



# Status of State-Defined Alternate Diplomas in 2018-19

NCEO Report 416



**NTACT**  
National Technical Assistance Center on Transition



**NCEO**  
National Center on Educational Outcome:

**Status of State-Defined Alternate Diplomas in  
2018-19**

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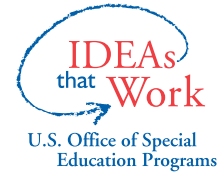
**September 2019**

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## Executive Summary

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The possibility of developing a “state-defined alternate diploma” for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities was included in the 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as the Every Student Succeeds Act. To count this diploma in a graduation measure for accountability, several criteria must be met, including that it must be standards-based, aligned to state requirements for the regular high school diploma, and obtained within the time period for which the state ensures the availability of a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

The purpose of this report is to summarize the status of state-defined alternate diplomas in the 50 U.S. states three years after ESSA indicated that states could develop these diplomas and use them in accountability calculations. The websites of state departments of education were searched for information on state-defined alternate diploma. Findings were sent to state departments of education for verification, with 86% responding by either verify the information found or to point to additional information.

The findings indicated that in school year 2018-19, eight states were developing or had implemented a diploma that they believed met the requirements for the state-defined alternate diploma. Names attributed to this diploma varied across the eight states, as did the implementation timelines. Details on course credit and exit exam requirements are presented. States made several resources available on their state websites, although most focused on the requirements rather than information that would help administrators and educators know how to implement the state-defined alternate diploma, or to help parents know how to make decisions for their own children with significant cognitive disabilities.

It is recommended that states intending to develop a state-defined alternate diploma consider ways to assist in the decision about whether parents and their children should pursue this diploma. Further, states should make information available on both the number of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities pursuing and earning a state-defined alternate diploma, and eventually, the post-school outcomes of these students.



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## Overview

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The “state-defined alternate diploma” was introduced in the 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This diploma is intended only for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who participate in a state’s alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS).

### Federal Requirements

The state-defined alternate diploma must meet specific requirements outlined in ESSA, including that it must be:

- Standards based
- Aligned with state requirements for the regular high school diploma
- Obtained within the time period for which the state ensures the availability of a free appropriate public education (FAPE)

As a result, to have a “state-defined alternate diploma” that meets ESSA requirements, a state needs to ensure that any graduation policy, course, or exit exam requirements for the alternate diploma be standards based, aligned with State requirements for a regular diploma, obtained within the FAPE period, and be defined by the State. Each of these requirements was described in more detail by Thurlow, Test, Lazarus, Klare, and Fowler (2016).

### Benefits of a State-Defined Alternate Diploma

Several benefits of establishing a state-defined alternate diploma have been identified. For example, this diploma option provides students with the most significant cognitive disabilities the opportunity to earn a diploma that shows they have completed a rigorous standards-based program of study. It also potentially provides them access to post-secondary education and employment opportunities that previously might have been denied to them.

Benefits to states have also been identified. ESSA explicitly allows for students earning a state-defined alternate diploma to be counted in the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR). In 2015, ACGR became a required part of states’ Title I accountability systems.

ESSA also made clear that other equivalents of diplomas (e.g., general equivalency diploma, certificate of completion, certificate of attendance, and other similar “lesser credentials”) would not count toward the calculation of the ACGR. States have had a history of establishing these

types of other diploma “equivalents” (see Johnson, Thurlow, Qian, & Anderson, 2019), yet few have targeted these other diplomas specifically for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

At the same time that ESSA allows state-defined alternate diplomas, it restricts the state-level participation of students in the AA-AAAS to 1.0% of the number of total tested students in a content area (e.g., reading/language arts, mathematics, science; see Thurlow & Lazarus, 2017). Data from 2015-16 indicated that more than 80% of states exceeded the 1.0% threshold (Thurlow & Wu, 2018). Those states exceeding the threshold are required to apply for a waiver, and are also subject to consequences for exceeding the threshold (Rooney, 2019). Because the state-defined alternate diploma option is intended for students who participate in the AA-AAAS, this threshold has implications for the number of students who would qualify for the state-defined alternate diploma option.

When ESSA introduced the “state-defined alternate diploma” option in 2015, 24 states offered diploma options specifically for students with disabilities, and additional states had multiple diploma and certificate options (e.g., completion, attendance, career and technical education) available for all students (Achieve & NCEO, 2016). In draft regulations, the U.S. Department of Education (2016) indicated that its review of state diploma options showed that no states had a state-defined alternate diploma that met the requirements outlined in ESSA for this diploma.

## Purpose of Report

It has now been three years since the state-defined alternate diploma was first allowed. There have been numerous discussions held with states about the pros and cons of developing a state-defined alternate diploma (Thurlow, Lazarus, & Gallo, 2017; Thurlow, Lazarus, & Strunk, 2017; Thurlow, Lazarus, & Test 2016), but until now, there has been no systematic documentation of which states are implementing or planning to implement a state-defined alternate diploma. The purpose of this report is to do just that—to document the status of state-defined alternate diplomas in states in 2018-19.

## Method

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From mid-January 2019 to mid-February 2019, we searched state department of education websites for information on state-defined alternate diplomas. Due to the variation in terminology, close attention was paid to discerning the difference between state-defined alternate diplomas and other alternatives for current and former students (e.g., high school equivalency credentials).



We documented information available on states' websites, and compiled all relevant documents. Based on these, we categorized states as either having or not having evidence of implementing (or planning to implement) state-defined alternate diplomas.

We crafted a verification process that would minimally burden state education professionals. We drafted two versions of e-mail notes, one for the states for which we found no evidence of state-defined alternate diploma availability, and one for states for which we located information about state-defined alternate diploma initiatives (see Appendix A). We sent the e-mails to state special education directors, essentially asking (a) whether the state had a state-defined alternate diploma; and (b) if the state had or was developing an alternate diploma, whether the links we located (and listed) were the most complete and relevant information available on the state's website. The verification window was initially 10 days, but was extended by a few days to permit clarification of states' responses when needed. The time period was February 15 through February 28, 2019. Out of the 50 states and one state entity (Washington, DC), 44 states responded, indicating a response rate of 86%. Verification responses were received from all states for which we had found evidence of a state-defined alternate diploma.

State respondents predominantly confirmed our initial findings about whether they either had or did not have a state-defined alternate diploma. One state indicated that, even though we found information on an alternate diploma on its website, it was no longer pursuing the development of a state-defined alternate diploma. Another state indicated that, despite having virtually no information on its website, it was in fact in the early stages of implementing a state-defined alternate diploma. States with state-defined alternate diplomas affirmed the webpages that we listed were indeed the correct and complete sources of information currently available. The additional state with a state-defined alternate diploma about which we had no initial information also provided documents describing its alternate diploma.

After the verification process was complete, we performed a quick review of the websites of states indicating they had a state-defined alternate diploma at the end of March. This enabled us to access additional information in order to provide full descriptions of states with state-defined alternate diplomas. Table 1 provides a list of steps we followed for our data collection.

**Table 1. Data Collection Steps**

<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Searched state websites in mid-January through mid-February 2019.</li><li>2. Contacted 51 (including DC) state special education directors on February 15, 2019 for verification, and heard back from respondents by the end of February 2019.</li><li>3. Revisited websites of states with verified state-defined alternate diplomas at the end of March 2019 to obtain all materials available as of March 31, 2019.</li></ol>
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## Results

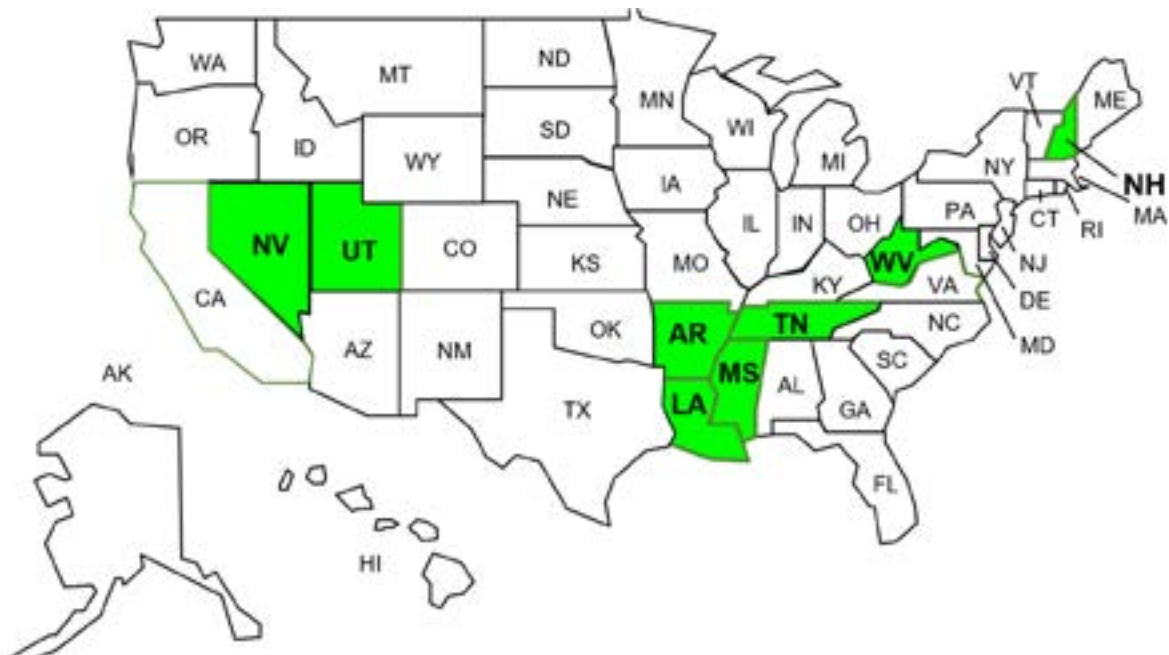
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Eight states provided documentation on their websites about their state-defined alternate diplomas. One of these states (New Hampshire) posted only a legal document that indicated districts could implement alternate diplomas.

### States with State-Defined Alternate Diplomas

The eight states for which we found website information about state-defined alternate diplomas, and that confirmed their work in developing state-defined alternate diplomas, included: Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Hampshire, Tennessee, Utah, and West Virginia (see Figure 1). The states varied considerably in the publicly-available information on their high school graduation systems, including their alternate diplomas. Some websites highlighted the state legislation and regulations pertaining to the development of alternate diplomas. Some provided summaries of official meetings at which an alternate diploma was discussed. Some provided presentation slides describing this new diploma program. As noted, one state, New Hampshire, had limited information on its website.

**Figure 1. States with State-Defined Alternate Diplomas**



## Names of Alternate Diplomas

Most of the eight states with state-defined alternate diplomas described their graduation system as awarding two diplomas: the standard diploma (also referred to as a regular or traditional diploma and an alternate diploma.) Several states identified the state-defined alternate diploma as simply the “alternate diploma” while others used similar terms, such as “alternate pathway to graduation” (see Table 2 for details). Two states used the term “alternative” rather than “alternate” in their names for the state-defined alternate diploma.

**Table 2. Diploma Names**

State	Alternate Diploma	Regular Diploma
Arkansas	Alternate Pathway to Graduation <sup>a</sup>	Core/General Pathway <sup>a</sup>
Louisiana	Alternative Pathway to a Diploma (for students with disabilities)	TOPS University Diploma and Jump Start Career Diploma <sup>b</sup>
Mississippi	Alternate Diploma	Traditional Diploma
Nevada	Alternative Diploma	Standard Diploma
Tennessee	Alternate Academic Diploma (AAD)	Regular Diploma
Utah	Alternate Diploma	Regular/Traditional Diploma
West Virginia	Alternate Diploma	Regular/Standard Diploma

Note. New Hampshire is not included in this table because this information was not provided on the state website.

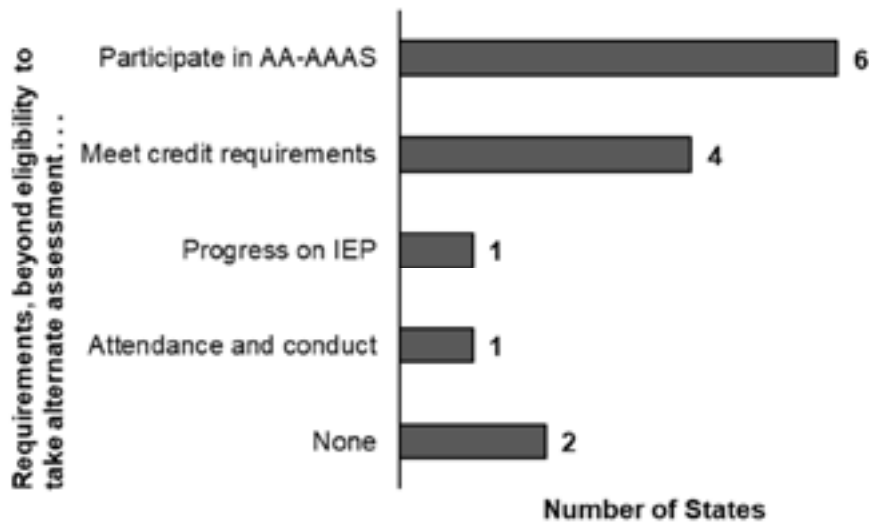
<sup>a</sup>Arkansas indicated that both the Core/General Pathway and the Alternate Pathway are pathways to one diploma, with different (but aligned) graduation requirements.

<sup>b</sup>Louisiana has two separate regular diplomas, with different requirements. See Appendix C for detailed information.

## Eligibility Guidelines

All states indicated students who were already determined by Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams to be eligible for taking the AA-AAAS can also pursue state-defined alternate diplomas. Additional criteria states identified for students to be eligible to pursue alternate diplomas are summarized in Figure 2. Six states indicated that to be eligible for the state-defined alternate diploma, the student had to be participating in the AA-AAAS. Four states indicated that students also needed to complete academic credits required in those states. Several states also had other criteria. For example, one state specified that students must also have demonstrated progress on their IEPs, as determined by IEP teams. Another state indicated that students needed to demonstrate appropriate attendance and conduct as a condition of being permitted to pursue a state-defined alternate diploma. Two states did not have information about any eligibility guidelines beyond being eligible to take the state’s AA-AAAS. See Appendix B for the state-by-state eligibility information.

**Figure 2. Eligibility Requirements**



Note. New Hampshire and West Virginia are included in “none” because they did not provide this information on their state websites.

### Implementation Timelines

States differed in the timing of implementing their state-defined alternate diplomas. We identified the graduating class first able to earn a state-defined alternate diploma in each state (see Table 3). Louisiana reported that it began awarding a state-defined alternate diploma in 2018. Two states indicated that they will award their first state-defined alternate diplomas at the end of the 2018-19 school year; one state will award with the class of 2020, and two states with the class of 2022.

**Table 3. Graduating Class First Eligible for Alternate Diploma**

State	Alternate Diploma	Graduating Class
Arkansas	Alternate Pathway to Graduation	2020
Louisiana	Alternative Pathway to a Diploma	2018
Mississippi	Alternate Diploma	2022
Nevada	Alternative Diploma	2022
Tennessee	Alternate Academic Diploma (AAD)	2019
Utah	Alternate Diploma	2019
West Virginia	Alternate Diploma	2021

Note. New Hampshire did not provide this information on its state website.

## State-Defined Alternate Diploma Requirements

**Course and credit requirements.** The total numbers of credits required to earn the state-defined alternate diplomas was the same or nearly identical to the numbers required for the standard diplomas in the seven states with available information (see Table 4). Across the states, credits ranged between 22 and 24 for the standard diplomas, and between 22 and 25 credits for the alternate diplomas. One state’s (West Virginia) website indicated that 16 credits were required for the alternate diploma. We calculated the number of credits based on the posted information for this state, and the low total was due to the absence of specific numbers of credits for some content areas.

Another state, Louisiana, required a different number of credits for the alternate diploma than for its standard diplomas. The career diploma required 23 credits, and the university diploma required 24 credits. The alternate diploma had a range of required credits—with a minimum requirement of 21 credits and a maximum of 25 required credits, based on academic coursework decisions approved by the IEP team. See Appendix C for state-by-state details on credit requirements for all content areas.

**Table 4. Total Credit Requirements for Alternate and Standard Diplomas**

State	Alternate Diploma	Standard Diploma
Arkansas	22.0	22.0
Louisiana	21.0 to 25.0	23.0 or 24.0 <sup>a</sup>
Mississippi	24.0	24.0
Nevada	23.0	23.0
Tennessee	22.0	22.0
Utah	24.0	24.0
West Virginia	16.0 <sup>b</sup>	24.0

Note. New Hampshire did not provide this information on its state website.

<sup>a</sup>Louisiana had a standard diploma option called “Career” that required 23.0 credits, and a “University” option that required 24.0 credits.

<sup>b</sup>West Virginia’s posted information for the alternate diploma did not list the required number of credits for some content areas.

Table 5 presents the minimum required credits for the state-defined alternate diploma and the standard diploma for English, math, science, and social studies. As shown in the table, three states required the same number of credits for the standard and alternate diplomas in these four academic content areas, while four states had one or more differences in academic credits for the two types of diplomas. In all cases, when there were differences in these content areas, the required numbers of credits were lower for the alternate diplomas than for the standard diplomas. Appendix C includes details on requirements for these content areas, as well as for other areas that states include in their diploma requirements (e.g., physical education, art, financial literacy).

**Table 5. Comparison of Credit Requirements for Alternate and Standard Diplomas**

State	English	Math	Science	Social Studies	Electives
Arkansas	Same	Same	Same	Same	Missing info
Louisiana	Same	Same	Unique <sup>a</sup>	Unique <sup>a</sup>	Different
Mississippi	Same	Same	Different	Different	Different
Nevada	Same	Different	Different	Different	Same
Tennessee	Same	Same	Same	Same	Missing info
Utah	Same	Same	Same	Same	Same
West Virginia	Same	Different	Same	Same	Missing info

Note. New Hampshire did not provide this information on its state website.

<sup>a</sup>In Louisiana, the number of credits in science and social studies for the alternate diploma is less than for the university diploma, but the same as for the career diploma.

**Exit exam requirements.** Three states—Louisiana, Mississippi, and Nevada—indicated that students seeking standard diplomas were required to complete academic assessments as a criterion for graduation. Table 6 shows the exit exam requirements for students earning alternate diplomas and standard diplomas. All three states required participation in AA-AAAS. One of the three states, Louisiana, indicated that students must earn a score of ‘meets standards’ or ‘exceeds standards’ on the AA-AAAS to earn the alternate diploma. Two other states did not explicitly indicate having alternate assessment score requirements. One additional state, Tennessee, indicated that students’ participation in end-of-course exams counted for a relatively small proportion of overall course grades for those seeking alternate diplomas; accordingly, students seeking alternate diplomas would not necessarily need to participate in end-of-course exams if other requirements (e.g., course requirements) were met to a sufficient extent.

**Table 6. Exit Exam Requirements for Alternate Diplomas and Standard Diplomas**

State	Alternate Diploma	Standard Diploma
Louisiana	Alternate assessment in ELA and math, score of “meets standards” or “exceeds standards,” or growth portfolio	End-of-course exams in Algebra or Geometry, English II or English III, and Biology or US History; ACT in English, math, reading, science; and ‘may additionally take the WorkKeys assessment’
Mississippi	Mississippi Academic Assessment Program-Alternate in Algebra, English, & Biology	End-of-course exams in Algebra I, Biology I, English II, and U.S. History; ACT English and ACT Math or ACT WorkKeys or SAT equivalency subscores

**Table 6. Exit Exam Requirements for Alternate Diplomas and Standard Diplomas (continued)**

State	Alternate Diploma	Standard Diploma
Nevada	Nevada Alternate Assessment	End-of-course exams in math (4 tests) and ELA (2 tests); CCR <sup>a</sup> : ACT in English, math, reading, science, written essay

<sup>a</sup>In Nevada, the information about general diploma exit exams included the term “CCR,” or “College- and Career-Ready.”

### Available Resources

Table 7 lists the types of state-defined alternate diploma resources available on state websites. Two types of resources were found. All states’ websites included resources describing the availability of, and requirements for, the state-defined alternate diploma. These included resources such as brief overviews, slide decks, and frequently asked questions (FAQs). In addition, three states included a link to resources to help teachers implement the state-defined alternate diploma. For one state (Mississippi), this document was generic and designed to “aid in providing quality classroom instruction for all students, including general education students and students with disabilities who receive instruction in general education settings.” See Appendix D for links to each state’s state-defined alternate diploma resources.

**Table 7. Type of State Defined Alternate Diploma Resources Available in Each State**

State	Administrators	Teachers	Parents	Students
Arkansas	R	R	R	R
Louisiana	R	R	R	R
Mississippi	R	R, I	R	R
Nevada	R	R, I	R	R
New Hampshire	R	R	R	R
Tennessee	R	R	R	R
Utah	R	R	R	R
West Virginia	R	R, I	R	R

R = Requirement Resources; I = Implementation Resources

## Discussion

Much has happened since a state-defined alternate diploma for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities was included as an option for states in ESSA in 2015. Since then, states have engaged in numerous discussions with each other (e.g., Thurlow, Lazarus, & Gallo, 2017; Thurlow, Lazarus, & Strunk, 2017; Thurlow, Lazarus, & Test, 2016), as well as with colleagues in

their own states and with other stakeholders. Now, in 2019, eight states have either implemented, or are on the path to implementing, what they believe to be a state-defined alternate diploma.

The purpose of this report was to share information on which states have, or are planning to have, a state-defined alternate diploma and what they are requiring of students to earn one of these diplomas. We started this work by searching states' websites to find any information that the state might have on this new type of diploma designated for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. After a thorough website search, we verified our findings with the states.

We found the eight states that confirmed that they had a state-defined alternate diploma varied considerably in where they were in implementation as well as the extent to which information was available for stakeholders, including parents of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These states also varied in a number of other ways, including the terms they used to describe their state-defined alternate diploma, their eligibility requirements, the graduating class implementation date, and the course credit and exit exam requirements.

We also found the information made available publicly by states was not always as clear as it might be in conveying the purpose of the state-defined alternate assessment, who the alternate diploma was for, and the requirements for earning this diploma. In fact, some states had old (and inaccurate) information posted on their websites. This sometimes resulted in confusing information being presented. For example, in one state information indicating that students who earn a state-defined alternate diploma would not be included in the state's Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate was old and inaccurate for the current status of the state's alternate diploma.

All but one of the eight states with a state-defined alternate diploma provided resources for the public, including educators and parents. These resources nearly always simply presented the requirements and policies of the state-defined alternate diploma; only rarely did they provide implementation resources that could help administrators and educators know how to implement it, or to help parents know how to make decisions for their own children with significant cognitive disabilities.

Despite the potential benefits for students of earning a state-defined alternate diploma, as well as for the state's Title I accountability system, rarely were the pros and cons of developing this diploma discussed publicly. Looking forward, states that do develop this diploma may want to consider ways to assist in the decision about whether parents and their children should pursue this diploma. Further, they likely will want to make the information on the outcomes of the state-defined alternate diploma public; this might include reporting annually the number of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities pursuing the diploma, and eventually, the post-school outcomes of these students and whether they are consistent with the goals of IDEA 2004 and the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (see Thurlow, Nye-Lengerman, & Lazarus, 2019), those being postsecondary education or competitive integrated employment.



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## Appendix A

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E-mail, Two versions

### 1) For states with no evidence of state-defined alternate diplomas:

Hi [Special Education Director's name],

The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) is examining the status of your state with respect to the ESSA-allowed “state-defined alternate diplomas.” Please take a moment to reply to this e-mail to verify the information we found in our website search (highlighted in yellow for clarity). Please respond by February 25, 2019.

1. Our search of your state’s website indicated that [state name] does not have a state-defined alternate diploma. Is this a correct conclusion?

YES, you are correct that we do not have a state-defined alternate diploma.

NO – we do have a state-defined alternate diploma.

If you do, please provide the weblinks to the most current information about your state’s state-defined alternate diploma:

If you have any questions about our request, please e-mail Chris Rogers at roge0229@umn.edu or Martha Thurlow at thurl001@umn.edu

Thank you for taking the time to provide this information!

Martha Thurlow, Director, NCEO

Chris Rogers, Research Fellow, NCEO

**2) For states with evidence of state-defined alternate diplomas:**

Hi [Special Education Director's name],

The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) is examining the status of your state with respect to the ESSA-allowed "state-defined alternate diploma." Please take a moment to reply to this e-mail to verify the information we found in our website search (highlighted in yellow for clarity). Please respond by February 25, 2019.

1. Our search of your state's website indicated that [state name] has a state-defined alternate diploma. Is this a correct conclusion?

YES, we have a state-defined alternate diploma

NO, we do not have a state-defined alternate diploma

We reached that conclusion based on information at the following weblink/s:

·  [state education website link/s]

2. Is this information the most current information available on your state's website?

YES, the weblink/s you listed are the most current information

NO, the weblink/s you listed are not the most current information

If not, please provide the weblinks to the most current information about your state's state-defined alternate diploma:

If you have any questions about our request, please e-mail Chris Rogers at roge0229@umn.edu or Martha Thurlow at thurl001@umn.edu

Thank you for taking the time to provide this information!

Martha Thurlow, Director, NCEO

Chris Rogers, Research Fellow, NCEO

## Appendix B

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### Eligibility Guidelines

#### Arkansas

The alternate pathway to graduation ... *provides a meaningful diploma option for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.*

⇒ *Arkansas Alternate Pathway to Graduation: Five Things Administrators Need to Know*

#### Louisiana

The alternative pathway to a high school diploma is for ... *Students with disabilities that significantly impact cognitive functioning and/or adaptive behavior. . . . Students assessed on the alternate assessment are able to pursue an alternative pathway to a high school diploma.*

⇒ *Louisiana Special Education Guidance for High School Students*

#### Mississippi

- *All students are required to participate in the Mississippi Academic Assessment Program Alternate (MAAP-A) with a score TBD.*
- *Students who have met the criteria on their IEP for having a Significant Cognitive Disability (SCD) may participate in a program of study to earn the Alternate Diploma.*

⇒ *Mississippi Diploma Options*

#### Nevada

Who is eligible to earn Nevada's Alternative Diploma?

In order to earn the Nevada Alternate Diploma, a student must:

1. *Be a student with a disability;*
2. *Participate in the Nevada Alternate Assessment;*
3. *Earn the prescribed credit minimum for the student's graduating cohort*

⇒ *Nevada Alternative Diploma Implementation Guidance*

#### New Hampshire

“... may be appropriate for some students with significant cognitive disabilities”. . . “who participate in the ... alternate assessment”

⇒ *Technical Advisory: Alternate Diploma*

## Tennessee

Who is eligible to earn the alternate academic diploma?

In order to earn the AAD, a student must have:

1. *participated in the high school alternate assessments;*
2. *earned the prescribed 22 credit minimum;*
3. *received special education services or supports and made satisfactory progress on an individualized education program (IEP);*
4. *satisfactory records of attendance and conduct; and*
5. *completed a transition assessment(s) that measures, at a minimum, postsecondary education and training, employment, independent living, and community involvement.*

⇒ **Frequently Asked Questions: Alternate Academic Diploma**

## Utah

*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;*

*With a significant cognitive disability (SWSCD) as defined by R277-7-5-2(8);*

*Who meets the requirements for participation in Utah's alternate assessments.*

⇒ **Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Alternate Diploma**

## AND

*the student meets all graduation requirements prior to exiting school ...*

⇒ **R277-705-5**

## West Virginia

Based upon the review of the data, the IEP Team must carefully consider the following questions:

1. *Is the student capable of attaining the West Virginia College- and Career-Readiness Standards?*
  - *If yes, the student is eligible for a standard diploma.*
  - *If no, proceed to next question.*
2. *Is the student capable of attaining the West Virginia College- and Career-Readiness Standards with instructional modifications and accommodations (pre-teach, reteach, specialized instructional strategies, differentiated instruction, co-teaching, instructional technology, etc.)*
  - *If yes, the student is eligible for a standard diploma.*
  - *If no, proceed to next question.*
3. *Does the student have significant impairment of cognitive abilities and adaptive skills that may require instruction in the Alternate Academic Achievement Standards?*

- *If yes, the student is eligible for an alternate diploma.*
- *If no, the IEP Team needs to reconsider Question 2 and revise the IEP to better meet the needs of the student.*

⇒ *Understanding Alternate Diplomas: What teachers, parents, and students need to know*





## **Appendix C**

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Credit Requirements for Alternate and Standard Diplomas

State	Diploma	English	Math	Science	Social Studies	Physical Education	Health	Arts	Tech./Computers	Finances	Electives	Career Prep.	Other	TOTAL
Arkansas	Alternate	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.0		1.0	0.5	M	M		6.0	0.5 <sup>g</sup>	22.0
	Standard	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	0.5	0.5	0.5	M	M		6.0	0.5 <sup>g</sup>	22.0
Louisiana	Alternate	4.0	4.0	2.0	2.0						2-4 <sup>f</sup>	7-9 <sup>f</sup>		unique <sup>f</sup>
	Standard	4.0	4.0	4 / 2 <sup>b</sup>	4 / 2 <sup>b</sup>	U <sup>c</sup>	U <sup>c</sup>	1 / 0 <sup>b</sup>			3 / 0 <sup>b</sup>	0 / 9 <sup>b</sup>	2 / 0 <sup>h</sup>	unique <sup>b</sup>
Mississippi	Alternate	4.0	4.0	2.0	2.0	0.5	0.5	1.0					4.0 <sup>i</sup>	24.0
	Standard	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.5	0.5	0.5	1.0	1.0					24.0
Nevada	Alternate	4.0	3.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	0.5	1.0	0.5					23.0
	Standard	4.0	4.0	3.0	1.0	2.0	0.5	1.0	0.5				M <sup>k</sup>	23.0
Tennessee	Alternate	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	M		M		0.5	M		M	22.0
	Standard	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	U <sup>d</sup>	U <sup>d</sup>	1.0		0.5	3.0		2.0 <sup>j</sup>	22.0
Utah	Alternate	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	U <sup>e</sup>	U <sup>e</sup>	1.5	0.5	0.5	5.5	1.0		24.0
	Standard	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	U <sup>e</sup>	U <sup>e</sup>	1.5	0.5	0.5	5.5	1.0	M <sup>m</sup>	24.0
West Virginia <sup>a</sup>	Alternate	4.0	3.0	3.0	4.0	1.0	1.0				M			16.0 <sup>n</sup>
	Standard	4.0	4.0	3.0	4.0	1.0	1.0	1.0			6.0			24.0

Tech./Computers = Technology or Computer Science

Finances = Financial Literacy / Personal Finance

Career Prep. = Career Readiness or Preparation

M = missing information; in these content areas, states referred to courses, but not numbers of credits.

U = unique; these states counted credits uniquely for physical education and health, including which diploma/s required them.

Note. New Hampshire did not provide this information on its state website.

<sup>a</sup>The course credit information provided for West Virginia will be effective for students graduating in 2020 onward.

<sup>b</sup>In Louisiana, there were two diplomas: "University" and "Career"; the general pathway required 24.0 credits for the University diploma and 23.0 credits for the Career diploma.

<sup>c</sup>Louisiana combined Physical Education and Health into one requirement, totaling 2.0 credits, for the general diplomas (both types).

<sup>d</sup>Tennessee combined Physical Education and Wellness into one requirement, totaling 1.5 credits, for the general diploma.

<sup>e</sup>Utah combined Physical Education and Health into one requirement, totaling 2.0 credits, for both the alternate diploma and the general diploma.

<sup>f</sup>In Louisiana, there were two diplomas: "University" and "Career"; the Alternative Pathway required a range of 21.0 to 25.0 credits, depending on which type of diploma was being earned.

<sup>g</sup>Oral communication

<sup>h</sup>Foreign language

<sup>i</sup>Life skills development

<sup>k</sup>Foreign language, with no specific number of credits; further, it variously referred to demonstrated proficiency in speaking "not less than two languages" and completing a "world language course."

<sup>l</sup>In Tennessee, the foreign language requirement for the general diploma "may be waived by the ... district ... to expand and enhance the elective focus."

<sup>m</sup>Library media skills coursework is required, but the number of credits is not specified.

<sup>n</sup>West Virginia's information on number of alternate diploma credits appeared incomplete.



## Appendix D

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### State Resources

#### Arkansas

<http://www.arkansased.gov/divisions/learning-services/special-education/alternate-pathway-to-graduation>

- [Arkansas Alternate Pathway to Graduation Course Requirements and Standards:](#)
- [Arkansas Alternate Pathway to Graduation Informational Document: Commissioner’s Memo LS-19-069 \(From 2-27-2019\)](#)
- [ESSA High School Graduation Rate Non-regulatory Guidance](#)
- [Explanatory presentation](#)
- [Explanatory presentation recording](#)
- [Five Things Administrators Need to Know](#)
- [Five Things Parents Need to Know](#)
- [Five Things Teachers Need to Know](#)
- [Form for entering questions](#)
- [K-12 Course Code Chart for Special Education Classes](#)
- [NCEO Brief explaining the Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\) requirements](#)
- [Q&A Document](#)
- [Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities Definition](#)
- [Summer 2019 PD Schedule](#)

#### Louisiana

<http://www.louisianabelieves.com/courses/graduation-requirements>

<http://www.louisianabelieves.com/students-with-disabilities>

<https://www.louisianabelieves.com/students-with-disabilities/graduation-pathways-for-students-with-disabilities> [This links to a table of resources for 833 and LAA1 (SDAD); See “training deck” for LAA1 details]

#### Louisiana Alternate Diploma Resources

##### Graduation Pathways for Students with Disabilities:

<https://www.louisianabelieves.com/students-with-disabilities/graduation-pathways-for-students-with-disabilities>

Pursue a standard high school diploma by meeting standard graduation requirements through alternate means. Students at the high school level who are assessed on Louisiana Alternate Assessment Level 1 (LAA 1) can pursue a diploma pathway by meeting alternate requirements.

Resources are available, diploma, certain students with disabilities who have an IEP have alternative pathways to a diploma.

Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities:

<https://www.louisianabelieves.com/students-with-disabilities/students-with-significant-cognitive-disabilities>

School Diploma for Students Assessed on an Alternate Assessment

Graduation Requirements:

<https://www.louisianabelieves.com/courses/graduation-requirements>

Jump Start pathway to a diploma, certain students with disabilities will be eligible for alternate pathways to a diploma using the provisions of Act 833 (2014) or the due to their being assessed on LAA1, and thereafter) will take core academic classes to work towards a diploma.

2018 Teacher Leader Collaboration Materials:

<https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/2018-teacher-leader-collaboration-materials>

Academics:

<https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/academics>

Courses:

<https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/courses>

LA Implementation Guide: Alternative Pathways to a High School Diploma:

<https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/academics/alternative-pathways-to-a-high-school-diploma-implementation-guide.pdf?sfvrsn=4>

School System Support Library:

<https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/school-system-support-library>

## **Mississippi**

Access for All Guide (Note: refers to alternate assessment but not alternate diplomas). This guide will aid in providing quality classroom instruction for all students, including general education students and students with disabilities who receive instruction in general education settings.

<https://mdek12.org/sites/default/files/documents/OAE/OAE/2019-access-for-all-guide.pdf>

Alternate Diploma Four Year Program of Study: <https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/OSE/Info-and-Publications/Alternate%20Diploma%20Four%20Year%20Program%20of%20Study.Final.pdf>

Communication Toolkit for Parents and Educators: <https://www.mdek12.org/OCGR/diploma>

- [Overview: Mississippi High School Diploma and Endorsement Options](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions for Parents Regarding Diploma and Endorsement Options](#)
- [Sample Letter to Parents of Students in Grades 7-9](#)
- [Brief Videos About Traditional Diploma and Each Endorsement Option \(Do not describe Alternate Diploma\)](#)

Mississippi Alternate Academic Achievement Standards:

English Language Arts: <https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/OSE/Info-and-Publications/alternatestandards-english-language-arts.pdf>

English Language Arts Comparison Document:

<https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/OSE/Info-and-Publications/alternatestandards-ela-compdoc.pdf>

Mathematics: <https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/OSE/Info-and-Publications/alternatestandards-math.pdf>

Mathematics Comparison Document:

<https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/OSE/Info-and-Publications/alternatestandards-math-compdoc.pdf>

Mississippi Extended Science Framework:

<https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/OSE/Info-and-Publications/MESF.pdf>

Science K-8 and Biology:

[https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/OSE/Info-and-Publications/MS\\_AAAS\\_Science\\_5\\_25\\_18%20Final%20Copy.pdf](https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/OSE/Info-and-Publications/MS_AAAS_Science_5_25_18%20Final%20Copy.pdf)

Career Readiness:

[https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/OSE/Info-and-Publications/MS\\_AAAS\\_Career%20Readiness%20I%20standards%20FINAL.pdf](https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/OSE/Info-and-Publications/MS_AAAS_Career%20Readiness%20I%20standards%20FINAL.pdf)

Life Skills Development I:

[https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/OSE/Info-and-Publications/MS\\_AAAS\\_Life%20Skills%20Development%20I%20standards%20FINAL.pdf](https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/OSE/Info-and-Publications/MS_AAAS_Life%20Skills%20Development%20I%20standards%20FINAL.pdf)

Teacher Resource Guide – Alternate English Elements I & II:

<https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/OSE/Info-and-Publications/TRG.Final.ELA.Published.pdf>

Teacher Resource Guide – Alternate Math Elements I & II:

<https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/OSE/Info-and-Publications/TRG.Final.2018%20Mathematics.Published.pdf>

Teacher Resource Guide – Career Readiness I:

<https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/OSE/Info-and-Publications/TRG.Final.Career%20Readiness.Published.pdf>

Teacher Resource Guide – Life Skills Development I:

<https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/OSE/Info-and-Publications/TRG.Life%20Skills%20DevelopmentI.Published.pdf>

Requirements for the Alternate Diploma:

[https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/SEC/Diploma/Mississippi%20Diploma%20Options%20\(Revised%208.23.18\).pdf](https://www.mdek12.org/sites/default/files/Offices/MDE/OAE/SEC/Diploma/Mississippi%20Diploma%20Options%20(Revised%208.23.18).pdf)

## **Nevada**

Page of guidance documents:

[http://www.doe.nv.gov/Special\\_Education/Alternative\\_Diploma\\_Guidance\\_Documents/](http://www.doe.nv.gov/Special_Education/Alternative_Diploma_Guidance_Documents/)

NV Alternative Diploma Implementation Guide:

[http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/nde.doe.nv.gov/content/Special\\_Education/Additional\\_Resources/AD\\_Legal.pdf](http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/nde.doe.nv.gov/content/Special_Education/Additional_Resources/AD_Legal.pdf)

Alternate Diploma Computer Education and Technology Guidance:

[http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Special\\_Education/ADComputerEdTechCreditsGuidance.pdf](http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Special_Education/ADComputerEdTechCreditsGuidance.pdf)

Alternative Diploma Health Education Guidance:

[http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Special\\_Education/ADHealthEducationGuidance.pdf](http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Special_Education/ADHealthEducationGuidance.pdf)

Alternative Diploma Physical, Earth, and Environmental Science Guidance:

[http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Special\\_Education/ADScience-Credit%20Guidance.pdf](http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Special_Education/ADScience-Credit%20Guidance.pdf)



Alternative Diploma Social Studies Guidance:

[http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Special\\_Education/ADSocialStudiesCreditsGuidance.pdf](http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Special_Education/ADSocialStudiesCreditsGuidance.pdf)

English Language Arts NVACS Connectors Guidance:

[http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Special\\_Education/ELANVACSConnectorStandards.pdf](http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Special_Education/ELANVACSConnectorStandards.pdf)

Mathematics NVACS Connectors Guidance:

[http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Special\\_Education/MathNVACSConnectorStandards.pdf](http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Special_Education/MathNVACSConnectorStandards.pdf)

Science NVACS Connectors Guidance:

[http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Special\\_Education/ScienceNVACSConnectorStandards.pdf](http://www.doe.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/ndedoenvgov/content/Special_Education/ScienceNVACSConnectorStandards.pdf)

## **Tennessee**

2017 memo about Alternate Assessment and ESSA. Says that taking the Alternate Assessment will NOT lead to a general high school diploma: [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/special-education/memo/sped\\_memo\\_new\\_req\\_for\\_alt\\_assessments\\_per\\_essa.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/special-education/memo/sped_memo_new_req_for_alt_assessments_per_essa.pdf)

TN Alternate Academic Diploma Course Requirements:

<https://www.tn.gov/education/student-support/special-education/special-education-tools-resources.html>

TN FAQ:

[https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/special-education/transition/sec\\_trans\\_alt\\_academic\\_diploma\\_faq.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/special-education/transition/sec_trans_alt_academic_diploma_faq.pdf)

TN Special Education Secondary Transition page (Has info about Alternate Diploma):

<https://www.tn.gov/education/student-support/special-education/special-education-secondary-transition.html>

TN State Board Policy (1/26/2018):

[https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/stateboardofeducation/documents/sbe\\_meeting\\_january\\_26\\_2018/1-26-18%20III%20C%20High%20School%20Policy%202.103%20Cover%20Sheet.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/stateboardofeducation/documents/sbe_meeting_january_26_2018/1-26-18%20III%20C%20High%20School%20Policy%202.103%20Cover%20Sheet.pdf)

## **Utah**

Extended Core Standards For Students With Significant Cognitive Disabilities – Grades K-12:  
<https://www.schools.utah.gov/file/869ea814-8f0e-448c-90cb-869fd5507018>

Press release on diploma options – not necessarily for the 1% Alternate Diploma though:  
<https://www.schools.utah.gov/file/fd59096a-ed0b-47f2-b262-ee3a68b07ab2>

Utah Administrative Code (R277-705-5. Alternate Diploma), which is policy information on Alternate Diplomas. It appears to leave the decision up to the districts.  
<https://rules.utah.gov/publicat/code/r277/r277-705.htm#T5>

## **West Virginia**

2018 New policies (includes alternate academic standards):  
<https://www.wvea.org/content/state-board-education-adopts-9-new-policies>

All Things Alternate PowerPoint (on Alternate Standards, Assessment and Diploma):  
<https://wvde.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/all-things-alternate-PP-002-with-data.pptx>

All Things Alternate PowerPoint – Part 2 (from the CASE Conference April 24-25, 2018):  
<https://wvde.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CASE-Conference-2018-PP.pptx>

Alternate Diplomas in West Virginia – PowerPoint:  
<https://wvde.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Alternate-Diploma-Slides-for-RESA-Tour.pptx>

ESSA in West Virginia:  
<http://www.lawv.net/Resources/Self-Help-Library/Education/Every-Student-Succeeds-Act-What-you-Need-to-Know>

Graduation 20/20  
<https://wvde.us/special-education/initiatives/graduation-20-20/>

Intellectual Disability – West Virginia Department of Education:  
<https://wvde.us/special-education/resources-sp-page/intellectual-disability/>

Understanding Alternate Diplomas Brochure:  
[https://wvde.state.wv.us/osp/Graduation/alternatediploma\\_brochure.pdf](https://wvde.state.wv.us/osp/Graduation/alternatediploma_brochure.pdf)

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