



New Hampshire

Department of Education

Serving New Hampshire's Education Community

Technical Advisory

Alternate Diploma

Ed 306.27(q)(4)

This Technical Advisory provides information for school districts who are interested in offering an alternate diploma as outlined in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

The New Hampshire Department of Education (NHDOE) has received questions from school districts regarding the option of an alternate diploma under ESSA. The “State-defined alternate diploma” is another graduation option that may be appropriate for some students with significant cognitive disabilities. The NHDOE is endorsing the alternate diploma and encourages school boards to review this option.

ESSA allows school boards and boards of trustees for chartered public schools to adopt policies that would provide schools with an option for granting a “State-defined alternate diploma.” This diploma shall only be awarded to students who have the most significant cognitive disabilities and who participate in the State’s alternate assessment. Whereas the determination of a student participating in the alternate assessment is the responsibility of a student’s IEP team, including the parent, the decision to award the alternate diploma would also be the responsibility of the student’s IEP team.

Therefore, students with Section 504 plans or students without IEPs could not be awarded an alternate diploma. Additionally, students with IEPs who are granted an alternate diploma may not be prevented from working towards meeting the requirements for the regular high school diploma. This means that being awarded the alternate diploma does not end a student’s eligibility for special education.

New Hampshire Administrative Rules for Education, Ed 306.27(q)(4) states that:

Students may earn certificates of completion or equivalency diplomas, but these shall not be equal to a regular high school diploma.

The State-defined alternate diploma would provide students who may have ordinarily been awarded a certificate of attendance with the option to achieve a diploma. The language for establishing the State-defined alternate diploma and outlining who qualifies for it, under what circumstances is found in ESSA and is as follows:

ESSA, Section 8101(a)(23) provides the ability to grant the alternate diploma in the section that defines the term “extended year adjusted cohort graduation rate” (extended year ACGR). The extended year ACGR “includes the number of students earning a regular diploma before, during or at the conclusion of one or more additional years beyond the fourth year or a summer session immediately following the additional year of high school.”

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The intent of this section is to outline the formula by which the State would calculate this graduation rate. This section clarifies that, among other qualifying instances, a student would be calculated at this rate if he/ she is a student:

- with the most significant cognitive disabilities in the graduation cohort, as adjusted under clause (i);
- assessed used the alternate assessment aligned to alternate academic achievement standards under section 1111(b)(2)(D); and
- awarded a State-defined alternate diploma that is—
 - (AA) standards-based;
 - (BB) aligned with the State requirements for the regular high school diploma; and
 - (CC) obtained within the time period for which the State ensures the availability of a free appropriate public education under section 612(a)(1) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(1)); and (II) shall not include any student awarded a recognized equivalent of a diploma, such as a general equivalency diploma, certificate of completion, certificate of attendance, or similar lesser credential.

School districts that currently offer an alternate diploma are encouraged to review their school board policies to ensure compliance with ESSA.

For more information regarding the State-defined alternate diploma please contact:

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