

ALTERNATE DIPLOMA FOR STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to meet the requirements of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act ("ESSA") to establish and allow the awarding of a District Alternate Diploma to certain students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

B. INTRODUCTION

Under ESSA, states may adopt alternate content standards and alternate assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. In states that have adopted alternative content standards, ESSA allows local school boards to adopt policies allowing certain students with significant cognitive disabilities the ability to earn an Alternate Diploma based on the alternative content standards.

An Alternate Diploma provides students who may have ordinarily earned certificates of attendance, or completion under New Hampshire Administrative Rule Ed 306.23(d)(4), with the option to earn a diploma.

New Hampshire has adopted Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) as an alternate assessment tool. The DLM assessment measures yearly student progress and provides independent standards which align with the NH Statewide Assessment. Accordingly, this policy authorizes the District to award an Alternate Diploma in accordance with the requirements and conditions below.

C. ELIGIBILITY

Consistent with ESSA, the Alternate Diploma may be awarded to students who:

1. Have significant cognitive disabilities; and
2. Have a current Individualized Education Program ("IEP"); and
3. Participate in the state authorized alternate assessment (currently DLM).

The Alternate Diploma is NOT available to students without IEPs, including students with Section 504 plans.

D. DETERMINATION OF AWARD

The determination to award the Alternate Diploma is the responsibility of the student's IEP team, including the student's parent(s)/guardian(s). The IEP team's consideration of the appropriateness of an Alternate Diploma should be included in transition planning beginning at age sixteen (16). Details of this decision shall be included in the student's IEP transition plan in accordance with Ed 1109.03.

E. TIME OF AWARD

The student may choose (individually or through the IEP team) to receive the Alternate Diploma at one (1) of three (3) times:

1. At graduation with common age peers;
2. At the conclusion of the student's IEP; or
3. Upon reaching age twenty-two (22).

If the student participates in the traditional graduation ceremony, the student will be included in the graduation program with no difference in listing from their peers awarded a regular diploma.

F. EFFECT OF AWARD AND CONTINUED ELIGIBILITY

1. Under 34 CFR 300.102 (a)(3), the awarding of any document other than the regular high school diploma shall not terminate a child's eligibility for free and appropriate public education ("FAPE"). Accordingly, earning an Alternate Diploma does not end a student's eligibility for special education services. Rather, students who have earned the Alternate Diploma, and are otherwise eligible for special education services, may continue to receive such services and may continue working toward meeting the requirements for the regular high school diploma.
2. Alternate Diplomas awarded under this policy are counted in the state graduation rate, while certificates of attendance or equivalency are not.

G. IMPLEMENTATION

The Superintendent, with the assistance of the Director of Special Education and Counseling Services, is directed to establish and make available procedures and administrative rules to implement this policy.

Legal References:

20 U.S.C. §7801 (23) Every Student Succeeds Act (§8101(a)(23))
34 C.F.R. 300.102 (a)(3); 300.43; and 300.320(b)
RSA 186-C:2 Definitions
Ed 306.23(d)(4) Minimum Standards/High School Requirements/Equivalency Diplomas
Ed 1109.03 When an IEP is in Effect... Transition Services

Adopted: **11/03/2025**