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Alternate Diploma

House Bill 1041 amended 70 O.S. § 11-103.6 to create a new graduation pathway for the 1% of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are taught to alternate academic achievement standards, are participating and participate in the Oklahoma Alternate Assessment Program (OAAP).

Regular Diploma vs. State-Defined Alternate Diploma

Under the IDEA and OK State Special Education Policies and Procedures, the district's obligation for Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) ends when 1.) the student meets the district's requirements that apply to all students for a receipt of a standard/regular high school diploma, or 2.) at the end of the school year in which the student turns 22 years of age.

§300.102 Limitation - exception to FAPE for certain ages states,

-As used in paragraphs (a)(3)(i) through (iii) of this section, the term regular high school diploma means the standard high school diploma awarded to the preponderance of students in the State that is fully aligned with State standards or a higher diploma,

-except that a regular high school diploma **shall not** be aligned to the alternate academic achievement standards described in section 1111(b)(1)(E) of the ESEA. A regular high school diploma does not include a recognized equivalent of a diploma, such as a general equivalency diploma, certificate of completion, certificate of attendance, or similar lesser credentials.

Therefore, any student who is taught to alternate academic achievement standards and is assessed under the Oklahoma Alternate Achievement Program (OAAP), shall not receive a "regular high school diploma." The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) allows states to define and adopt an alternate diploma under certain conditions. The alternate diploma must be specifically designated for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities assessed using the alternate assessment aligned to alternate academic achievement standards. The State-defined alternate diploma can be counted in a state's adjusted cohort graduation rate if it is:

1. standards-based
2. aligned with the State requirements for the regular high school diploma
3. obtained within the time for which the State ensures the availability of a FAPE.

Oklahoma will now offer a standard/regular diploma and an alternate diploma beginning in the 2023-2024 school year. This state-defined alternate diploma will expand graduation opportunities for the 1% of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Absent this alternate diploma, this group of students could not receive a diploma under federal law. The biggest difference between the regular high school diploma and the alternate diploma is the district's obligation for FAPE under IDEA. The district obligation for FAPE ends when the student receives a regular high school diploma. However, the district obligation for FAPE does not end when the student receives an alternate diploma (usually at 18 years of age).

For students who are taught to alternate standards and assessed through the OAAP, when the student has earned the appropriate credits, the student will graduate, earning the alternate diploma. If the student has not turned 22 on or before September 1, the student will be offered continued enrollment following graduation with an alternate diploma and the district will continue to provide a FAPE through the school year in which they turn 22. In order for a student to receive FAPE, the student is allowed to attend the same length of day and week as students without a disability. Districts must not make blanket decisions. However, as with any student with a disability, the IEP Team may determine a shortened day/week is appropriate.

Districts must provide students with secondary transition services.

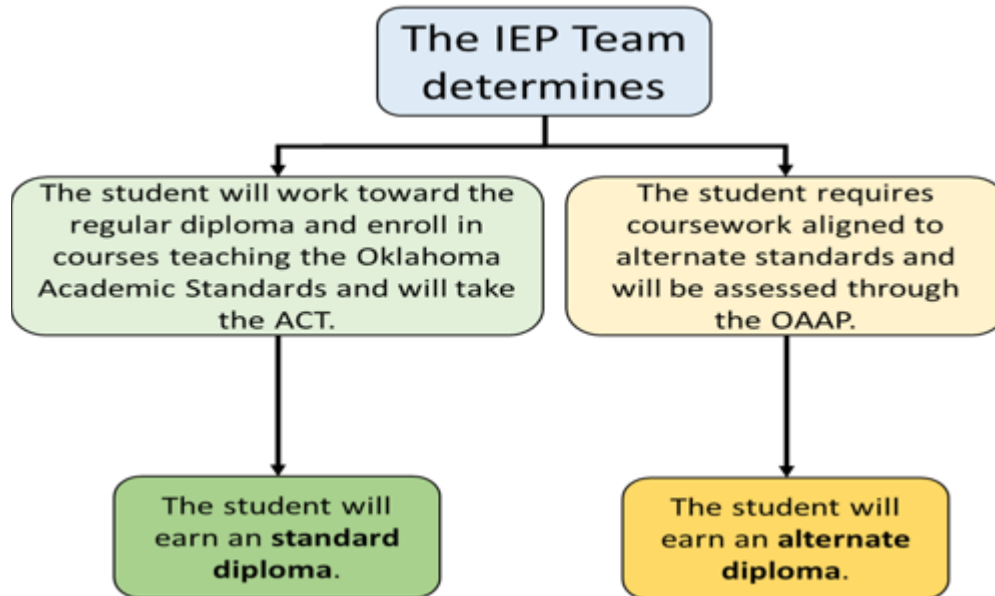
Secondary transition services are defined as a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that are designed within a results-oriented process. These services are focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the student to facilitate the student's movement from secondary school to post-secondary activities (e.g., postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment, supported employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation). Transition services may include instruction, related services, community experiences, development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and a functional vocational evaluation. These services are based on the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's strengths, preferences, and interests. Students will enroll in courses that will support the continued development of secondary transition, life skills, and career readiness. Finally, OSDE will provide is providing additional one-time funding through Project 618 to assist districts in these endeavors. District must submit their budget by April 24, 2024. See the [Project 618 Memo](#) for more information.

Returning to school after earning an alternate diploma is a decision of the IEP team. It is not required that a student return for an additional four years or even one year. IEP team decisions should rely heavily on student and family preferences and be based on the postsecondary plans and goals of the student. Simply put, the district must make FAPE available to each student who graduates with an alternate diploma, but the student is not required to return after graduation if the IEP team determines otherwise. Continued enrollment does not need to be consecutive.

Criteria for the Alternate Diploma

To participate in the OAAP, students must require alternate achievement standards in all content areas and must have an IEP containing rigorous, measurable goals that include short-term benchmarks/objectives. In addition, students must meet the criteria identified in [The Criteria Checklist for Assessing Students with Disabilities on Alternate Assessments](#) and the IEP team must determine **annually** that the alternate assessment

is appropriate for the student. Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) mandates that no more than 1% of all tested students may participate in an alternate assessment. IEP teams should discuss the accommodations needed for students to participate in the general assessment prior to considering eligibility in the alternate assessment.



Whether a student receives a regular diploma, or an alternate diploma, is not determined by the ACT/SAT or the OAAP. If the student qualifies for the OAAP according to the criteria and if they require coursework aligned to alternate achievement standards, they cannot earn a regular diploma beginning in the 23/24 school year (e.g., Student takes the OAAP in 8th grade. Student takes coursework aligned to alternate standards in 9th -11th grade but then takes the ACT. The coursework taught to alternate achievement standards cannot count toward the regular high school diploma. Student would have to retake required courses taught to OAS to earn a regular high school diploma).

Graduation Requirements for the Alternate Diploma

The state-defined alternate diploma is standards-based and aligned with the requirements for a standard diploma. A student may be awarded an alternate diploma upon completion of the following curriculum units or sets of competencies at the secondary level, typically at the end of the 12th grade with their cohort. The requirements to earn the alternate diploma are outlined in HB 1041 and mirror the requirements of the regular high school diploma, with the addition of two units of Life skills and two units of Career readiness. Students will be required to earn credits as follows to receive the alternate diploma.

1. Language Arts – Four units or sets of competencies based on alternate academic achievement standards to consist of reading literature, reading informational text, writing, speaking, and listening, and language in the following courses: a. English 1 Alternate, b. English 2 Alternate, c. English 3 Alternate, and d. English 4 Alternate;

2. Mathematics – Three units or sets of competencies based on alternate academic achievement standards to consist of numbers, quantities, algebra, functions/statistics, probability, and geometry in the following courses: a. Math Alternate 1, b. Math Alternate 2, and c. Math Alternate 3;
3. Science – Three units or sets of competencies based on alternate academic achievement standards to consist of life science, physical science, and earth science in the following courses: a. Life Science Alternate, b. Physical Science Alternate, and c. Earth Science Alternate;
4. Social Studies – Three units or sets of competencies based on alternate academic achievement standards to consist of United States History, United States Government, Oklahoma History, and Geography or Social Studies in the following courses: a. Social Studies Alternate 1, b. Social Studies Alternate 2, and c. Social Studies Alternate 3;
5. Arts – One unit or set of competencies that may include, but is not limited to, courses in Visual Arts and General Music;
6. Computer Education or World Language - One unit or set of competencies of computer technology, whether taught at a high school or a technology center school, including computer programming, hardware, and business computer applications, such as word processing, databases, spreadsheets, and graphics, excluding keyboarding or typing courses, or one unit or set of competencies of world or non-English language
7. Career Readiness – at least two units of Career readiness, including Career Readiness I, Career Readiness II, Career Readiness III, or Career Readiness IV. Each Career readiness course may be substituted for Careers/Exploration, Internship I, or Internship II; and
8. Life Skills – at least two units of Life skills, such as Life Skills I, Life Skills II, Life Skills III, or Life Skills IV. Each life skills course may be substituted for the Life Skills or Family and Consumer Science courses.

As is the case for all students, **elective coursework** is required to reach the state minimum of 23 credits for graduation. Completion of an Individualized Career and Academic Plan (ICAP), Personal Financial Literacy, the U.S. Naturalization Test, and CPR/AED requirements are optional and will be IEP team decisions. See the new [Alternate Diploma Graduation Checklist](#) for more information.

[Alternate Diploma Standards, Course Codes, Titles, and Descriptions](#)

To meet the new graduation requirements outlined in HB 1041, the OSDE-SES developed alternate diploma standards (essential elements) in the areas of Social

Studies (Geography, Oklahoma History, U.S. Government), Life Skills, and Career Readiness. The career readiness alternate standards were adapted from the *Pre-Employment Transition Services Guide* developed by Janice Robey, Natasha McDaniel, and Nikki Worthley Mire. The new alternate diploma standards were approved by the State Board of Education on July 27 and are in effect for the 2023-2024 school year. Essential Elements (alternate academic achievement standards) already existed for English Language Arts, Math, Science, and U.S. History. New subject/course codes, titles, and descriptions are available for the alternate diploma courses. See the table below for the alternate diploma standards (essential elements) and corresponding courses.

New Alternate Diploma Standards (Essential Elements)	Corresponding Courses
Social Studies (Geography, OK History, U.S. Government)	Social Studies I Alternate (Geography), Social Studies II Alternate (OK History, U.S. Govt.)
Career Readiness	Career Readiness I Alternate, Career Readiness II Alternate, Career Readiness III Alternate, and Career Readiness IV Alternate *Internship I (6450), Internship II (6455)
Life Skills	Life Skills Alternate I, Life Skills Alternate II, Life Skills Alternate III, and Life Skills Alternate IV
Existing Alternate Diploma Standards (Essential Elements)	Corresponding Courses
English Language Arts (ELA)	English, I Alternate, English II Alternate, English III Alternate, English IV Alternate
Math	Math I Alternate, Math II Alternate, Math III Alternate, Math IV Alternate
Science	Life Science Alternate, Physical Science Alternate, Earth Science Alternate
Social Studies (U.S. History)	Social Studies III Alternate

*These courses may count as a Postsecondary Opportunity (PSO) if they meet the requirements outlined in the [Internships Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\)](#). Visit the [OSDE Accountability](#) webpage for more information about PSO.

Least Restrictive Environment

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states that, to the maximum extent appropriate, all students with disabilities, 3 through 21 years of age, are to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) with age-appropriate peers, both with and without disabilities. LRE still applies to students seeking an Alternate Diploma.

Course Substitutions

Courses in the core curriculum may be used as substitutions for courses required by the alternate diploma and other courses approved by the State Board of Education. Students working to earn an alternate diploma will need to earn credits for the new required courses or have taken a similar course that can be substituted. Careful attention should be paid at the time of enrollment to the Life skills and Career readiness course requirements to ensure the student will meet all the requirements necessary to graduate and be conferred an alternate diploma. See the Alternate Diploma Course Substitutions document for more information.

Grading

Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) determine grading policies. Any unique grading methods or criteria required to evaluate an individual student's progress must be determined by the IEP team. Parent(s) should be informed of these unique methods or criteria, how the student is functioning, and what progress is being made (which includes how the data is used to determine grading scales on a report card). Any unique grading or progress reporting is to be determined and documented on an individual basis within the IEP. While the LEA may establish criteria for class ranking, honors, grades, etc., they cannot be discriminatory. A child with a disability is required to have the same opportunities as any non-disabled child. Therefore, setting maximum grade caps would be discriminatory (e.g., allowing no child with a disability to make a grade higher than a grade of "B"). Grades, which impact class ranking and honor roll status, must be applied similarly to students with disabilities as they are to students without disabilities.

Graduation and Diplomas

Students will be awarded the alternate diploma when they meet the requirements. Most students will earn their credits and receive their alternate diploma in four years at the same rate as their age peers. Students will participate in the graduation ceremony with the other graduates from their cohort unless the IEP Team determines otherwise.

If a student with a significant cognitive disability was taught to alternate academic achievement standards yet was awarded a regular/standard high school diploma in past years, the student may return for FAPE through the school year in which the student turns 22.

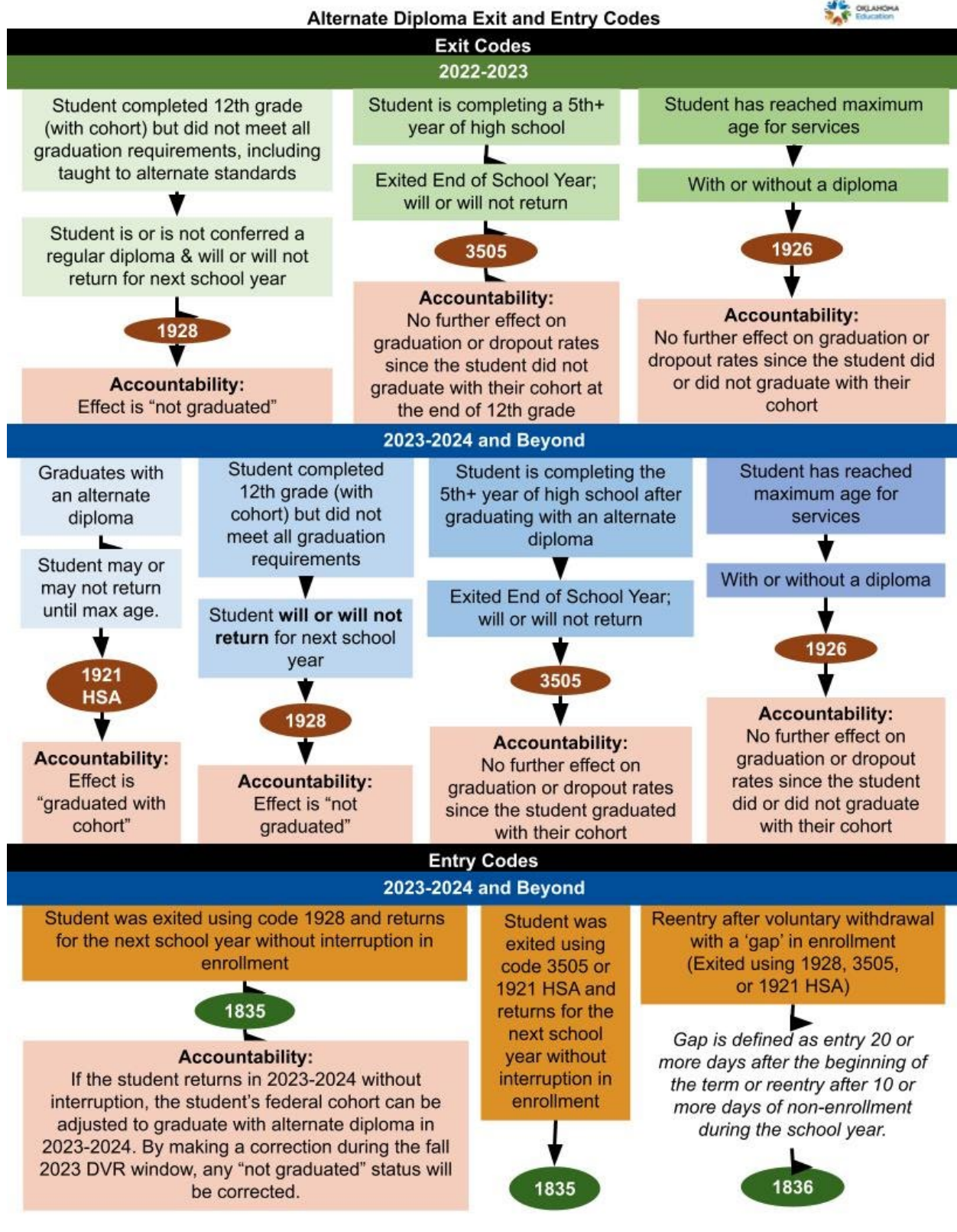
Students are afforded enrollment, even if they participated in the graduation ceremony earning an Alternate Diploma. This also includes any move-in students who were taught to alternate academic achievement standards.

Diplomas and Transcripts

LEAs issue diplomas. The verbiage used on the district-issued diploma is a decision of the district. There is no requirement at the state level regarding the use of the word “alternate” to be used on the graduation diploma. The OSDE prefers that it say “Diploma”.

Some new course titles required for graduation with an alternate diploma make use of the word “Alternate”. It is appropriate to use these titles on the transcript. It is also appropriate to identify on the transcript that the student was conferred an alternate diploma. In a memo from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights Q&A issued in October 2008 it states: “8. May a transcript for a student with a disability indicate, either through specific notations or the use of asterisks or other symbols, that a student took classes with a modified or alternate education curriculum?” ” In general, yes. While a transcript may not disclose that a student has a disability or has received special education or related services due to having a disability, a transcript may indicate that a student took classes with a modified or alternate education curriculum. This is consistent with the transcript’s purpose of informing postsecondary institutions and prospective employers of a student’s academic credentials and achievements.

Exit and Entry Codes



18-22-Year-Old Extended Transition Programs

IDEA and Oklahoma Special Education Policies and Procedures

The IDEA and Oklahoma Special Education Policies and Procedures still apply for students participating in the extended transition programs and must be followed. Students must have a current IEP based on Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance and it must be updated annually. The IEP team must consider an evaluation every three years. Refer to the [OSDE-SES Policies and Procedures](#) and the [Alternate Diploma Guidance Brief for Educators](#) for detailed information.

Enrollment and Attendance

Students must be enrolled, and attendance must be taken for the district to receive funding. Students attending 18-22 Extended Transition Programs at another site will remain enrolled at their home site.

As previously mentioned, students are allowed to attend the same length of day and week as students without a disability to receive a FAPE. Districts must not make blanket decisions. For example, it would not be appropriate to determine that students may only attend an extended transition program for two days per week. However, as with any student with a disability, the IEP Team may determine a shortened day/week is appropriate to address the student's unique disability-related needs. If the student attends the days/hours per week outlined in the IEP, the student is counted present for the entire school day, since that is the student's school day. Use the rule of "present until absent and absent until present" in reporting absences.

Note: The Oklahoma State Department of Education requires the IEP team to document that an FBA has been conducted and a BIP is currently in place to finalize the IEP when shortening the student's day/week due to a behavior concern. See

Developing/Expanding Transition Programs

In anticipation of students returning for FAPE for the 2023-2024 school year and beyond, districts should consider developing or expanding programs serving 18–22-year-old students. Districts should consider the following:

- Teaching/Learning
 - Curriculum
 - Materials
 - Supplies
 - Equipment
 - Logistics
- Funding
 - State Funds: ADM, including sped weights

- Federal Funds: Project 621 based on Oct. 1 child count
- New Funds: Project 618 – Developing/Expanding 18–22-year-old programs (one time allocation) based on Oct. 1, 2022, OAAP counts, projecting students who will be 18-22 for the 2023-2034 school year.
- Collaboration
 - Vendors
 - Other districts
 - Community partners
 - OSDE-SES
- Training
 - Teachers
 - Paraprofessionals
 - Employment Consultants/Support Specialists (Job Coaches)

Competencies

Competencies are needed for post-graduation courses, not standards. OSDE-SES is collaborating with special education teachers who are experts in teaching students with significant cognitive disabilities to develop the competencies and other resources for the 18-22 extended transition programs. Competencies will align with the course codes, titles and descriptions used for non-degree extended transition programs and will provide a framework to guide a district's expansion and/or development of transition opportunities and programs for 18–22-year-old students with disabilities. More guidance will be coming this fall. The Extended Transition Program Courses are Pass/Fail because they are not required to graduate with an Alternate Diploma.

Individualized Quality Transition Services

IEP Teams should focus on the transition skills and services that students need to close the gaps that exist between the student's transition from school to adult life in relation to postsecondary goals. Transition services must be individualized and should include services that are likely to enable the student to achieve their postsecondary goals in education/training, employment, independent living, and community participation. The focus of Extended Transition Programs should be on Community-Based Instruction (CBI) and Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLE). High School Secondary Transition Programs should also begin using CBI and WBLE for Career Readiness and Life Skills activities. Students need opportunities to generalize the skills they work on in the classroom to the community and workplace settings.

Extended Transition Programs should consider the following when expanding and/or developing programs for students with disabilities ages 18-22:

PREDICTORS OF POSTSCHOOL SUCCESS (National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, NTACTION: C)

- Self-Determination/Self-Advocacy

- Community Based Instruction
- Work Experiences (Work Adjustment Training, Work Study)
- Goal Setting
- Self-Care/Independent Living
- Person-Centered Planning
- Interagency Collaboration
- See the [Predictors of Postschool Success](#) for more information.

Community-Based Instruction

Community-based instruction (CBI) is teaching functional skills that take place in the community where target skills would naturally occur (Brown et al., 1983). CBI as an instructional method or strategy should be the focus of Extended Transition Programs. Students with disabilities need many opportunities to practice and generalize the skills they work on in the classroom, to the community and workplace settings, or natural environments. High School Secondary Transition Programs should begin using CBI for Career Readiness and Life Skills activities in grades 9-12, and CBI should be evident as a hallmark of Extended Transition Programs.

Community-based instruction (CBI) is an evidenced based instruction method or strategy that promotes the teaching and use of academic and functional skills in the community and natural environments. The setting, as well as the tasks performed in these settings, should be relevant to the student, facilitate independence and be age appropriate. Instruction, materials, and activities need to mirror age-appropriate activities used by non-disabled same age peers while being developmentally appropriate for the needs of the student. (Retrieved from Project 10 Transition Education Network 07/28/2023 [Community-Based Instruction \(project10.info\)](#))

Work-Based Learning

Research supports the idea that meaningful work experiences during secondary education is a strong predictor of post-school employment for students with all disabilities (Luecking & Fabian 2000, Test et al., 2009). Work experiences are also cited by the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition as one of the predictors of postschool success. High School Secondary Transition Programs should begin using WBLE for Career Readiness activities as appropriate for individual students, and WBLE should be a main component of Extended Transition Programs.

According to the VCU Center on Transition Innovations, work-based learning experiences for students with disabilities are supervised, school-coordinated activities which provide opportunities for students to achieve employment related competencies in a workplace environment. These activities extend the classroom into the workplace and are related to students' career interests and program of study. Work-based learning experiences involve assessment of students' interests, aptitudes, and abilities while learning about career possibilities.

Resources

OSDE-SES Resources

- Alternate Diploma and Extended Transition Program Subject/Course Codes, Titles, and Descriptions
- Alternate Diploma Graduation Checklist
- Alternate Diploma Guidance Brief for Parents
- Alternate Diploma Guidance Brief for Educators
- Alternate Diploma Exit and Entry Codes Flowchart
- Alternate Diploma Collaboratives-Slide Decks and Recordings
- Oklahoma's Got Talent (Showcasing Transition Programs from Schools/Districts)- Slide Decks and Recordings

To access these documents and other Alternate Diploma resources, visit access the [Alternate Diploma Collaborative Folder](#).

Additional Resources

- NTACT's [Predictors of Postschool Success](#) and Effective Practices Alignment (Retrieved from NTACT website, 2023)
- [Evidence Based Practices for Transition Youth](#) (Ohio Employment First Transition Framework-Evidence Based Practices Tool, 2018)
- [Community Based Instruction: An Instructional Strategy](#) (Florida Department of Education Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, 2018)
- NTACT's [Workplace Readiness Training](#) for development of workplace readiness traits soft skills, employability skills, or job readiness skills. (Retrieved from NTACT website 6/26/2023)