

Alternate Pathway to A High School Diploma

What is the alternate pathway diploma?

The alternate pathway to a high school diploma offers students with significant cognitive disabilities a way to earn a high school diploma. This is known as an alternate pathway diploma (*CA Education Code Section 51225.31*).

How is the alternate pathway diploma different from a certificate of completion?

The alternate pathway diploma is aligned to state standards, and to coursework that meets the state's minimum requirements. Upon completion of state standards-aligned coursework to meet statewide course requirements, the local educational agency (LEA) must award the qualifying student a diploma of graduation from high school. The certificate of completion requirements allows more flexibility, and are tied to a student's IEP goals, rather than strictly to state standards.

Why was alternate pathway diploma created?

The alternate pathway diploma ensures students with significant cognitive disabilities have the opportunity to earn a diploma that would allow them to access further education and/or post-secondary employment. Example: Many employers require a diploma, and this pathway can help students find employment.

Who is eligible for the alternate pathway diploma?

Students who have an IEP and are eligible to take the California Alternate Assessment (CAA) in 11th grade and complete state standard-aligned coursework to meet California minimum requirements (*CA Education Code Section 51225.3*).

Is there a timeline in determining the option of alternate pathway diploma?

Yes. The IEP team must determine and notify parent(s)/guardian(s) whether the student with an IEP may be eligible to receive a high school diploma under the alternate pathway diploma.

*Parent tip: Discuss options at the IEP meeting in 8th grade.

Is a student on this pathway still eligible for school district services until age 22?

Yes. Students who graduate under this pathway continue to have the right to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) until age 22. School districts remain the generic resource for students in these cases.

When is this option available?

An individual with exceptional needs, who entered ninth grade in the 2022-23 school year or later, shall be eligible for the alternate diploma pathway diploma. Interested students/families may communicate with their local educational agencies and/or their IEP team and continue to collaborate with their IPP planning team to address post-secondary and vocational goals.

For more detailed information, please visit: [A New Pathway to a High School Diploma - Laws, Regulations, & Policies \(CA Dept of Education\)](#)