

# High School Diploma Options for Students with Disabilities

Successful transitions to post-school adult life for students with disabilities require lots of planning, goal-setting, and decision-making. One of the most important decisions to be made is the type of high school diploma the student will work toward. Beginning at age 14, the student and family make this diploma decision with the individual educational plan (IEP) team. The decision is based on the student's needs and goals for the future.

It is important that families be fully informed about diploma options, because a student's opportunities for employment, further education and training, and military service after graduation may depend on the type of diploma that the student earns. The diploma decision may be changed later through an IEP meeting, if necessary.

The IEP team must make an initial diploma decision at the IEP meeting during the student's eighth-grade year or during the school year of the student's 14th birthday (whichever comes first). IEP teams should consider diploma options in the following order, according to the student's needs and abilities:

- **Standard Diploma**
- **Standard Diploma with FCAT waiver**
- **Special Diploma, Option 1**
- **Special Diploma, Option 2**

Depending on the diploma option selected, some students may need to spend more than four years in high school. The school district must continue to offer special education and related services until a student with a disability is 22, or until the student earns a standard diploma, whichever comes first. Students who do not meet requirements for a standard or special diploma may be awarded either a regular or a special certificate of completion, depending on their coursework.

This pamphlet provides information about the various diplomas and certificates of completion. It describes requirements students must meet and the opportunities for post-school education or employment typically available to students with each type of diploma or certificate of completion. The back page describes the GED Exit Option Model, which is available only to students who are at least 18 years old. The back page also includes a chart that shows the differences in post-school opportunities offered by each type of diploma or certificate of completion.

**Note:** There may be exceptions to general admission policies, such as provisional enrollment for community college or acceptance into the military for students with special diplomas. Families should investigate further to find out about specific requirements for employment, the military, technical programs, and postsecondary education. Further tests such as college placement, basic skills, or ability tests may be used to determine eligibility for some options.

Getting the Right Fit

# Standard Diploma

The standard diploma is the type of high school diploma earned by most students who graduate from Florida high schools. All students, including students with disabilities, may work to earn a standard diploma. Students must meet the graduation requirements set by the state *and* any additional requirements set by the local school district.

The following are the state requirements for a standard diploma:

- The student must earn an overall 2.0 grade point average (GPA) on a 4.0 scale.
- The student must earn a passing score on both portions of the grade 10 Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).
- The student must successfully complete credits in the required subject areas for one of the following graduation programs:
  - the traditional 24-credit standard diploma
  - the three-year, 18-credit college preparatory diploma
  - the three-year, 18-credit career preparatory diploma.

At the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, students working toward a standard diploma will be asked to select one of these three programs.

**Some local school districts have additional requirements for the 24-credit program. Check with the local school board about local requirements.**

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*After graduation with a standard diploma, students may enter the work force; military service; or postsecondary education institutions such as technical centers, community colleges, and universities.*

# Standard Diploma with FCAT Waiver

For students with disabilities, the IEP team may waive the FCAT requirement for graduation with a 24-credit standard diploma. To be considered for the waiver, a student must meet all of the following criteria:

- The student has taken the grade 10 FCAT with appropriate, allowable accommodations at least twice and has participated in the March administration of the FCAT during the senior year.
- The student has participated in intensive remediation in math and/or reading, if passing scores were not earned.
- The student is progressing toward meeting the minimum number of course credits prescribed by the state and district school board.
- The student has demonstrated the knowledge, skills, and abilities required by the grade 10 Sunshine State Standards.
- The student has an overall grade point average of 2.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale.
- The IEP team has determined that the FCAT cannot accurately measure the student's abilities, even if all appropriate, allowable testing accommodations are used.

If there is sufficient evidence that the student has mastered the applicable Sunshine State Standards and the IEP team determines that the FCAT is **not** an accurate measure of the student's ability, the FCAT requirement may be waived for either the reading portion, the mathematics portion, or both portions of the test, and the student may graduate with a standard diploma.

**An FCAT waiver may be used only for the traditional 24-credit graduation program. The FCAT waiver is not available to students in either of the three-year, 18-credit options.**

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*After graduation with a standard diploma, students may enter the work force; military service; or postsecondary education institutions such as technical centers, community colleges, and universities.*

# Special Diploma

Special diplomas are available to certain students with disabilities who have been identified as specific learning disabled, emotionally handicapped, educable mentally handicapped, trainable mentally handicapped, physically impaired, language impaired, or profoundly handicapped (profoundly mentally handicapped, dual sensory impaired, autistic, and severely emotionally disturbed).

Students identified as visually impaired or speech impaired are not eligible for a special diploma unless they have another identified disability.

There are two types of special diplomas: **Option 1 and Option 2**. The requirements for each are listed below.

**The three-year, 18-credit graduation programs are not available for students working toward a special diploma.**

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*After graduation with a special diploma, students may enter the work force, possibly enter military service, attend adult basic education classes, or possibly be provisionally enrolled in a community college or technical center. They may be required to take a test of basic skills and complete remedial coursework.*

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## Special Diploma, Option 1 Requirements

The requirements for a special diploma under **Option 1** are as follows:

- The student must earn the minimum number of course credits determined by the local school board.
- The student must show mastery of the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma.



## Special Diploma, Option 2 Requirements

Special diploma, **Option 2**, is based on mastery of a set of employment and community competencies identified in the graduation training plan developed for each individual student by the IEP team.

The requirements for a special diploma under **Option 2** are as follows:

- The student must be successfully employed for at least one semester, at or above minimum wage.
- The student must achieve all annual goals and short-term objectives related to employment and community competencies in the graduation training plan.
- The student must show mastery of competencies in his or her employment and community competencies training plan.

# Certificates of Completion

Students who complete the required courses but fail to meet the other diploma requirements may receive a certificate of completion. **A certificate of completion is not a diploma.** It certifies that the student attended high school.

**Certificates of completion are not available for students on the three-year, 18-credit graduation programs.**

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*After graduation with a certificate of completion, students may enter the work force, attend adult basic education classes, or possibly be enrolled in a community college or technical center. Students may be required to take the college placement test or a test of basic skills and complete remedial coursework.*

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## All Students

A **certificate of completion** is available to any student pursuing a standard 24-credit diploma who passes the required courses but fails to achieve the required grade point average and/or pass the grade 10 FCAT.

- A regular **Certificate of Completion** may be awarded to a student who completes all standard course requirements, but who is unable to earn an overall 2.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale **and** earn a passing score on the grade 10 FCAT.
- A **Certificate of Completion—College Placement Test Eligible** may be awarded to a student who completes standard course requirements and earns an overall 2.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale but who is unable to earn a passing score on the grade 10 FCAT. Students who receive a Certificate of Completion—College Placement Test Eligible must be allowed to take the College Placement Test and be admitted to remedial or credit courses at a Florida community college, as appropriate.

## Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who are eligible for a regular certificate of completion have further considerations:

- Students with disabilities who have not passed the FCAT may be eligible for an FCAT waiver, if they meet all other requirements for graduation with a standard diploma.
- Students with disabilities who are eligible to receive a regular certificate of completion may choose to receive a Special Diploma, Option 1, instead.
- Students with disabilities who are eligible to receive a regular certificate of completion may choose to remain enrolled and continue to receive exceptional student education (ESE) services in pursuit of a standard diploma until their 22 birthday.
- A **special certificate of completion** is available to students with disabilities who are unable to meet all of the requirements for a special diploma. The certificate indicates that the student passed the required ESE courses but did not master all of the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma.

# Quick Reference Chart

	Is a high school diploma	Is recognized by employers	Is accepted by technical centers	Is accepted by community colleges	Is accepted by state universities	Is accepted by the military
<b>Standard Diploma</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Standard Diploma with FCAT waiver</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Special Diploma Option 1</b>	Yes	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	No	Maybe
<b>Special Diploma Option 2</b>	Yes	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe	No	Maybe
<b>Regular Certificate of Completion—College Placement Test Eligible</b>	No	No	Maybe	Yes	No	No
<b>Regular Certificate of Completion</b>	No	No	Maybe	Maybe	No	No
<b>Special Certificate of completion</b>	No	No	Maybe	Maybe	No	No
<b>GED</b>	Yes	Maybe	Yes	Yes	No	Maybe

*("Maybe" indicates a need for the family to get more information.)*

For more information, contact the IEP team, school principal, or school district administrator of exceptional student education. Or contact the Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services at 850-245-0478; [www.myfloridaeducation.com/commhome](http://www.myfloridaeducation.com/commhome)

## State of Florida High School Diploma (GED)

Any student who is at least 18 years old and who has not earned a standard diploma may earn a State of Florida diploma by passing the Tests of General Educational Development (GED). The GED consists of separate tests in English, social studies, science, literature, and mathematics. Students must also write a 200-word essay. Special editions are available in Spanish, large print, and braille, and on audiocassette. GED test preparation classes are offered through local adult education programs.

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*After receiving a State of Florida diploma, students may enter the work force, military service, community college, or technical school (depending on the school and program). Students may be required to take a test of basic skills.*

## GED Exit Option Model

In some school districts, students who lack the required course credits or grade point average may be eligible to work toward a diploma under the GED Exit Option Model. These students may earn a standard diploma from their high school, as well as a State of Florida diploma, by passing both the FCAT and the GED tests.



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Commissioner*