



Administrative Consideration for Changes in Definition of Diploma

Overview of the Change

- The Iowa State Board of Education amended Iowa's special education rules to conform with ESSA-required language related to the graduation of individuals eligible for special education. The definition of a regular high school diploma now is:

[T]he term "regular high school diploma" means the standard high school diploma awarded to the preponderance of students in the State that is fully aligned with State standards, or a higher diploma, except that a regular high school diploma shall not be aligned to the alternate academic achievement standards described in section 1111(b)(1)(E) of the ESEA. A regular high school diploma does not include a recognized equivalent of a diploma, such as a general equivalency diploma, certificate of completion, certificate of attendance, or similar lesser credential.

- This amendment makes clear that a regular high school diploma must be fully aligned to State-required standards. In Iowa's case, that would be the graduation requirements set forth in Iowa Code section 256.7(26): four years of English, three years of math, three years of social studies, and three years of science ("4-3-3-3"). To earn a regular high school diploma going forward, a child with a disability must complete 4-3-3-3.
- It is no longer permissible to award a regular high school diploma based on IEP goal attainment solely. A child may either graduate based on 4-3-3-3 or based on 4-3-3-3 plus IEP goals.
- The amendment begins with the 2018 9th grade cohort (Class of 2022).

Implications for District Policies and Procedures

- Districts retain decision-making authority on the way students who receive special education services may meet the 4-3-3-3 requirements. Iowa Code Section 256.7(26) uses the term 'years' to define the amount of time a student will be engaged in learning core content standards for each subject. It does not specify Carnegie Units or specific course work.
- The District may establish policies and procedures that permit students receiving special education services to complete 4-3-3-3 requirements in unique, individualized manners. It is essential, however, that Iowa Academic Standards be addressed.
- The District may provide a certificate of completion/attendance to those students receiving special education services who do not complete 4-3-3-3. Students who receive a certificate of completion/attendance remain eligible for special education services until they reach the maximum age of 21.
- The District should also consider providing guidance to their IEP teams on the ways in which District policies permit IEP teams to determine how students with IEPs may meet the District's 4-3-3-3 requirements.