

Subject:
Alternative Pathways to High School Graduation

School Approval Standard:
Ed 306.27

This is the sixteenth in a series of Technical Advisories issued by the Department to clarify the new School Approval Standards.

I. Actual Text from the NH *Minimum Standards for School Approval*:

Ed 306.27 High School Curriculum, Credits, Graduation Requirements and Cocurricular Program

(h) The local school board of each high school shall award a regular high school diploma to those students who earn at least 20 credits for courses selected from the school's program of studies, provided that the student meets the requirements for high school graduation.

(i) If the local school board adopts a policy that would allow students to graduate from high school as a result of demonstrating mastery of required competencies, the policy shall require students to meet both state and local standards. By the 2008-2009 school year, the local school board shall require that a high school have in place competency assessments for all courses offered through the high school.

(j) The local school board of each high school shall award a regular high school diploma to all students, with and without disabilities, who have earned at least their local high school's required units of credit for graduation, selected from the school's program of studies or comparable classes and courses approved for regular credit by the applicable academic department or school program.

(k) The awarding of different types of diplomas shall be governed by the following:

- (1) A school shall award a regular diploma for completion of the district minimum earned course credit requirements;
- (2) A school may award a special diploma that recognizes academic achievement;
- (3) Credits earned in adult education, including but not limited to night school, may be used to earn a regular diploma; and
- (4) Students may earn certificates of completion or equivalency diplomas, but these shall not be equal to a regular high school diploma.

(l) All students with disabilities shall be entitled to continue with their high school educational program until such time as each student has earned a regular high school diploma or has attained the age of 21, whichever comes first, or until the IEP or Section 504 team, through a formal evaluation process, determines that such student is no longer in need of, and thereby not eligible for, special education and related services or accommodations and auxiliary supports.

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(m) The 20 credits required for graduation shall be distributed as specified in Table 306-2:

Table 306-2 Required Subjects and Credits for High School Graduation

Required Subjects	Credit(s)
Arts education	½ credit
Information and communications technologies	½ credit or demonstrate proficiency
English	4 credits
Mathematics	3 credits, including algebra credit that can be earned through a sequential, integrated, or applied program
Physical sciences	1 credit
Biological sciences	1 credit
US and NH history	1 credit
US and NH government/civics	½ credit
Economics	½ credit
World history, global studies, or geography	½ credit
Health education	½ credit
Physical education	1 credits
Open electives	6 credits
Totals	20 credits

II. State Department Guidance:

Number of credits:

Schools have the option of offering a two-tiered diploma system. While this is not required, a two-tiered diploma system may work locally for high schools with a graduation credit requirement that is higher than the state's minimum required credits for graduation. Schools may wish to put in place a regular diploma that meets the state's graduation requirements as set forth in the minimum standards, (20 credits distributed as found in Table 306-2 above) *and* a special diploma that meets a higher number of credit requirements determined by the district – both to be counted as a “graduate” for reporting purposes). The Class of 2009 will be the first cohort held to the minimum of 20 credits for High School graduation requirement.

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Competencies:

By the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year, schools should have in place a system by which students may demonstrate mastery of required high school course competencies, as well as a plan to implement and continuously improve this system. As noted in Technical Advisory #12, it is the purview of the local school board to identify or develop high school course competencies, decide on appropriate competency assessment methods, and define sufficiency (identify necessary and sufficient evidence for students to demonstrate mastery).

An addendum to Technical Advisory #12 will be released shortly to address specific questions regarding competency assessment, such as *Steps to comply with the rule*, *Progress towards implementation of the rule*, and *Conditional approval*.

Diploma/Certificate types and definitions:

The governance of high school diplomas rests with the local district, subject to local board policy and the *Minimum Standards for School Approval*. State rule Ed 306.22 specifies four types of diploma: “*regular diploma, special diploma, certificate of completion, and equivalency diploma*”. [Note: an “*equivalency diploma*,” as described in Ed 306.22, refers to a New Hampshire Certificate of High School Equivalency which is also called a general educational development certificate (GED)] The rules governing Adult High School diplomas are described in Ed 702.01 through 702.07 and discussed further, below.

A diploma type may be reported only once during a student’s high school years. Issuance of any type of completion certificate (diploma, certificate of completion or certificate of attendance) should be reported to the DOE in the next end of year (EOY) or beginning of year (BOY) submission. A student who finishes high school but does not receive some type of certificate from the school board must be reported as a dropout. When reporting diploma types to the DOE, choose the closest description. The DOE will classify recipients of diplomas from approved schools and programs as high school graduates. “Other program completers” and “certificate of attendance” recipients will be classified as “other program completers.”

Requirements for the “*regular diploma*” and the “*special diploma*” (Ed 306.22) are set by the local school board. As described earlier in this TA, local school boards may also issue a “state minimum standard diploma.”

Diplomas and Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities are entitled to the opportunity to earn a regular high school diploma, and issuance of any other type of certificate does not terminate their eligibility for a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE). It is recommended that students be awarded a certificate of completion only at the conclusion of their high school education. Students who continue to be enrolled after receiving any type of completion certificate must be reported as “post graduate”. Post graduate students are not included in the ADM used to determine state aid or apportion cooperative budgets (unless the articles of agreement specify otherwise).

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If the local school board so determines, a student who still needs to complete an individualized program may be allowed to participate in the graduation walk and ceremony with his/her class. Students with IEPs often participate in graduation ceremonies at the end of their fourth year even though their program includes additional years of education. Documents which have the appearance of a diploma, but are only for ceremonial use, should not be confused with the local school board's official recognition of high school completion. Only the official designation by the school board should be reported to the state and recorded on the transcript.

The following completion designations are not considered regular or special diplomas. "Other program completer" applies only to students with IEPs. This designation indicates that the school board has recognized the fulfillment of both the educational objectives and the time requirements of an individual's IEP. Educational objectives may include life skill activities. "Certificate of attendance" also applies only to students with IEPs. This designation indicates that the school board has recognized a student's completion of a locally defined attendance objective. That objective must be for at least 4 years. The student may or may not have met educational objectives. Students that time-out at age 21 are usually awarded a certificate of attendance.

Earning credit toward graduation

A local school board may award a diploma to students who meet at least the state requirements for graduation as listed above in Ed 306.27. It may, in addition, award a diploma to students who earn in excess of the state minimum requirements. A district may award credit or partial credit towards graduation for approved extended learning activities, including but not limited to, adult education and night school. A district, if it chooses, may award credit toward graduation to a student attending classes in both a regular high school and an alternative high school. These options are available under these rules for local school boards, districts, and high schools to consider.

For those school districts with a local board policy providing extended learning opportunities, credit may be obtained through such opportunities, provided that the board and school's policies and procedures meet the requirements under Ed 306.27(b)(4). The definition of extended learning opportunities under the *Minimum Standards* means educational activities that occur outside of the classroom for credit or as a supplement to classroom instruction. These may include, but are not limited to, independent study, private instruction, team sports, performing groups, internships, community service, and work study. Schools are encouraged to develop local board policies that clearly delineate under what circumstances and for what courses extended learning opportunities are available for credit.

Adult High School Students

A local school board may award an Adult High School diploma to those students enrolled in an Adult High School meeting the requirements of Ed.702. The course requirements and units of credits for an Adult High School are listed in Ed 702.05.

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Currently, a local school board may award a diploma from an Adult High School Program to those students who earn at least 18 credits, provided the program meets the requirements of Ed 702. It is recommended that those districts operating Adult High Schools align the credit requirements of their Adult High School programs to 20 credits, wherever possible, and that the range of course offerings be expanded to those minimally expected for the regular high school programs. Many high schools now offer other means of obtaining credit through alternatives, including credit recovery programs and are urged to make the connections to these forms of credit as seamless as possible for students seeking to obtain a diploma through a combination of day, night, and sometimes other alternative course offerings.

More information on this topic is available in the Technical Advisory *Student Accounting: Follow The Child at the High School Level*. Please note that a student who earns a diploma from an Adult High School Program, who is under 21 years of age, with an IEP, may still be eligible for special educational supports and services from his/her high school district.

Senate Bill 18-FN – Education age

If the age of required attendance of children in school is raised from 16 to 18 years of age, students above the age of 16 but below the age of 18 should be considered enrolled in high school if they participate in any of the locally determined pathways toward graduation, as long as they are in compliance with the state education rules. Such students will be considered graduates if they complete their high school education as described in the *Minimum Standards for School Approval* even if they complete through an individualized learning plan such as described in this Technical Advisory. More information on coding in such circumstances will be made available as needed.

Tuitioned students

Districts without high schools that send pupils to high schools in other districts under RSA 194:21-a, RSA 194:22, or RSA 195-A may wish to negotiate the types of diplomas available to their pupils as part of the tuition agreements with the receiving districts. High school diplomas may not be issued by districts that do not operate a high school.

Students who “go away” to an alternative learning environment for a time with the intent of returning, (such as ski school)

Schools have local decisions to make regarding such students. The minimum standards are intended to give both schools and students more flexibility. If the student becomes formally enrolled in an approved non-public school, then they should be reported as a withdrawal. If the circumstance is more individualized, then the experience can be considered as an Extended Learning Opportunity, and thus subject to the requirements under 306.27(b)(4) which includes prior approval of the school and other considerations.

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GED and Home Schooled students:

For local purposes, districts may want to compile records of high school students reported as drop-outs who do complete a GED certificate. It may be useful for local school boards to have statistics not only on the reported drop-out numbers but on subsequent educational success of reported drop-out students, even if they cannot be reported as graduates on the state record. The department hopes to compile this data state-wide and list it separately to demonstrate another pathway to success beyond the high school diploma.

Home schooled students are not considered enrolled in a high school, nor reported as such.

III. Q & A and/or FAQs regarding state and federal requirements regarding graduation

Q. Who may issue a diploma?

A. High school diplomas may be issued by the governing body of an approved regular high school, approved charter school, approved adult high school, approved alternative high school program, or an approved private school, as long as the school or program has been approved to provide instruction up to grade 12.

Q. If a student develops a plan and it takes place outside of the school, is he considered enrolled?

A. According to the Minimum Standards for School Approval, local school board policy can allow for the approval of a learning plan developed by the student, school, and appropriate others that includes learning outside of the regular classroom experiences. The student is considered enrolled if the experience and assessment of learning is overseen by the school, according to the minimum standards requirements 306.27(b)(4).

Q. Does a standard regular diploma have to be completed in 4 years?

A. No, but NCLB says that the definition of a graduate is based on a 4 year completion with a regular diploma

For more information on this topic, contact:

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