



### Graduation and Diplomas for Students who Participate in the Oklahoma Alternate Assessment Program (OAAP)

Oklahoma is in the process of adopting an alternate diploma. Please see [House Bill 1041](#) for more information. The alternate diploma is an alternate pathway to graduation determined by the IEP Team for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. If a student has significant impairment of cognitive abilities and adaptive skills that require instruction using an alternate curriculum, then they are eligible for an alternate diploma if they have been taking the OAAP. 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. It is not required that a student return for an additional four years or even one year. IEP team decisions should rely heavily on student and family preferences and be based on the postsecondary plans and goals of the student. Simply put, the district must make it available to each student who graduates with an alternate diploma, but the student is not required to return after graduation if the IEP team determines otherwise.

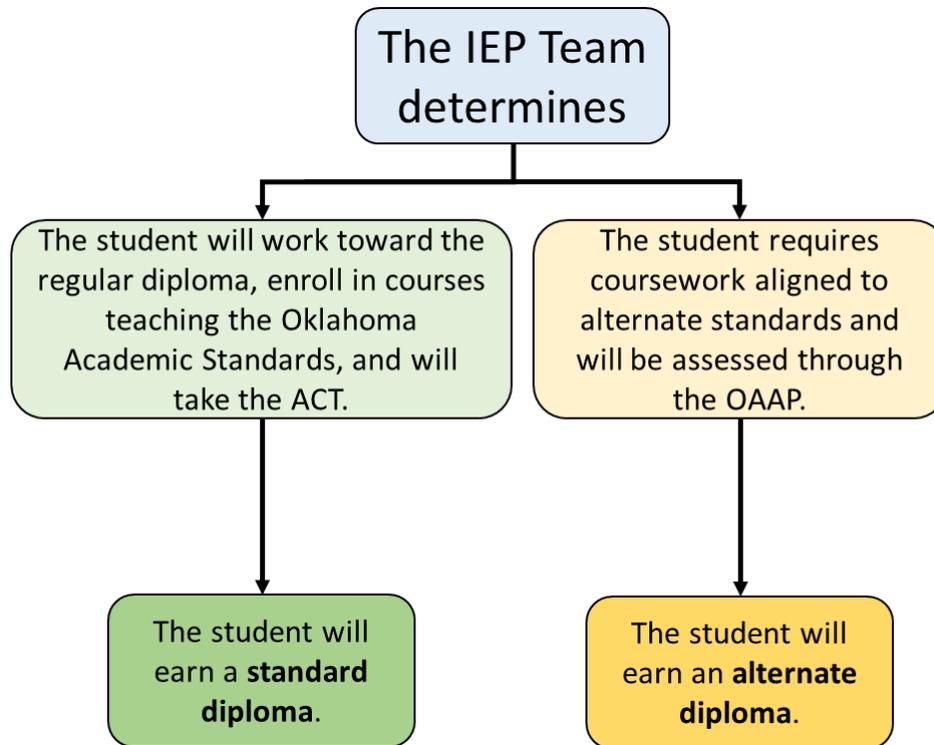
Once a student earns the required credits for the alternate diploma, typically completed within four years, they will receive an alternate diploma. However, graduating with an alternate diploma does not end the opportunity to continue receiving FAPE through the maximum age. As an example, after four years of high school earning the required credits to graduate with an alternate diploma, the adult student or the guardian of the student may choose to exit and not to return to receive FAPE through the end of the school year in which they turn 22 (maximum age).

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the obligation to make available a free appropriate public education (FAPE) continues beyond high school if the student has not graduated from high school with a regular diploma as defined by IDEA and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). To be treated as a "regular high-school diploma" federal law requires that it be fully aligned with the State's standards. ESSA, Section 8101(43).

Therefore, students assessed through the Oklahoma Alternate Assessment Program (OAAP) are NOT eligible for a regular high school diploma. The OAAP is aligned to alternate academic achievement standards. The regular diploma offered in Oklahoma districts to students who participate in the OAAP does not end a district's FAPE obligation. If your child participated in the OAAP and was taught to alternate standards, they will still be eligible to receive special education services through the school year in which the student turns 22 years of age.



### Alternate Diploma Flow Chart



**For the 2022-2023 school year**, the IEP team should determine whether, absent the option for an alternate diploma for the 2022- 2023 school year, to award a student participating in the OAAP with a standard diploma. The OSDE does not wish to negatively impact postsecondary options for these students or prevent them from receiving recognition for their accomplishments.

If a student has not reached the maximum age for FAPE, receiving a standard diploma (for the 2022-2023 school year) will not end a district's FAPE obligation. However, some adult students may wish to pursue postsecondary options and exit high school prior to reaching the maximum age.

**Beginning in the 2023-2024 school year**, students assessed through the Oklahoma Alternate Assessment Program (OAAP) are NOT eligible for a regular high school diploma. The OAAP is aligned to alternate academic achievement standards.



### Benefits of an Alternate Diploma

- Although districts in Oklahoma have been providing high-quality education to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, developing an alternate diploma will help create more access and opportunity for these students and provide services that are more closely aligned with their unique needs.
- Academic coursework for these students needs to be appropriate and challenging. The OSDE will ensure through the alternate academic achievement standards that students will be exposed to the same level of academic rigor across the state.
- Life skills, transition skills, and career readiness should be an important part of the curriculum for these students. The OSDE will develop in partnership with stakeholders (parents and teachers), additional courses that reflect what these students need to help them succeed in postsecondary life.
- These students should receive recognition for their accomplishments and that recognition should provide equal benefits. Other options, such as a certificate of completion, do not carry the same weight as a state-defined alternate diploma nor do they provide an equal benefit.

Oklahoma joins many other states that have adopted an alternate diploma to ensure that Oklahoma students are able to both receive a meaningful diploma and continue to receive the services they need for a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Other states have state-defined alternate diplomas including Nevada, California, Georgia, Utah, Arkansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, New Hampshire, Tennessee, and West Virginia.

### Frequently Asked Questions

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

- 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 student with an IEP who is working on an alternate diploma remains entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) through the end of the school year in which the student turns 22 years of age.

# ALTERNATE DIPLOMA FOR PARENTS

## SPECIAL EDUCATION - GUIDANCE BRIEF



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

- 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.
  - However, University programs that have been developed for adults with significant cognitive disabilities will accept an alternate diploma (e.g., Opportunity Orange Scholars at OSU, Sooner Works at OU and Riverhawks at NSU).

Q: How is the State-defined Alternate Diploma different from a Regular Diploma?

- Under IDEA, districts no longer have an obligation to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) once the student earns a regular diploma. However, a State-defined Alternate Diploma does not terminate a (FAPE) for students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The alternate diploma is only for those students assessed using the alternate assessment aligned to alternate academic achievement standards.

Q: How will this diploma impact these students' future postsecondary and/or transition opportunities?

- For postsecondary and transition opportunities, many institutions will accept the credential for transition opportunities. Similar to the regular diploma, there would most likely be additional admission criteria for postsecondary institutions (such as DRS [Sheltered Workshops and Support Employment](#) and [Project Search](#) through the Technology Centers will accept an alternate diploma).

Q: What are alternate academic achievement standards?

- The academic achievement of students participating in the OAAP is measured against alternate achievement standards, which differ in complexity from the achievement standards of the general state assessments. In order to participate in the OAAP, students must require alternate achievement standards in all content areas and must have an IEP containing rigorous, measurable goals that are aligned to the [Essential Elements](#) that include short-term benchmarks/objectives.

*For questions, please contact the OSDE Office of Special Education Services at  
(405) 521-3351*

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