



# NEBRASKA

## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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www.education.ne.gov  
301 Centennial Mall South  
P.O. Box 94987  
Lincoln, NE 68509-4987

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TEL 402.471.2295  
FAX 402.471.0117

## Memo

To: Nebraska School Superintendents  
From: Dean Folkers  
CC: Pam Tagart, Adria Bace, Diane Stuehmer, Valorie Foy, Matt Hastings, Brian Halstead, Deborah Frison  
Date: 10/11/2017  
Re: Changes to the Cohort Graduation Rate Calculation

This memo serves to inform you of upcoming changes to the calculation for the cohort graduation rate. For the 2018 graduation cohort, only students with a completer code 210 (Completer: Graduated with a Regular or Advanced Diploma) will be included in the numerator for the rate calculation.

In the past, both 210 and 211 (completer with an alternative/modified diploma) completer codes were included in the numerator. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) High School Graduation Rate Non-Regulatory Guidance dated January 2017 indicates that including both codes in the numerator is not allowable. Using preliminary data for the 2017 cohort, NDE did not find a significant change with this approach to the graduation rate calculation, yet NDE will continue to monitor.

Here are some clarifications provided to school districts that may help:

- A special education student that meets the same requirements as the all other students in the district may be reported as a 210 (Completer: Graduated with a Regular or Advanced Diploma).
- A special education student that completes their IEP, but does not meet the same graduation requirements as all other students required by the district should be coded as a 211 or 212. This issue is specifically addressed in A-14 and A-15 of the Non-Regulatory guidance.

Looking ahead to the 2018-19 school year, there are other considerations in the Non-Regulatory Guidance that NDE, including the Office of Special Education, will be discussing (*e.g.*, state-defined alternate diploma, residence and membership of contracted-in students, etc.). These considerations will not affect the 2018 cohort, but may affect the 2019 cohort.

For more information about this change, please contact Pam Tagart ([pam.tagart@nebraska.gov](mailto:pam.tagart@nebraska.gov)) or the NDE Helpdesk ([nde.helpdesk@nebraska.gov](mailto:nde.helpdesk@nebraska.gov)).



### **Regular high school diploma**

#### **A-13. How is a “regular high school diploma” defined?**

For the purposes of calculating the ACGR, a “regular high school diploma” is the standard high school diploma awarded to the preponderance of students in a State that is fully aligned with the State’s standards and does not include a general equivalency diploma, certificate of completion, certificate of attendance, or any other similar or lesser credential, such as a diploma based on meeting Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals. The term “regular high school diploma” also includes any “higher diploma” that is awarded to students who complete requirements above and beyond what is required for a regular high school diploma. (ESEA section 8101(43); 34 C.F.R. § 200.34(c)(2)).

#### **A-14. May a general equivalency diploma, alternative diploma, certificate of attendance, or diploma based on meeting IEP goals be counted as a regular high school diploma?**

No. A State may not include a recognized equivalent of a diploma as a regular high school diploma for the purpose of calculating the four-year or extended-year ACGR. (ESEA section 8101(43)(B); 34 C.F.R. § 200.34(c)(2)). Thus, students who graduate with a credential other than a regular high school diploma, such as a general equivalency diploma, modified diploma, certificate of completion, certificate of attendance, or a diploma based on meeting a student’s IEP goals, may not be counted in the numerator as having earned a regular high school diploma, but must be included in the denominator of the four-year and extended-year ACGR. (See A-18 for how a State may count a student who graduates with a State-defined alternate diploma).

#### **A-15. Why is a diploma based on meeting a student’s IEP goals considered a lesser credential?**

Under 34 C.F.R. § 300.320(a)(2), each child’s IEP must include a statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals, designed to: (1) meet the child’s needs that result from the child’s disability, to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum, and (2) meet each of the child’s other educational needs that result from the child’s disability. Although the use of standards-based IEPs has greatly expanded, IEP goals cannot serve as a proxy for determining whether a student has met a State’s grade-level academic content standards. Therefore, a diploma based on meeting IEP goals will not provide a sufficient basis for determining that the student has met a State’s grade-level academic content standards; rather, it will only demonstrate that the student has attained his or her IEP goals during the annual period covered by the IEP. Therefore, a diploma based on attainment of IEP goals, regardless of whether the IEP goals are fully aligned with a State’s grade-level content standards, should not be treated as a regular high school diploma.

### **State-defined alternate diploma**

#### **A-16. What is a State-defined alternate diploma for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities?**

A State-defined alternate diploma is a diploma that: (1) is standards-based, and (2) aligned with the State’s requirements for the regular high school diploma. Under the ESEA, a State has the

option to offer a State-defined alternate diploma to an eligible student with the most significant cognitive disabilities and count the student as a graduate in the State's ACGR if the student receives the State-defined alternate diploma within the time period for which the State ensures the availability of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) under section 612(a)(1) of the IDEA. (ESEA section 8101(23)(A)(ii)(I)(bb), (25)(A)(ii)(I)(bb); 34 C.F.R. § 200.34(a)(1)(ii), (c)(3), (d)(1)).

**A-17. Is a State-defined alternate diploma the same as a diploma based on meeting a student's IEP goals?**

No. As reflected in question A-16 above, a State-define alternate diploma must be both standards-based and aligned with the State's requirements for a regular high school diploma. Therefore, a diploma based solely on meeting a student's IEP goals cannot meet the definition of a State-defined alternate diploma.

**A-18. Who is eligible for a State-defined alternate diploma?**

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 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)).

**A-19. How must a State count students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who graduate with a State-defined alternate diploma in the four-year and extended-year ACGR?**

In a State that offers a State-defined alternate diploma, all students must be included in the cohort of entering first-time students in grade 9. (ESEA section 8101(23)(A)(i), (25)(A)(i); 34 C.F.R. § 200.34(a)(2)). Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are eligible for a State-defined alternate diploma must remain in the cohort through their fourth year of high school. (34 C.F.R. § 200.34(b)(5)(i)). A State may remove students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are eligible for a State-defined alternate diploma from the students' original cohort if the students do not graduate in four years when their original cohort completes grade 12, provided the student remains in school working toward the State-defined alternate diploma. Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who exit with no credentials (i.e., neither a regular high school diploma nor a State-defined alternate diploma) prior to the end of grade 12 must remain in the denominator for the students' grade 9 cohort.

If students with the most significant cognitive disabilities have not graduated or exited with credentials (e.g., regular high school diploma, State-defined alternate diploma) at the time their four-year cohort graduates, a State should remove the students from their original four-year cohort and reassign the students to the four-year cohort graduating in the year of their exit. Such students will then appear in the denominator of the new cohort assignment and, if they receive a State-defined alternate diploma, in the numerator for that cohort's four-year ACGR. The Department recommends that a State code these students within their data systems as potential State-defined alternate diploma recipients. This will ensure that these students are accounted for between their original grade 9 cohort's graduation and the students' actual

graduation or exit from high school. Reassignment of a student to a cohort must take place within the time period for which the State ensures the availability of FAPE for students with disabilities under section 612(a)(1) of the IDEA. At the time of exit, students must be included in the denominator regardless of how they exit (e.g., with a State-defined alternate diploma or certificate of attendance). A student who receives a State-defined alternate diploma is counted in the numerator. A student who receives any other credential or drops out must be counted in the denominator only. A student reassigned to a new cohort will be included in any extended-year ACGR rate associated with the student's new four-year cohort. (See Attachment E). A student with the most significant cognitive disability who is eligible to receive a regular high school diploma must remain in his or her original cohort for the calculation of the ACGR; only students who receive a State-defined alternate diploma may be reassigned to a different cohort. (34 C.F.R. § 200.34(a)(1)(ii), (b)(5)).

**A-20. Is there a cap on the number or percentage of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to whom a State may award a State-defined alternate diploma?**

No. There is no specific cap on the number or percentage of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to whom a State may award a State-defined alternate diploma. However, under section 1111(b)(2)(D) of the ESEA, a State must ensure that the total number of students assessed in each subject using an alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards does not exceed one percent of the total number of students in the State who are assessed in each subject. (Note: there is no similar cap on the percentage of students in an LEA who may be assessed using an alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards.) To be eligible for a State-defined alternate diploma, a student must have taken the State's alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards. While there is no cap on who may receive a State-defined alternate diploma, because of the connection to the alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards under section 1111(b)(2)(D) of the ESEA, the Department expects that, in general, no more than one percent of students graduating in a State in a given year would receive a State-defined alternate diploma.

**SECTION B. CALCULATING THE ACGR**

**Adjusting a cohort**

**B-1. How does a school or LEA “adjust” a cohort?**

The four-year ACGR follows a cohort, or a group of students, who begin as first-time grade 9 students in a particular school year and who graduate with a regular high school diploma in four years or less. An extended-year graduation rate follows the same cohort of students for an additional year or years. The cohort is “adjusted” by adding any student transferring into the cohort and by subtracting any student who, during the years covered by the rate, transferred out, emigrated to another country, transferred to a prison or juvenile facility, or died. (8101(23), (25); 34 C.F.R. § 200.34(b)). Additional requirements for adjusting a cohort apply to students eligible to receive a State-defined alternate diploma, which are described in question A-18.

