



Office of Next Generation Learners  
Division of Learning Services

## **Questions and Answers**

### **Certificate of Attainment and Standard Diploma**

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This Question and Answer Document (Q & A) is to provide clarification regarding the awarding of a diploma or certification of attainment (completion) to students with disabilities exiting high school. Regulatory guidance is contained in the Minimum Requirements for High School Graduation Regulation, 704 KAR 3:305 (See attachment A).

**1. How is the determination made as to whether a student is earning a diploma or a certificate of attainment?**

**ANSWER:** For a student whose disability precludes a course of study leading to a standard diploma consistent with the requirements of 704 KAR 3:305, a student's Admissions and Release Committee (ARC) determines eligibility for the alternative course of study by documenting that ALL the following criteria are met:

- The student's demonstrated cognitive disability and adaptive behavior prevent completing the regular course of study leading to a standard diploma, even with program modifications, adaptations and extended school services;
- The student's current adaptive behavior requires extensive direct instruction in multiple settings to apply and generalize functional and work-readiness skills in school, work, home and community environments;
- The student's inability to complete the course of studies is not the result of excessive or extended absences nor the result of visual or auditory disabilities; specific learning disabilities; emotional behavioral disabilities; or social, cultural or socioeconomic differences;
- The student, when instructed solely or primarily through school-based instruction, is unable to apply academic skills at a minimal competency level in natural settings; and
- The student is unable to acquire, maintain and generalize skills without intensive, frequent and individualized community-based instruction.

Note: Students not meeting these criteria pursue the course of study for a standard diploma.

The ARC makes the decision that a student is eligible for the alternative course of study only after a thorough review and documentation that the student meets the criteria stated above. The ARC must clearly document the decision in the student's records and reflect the course of study in the student's Individual Education Program (IEP). Annually, the ARC reviews the student's program to make sure the decision is still appropriate and that there have not been changes

that would enable the student to pursue a standard diploma and achieve the content and performance standards of the standard curriculum/course of study.

**2. What are the minimum requirements that must be met to earn a high school diploma?**

**ANSWER:** See attachment A, 704 KAR 3:305.

**3. What agency/body promulgates regulations for the high school diploma and certificate of attainment?**

**ANSWER:** The Kentucky Board of Education.

**4. What entity issues a high school diploma?**

**ANSWER:** 704 KAR 3:305 establishes the minimum requirements necessary for entitlement to a high school diploma or certificate of attainment. A local school board may have additional minimum requirements to earn a standard high school diploma. Local boards of education then award, upon completion of requirements by the student, a diploma or certificate of attainment.

**5. What must a local board of education provide for students who are earning a certificate of attainment?**

**ANSWER:** At all levels (primary, intermediate, middle and high school), the curriculum, coursework and standards for students pursuing a certificate shall be aligned with *Kentucky's Academic Expectations*, the content standards outlined in the *Program of Studies* and the student's IEP.

The course of study may be adjusted and based on a narrower breadth, depth and complexity of content standards and reflect alternative performance or achievement standards. It must promote access to the standard/general curriculum and provide the opportunity for students to be involved in and to progress in the general education curriculum regardless of where instructional services are provided. The course of study, including the content and achievement standards, must be challenging for the eligible students with disabilities, must support individual growth and must build on the individual student's present level of performance.

Typically this course of study includes a range of curricular options critical to successful transition based on the general/standard curriculum and such life domains as career/vocational (e.g., job exploration, job skills, career and transition planning), recreation/leisure, communication and personal management (e.g., community and daily living). Instruction and student learning is in the context of real-life applications that students experience at school, in the home and community or on the job.

**6. Is a local board of education permitted to issue a “diploma” to those students meeting requirements of the certificate of attainment?**

**ANSWER:** A local board of education has the option to name the document recognizing completion of high school commensurate with its local board policies and procedures; however, any diploma designation other than the standard diploma must be annotated so as to reflect the skills the student is able to do. A diploma designation must not misrepresent that the student has met the requirements of a standard diploma if in fact they have not.

**7. How are students who are earning a Certificate of Attainment assessed in the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS)?**

**ANSWER:** Students earning a certificate of attainment are generally those with moderate to severe cognitive disabilities and generally represent approximately one percent (1%) of the student population for whom traditional assessments, even with modifications, would be an inappropriate measure of progress. Students eligible for the certificate of attainment generally also meet the eligibility requirements for the Kentucky Alternate Assessment Program (KAAP) and are assessed on the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) with the KAAP.

In order for a student to participate in the KAAP, the student must meet ALL of the following criteria:

- The student has a current Individual Education Plan
- The student’s demonstrated cognitive ability and adaptive behavior prevent completion of the regular course of study even with program modifications and/or accommodations
- The student’s current adaptive behavior requires extensive direct instruction in multiple settings to accomplish the application and transfer of skills necessary in school, work, home, and community environments
- The student’s inability to complete the course of study may NOT be the result of excessive or extended absences, or it may NOT be primarily the result of visual or auditory disabilities, specific learning disabilities, emotional-behavioral disabilities, or social/cultural/economic differences

- The student is unable to apply or use academic skills at a minimal competency level in natural settings (i.e., home, community, or work site) when instructed solely or primarily through school-based instruction
- The student is unable to acquire, maintain, or generalize skills, and demonstrate performance without intensive, frequent, and individualized community-based instruction
- The student is unable to complete a regular diploma program even with extended schooling and program modifications/accommodations.

Note: The Guidelines for the Kentucky Alternate Assessment contains additional information regarding the participation of students in the Alternate Assessment (See attachment B).

**8. Why are students who are earning a certificate of attainment sometimes in class with students who are earning a diploma?**

**ANSWER:** Students with disabilities are expected to have access to the general curriculum and there are a variety of ways a student with significant disabilities may access the general curriculum. Some options include participating in:

- Curricular activities in the same way as other students (in the same classroom);
- The same activities but different levels than other students (the same classroom);
- The same activities but different educational goals that are embedded into the classroom activities and routines;
- A different activity with different goals but related to the classroom activities (same classroom); or
- General curricular information in a separate special education setting based on narrower breadth, depth and complexity.

**9. A student who is earning a certificate of attainment received a letter grade in a content area class. Does this mean he is earning the same credit for this content class?**

**ANSWER:** When a student earning a certificate of attainment participates in a general education class, it is allowable for the student to receive a similar grade designation based on procedures that are different from the class at large, and evaluated based on the goals in his IEP. Participating in the content class benefits the student in meeting his IEP goals. Although general designations or labels that do not indicate a student's participation in special education are permissible, special education cannot be listed on transcripts to show that a student received adaptations in the general education classroom.

**10. Does earning a certificate of attainment limit a student's post-school opportunities?**

**ANSWER:** Students earning a certificate of attainment are in a course of study, which includes a range of curricular options critical to successful transition based on the general/standard curriculum and such life domains as career/vocational (e.g., job exploration, job skills, career and transition planning) and recreation/leisure, communication and personal management (e.g., community and daily living). Instruction and student learning is in the context of real-life applications that students experience at school, in the home and community or on the job. This type of coursework enables the ARC to plan effectively for successful transition to postsecondary environments, including linking to appropriate adult agency service providers and employment.

**11. How does the school plan for the student's successful transition to postsecondary environments?**

**ANSWER:** The student's ARC must address transition requirements within the individual education program (IEP). According to 707 KAR 1:320, by the child's sixteenth birthday, the IEP shall include:

- (a) appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills; and
- (b) the transition services (including the course of study) needed to assist the child in reaching these goals.

Additionally, according to 704 KAR 3:305, each student must complete an individual learning plan, which incorporates emphasis on career development.

**12. For students earning a certificate of attainment, how does the school communicate the student's progress?**

**ANSWER:** 707 KAR 1:320 requires ARCs to report progress on IEP goals at least as often as reports are given to parents of students without disabilities. Typically, progress reports are sent to parents at the same time report cards are given at each school.

**704 KAR 3:305. Minimum requirements for high school graduation.**

RELATES TO: KRS 156.160(1)(a), (d), 158.645, 158.6451

STATUTORY AUTHORITY: KRS 156.070, 156.160(1)(a), (d)

NECESSITY, FUNCTION, AND CONFORMITY: KRS 156.160 requires the Kentucky Board of Education to promulgate administrative regulations relating to the courses of study for the different grades and the minimum requirements for high school graduation. The content standards for the courses of study are established in the Kentucky core academic standards, 704 KAR 3:303. This administrative regulation establishes the minimum requirements necessary for entitlement to a high school diploma.

Section 1. Until the graduating class of 2012, each student in a common school shall complete an individual learning plan which incorporates emphasis on career development and shall have a total of at least twenty-two (22) credits for high school graduation. Those credits shall include the following minimum requirements:

- (1) Language arts: Four (4) credits (including English I, II, III, and IV);
- (2) Social studies: three (3) credits (to incorporate U.S. History, Economic, Government, World Geography, and World Civilization);
- (3) Mathematics: three (3) credits (including Algebra I, Geometry, and one (1) elective as provided in the Kentucky core academic standards, 704 KAR 3:303);
- (4) Science: three (3) credits (including life science, physical science, and earth and space science as provided in the Kentucky core academic standards, 704 KAR 3:303);
- (5) Health: one-half (1/2) credit;
- (6) Physical education: one-half (1/2) credit;
- (7) History and appreciation of visual and performing arts (or another arts course which incorporates this content): one (1) credit; and
- (8) Electives: seven (7) credits.

Section 2. Beginning with the graduating class of 2012, each student in a common school shall have a total of at least twenty-two (22) credits for high school graduation. Those credits shall include the content standards as provided in the Kentucky core academic standards, 704 KAR 3:303. Additional standards-based learning experiences shall align to the student's individual learning plan and shall consist of standards-based content. The required credits and demonstrated competencies shall include the following minimum requirements:

- (1) Language arts - four (4) credits (English I, II, III, and IV) to include the content contained in the Kentucky core academic standards for English and language arts.
  - (a) Language arts shall be taken each year of high school.
  - (b) If a student does not meet the college readiness benchmarks for English and language arts as established by the Council on Postsecondary Education in 13 KAR 2:020, the student shall take an English and language arts transitional course or intervention, which is monitored to address remediation needs, before exiting high school;
- (2) Social studies - three (3) credits to include the content contained in the Kentucky core academic standards for social studies;
- (3) Mathematics - four (4) courses of mathematics, including three (3) credits that shall include the content contained in the Kentucky core academic standards for mathematics and include the following minimum requirements:

(a) Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II. An integrated, applied, interdisciplinary, occupational, or technical course that prepares a student for a career path based on the student's individual learning plan may be substituted for a traditional Algebra I, Geometry, or Algebra II course on an individual student basis if the course meets the content standards in the Kentucky core academic standards, 704 KAR 3:303;

(b) A mathematics course or its equivalent as determined by the district shall be taken each year of high school to ensure readiness for postsecondary education or the workforce; and

(c) If a student does not meet the college readiness benchmarks for mathematics as established by the Council on Postsecondary Education in 13 KAR 2:020, the student shall take a mathematics transitional course or intervention, which is monitored to address remediation needs, before exiting high school; and

(d) Prealgebra shall not be counted as one (1) of the three (3) required mathematics credits for high school graduation but may be counted as an elective;

(4) Science - three (3) credits that shall incorporate lab-based scientific investigation experiences and include the content contained in the Kentucky core academic standards for health;

(5) Health - one-half (1/2) credit to include the content contained in the Kentucky core academic standards for health;

(6) Physical education - one-half (1/2) credit to include the content contained in the Kentucky core academic standards for physical education;

(7) History and appreciation of visual and performing arts (or another arts course which incorporates this content) - one (1) credit to include the content contained in the Kentucky core academic standards for arts and humanities or a standards-based specialized arts course based on the student's individual learning plan;

(8) Academic and career interest standards-based learning experiences - seven (7) credits including four (4) standards-based learning experiences in an academic or career interest based on the student's individual learning plan; and

(9) Demonstrated performance-based competency in technology.

Section 3. (1) A local board of education may substitute an integrated, applied, interdisciplinary, occupational, technical, or higher level course for a required course if the alternative course provides rigorous content and addresses the same applicable components of 703 KAR 4:060.

(2) For students with disabilities, a local board of education may substitute a functional, integrated, applied, interdisciplinary, occupational, technical, or higher level course for a required course if the alternative course provides rigorous content and addresses the same applicable components of 703 KAR 4:060. These shall be based on grade-level content standards and may be modified to allow for a narrower breadth, depth, or complexity of the general grade-level content standards.

Section 4. (1) A district shall implement an advising and guidance process throughout the middle and high schools to provide support for the development and implementation of an individual learning plan for each student. The plan shall include career development and awareness and specifically address Vocational Studies Academic Expectations 2.36-2.38 as established in Academic expectations, 703 KAR 4:060.



(2) A district shall develop a method to evaluate the effectiveness and results of the individual learning plan process. The evaluation method shall include input from students, parents, and school staff. As part of the evaluation criteria, the district shall include indicators related to the status of the student in the twelve (12) months following the date of graduation.

(3) A feeder middle school and a high school shall work cooperatively to ensure that each student and parent shall receive information and advising regarding the relationship between education and career opportunities. Advising and guidance shall include information about financial planning for postsecondary education.

(4) A school shall maintain each student's individual learning plan. The individual learning plan shall be readily available to the student and parent and reviewed and approved at least annually by the student, parents, and school officials.

(5) Beginning with a student's eighth grade year, the individual learning plan shall set learning goals for the student based on academic and career interests and shall identify required academic courses, electives, and extracurricular opportunities aligned to the student's postsecondary goals. The school shall use information from the individual learning plans about student needs for academic and elective courses to plan academic and elective offerings.

(6) Beginning with the graduating class of 2013, the development of the individual learning plan for each student shall begin by the end of the sixth grade year and shall be focused on career exploration and related postsecondary education and training needs.

Section 5. (1) A board of education may award credit toward high school graduation for satisfactory demonstration of learning based on content standards described in the Kentucky core academic standards, 704 KAR 3:303, and a rigorous performance standards policy established by the board of education. A school shall establish performance descriptors and evaluation procedures to determine if the content and performance standards have been met.

(2) A board of education shall award credit toward high school graduation based on:

(a) A standards-based Carnegie unit credit that shall consist of at least 120 hours of instructional time in one subject; or

(b) A standards-based performance-based credit, regardless of the number of instructional hours in one (1) subject.

(3) A local board of education which has chosen to award standards-based performance-based credit shall award a standards-based credit earned by a student enrolled in grade 5, 6, 7 or 8 if:

(a) The content of the course is the same that is established in the Kentucky core academic standards, 704 KAR 3:303; and

(b) The district has criteria in place to make a reasonable determination that the middle level student is capable of success in the high school course.

(4) A board of education which has chosen to award standards-based performance-based credit shall establish a policy for a performance-based credit system that includes:

(a) The procedures for developing performance-based credit systems and for amending the system;

(b) The conditions under which each high school may grant performance-based credits and the related performance descriptors and assessments;

(c) Objective grading and reporting procedures;

(d) Content standards as addressed in 704 KAR 3:303, Kentucky core academic standards, and 703 KAR 4:060, Academic expectations;

(e) The extent to which state-provided assessments will be used in the local performance-based credit system;

(f) The ability for students to demonstrate proficiency and earn credit for learning acquired outside of school or in prior learning; and

(g) Criteria to ensure that internships, cooperative learning experiences, and other learning experiences in the school and community are:

1. Designed to further student progress towards the individual learning plan;
2. Supervised by qualified instructors; and
3. Aligned with state and local content and performance standards.

(5) A board of education may award standards-based, performance-based credit toward high school graduation for:

(a) Standards-based course work that constitutes satisfactory demonstration of learning in any high school course, consistent with Section 1 or 2 of this administrative regulation;

(b) Standards-based course work that constitutes satisfactory demonstration of learning in a course for which the student failed to earn credit when the course was taken previously;

(c) Standards-based portfolios, senior year or capstone projects;

(d) Standards-based online or other technology mediated courses;

(e) Standards-based dual credit or other equivalency courses; or

(f) Standards-based internship, cooperative learning experience, or other supervised experience in the school and the community.

(6) Each local board of education shall maintain a copy of its policy on high school graduation requirements. This policy shall include a description of how the requirements address KRS 158.6451(1)(b) and 703 KAR 4:060.

Section 6. (1) A student who satisfactorily completes the requirements of this administrative regulation and additional requirements as may be imposed by a local board of education shall be awarded a graduation diploma.

(2) The local board of education shall award the diploma.

Section 7. This administrative regulation shall not be interpreted as prohibiting a local governing board, superintendent, principal or teacher from awarding special recognition to a student.

Section 8. (1) Until the graduating class of 2012, if the severity of an exceptional student's disability precludes a course of study leading to receipt of a diploma, an alternative program shall be offered.

(a) This program shall be based upon student needs, as specified in the individual educational plan, and shall be reviewed at least annually.

(b) A student who completes this course of study shall be recognized for achievement.

(c) This may be accomplished by the local board of education awarding a certificate.

(2) Beginning with the graduating class of 2012, if the severity of an exceptional student's disability precludes a course of study that meets the high school graduation requirements established in Section 2 of this administrative regulation leading to receipt of a high school diploma, an alternative course of study shall be offered.

(a) This course of study shall be based upon student needs and the provisions specified in 704 KAR 3:303, Kentucky core academic standards, and shall be reviewed at least annually.

(b) A student who completes this course of study shall receive a certificate of attainment to be awarded by the local board of education consistent with the graduation practices for all students. (5 Ky.R. 633; Am. 6 Ky.R. 53; eff. 7-17-79; 6 Ky.R. 238; 526; eff. 4-1-80; 9 Ky.R. 1027; 1208; eff. 8-3-83; 11 Ky.R. 1076; eff. 3-12-85; 17 Ky.R. 113; eff. 9-13-90; 23 Ky.R. 3419; 3827; 24 Ky.R. 82; eff. 7-2-97; 32 Ky.R. 1779; 2028; 33 Ky.R. 766; eff. 10-6-2006; 37 Ky.R. 138; 1644; eff. 2-4-2011.)

**Attachment B****Participation Guidelines**

Participation in the assessment and accountability system is an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team decision and as such, should be based on the individual needs of the student. The *Participation Guidelines* below are designed to assist the IEP team in determining *how* the student will participate in the statewide assessment and school accountability system. These guidelines are in the current (703 KAR 5:070) and as such have not changed from previous versions of the KY Alternate Assessment. However, to accommodate learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities, two additional questions should be considered. These questions assist the IEP team in selecting the appropriate Performance Dimension. In addition, recent regulatory changes refer to a “certificate of attainment” (704 KAR 3:305) rather than “certificate of program completion” referred to in previous versions of the assessment. Finally, these participation guidelines apply to the entire alternate assessment system including all the assessment components specified in the *Overview of the Assessment Design* (p.2).

**It is important to note that participation in the KY Alternate[0] Assessments should not be based solely on the categorical labels (i.e., Mild Mental Disability MMD), which are used to determine eligibility for special education services.**

The Participation Guidelines for the Kentucky Alternate Assessments include a two-part process. First, the IEP team must consider each of the items below and answer “YES” to ALL statements to determine if the student will participate in the Kentucky Alternate Assessments. Then, the IEP team must select Performance Dimension A or Performance Dimension B of the scoring rubric. A form that can be used to document the IEP team decision can be found in Appendix B.

**Participation Guidelines**

**Instructions:** 1) Answer “Yes” to all of the following statements and 2) select the Performance Dimension based on the descriptors provided.

**Part 1:**

The student’s demonstrated cognitive ability and adaptive behavior itself prevents completion of the general education course of study even with program modifications and/or accommodations;

The student’s current adaptive behavior requires extensive direct instruction in multiple settings to accomplish the application and transfer of skills necessary in school, work, home, and community environments;

**It is important to note that participation in the KY Alternate[0] Assessments should not be based solely on the categorical labels (i.e., Mild Mental Disability MMD), which are used to determine eligibility for special education services.**

The student's inability to complete the course of study may not be the result of excessive or extended absences; or it may not be primarily the result of visual or auditory disabilities, specific learning disabilities, emotional-behavioral disabilities, or social, cultural, and economic differences;

The student is unable to apply or use academic skills at a minimal competency level in natural settings (i.e., home, community, or work site) when instructed solely or primarily through school-based instruction;

The student is unable to acquire, maintain, generalize skills, and demonstrate performance without intensive, frequent, and individualized community-based instruction; and

For a student with disabilities who is age-equivalent to an 12<sup>th</sup> grader, 18 years old, or who is in his/her last anticipated year of school (see Section 1, B.2), the student is unable to complete a regular diploma program even with extended schooling, program modifications, and accommodations.

Part 2:

The IEP team must select one of the following: Performance Dimension A or Performance Dimension B using the specified indicators.

**Performance Dimension A: Attainment** should be chosen if the student's communication is best described by the following indicators:

Student uses verbal or written words, signs, Braille, or language-based augmentative systems to request, initiate, and respond to questions, describe things or events, and express refusal.

OR

Student uses intentional communication, but not at a symbolic language level:  
Student uses understandable communication through such modes as gestures, pictures, objects/textures, points, etc., to clearly express a variety of intentions.

**Performance Dimension B: Progress** *may* be chosen if the student's communication is best described by the following indicators. While students who participate in Performance Dimension B may be able to score at the proficient level, distinguished scores are *not* available if this performance dimension is chosen.

Student communicates primarily through cries, facial expressions, change in muscle tone but no clear use of objects/textures, regularized gestures, pictures, signs, etc. to communicate.

Student alerts to sensory input from another person (auditory, visual, touch, movement) BUT requires actual physical assistance to follow simple directions or the student's response to sensory stimuli (e.g., sound/voice; sight/gesture; touch; movement; smell) is unclear.

Participation in Performance Dimension B: Progress requires a formal IEP or ARC team meeting.

Grade 14 occurs once a student has completed grade 12 assessment.

The IEP team may decide that a student who communicates as described for Performance Dimension B *may* choose to assess the student using Performance Dimension A.

The IEP team may decide that a student who communicates as described for Performance Dimension B *may* choose to assess the student using Performance Dimension A.