

Understanding Alternate Diplomas:

What Teachers, Parents, and Students Need to Know



The Need for an Alternate Diploma

Policy 2510: Assuring the Quality of Education: Regulations for Education Programs states that local boards of education shall award a high school diploma to every student who completes the standard graduation requirements. Students who meet the criteria for participation in the West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment based on Alternate Academic Achievement Standards are presumed to be pursuing an alternate diploma. Only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are eligible for an alternate diploma.

Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities typically have general intellectual functioning more than three standard deviations below the mean and exhibit concurrent deficits in adaptive functioning across multiple environments in conceptual, social, and practical domains. For more information, see **WVBE Policy 2419: Regulations for the Education of Students with Exceptionalities**, and the “**Eligibility Determination Checklist for Participation in the West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment (WVASA)**.”

IEP Team Decision

As stated in **WVBE Policy 2419**, beginning with the first IEP to be in effect when a student is 14 years old (or sooner at the discretion of the IEP team), the IEP team must address post-secondary goals, including the type of diploma the student will be working toward, as well as the implications of that decision. 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.

IEP Team Procedures

The IEP Team annually reviews the student’s eligibility for a regular or alternate diploma, and progress toward graduation. The IEP Team must carefully review the student’s most recent summative and formative assessment data. Based upon the review of these and other data, the IEP Team must complete the “**Eligibility Determination Checklist for Participation in the West Virginia Alternate Summative Assessment (WVASA)**.”

During High School

Students pursuing an alternate diploma must complete the same graduation requirements (i.e., credits) as their peers pursuing a regular diploma. Students pursuing an alternate diploma will receive credits and grades for all classes, just as their general education peers. Some students working toward an alternate diploma may require extended time to meet graduation credit requirements or meet individualized transition goals as determined by the student’s IEP Team. FAPE ensures students working toward an alternate diploma can remain enrolled until the end of the school year following their 21st birthday, if needed. This is an individualized decision as remaining in high school until age 21 may not be appropriate for all students working toward an alternate diploma. If a student remains in school until age 21, the following guidance applies:

- » Transition goals should align with transition plans based on individualized assessments.
- » Students should be enrolled in high school full time.
- » Students will adhere to attendance policies.
- » The Personalized Education Plan (PEP) and the transition section of the IEP should align to ensure the student is working on a consistent set of goals that will facilitate movement from school to post-school activities in accordance with **WVBE Policy 2419**.
- » Per **WVBE Policy 2510.9.1.h**, the state of West Virginia recognizes uniform grading rules for courses in which high school credits will be awarded. Thus, there is not a modified grading scale for students working toward an alternate diploma.

Graduation Considerations

- » The alternate diploma is an alternate path to graduation determined by the IEP Team for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. All students earning diplomas must have completed standards-based instruction.
- » If a student remains in school until age 21, the student shall be allowed to participate in graduation ceremonies with the student's original cohort if requested by the parent/adult student per **WVBE Policy 2419**.
- » The diploma (i.e., the paper certificate) awarded to students at the graduation ceremony shall look identical and contain the same language for all students. Disabilities shall not be indicated on the credential. Alternate courses codes, however, will be listed on official student transcripts.

Beyond High School

United States Military

- » Serious candidates for military enlistment are required to have a regular high school diploma, or an accepted high school equivalency credential such as a GED or HiSET.
- » Candidates must also earn a minimum Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) score of 50 to be considered for military enlistment.
- » It is important to note that 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.

College and University

- » Admission to a four-year college or university with an alternate diploma could be challenging, as satisfactory performance on a college entrance exam may be required prior to acceptance. Contact the school's admissions office for the most current information regarding alternate diplomas.
- » A limited number of community college courses may be available to students with an alternate diploma; however, they may not be applicable towards the completion of a degree.
- » Students with intellectual disabilities may be eligible for limited federal financial aid if specific requirements are met.
- » Visit <https://studentaid.gov> for the most current information on federal student aid eligibility requirements. Limited state and private financial aid and scholarships may be available.

Additional information related to special education, alternate assessment, and graduation can be found at the following websites:

- » <https://wvde.us/special-education/>
- » <https://wvde.us/assessment/>
- » <https://wvde.us/special-education/wv-guideposts-to-graduation/>
- » <https://wvde.us/middle-secondary-learning/policy-resources/>