

Graduation Guidelines
Work Group Reports and Recommendations
Executive Summary: Special Populations
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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INTRODUCTION:

The Special Populations Workgroup for Students with Disabilities convened on April 4, 2014 and had six face-to-face meetings and two meetings via conference call. This work group included special education directors, special educators, parents, Colorado Special Education Advisory Council members, college level disability services coordinators, disability advocates from ARC and the Legal Center, professor of education from the University of Northern Colorado, and the CDE Exceptional Student Services Unit representatives.

DEFINITION and KEY MESSAGES:

Students in this special population group are defined as “Students with disabilities under IDEA.”

Considerations: As this group proceeded with their work, there were several guiding beliefs and key considerations that guided the dialogue and thinking.

- To be meaningful, a high school diploma should guarantee that students are: 1) prepared to enter credit-bearing courses in postsecondary education institutions; 2) prepared academically to enter military career training; and 3) prepared to be productive entry-level employees in the workforce;
- OCR states that each student must have equal opportunity to work towards any diploma option; however, there is no guarantee of earning a regular diploma;
- Research shows that lack of a regular diploma can be a barrier to an individual moving into a postsecondary program or employment. Certificates of attendance, certificates of achievement, or a vocational diploma may not be accepted by colleges or employers;
- The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) have called into question the practices established in many states that give students with disabilities exceptions of some kind to states' graduation requirements, calling into question the practice of allowing a student to obtain a regular diploma without meeting the state academic standards.

Assumptions: Students with disabilities under IDEA:

- Will meet general education expectations whenever possible
- Will have the same opportunity as non-disabled students to earn a diploma
- Will have access to a rigorous, well-defined course of study as determined by the IEP team
- Will have an opportunity to demonstrate competency through a variety of approaches and pathways
- Will participate in the development and implementation of Transition IEPs and Individual Career and Academic Plans (ICAPs) that identify strengths, interests, aptitudes, gaps, as well as set rigorous competency goals and criteria for reaching them
- Can learn when time and support are variable based on and aligned with IEPs

IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

When considering the recommendations, the committee was guided by this statement: (Colorado High School Graduation Guidelines, adopted by the State Board of Education, May 2013):

“Local districts have the authority to adapt the determinations of competencies to accommodate for the unique needs of students with exceptionalities (i.e., students with disabilities...)”

Districts should:

- **Provide meaningful and multiple pathways** for students to demonstrate competency and earn a diploma through the use and attainment of:
 - Various competency measures such as those listed on the Graduation Guidelines menu of demonstrations to provide meaningful and rigorous options for the majority of students with disabilities.
 - Strongly-threaded, individualized, standards-based Transition IEPs that are grounded in an assessment process to determine students’ strengths, interests, and preferences as well as needs to assist in movement toward identified postsecondary goals and competencies.
 - Industry standards, military standards, college entrance requirements and/or Colorado Academic Standards as described in students’ Transition IEPs and/or ICAPs.
 - Extended Evidenced Outcomes (EEOs) when appropriate.
- **Use workforce readiness competencies and industry standards** to provide authentic opportunities and experiences for students (an evidence-based practice) to learn skills and other competencies that lead to successful post-school outcomes.
- **Allow for flexibility with in state transfers** either by adopting designated pathways or developing equivalent pathways for students to demonstrate competency toward diploma attainment.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Do we have a strong special education team?
- Do we have training in place for the team?
- Are the requirements for students with disabilities under IDEA consistent across the district, so that when students move from school to school they don’t lose out?
- Do students with disabilities have sufficient support and multiple pathways to graduate ready to pursue postsecondary options and/or possess the skills to being their career following graduation?
- Do our transcripts reflect the students’ job readiness and life skills? How do you credit students for their individual course of study and/or other pathways to success (i.e. work study)?

TOOLS and RESOURCES:

Research: Information related to graduation guidelines and diploma options was gathered from:

- the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/nceo/about/> Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center (MPRRRC), <http://www.usu.edu/~mprrc/>
- the Project Forum at National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), <http://www.nasdse.org/Projects/ProjectForum/tabid/415/Default.aspx>
- LRP Publications <http://www.lrp.com/>
- the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html> , and
- the websites of many states

Tools:

- CDE Indicator 13 Compliance Tips
- Individualized Education Plan (IEP)
- Naviance
- Consistent training for IEP teams
- Principal, teacher, and family training
- Work Keys Assessment on job readiness and academic skills
- Institute for Community Inclusion
- New Mexico pathways to a Diploma: www.NSTAC.org

BEST and PROMISING PRACTICES

- Programs: SWAP, PACE, ACE, ACT Prep Courses, Colorado workforce (agency linkage) (Poudre)
- Best practices:
 - Strong Indicator 13 practices (Poudre)
 - Providing real experiences within the workforce based on their individual interests → on job training (Poudre, CSDB)
 - Opportunities for internships that will be counted as high school credit
 - Link Transition IEP and ICAP
 - Work keys assessments to measure job ready academic skills (Weld County)

CHALLENGES

- **Time:** If learning is a constant, and time is the variable, it is critical that schools not have negative ramifications for allowing more time
- **Training:** Districts and schools must provide effective professional development opportunities
- **Requirements across districts:** Consider consistent requirements across districts so students who move from district to district will not be penalized
- **Discrimination:** Support unique pathways for students with disabilities (IDEA) that result in a diploma for all students