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## Understanding Alternate Diplomas

This brochure has been developed to assist the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team to determine the type of diploma for which a student is eligible.



Additional information related to special education can be found by visiting the Special Education Services website at <http://wvde.us/special-education/>.

# UNDERSTANDING ALTERNATE DIPLOMAS

*What teachers, parents, and students need to know.*

West Virginia Department of Education

Office of Federal Programs & Support

## Need for an Alternate Diploma:

Policy 2510: Assuring the Quality of Education: Regulations for Education Programs states that county boards of education shall award a high school diploma to every student who completes the standard graduation requirements.

Students who meet the criteria for the Alternate Assessment based on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards are presumed to be pursuing an Alternate Diploma.

Only students with a Significant Cognitive Disability are eligible for an Alternate Diploma. West Virginia defines a Significant Cognitive Disability as students having general intellectual functioning more than three standard deviations below the mean, in consideration of 1.0 standard error of measurement as determined by a qualified psychologist, using an individually administered intelligence test; and the student exhibits concurrent deficits in adaptive functioning expected for his or her age across multiple environments based on clinical and standardized assessment in at least one of the following domains: conceptual, social or practical.

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## IEP Team Decision

As stated in Policy 2419: Regulations for the Education of Students with Exceptionalities, beginning with the first IEP to be in effect when a student is fourteen (July 1, 2019) years old (or sooner at the discretion of the IEP team), the IEP team must address postsecondary goals including the type of diploma the student will be working toward. Every effort must be made to include both the parents and the student in this meeting as its primary purpose is to plan the student's post-secondary program.

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## IEP Team Procedures

The IEP Team must carefully review the most recent summative and formative assessment data on the student. In addition, they must look at the student's past history and future expectations on the West Virginia Summative Assessment.

Based upon the review of the data, the IEP Team must carefully consider the following questions:

1. Is the student capable of attaining the West Virginia College- and Career-Readiness Standards?
  - If yes, the student is eligible for a standard diploma.
  - If no, proceed to next question.
2. Is the student successfully attaining the West Virginia College- and Career-Readiness Standards with instructional modifications and accommodations (pre-teach, re-teach, specialized instructional strategies, differentiated instruction, co-teaching, instructional technology, etc.)?
  - If yes, the student is eligible for a standard diploma.
  - If no, proceed to next question.
3. Does the student have significant impairment of cognitive abilities and adaptive skills that may require instruction in the Alternate Academic Achievement Standards?
  - If yes, the student is eligible for an alternate diploma.
  - If no, the IEP Team needs to reconsider Question 2 and revise the IEP to better meet the needs of the student.

The determination of the student's eligibility for an alternate or standard diploma and the student's progress toward this goal is to be reviewed annually by the IEP Team.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: Does the United States Military accept students who have earned an alternate diploma?**

**A:** An applicant who possesses a local or state-issued diploma on the basis of an attendance credential (non-standard diploma) is not to be considered a Tier I high school graduate in the Navy, Army, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marine Corps. Well over 90% of enlistees are Tier I so this greatly reduces the chances of enlistment in these branches. It is important to note that the eligibility requirements may change due to the needs of the United States Department of Defense so students and their parents should check with recruiters to determine if an alternate diploma is currently being accepted. It is also important to note that ALL branches of the military require a minimum score of 50 on the Armed Forces Qualifying Test (AFQT).

**Q: Can a student with an alternate diploma be accepted into a college?**

**A:** Most four year universities do not accept an alternate diploma. A limited number of remedial level community college courses are available to students with an alternate diploma; however they are not applicable towards the completion of a degree.

**Q: Are students who receive an alternate diploma eligible for federal or state financial aid at a postsecondary institution?**

**A:** Students who receive an alternate diploma are not eligible for federal financial aid. Limited state and private financial aid and scholarships might be available.

**Q: Can a student earning an alternate diploma participate in the high school graduation ceremony?**

**A:** Students with disabilities receiving alternate diplomas shall be allowed to participate in graduation ceremonies with their same grade classmates and continue with special education eligibility services.

**Q: Can a student working toward an alternate diploma continue public education to age 21?**

**A:** A student with an IEP who is working on an alternate diploma remains entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) through the age of 21.