



# GRADUATION

## What about Graduation?

Graduation issues should be addressed in each student's IEP. The IEP is the place to document modifications to graduation requirements so that they meet the unique educational needs of students with disabilities. The IEP must completely document the modifications made to accommodate a student with disabilities so that they are clearly understood by all IEP team members.

Students with disabilities and their parents must be able to make informed decisions regarding graduation options.

Parents must be notified of their student's graduation as a change in placement with enough time to appeal the action. If state and federal regulations have been followed, graduation should not come as a surprise to parents, since transition needs would have been addressed by the time the student turned 16. Services would begin by age 16, or younger, depending on which was most appropriate. Schools should have been holding IEP meetings which addressed graduation requirements in the transition plan.



The issuance of a regular high school diploma terminates a student's eligibility for public education services. Some agencies will not serve eligible adults with significant disabilities in day programs until the turn 22, even if they have graduated. A parent may not require the school district to withhold the issuance of a diploma until age 22 if the student with disabilities has met the graduation requirements. It is necessary to make an informed decision in selecting a graduation option and to make certain it is recorded on the IEP. This should reduce misunderstandings and clarify the time frame available to attain transition goals, including whether to graduate with peers or continue with additional schooling.

## Diploma

A high school diploma will be awarded to a student who has successfully completed all Utah State Office of Education and school district graduation requirements. Graduation requirements may vary from district to district. It is important to understand your school district or charter school's requirements. Please check your district or charter school's website or contact the school or district personnel for more information.

## Certificate of Completion

According to school district or school criteria, a certificate of completion may be awarded to students who:

- Have completed their senior year,
- Are exiting the school system, and
- Have not met all state or district requirements for a diploma.

## Eligibility Ends

Graduation with a regular high school diploma ends eligibility for FAPE, and graduation is a change of placement requiring prior written notice.

*If your child has special needs, so do you! We can help!*

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**Graduation is NOT** an alternative degree that is not fully aligned with the state's academic standards, such as: a certificate of completion, an alternative diploma, or a GED. (These options will not end eligibility.)

### **IEP Amendment to Graduation Requirements**

A student's IEP team may amend graduation requirements and must document in the IEP the nature and extent of any modifications, substitutions, and/or exemptions made to accommodate the needs of a student with disabilities. The IEP team must refer to the USOE Special Education Graduation Guidelines for additional information.

It is best to start working on amendments to graduation requirements before the student enters the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (when credits start to count for graduation).

### **Summary of Performance**

For a student whose eligibility terminates due to graduation from secondary school with a regular diploma, or due to exceeding the age of eligibility for FAPE under Utah law, an LEA must provide the student with a summary of the student's academic achievement and functional performance, which shall include recommendations on how to assist the student in meeting the student's postsecondary goals.

If graduation requirements as amended on the IEP are completed, the student will graduate and receive a Utah Alternative Assessment (UAA) diploma.

If graduation requirements as amended on the IEP are not completed and the student's Transition Plan documents the need for transition services offered by the L.E.A. outside of the local high school, the student may be allowed to participate in the graduation ceremonies; however, a diploma would not be issued until the student has successfully completed his/her program.

If the graduation requirements as amended on the IEP are not completed and the IEP team determines that the student can benefit from continued educational programming in the local school, the student may be allowed to participate in graduation ceremonies and receive a diploma at such time as amended graduation requirements are met.

If graduation requirements as amended on the IEP are not completed before the student reaches age 22, the student may be issued a certificate (e.g. Certificate of Completion or Progress) indicating that a record of competencies can be made available to them or to others who may legitimately inquire.

If graduation requirements as amended in the IEP are not completed due to factors that are not a direct manifestation of the student's disability, the student is not eligible to participate in graduation ceremonies or receive a diploma until the amended requirements are met. The local principal is authorized to make this decision.

The Utah Parent Center also offers a workshop and companion parent handbook called From 'NO' Where to 'KNOW' Where – Transition to Adult Services A Parent Handbook. The presentation and handbook provide detailed information on many topics related to transition planning. Please [CLICK HERE](#) to view those materials.

*This content is taken from the Utah Parent Center handbook: Parents as Partners in the IEP Process Parent Handbook*