

Dear Parents,

I am writing this letter to keep you updated on the change in the high school exit summary for students with severe disabilities. Many parents have been asking about the change from the IEP diploma to this new credential so I thought it would be helpful to explain the Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential.

The **Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential** is the high school exit credential for students with severe disabilities, who are eligible to take the New York State Alternate Assessment beginning this school year. The Skills and Achievement Credential will provide this group of students, who are exiting school after attending at least 12 years, excluding kindergarten, with a commencement certificate similar in form to the diploma issued by Mamaroneck Public Schools.

The Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential must be accompanied by documentation of the student's skills and strengths and levels of independence in academic, career development and foundation skills needed for post-school living, learning and working.

The following outlines information regarding the Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential:

- Requirements
- Summary Form
- Instruction
- Transition Planning

Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential: Requirements

The Board of Education or trustees of a school must issue a Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential to each student with a severe disability in accordance with the following rules:

1. Only students with disabilities who have been instructed and assessed on the alternate performance level for the State learning standards are eligible for this credential award.
2. The credential may be awarded any time after such student has attended school for at least 12 years, excluding kindergarten or received a substantially equivalent education elsewhere; or at the end of the school year in which a student attains the age of 21.
3. The credential would not be considered a regular high school diploma in accordance with State standards or for federal accountability purposes.
4. The credential must be similar in form to the diploma issued by the school district or nonpublic school, except that there shall appear on the credential a clear annotation to indicate the credential is based on achievement of alternate academic achievement standards.
5. The credential must be issued together with a summary of the student's academic achievement and functional performance (Student Exit Summary) and must include documentation of the student's:

■achievement against the Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) learning standards
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/cte/cdlearn/>;

■level of academic achievement and independence as measured by NYSAA;

■skills, strengths, interests; and

■as appropriate, other achievements and accomplishments.

6. For students less than 21 years old, the credential must be provided with a written assurance that the student continues to be eligible to attend the public schools of the school district in which the student resides without payment of tuition until the student has earned a regular high school diploma or until the end of the school year in which the student turns age 21, whichever occurs first.

Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential: Student Exit Summary Form

1. Level of achievement and independence for each of the CDOS standards, including, but not limited to:

- career development;
- integrated learning; and
- universal foundation skills including: basic skill in reading, writing, listening, speaking, math and functional math;
- thinking skills;
- personal qualities;
- interpersonal skills;
- use of technology;
- managing information and resources; and
- Systems skills.

2. Academic skills, as measured by the State assessment for students with severe disabilities (i.e., NYSAA); and

3. Strengths and interests and, as appropriate, other student achievements and accomplishments.

Instruction to Prepare Students for the Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential

In order for students to develop the competencies that must be documented with the credential award, students must be provided instruction in CDOS learning standards and be provided opportunities, as appropriate, to engage in instructional and work preparation experiences, both in school and, whenever possible and appropriate, in the community. Schools are encouraged to review their curriculum instruction for students with severe disabilities to ensure that such students have maximum opportunities to achieve their highest academic and career development potentials.

The Learning Standards for CDOS include key ideas, performance indicators describing expectations for students, and sample tasks suggesting evidence of progress toward the standards (see <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/cte/cdlearn/documents/cdoslea.pdf>). The Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) Resource Guide with Core Curriculum is a companion document to the CDOS learning standards. It further develops the core content for each learning standard and career major. The document is also rich with teacher developed classroom activities that help students achieve the CDOS standards (see <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/cte/cdlearn/cdosresourceguide.html>).

Transition Planning and Services

To appropriately prepare a student for the Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential, the school must develop an individual transition plan documented in the student's IEP. Beginning with post-secondary goals projected for the student, the IEP transition plan identifies the needs of the student to meet those post-secondary goals and recommends annual goals and services to incrementally prepare the student to meet his/her post-secondary goals for living, learning and working. Individualized transition planning must begin as early as possible, but not later than the school year in which a student turns age 15. The coordinated set of transition activities must be focused on improving both the academic and functional achievement of the student with a disability to facilitate his/her movement from school to post-school activities.

High school transition planning includes exploring post-secondary opportunities and employment options and should include connecting with the adult service agencies that may provide the student with services when he or she is no longer eligible for a free appropriate public education after the age of 21. For additional information on transition planning, see <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/transitionplanning-2011.htm>.

Please contact Student Support Services if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,
Lori Freeman
Director of Special Education PreK-12