



Mississippi Diploma Requirements and Endorsement Options Frequently Asked Questions for Parents

Mississippi students now have the opportunity to make their high school diploma more valuable. Starting in 2018-19, 9th graders will choose whether they want to work toward a Traditional Diploma, or take additional classes to earn an academic, distinguished academic or career and technical education endorsement. Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities may pursue an alternate program of study to earn the Alternate Diploma.

1. Why does Mississippi offer different diploma endorsement options?

The endorsement options are part of a statewide effort to increase college and career opportunities for all students. One of the top goals of the Mississippi State Board of Education is for every student to graduate from high school prepared for college and career. Students who earn an endorsement demonstrate they have exceeded the minimum requirements to graduate from high school.

2. What are the benefits of the career and technical education (CTE) endorsement?

Students who pursue the CTE endorsement will start studying for their chosen career path while in high school. Depending on their CTE course of study, high school graduates may be eligible to enter the workforce directly or qualify for advanced training in their field.

3. What are the benefits of the academic and distinguished academic endorsements?

Students who earn an academic or distinguished academic diploma endorsement will receive automatic admission into any of the state's public universities.

4. The academic and distinguished academic endorsements require students to complete advanced courses. What are the benefits of mastering Advanced Placement (AP) courses, International Baccalaureate courses or dual credit courses?

These courses expose students to college-level material, which helps students prepare for the type of coursework they will be required to master in college. In addition, AP and dual credit courses save on future tuition costs because they allow students to earn college credit while in high school.

5. Are students who take CTE courses or advanced coursework required to pursue the endorsements?



No. Students are encouraged to take specialized classes that fit their goals and interests, whether or not they pursue and endorsement.

6. How can students make sure they select an endorsement that fits their skills and interests and stay on track throughout high school to successfully earn the endorsement?

Before the end of grade 7, all students are required to have an Individual Success Plan (ISP). The ISP is a five-year career exploration plan that students complete with the help of a teacher or school counselor. The ISP helps students identify their career interests and plan a program of study that aligns with their career goals and leads to graduation. The ISP is reviewed and approved annually by the student, parent and educator.

7. Can students change their endorsement after it has been selected?

Yes. Students can make changes to their endorsement plans with parental approval.

8. Can students pursue more than one endorsement?

Yes. Students should work with their teachers and school counselors to select classes that will lead to their selected endorsements.

9. What if a student attempts an endorsement, but does not meet requirements?

The student will graduate with the Traditional Diploma with no endorsement.

10. Must all students choose an endorsement?

No. Students should identify an endorsement before entering the 9th grade, but it is not required.

11. How can students qualify for the Alternate Diploma?

Students who have met the criteria on their IEP (Individualized Education Program) for having a Significant Cognitive Disability may participate in a program of study to earn the Alternate Diploma. Approximately 1 percent of students have a Significant Cognitive Disability.

12. What is a Certificate of Completion?

A Certificate of Completion is not a high school diploma or its equivalent, but rather an acknowledgement of a student's completion of his/her Individualized Education Program (IEP). Students are eligible for a Certificate of Completion if they have not met the requirements of either the Traditional Diploma or the Alternate Diploma and have reached the maximum age of service under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which in Mississippi is age 20.



13. In which grade can students start to earn high school credits (Carnegie units)?

Starting in grade 7, students may be awarded a Carnegie unit credit provided the course is a Carnegie unit bearing course in the current edition of the Approved Courses for the Secondary Schools of Mississippi Manual.

14. What are the graduation requirements for students in grades 10-12?

Students who are in grades 10-12 must meet the graduation requirements that were in place when they entered grade 9.

15. If students in grades 10-12 meet the requirements for one or more of the endorsement options, will they receive the endorsement?

Upon graduation, students currently in grades 10-12 who meet the requirements for an endorsement will receive the endorsement.

16. How can seniors qualify for early release? (Early release allows seniors who have earned most of their graduation credits to leave campus for part of the school day to work in the community.)

Seniors must meet **one** the following requirements to qualify for early release:

- Have scored at least 17 on the English portion of the ACT and 19 on the Math portion or have scored at the Silver level on the ACT WorkKeys for the CTE endorsement
- OR**
- Meet all four of the following:
 - i. Have a 2.5 GPA
 - ii. Pass or meet all four end-of-course assessment requirements for graduation
 - iii. Be on track to meet diploma requirements
 - iv. Be enrolled in Essentials for College Math and/or Essentials for College Literacy

17. How can students qualify for early graduation?

Students who have successfully completed the requirements for an endorsement qualify for early graduation.