Family Guide: New California Alt Pathway to a High School Diploma for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities



WHAT IS THE NEW PATHWAY TO A HS DIPLOMA?

The new pathway provides an opportunity for students with significant cognitive disabilities to earn a high school diploma - previously most students in this student group received a certificate of completion when graduating or turning 22. Students eligible for this pathway can earn a diploma, participate in all graduation-related activities with their class, and continue to receive special education services under the IDEA until age 22.

WHO IS THE NEW PATHWAY FOR?

The new alternative pathway is for students with significant cognitive disabilities. California defines this students group as students who are **eligible** to take the California Alternative Assessments (CAAs) in statewide testing. Students only need to be eligible to take the CAA to qualify for this pathway and are not required to take statewide testing to be able to earn a high school diploma.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE IEP TEAM

- To what degree is my child able to demonstrate what they know, want and think? (i.e. AAC, AT, PECs)
- Are my child's IEP goals consistent with what they're supposed to learn for their grade (grade-level standards)?
- How will my child have access to the general education curriculum?
- Is my child on track to be able to earn a diploma through either traditional or alternative pathways? If not, how can we help them get on track?
- What other skills can my child be learning while pursuing a diploma on the alt pathway? What will transition look like?

ALT PATHWAY ELIGIBILITY OVERVIEW

1. The student was/is in high school in the 22-23 school year or later.
2. The IEP team has determined student is eligible to take the California Alternative Assessments (CAAs).
3. The student is taking standards-aligned course work to meet statewide course requirements for graduation with a diploma.

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS FOR ALT-PATHWAY

- 3 Three courses in English
- 2 Two courses in mathematics, including one year of Algebra I (EC Section 51224.5)
- 2 Two courses in science, including biological and physical sciences
- 3 Three courses in social studies, including United States history and geography; world history, culture, and geography; a one-semester course in American government and civics, and a one-semester course in economics
- 1 One course in visual or performing arts, world language, or career technical education.
- 2 Two courses in physical education, unless the pupil has been exempted pursuant to the provisions of EC Section 51241
- 1 One semester of Ethnic Studies, commencing with pupils graduating in the 2029–30 school year (a course based on the model curriculum developed pursuant to EC Section 51226.7)

ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1 How is a diploma different from a certificate of completion?

A diploma signifies that the student has completed specific standards aligned course requirements for graduation. This can open doors for more job opportunities, higher earning potential, and further education. A certificate of completion signifies the end of high school and is based on IEP goals. The certificate of completion does not require any specific coursework and is not considered a diploma.

2 How many years will it take for my child to earn their high school diploma on the alt-pathway?

The intent of the alt-pathway is to allow students to complete their course of study in 4 years alongside their same-age peers, but IEP teams may identify a different timeline that can be adjusted to meet the individual needs of students.

3 Are students who receive their diploma through the alt-pathway still eligible for services?

The student is still eligible to participate in public school until they are 22 years of age or until the IEP team determines they have completed their high school experience. Receiving a diploma on the alt-pathway does not end a student's eligibility for services under IDEA.

4 Who determines if my student is eligible for the alt-pathway, and when is the decision made?

IEP teams determine eligibility, based on state guidance/criteria. Discussions should begin early to ensure expressive communication needs are meaningfully addressed, supporting students ability to access educational content and instruction, and express their knowledge and skills. This makes it possible to accurately evaluate their academic growth.

SOURCES

https://casetext.com/statute/california-codes/california-education-code /title-2-elementary-and-secondary-education/ division-4-instruction-and-services/part-28-general-instructional-programs/chapter-2-required-courses-of-study/article-3-courses-of-study-grades-7-to-12/section-5122531-exemption-of-individuals-with-exceptional-needs-for-graduation

https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/lr/om082523.asp

https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/documents/altassessmentdecision.pdf

https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/hsgrmin.asp

https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/altassessment.asp

https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1325428.pdf

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