
SPECIAL EDUCATION CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to develop an alternative pathway to graduation, allowing students with Individualized Education Plans (“IEP”) who have significant disabilities to earn a Certificate of Completion (“COC”) from Excel Academy Charter School and its programs (“EACS”) based on federal and state mandates/legislation and California Department of Education (“CDE”) requirements. By developing a pathway that requires the same number of minimum state course requirements, students with disabilities can earn verification of school enrollment and engagement.

California public school students with significant disability conditions have the option to pursue a non-diploma track that will earn an alternative form of certification permitting participation in graduation and graduation related activities.

The U.S. Department of Education states, “...certificates of completion are used for students with IEPs who have not met state graduation requirements but still want to participate in graduation ceremonies with their class.” Additionally, state-defined alternate high school completion options are permitted to be offered under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Pub. L. No. 114- 95 § 114 Stat. 1177 (2015-2016). Guidance from the U.S. Department of Education concerning eligibility states: “Only a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities is eligible for a State-defined alternate diploma, and only if the student has taken the State’s alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards under section 1111(b)(2)(D) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (“ESEA”) and met any other State-defined requirements. (ESEA section 8101(23)(A)(ii)(I)(bb), (25)(A)(ii)(I)(bb); 34 C.F.R. § 200.34(c)(3))”

The high school graduation course requirements in California include a set of 13 minimum courses required under the California Education Code, in addition to other coursework adopted by the Local Education Agency (“LEA”). Ed. Code §51225.3 provides that all pupils receiving a diploma of graduation from a California high school must have completed all of the following courses, while in grades 9 to 12, inclusive.

Students with identified unique needs related to a disability condition are eligible for an alternate High School completion option, per their active Individualized Education Plan (“IEP”). If it is determined by the IEP team that the appropriate High School completion path is a Certificate of Completion (“COC”), the student will be required to meet the following requirements:

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1. Three years/six semesters of Language Arts (“ELA”)
2. Two years/four semesters of mathematics
3. Two years/four semesters of science, including one year each of life and physical science
4. Two years/four semesters of social studies
5. Two years/four semesters in physical education, unless the pupil has been exempted pursuant to the provisions of EC Section 51241
6. Three years/six semesters of Employment, Education, and Life Skills.
Five credits (one semester minimum) required in each category.

As IEP Teams consider the COC recommendation, the following information should be noted:

1. A COC is not equivalent to a high school diploma or GED graduation equivalency test.
2. A COC is not usually accepted at higher institutions of learning; most 4-year colleges and trade schools require a high school diploma or its equivalent for entrance. However, admission to community college programs is available to any adult age 18 and above, regardless of high school completion status.
3. The Armed Services limits the number of COC and GED candidates allowed to enlist in the military each year (between 1% and 10% depending on the branch) and the minimum requirements for the Armed Forces Qualification Test are higher for COC holders as opposed to those with high school diplomas.
4. A COC may affect the student’s ability to gain employment where a high school diploma is a job requirement.
5. To be eligible to receive federal student aid, a student must have either a high school diploma or a GED.

EACS will ensure that students participating in its COC pathway have options for effective, research based curriculum choices that include life skills. Curriculum is required to be provided at a student’s independent level with access to grade level general education curriculum and standards. The total number of credits required for a student who is working towards a certificate of completion is 140 credits.

If a student with an IEP is able to complete the prescribed courses in: ELA, math, science, social studies, PE, and transition/functional skills curriculum as described above, a COC may be awarded by EACS if the student has completed the following requirements:

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1. Satisfactory completion of 140 credits of a prescribed alternative course of study as identified on the student's IEP.
2. Satisfactory progress toward student's IEP goals and objectives during high school as determined by the IEP Team.
3. Satisfactory high school attendance, participation in the instruction prescribed in the student's IEP, and achievement of transition goals and objectives.
4. Satisfactory participation in required statewide testing (California Alternate Assessment).

Students with disabilities who complete the COC path are eligible to participate in one graduation ceremony and any school activity related to graduation once all requirements are met. Completing the COC requirements and exiting high school does not automatically terminate Free Appropriate Public Education ("FAPE") eligibility and does not serve to exit a student from special education. Federal law requires schools to provide "specially defined instruction, and related services, at no cost to parent/guardian, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability." The law requires schools to provide disabled students with these special supports from age 3 until age 22, or until they graduate from high school with a high school diploma.

Students who receive a COC may decide to return to high school and can do so through the age of 22. There are three events that end the school's responsibility to a student with a disability.

1. Student earns and receives a high school diploma.
2. Student turns 22.
3. Student or parent/guardian (in the case of conserved adults) requests revocation of all special education and related services.

Given that the aforementioned is based on an IEP team recommendation, the IEP team will meet to discuss high school completion options and determine the appropriate path for any student identified with a significant cognitive disability. This IEP meeting may occur as early as the spring semester of the student's 8th grade year but will be held no later than the first semester of enrollment in 9th grade coursework. The student's progress toward COC requirements will then be revisited at each IEP meeting to follow.