

# Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Alternate Diploma

1. What is the Alternate Diploma?
  - a. The Alternate Diploma is a diploma that is allowable under the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA) issued in accordance with USBE Board Rule [R277-705-5](#) for a student who is determined through the IEP process to be a student;
    - i. With a significant cognitive disability (SWSCD) as defined by [R277-705-2\(8\)](#);
    - ii. Who meets the requirements for participation in Utah's alternate assessments.
  - b. The Alternate Diploma is not an alternative diploma (GED, Adult Diploma, Certificate of Completion, or Career Development Credential).
    - i. The Alternate Diploma is not based solely on meeting a student's IEP goals.
    - ii. The Alternate Diploma is standards-based and aligned with state requirements for the regular high school diploma.
2. What are the current options for graduation for students with disabilities?
  - a. There are currently multiple graduation options for students with disabilities:
    - i. Graduate with a regular high school diploma.
    - ii. Graduate with an Alternate Diploma.
    - iii. Earn a certificate of completion (not counted as a graduate).
3. Is the Career Development Credential equivalent the Alternate Diploma?
  - a. The Career Development Credential is a career-focused work experience that is intended to be earned while a student is working toward a regular high school diploma or the Alternate Diploma. It does not end a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). For more information on the Career Development Credential, see FAQ document.
4. Why does Utah have the Alternate Diploma option?
  - a. Creating the Alternate Diploma option for SWSCDs allows a student the opportunity to learn rigorous standards-based content. It can also provide meaningful participation in his/her educational program and increase post-school outcomes.
5. Who can earn the Alternate Diploma?
  - a. A SWSCD who is accessing Utah grade level core standards through the alternate achievement standards (Essential Elements (EEs) for ELA/mathematics and Extended Core for science) and is participating in Utah's alternate assessments.
6. Who decides which diploma a student will earn?
  - a. The IEP team determines a student's pathway in accordance with LEA and [USBE Graduation Guidelines](#).
7. Can a SWSCD earn a regular high school diploma?
  - a. A SWSCD can earn a regular high school diploma if the student meets the requirements set by the LEA and the [USBE Graduation Guidelines for Students with Disabilities](#).
  - b. Completion of a regular high school diploma ends the LEA's obligation to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to a student with a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

8. Can a student work toward more than one type of diploma (e.g., the Alternate and a regular diploma)?
  - a. The IEP team should work with the student and the parent/guardian to determine the best pathway for the student.
    - i. A student who is pursuing the Alternate Diploma is a SWSCD who is accessing Utah grade level core standards through the alternate achievement standards (Essential Elements (EEs) for ELA/mathematics and Extended Core for science) and is participating in Utah's alternate assessments.
    - ii. A student who is pursuing a regular high school diploma is accessing the Utah core standards with accommodations and/or modifications. For more information on appropriate substitutions, see the [USBE Graduation Guidelines](#).
9. Will a student who receives the Alternate Diploma be eligible for federal aid at a post-secondary institution?
  - a. If a student meets the basic federal student aid eligibility requirements and the institution of higher education (IHE) participates in a [federal student aid](#) program, the student may be able to apply for certain types of federal financial aid. For more information regarding financial aid and a specific IHE, contact the admissions department of the institution.
10. Will IHEs accept the Alternate Diploma?
  - a. Each IHE has policies and procedures in place for admittance. A student who plans to attend a college or university should check with the admissions department at the school of their choice. [Think College](#) has information on college programs designed for students with SWSCD.
11. Will the Military accept the Alternate Diploma?
  - a. The requirements for the different military branches vary, but most require a minimum of a GED. A student who is interested in military service should contact a local recruiter or visit the [U.S. Military](#) website.
12. Is the Alternate Diploma recognized by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)?
  - a. NCAA schools require college-bound student athletes to build a foundation of high school courses to prepare them for the academic expectations in college. Visit the [NCAA Eligibility Center](#) for more information regarding NCAA approved courses.
13. Will the Alternate Diploma reduce employment opportunities?
  - a. Skills necessary to qualify a student for employment depend on the job duties and responsibilities required for a specific position. An alternate diploma should not limit a student from applying for a job that the student has the knowledge and skills to perform.
12. When applying for jobs, may a student with the Alternate Diploma indicate that they are a graduate?
  - a. A student who earns the Alternate Diploma is considered a high school graduate.
13. Can a student earn the Alternate Diploma in less than four years?
  - a. A student can complete an Alternate Diploma in less than four years if the student completes the requirements.

14. Will the Alternate Diploma option reduce graduation rates?
  - a. It may actually increase an LEA's graduation rate because a student who earns the Alternate Diploma will count as a graduate.
15. Will multiple diploma paths reduce the rigor and expectations for a student with a disability?
  - a. Most students with disabilities will earn a regular high school diploma. Only a SWSCD can earn the Alternate Diploma.
16. How long is an LEA required to provide services for a SWSCD who receives the Alternate Diploma?
  - a. Earning the Alternate Diploma does not end FAPE, therefore a student earning the Alternate Diploma is eligible for special education and related services until the student reaches the maximum age for eligibility as defined in the [USB E Special Education Rules](#).
17. How is a student who earns the Alternate Diploma reported to USB E by the LEA?
  - a. A student who earns the Alternate Diploma must be reported to UTREx with a high school completion status of 'GA' on the last enrollment record of the year. In order to submit a student to UTREx with the 'GA' code the student must have an associated SCRAM record in which the student is marked '1%'.
18. What does an LEA need to do to have the graduation cohort of a student who is on path to the Alternate Diploma reassigned?
  - a. Starting with the year of the student's original cohort year assignment a student who is on path to the Alternate Diploma must be reported to UTREx with a high school completion status of 'RA' on the last enrollment record of the year. As long as the student remains in school working toward the Alternate Diploma the LEA must continue to report the student to UTREx with a high school completion status of 'RA'. The cohort year will be reassigned one year at a time and can be reassigned multiple years in a row until the student completes the Alternate Diploma (and is reported to UTREx with the GA code), exits school, or otherwise ceases to continue on path to the Alternate Diploma.
19. How is a student who earns the Alternate Diploma included in reported graduation rates for both state and federal reporting?
  - a. A student who graduates with the Alternate Diploma is counted in the overall graduation rate for accountability as well as for SPP/APR Indicator 1 graduation rates. [ESSA's graduation rate guidance](#) provides information on calculations and adjusted cohorts.
20. Can a student who is working toward the Alternate Diploma who does not remain in school still count toward an LEA's graduation rate?
  - a. Once a student's cohort has been reassigned, if the student does not return to school that next year they will not count as a graduate. However, if the student then returns to school in a subsequent year, the student can still earn the Alternate Diploma if the requirements are met before reaching maximum age.