



Finishing High School: Certificate of Completion vs. Diploma

Completion of high school is an important time for all students. In Michigan, to earn a high school diploma, students must complete specific requirements set forth in the [Michigan Merit Curriculum \(MMC\)](#). The MMC can be individualized through a personal curriculum (PC), and is set up for students to demonstrate what they know and can do in order to receive a diploma at the end of their high school education. When a student does not participate in or has not completed the MMC requirements, the student will not earn a diploma and instead may receive a certificate of completion. There is no universal definition for a certificate of completion, which means there is variability in how certificates may be distributed and what a certificate may be called. Additionally, a certificate of completion recognizes a student for completion of a program. However, the certificate is not a recognized credential for purposes of employment or enrollment in college.

Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC) Requirements

The MMC was established under Michigan law and requires a minimum of 18 credits across subjects including math, physical education, science, social studies, visual performing and applied arts, and world language. This includes [academic requirements](#) (standards, benchmarks, and guidelines) set by the state with skills and knowledge students are expected to learn.

Completion of the MMC With a Personal Curriculum

All students must meet MMC requirements to receive a diploma whether or not they have an individualized education program (IEP). The [personal curriculum \(PC\)](#) is a tool which can be used to modify requirements of the MMC for students with an IEP to access and be successful in meeting MMC requirements for a diploma. If a PC is developed, it must be agreed upon by the superintendent or designee and the parent to be implemented.

Certificate of Completion

The IEP in place by the student's 16th birthday will include a transition plan which identifies the student's course of study. The course of study is either an MMC diploma or a certificate of completion. IEP teams, including the parents, must take each student's individual needs into account when identifying the course of study. A student's course of study should be evaluated annually, may change over time, and is individualized.

A certificate is not equivalent to a diploma and is not an accredited or legally recognized credential. Not all districts offer the option of a certificate of completion and some districts may have different forms of recognition for students who did not participate in or did not complete the MMC requirements. Other terms for certificate of completion may include certificate of attendance or certificate of participation.

When the student does not earn a diploma, he or she may be entitled to services and supports if they continue to meet special education eligibility. Often these services are available through post high school special education programming and focus on independent living skills and transitioning to the community. These services are usually offered through an intermediate school district or local school district and may be available until the student is 26 years of age.

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Family Matters fact sheets are intended to enhance public understanding of Michigan's special education system and are not a substitute for official laws and regulations.



A Comparison: Diploma and Certificate of Completion

Question to Consider	Diploma	Certificate of Completion
What are the requirements?	Student meets MMC credit requirements with or without a personal curriculum (PC)	Student has completed high school but has either not met requirements of the MMC or did not participate in the MMC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School determines requirements to get a Certificate of Completion • No legal requirement • Given at discretion of school district
Are accommodations allowed?	Yes; as documented in the IEP	Yes; as documented in the IEP
Do public school services end?	Yes	No, and an eligible student may continue to receive special education services to 26 years of age
Can the student participate in graduation activities?	Participation in graduation activities is at district discretion	Participation in graduation activities is at district discretion
Is the student eligible for admission to colleges or universities?	Yes, as long as other college or university requirements are met	Possibly, the student should contact the Student Disability Office for more information; also, the student may not be eligible for federal financial aid
Can the student be accepted by vocational or technical schools?	Yes	Possibly, the student should contact the Student Disability Office for more information
Can the student obtain employment?	As long as employment requirements are met	As long as employment requirements are met

Resources



Michigan Alliance for Families
information, support, and education

[Michigan Alliance for Families: Certificate of Completion](#)

Michigan Department of Education (MDE) Michigan Merit Curriculum resources:

- [Michigan Merit Curriculum \(MMC\) webpage](#)
- [Michigan Merit Curriculum High School Graduation Requirements](#) (document including legal information, FAQs, standard, and content information)
- [Michigan Merit Curriculum \(MMC\) One Sheet](#) (one page information sheet)