school diploma requirements in four years. Because he continued to qualify for services, he returned to school for another year to complete his graduation requirements. At the end of his fourth year in high school, he was coded as a “retained senior” (RT) and should be coded with RT for each and every year afterward that he will be retained. Juan will count as a Continuing Student in the four-year graduation rate, which is neither a graduate nor a dropout. If Juan is retained again at the end of his fifth year (coded as RT) he will count as a Continuing Student in the five-year graduation rate as well.

- Cohort graduation rate outcome: included in denominator only (continuing students are not identified as graduates)
- Indicator 1 outcome: not included (continuing students are not identified as exiters)

6. Retained Senior on path to the Alternate Diploma – RA

James, a student with a significant cognitive disability whose IEP team determined that he required intensive support and significant modifications to access grade level instruction and curriculum, and that he would participate in the state-wide assessment (DLM). His IEP team carefully planned his courses of study during high school, but due to illness James did not meet all the requirements to earn the Alternate Diploma by the end of his 12th grade year. James will return the following school year to continue to work toward earning the Alternate Diploma in post high school. James is coded “Retained senior on path to the Alternate Diploma” (RA) which will reassign his cohort to the following school year’s four year-cohort.

The RA code can only be used if it is the student's four-year cohort year (including if it is a reassigned four-year cohort year). If the student has already been included in a four-year cohort graduation rate calculation in the past, they are no longer eligible to have their cohort year reassigned. When the RA code is used but the cohort year cannot be reassigned the student will be treated as a dropout. So, for this reason, if the student’s four-year cohort year has already passed, the RT code should be used instead of the RA code.

- Cohort graduation rate outcome: NA – if student was in four-year cohort graduation rate year and received this code their cohort year would have been reassigned to the next year, therefore they are not included in the rate that year.
 - Indicator 1 outcome: not included (continuing students are not identified as exiters)
7. Transfer to Adult Education – AE
Jane leaves high school as an 11th grader and transfers to Adult Education (AE) and is no longer receiving services from her LEA. Jane does not complete the GED (GG) or Utah Adult Secondary Diploma (GC) by September 30th of her four-year cohort year. Jane's her final exit code is AE, which will count as a dropout in her four-year cohort graduation rate.
- Cohort graduation rate outcome: AE is included in denominator only (dropout)
 - Indicator 1 outcome: AE is included in denominator only (dropout)
8. Complete the GED – GG
Joy left high school as an 11th grader and transferred to Adult Education (AE) (no longer receiving services from her LEA). Joy completed the GED (GG) by September 30th of her four-year cohort graduation year. Joy's last LEA updated her high school completion status by submitting an S1-X record to USBE. Joy's status in the four-year cohort graduation rate is now GG, which is an 'Other Completer,' which is neither a graduate nor a dropout in her four-year cohort graduation rate. For Indicator 1 GG is considered a dropout.
- Cohort graduation rate outcome: GG is included in denominator only (other completer)
 - Indicator 1 outcome: GG is included in denominator only (dropout)
9. Complete a Utah Adult Secondary Diploma – GC
Janet left high school as an 11th grader and transferred to Adult Education (AE) (no longer receiving services from her LEA). Janet completed the Utah Adult Secondary Diploma (GC) by September 30th of her four-year cohort graduation year. Janet's last LEA updated her high school completion status by submitting an S1-X record to USBE. Janet's status in the four-year cohort graduation rate is now GC, which is treated as a graduate with a regular high school diploma.
- Cohort graduation rate outcome: GC is included in numerator (graduate)
 - Indicator 1 outcome: GC is included in numerator (graduate)
10. Transferring to UTech or higher education before graduation - UC or HE
Peter decides to transfer to UTech (UC) or an institution of higher education

(HE) before receiving his high school diploma. Peter is not considered a graduate or dropout; rather, he will be coded as a “non-graduate”, or more specifically, a “continuing student”.

- Cohort graduation rate outcome: included in denominator only (continuing students are not identified as graduates)
- Indicator 1 outcome: not included (continuing students are not identified as exiters)

11. Not on time graduate (Graduate with regular high school diploma after the cohort year has passed) – GM, GR, or GQ

Mary repeats 10th grade; thus, she does not graduate in four years with her cohort. At the end of Mary’s 11th grade, which is her four-year cohort year, if no high school completion status is reported she will be treated as unknown (UN) in the four-year cohort graduation rate, which is a dropout. If the high school completion status is reported as Retained Senior (RT) she will be treated as a Continuing Student in the four-year cohort graduation rate, which is neither a dropout nor a graduate in the four-year cohort graduation rate.

If Mary graduates with a regular high school diploma the following year (her 12th grade year) she will count as a graduate in the five-year cohort graduation rate and will be counted as a graduate in the indicator 1 rate for that year, but the opportunity for Mary to count as a graduate in a four-year cohort graduation rate has passed. This is due to very strict federal guidelines that only include **on-time** graduates in the four-year cohort graduation rate. Counting as a dropout in the four-year cohort graduation rate does not invalidate Mary’s high school diploma.

- Four-Year Cohort graduation rate outcome (11th grade year status is unknown – no code submitted): included in denominator only (dropout)
- Four-Year Cohort graduation rate outcome (11th grade year status is submitted as RT): included in denominator only (continuing student)
- Five-Year Cohort graduation rate outcome (12th grade year): included in numerator (graduate with a regular high school diploma)
- Indicator 1 outcome (12th grade year): included in numerator (graduate with a regular high school diploma)

12. Certificate of Completion (CT) vs. Retained Senior (RT)

Luke is a student with a disability who has spent four years in high school. Because he continues to qualify for services, the school knows he will be returning the following year. However, he walks with his class and receives a certificate of completion/award of completion from the LEA. Luke should NOT be coded with a high school completion status of CT, or certificate of completion, if

the LEA knows he will be returning. Instead, Luke is coded as a “retained senior” (RT) each and every year until he finally completes his high school career, at which time the LEA can code him as “aged out” (AO).

- Cohort graduation rate outcome: CT and RT are both included in denominator only (certificate of completion, CT, is not identified as a graduate; continuing students, RT, are not identified as graduates)
- Indicator 1 outcome: CT is included in denominator only (certificate of completion is not a regular high school diploma). RT is not included (continuing students are not identified as exiters).

13. Aged Out - AO

Kate is a 22-year-old student with a disability who has not completed her high school requirements. Because she is ineligible for services, the LEA should code her as an AO, which means she aged out of services. The LEA may award Kate a certificate of completion/award of completion, but should NOT code her as CT. She will not be considered a dropout but will be considered a “non-graduate”, or more specifically, an “other completer”.

- Cohort graduation rate outcome: Very unlikely that a student is in their cohort year when they age out – would have had to have been reported with the RA code every year from their original cohort year until they age out. If this happens, they would be included in denominator only (other completers are not identified as graduates)
- Indicator 1 outcome: included in denominator only (reached maximum age)

Dropout, including Graduation Pending and Unknown – DO, GP, & UN

Perry does not complete graduation requirements his 12th grade year. Perry may have: explicitly stated that he dropped out of school (DO); intended to complete graduation requirements during the summer but did not complete them by Sep 30 (GP); pr left school without explanation and his status cannot be determined (UN). Perry will count as a dropout.

- Cohort graduation rate outcome: included in denominator only (dropout)
- Indicator 1 outcome: included in denominator only (dropout)

Frequently Asked Questions about Graduation

When does FAPE end?

A student’s right to a FAPE ends when the student has graduated from high school with a regular high school diploma (GM, GR, GQ), or when the student reaches maximum

age for eligibility (AO). In Utah, if a student is age 21 as of July 1 of the upcoming school year, they may enroll for the entire school year (if the student is 22 on or before July 1, they are not eligible to enroll).

A student's eligibility for FAPE also terminates when a student receives a Utah Adult Secondary Diploma (GC) through an Adult Education program. A student's eligibility for FAPE does not terminate when the student receives a HSE, earned by passing all subtests of the GED (GG).

Earning the Alternate Diploma (GA) and earning a certificate of completion (CT) does not end FAPE.

Are any procedural safeguards required when a student with disabilities graduates from high school?

Yes. Graduation from high school with a regular high school diploma is a change in placement. The parent and adult student must receive prior written notice of this change a reasonable amount of time before the LEA proposes to terminate the student's eligibility under the IDEA by issuing the student a diploma; notification within at least 30 days of graduation would provide ample time for the parent or adult student to obtain legal guidance and file for a due process hearing, triggering the stay-put provision of IDEA. The prior written notice and notice of change of placement are generally included in a Special Education form titled "Prior Written Notice of Change of Placement in Special Education."

Can students who have graduated with a diploma continue to receive Special Education services under IDEA until age 22?

Yes and No. Students who earn the Alternate Diploma or graduate with a HSE remain eligible for a FAPE from a district or charter school until age 22. Students who graduate with a regular high school diploma are no longer eligible for a FAPE under IDEA and Utah Special Education Rules. Students who have earned a regular high school diploma may be eligible to attend Adult Basic Education classes if they lack sufficient basic educational skills to function effectively in society or to obtain or maintain employment; these students are no longer eligible for a FAPE but may still be eligible for accommodations under Section 504. Any needed accommodations must be provided by the adult Education program.

What is required for LEAs to award certificates of completion?

R277-705-4. Diplomas and Certificates of Completion.

- (1) An LEA shall award diplomas and **certificates of completion**.
- (2) An LEA shall establish criteria for a student to earn a certificate of completion that may be awarded to a student who:
 - (a) has completed the student's senior year;
 - (b) is exiting or aging out of the school system; and
 - (c) has not met all state or LEA requirements for a diploma

May an LEA set additional graduation requirements?

Yes. The USBE has outlined minimum course requirements for a regular high school diploma in Rule [R277-700](#). LEAs, through local school board approved policies, may set additional requirements.

May an LEA use different wording on a diploma?

Yes. LEAs may offer different wording as long as the wording does not identify a student as a student with a disability. For example, for a student who completed the Alternate Diploma an LEA can give it a different name such as "Diploma of Achievement," which is a different title than what is on a regular diploma but does not identify the students as a SWSCD.

Must an LEA waive diploma requirements for students with disabilities?

No. The IEP team may choose to amend graduation requirements by modification, substitution, and/or exemption, but is not required to do so. If the IEP team amends graduation requirements, a cumulative record of such amendments should be kept in the student's IEP file for review by subsequent IEP teams. This will allow each team to monitor the student's progress toward earning a diploma.

Does a student who completes goals and objectives defined in the IEP automatically graduate with a regular diploma?

No. Graduation requirements for a diploma, above the state-required minimum, are set by the LEA. While all students are eligible to work toward a diploma, and may eventually earn one, Special Education eligibility does not guarantee that a student will be awarded a diploma. All students who earn a high school diploma must meet USBE minimum graduation requirements, although the IEP team may amend the requirements for an individual student.

Many LEAs allow students with disabilities to participate in graduation ceremonies without awarding the student a diploma; this may lead the student and his/her family to assume that the student has "graduated" from high school. IEP teams should discuss

the LEA's policies or procedures regarding participation in graduation ceremonies by students who have not completed all graduation requirements. IEP teams, including the student and the student's parents, should discuss school exit options annually at IEP meetings beginning prior to ninth grade when students start to earn credits needed for a diploma. These exit options could include earning a diploma or a certificate of completion or staying in school until age 22.

May a student who participated in the alternate assessment DLM graduate with a regular high school diploma?

Yes, students who participate in state-level assessments through DLM may earn a regular high school diploma as long as all LEA graduation requirements are met prior to the student reaching age 22. However, for a student accessing instruction through alternate achievement standards, it may be more appropriate for them to earn the Alternate Diploma.

If a student with an IEP completes the LEA's requirements for a high school diploma, must the student be awarded a diploma?

Yes. When LEA diploma requirements have been met, the student must be awarded the diploma. Once earned, the diploma may not be withheld in order to provide additional Special Education services to the student. Annual consideration of the student's progress toward earning a diploma will help alleviate a situation where the student wishes to receive additional Special Education services but cannot because they completed a regular high school diploma. IEP teams should be clear with parents about anticipated graduation dates, and that services end when the student completes their regular high school diploma.

May the student who has earned a diploma continue to receive special education services, including transition services?

Yes and No. The obligation of the LEA to make a FAPE available does not apply to students who have graduated with a regular high school diploma or a Utah Adult Secondary Diploma. The LEA (district and charter school) must make a FAPE available to a student who has earned a HSE, certificate of completion, or the Alternate Diploma. This reiterates the importance of early planning, agency collaboration, and communication with parents about school completion.

Can an LEA set specific requirements for participation in graduation ceremonies?

Yes. Decisions about participation in graduation ceremonies are made at the LEA level. USBE SES recommends that LEAs clearly define local policies and procedures and make them available to students, parents, and LEA staff.

Frequently Used Acronyms

DLM – Dynamic Learning Maps
EE – Essential Elements (Utah’s Alternate Assessment)

FAPE – Free and Appropriate Public Education

GED – General Educational Development test

IEP – Individualized Education Program

HSE-High School Equivalency (AKA GED)

IDEA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004

LEA – Local Education Agency; includes all 41 Utah school districts, the Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind, and all public charter school agencies

OSEP- Office of Special Education Programs

SES – Special Education Section

SWSCD – Student with a Significant Cognitive Disability

USBE – Utah State Board of Education

Glossary

Accommodations- The actual teaching supports and services that the student may require to successfully demonstrate learning. Accommodations should not change expectations to the curriculum grade levels.

Modifications- Changes made to curriculum expectations in order to meet the needs of the student. Modifications are made when the expectations are beyond the student’s level of ability. Modifications may be minimal or very complex depending on the student performance and must be clearly acknowledged in the IEP.

Exemptions- Freedom from an obligation; permission or entitlement not to do something that others are obliged to do.