

# High School Diploma for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

## PARENT GUIDE



### HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA

Students with significant cognitive disabilities have the opportunity to earn a high school diploma that is standards-based and aligned to the state requirements through the alternate assessment exemption. Following completion of these requirements, students continue to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) up to the age of 22 or until the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team determines they have completed all LAUSD A-G diploma requirements.

### ELIGIBILITY

The diploma with the alternate assessment exemption is for students with significant cognitive disabilities who are eligible for an IEP and the California Alternate Assessment (CAA). While students need to be eligible to take the CAA, they are not required to partake in statewide testing in order to earn a high school diploma.

### CA EDUCATION CODE (EC) SECTION 51225.31 & SECTION 51225.32

Students with significant cognitive disabilities attending a public school in California can earn a diploma by meeting the following criteria as referenced in the student's IEP:

1. The student has been determined to be eligible to take the California Alternate Assessment, and
2. The student completes state standards-aligned coursework to meet minimum statewide course requirements for graduation.

### GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Students with significant cognitive disabilities can complete diploma requirements with the alternate assessment exemption with their high school cohort. They may also take other high school electives, including career, technical, vocational, and performance and visual arts classes, to ensure a full high school experience.

SUBJECT AREA	STATE MINIMUM
ENGLISH	3 years
MATH 1 year must be algebra aligned	2 years
SOCIAL STUDIES 1 year World History 1 year US History 1 semester Government 1 semester Economics	3 years
SCIENCE 1 year Biological Science 1 year Physical Science	2 years
PHYSICAL EDUCATION	2 years
VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS, WORLD LANGUAGE, OR CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION	1 year

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **How is a diploma with the alternate assessment exemption different from a certificate of completion?**

A diploma requires specific, standards-aligned coursework for graduation. This can lead to increased job opportunities, higher earning potential, and access to further education.

A certificate of completion is based on an alternative course of study as identified on the student's IEP and is not considered equivalent to a diploma.

### **Are students who receive the diploma with the alternate assessment exemption still eligible for special education services?**

Earning a diploma with the alternate assessment exemption does not end eligibility for services under IDEA. Students who earn a diploma with the alternate assessment exemption can continue receiving special education services until age 22 or completion of all LAUSD A-G diploma requirements.

### **How many years will it take for a student to earn their high school diploma with the alternate assessment exemption?**

The course of study to earn a diploma with the alternate assessment exemption is designed to enable students to graduate within four years alongside their peers. However, IEP teams have the flexibility to adjust this timeline based on each student's individual needs.

### **Who determines if a student is eligible for a diploma with the alternate assessment exemption and when is the decision made?**

The IEP team determines whether a student with significant cognitive disabilities is eligible for a high school diploma under the new Education Code sections 51225.31 and 51225.32. The IEP team assesses eligibility based on state criteria as early as eighth grade and continuing until graduation or until the student is no longer eligible for an IEP.

## Resources

### **LAUSD DIVISION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION WEBSITE**

<https://sped.lausd.org/>

### **DIVISION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION – ADULT TRANSITION PROGRAMS**

[https://bit.ly/transition\\_programs](https://bit.ly/transition_programs)

### **CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION – DIPLOMA PATHWAY FOR STUDENTS WHO QUALIFY FOR THE CALIFORNIA ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT**

<https://bit.ly/cde-diploma-info>

