



Guidance

Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education
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Graduation Decisions for Students with Disabilities

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 \(MMC\)](#). A high school diploma is available to all students and does not include an alternative credential which is not fully aligned with the State's academic standards, such as a certificate or a general educational development credential (GED). 34 CFR § 300.102(a)(3)(i).

This document supports Individualized Education Program (IEP) Teams in developing an individualized plan for graduation over a multi-year time frame, using strategies and planning tools outlined below.

Course of Study

The [National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative \(NTACT:C\)](#) defines course of study as, “a multi-year description of coursework from the student’s current to anticipated exit year needed to achieve the student’s desired post-school goals.” The course of study should focus on:

- How the educational program can be planned and relate directly to the student’s goals beyond secondary education.
- How those courses are linked to post-secondary and Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals.

If the student is on a path to receive a diploma, ensure the course of study aligns with the [Michigan Merit Curriculum \(MMC\)](#).

The IEP Team must determine the instruction and educational experiences to assist the student in preparing for the transition from secondary education to post-secondary life. The IEP Team should consider the following:

- Desired post-secondary goals, strengths, interests, functioning levels and need for accommodations and modifications;
- The knowledge, skills, and behaviors the student will need to complete school and reach desired post-secondary goals;
- An educational plan, or course of study, for the student to ensure movement toward post-secondary goals; and
- Elective, advanced placement, modified or specially designed courses, as well as other educational experiences in the school or community.

The process for developing the course of study should assist the student, and their family, in selecting courses which are meaningful and motivate the student to complete their education with a direction. A student’s individualized course of study should be evaluated annually and may change over time. Requirements should be mapped out to address educational experiences, courses, work experiences, and transition services necessary to successfully complete their education.

The chart below is an example course of study for a ninth grade student with a post-secondary goal of becoming a certified auto mechanic. The determination of a course of study will be dependent on individual student goals and district course offerings.

Grade	Course of Study (from student’s current year to year of graduation)
9th	English 9, Civics, Algebra I, Physical Science, Health, Reading, Communication Technology, Career Interest Inventory (EDP)
10th	English 10, World History, Geometry, Biology, Physical Education, Spanish 1, Auto Mechanics, Job Exploration Counseling (PreETS)
11th	English 11, US History, Algebra II, Environmental Science, Strength Conditioning, Auto Mechanics II, Project Search
12th	English 12, Statistics, Advanced Strength and Conditioning, Auto Mechanics III, Co-op, Project Search

Personal Curriculum

The [Personal Curriculum \(PC\)](#) is a tool which can be used by a district to modify requirements of the MMC for all students, in order to individualize the rigor and relevance of the educational experience and assist the student in earning a high school diploma. PCs are designed to serve students who want to accelerate, or go beyond, the MMC requirements or for students who need to individualize learning requirements to meet MMC expectations. The intention of a PC is to make the MMC accessible to all students while maintaining the academic rigor required to uphold the integrity of the high school diploma.

Access to additional modifications to individualize the MMC requirements leading to a diploma, is available for students with IEPs who are able to demonstrate a need for the modification to the MMC within the area of his/her disability. All PC modifications must align to a student's IEP, Educational Development Plan (EDP), and transition plan, and must be approved by a PC team which includes the parent or guardian, and district leadership. The intent of the PC is to make minor modifications, leaving the majority of the MMC standards intact so students have a foundation of knowledge and skills for success in their adult lives.

Graduation and Eligibility for Special Education

Students with disabilities can receive a 'regular' high school diploma with or without a personal curriculum, upon meeting state and district graduation requirements.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires districts to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to all eligible students with disabilities. 34 CFR § 300.102. However, the obligation to make FAPE available does not apply with respect to students with disabilities who have graduated from high school with a regular high school diploma. Therefore, when a student with a disability receives a regular high school diploma their entitlement to special education ends.

Graduation from high school constitutes a change of placement, which requires prior written notice.

Certificate of Completion

A certificate of completion is a form of recognition for students completing a program or meeting a pre-defined set of skills but who have not met the requirements of the Michigan Merit Curriculum. The certificate of completion 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 used for certificate of completion may include certificate of attendance or certificate of participation. When students do not earn a diploma, they 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, in Michigan, may be available until students are 26 years of age.

Conclusion

Planning for a student's high school completion requires early and ongoing discussions by the IEP Team, with a balanced focus on academic requirements and transition needs. Planning for high school completion is not a last-minute decision, but rather a multi-year planning process.

Resources

- [Educational Development Plan Fundamentals](#)
- [Family Matters Personal Curriculum \(PC\) Fact Sheet](#)
- [Finishing High School: Certificate of Completion v. High School Diploma](#)
- [High School Graduation Requirements Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Michigan Merit Curriculum One Sheet](#)
- [Personal Curriculum \(PC\)](#)
- [Work Based Learning Manual](#)