**Special Education Graduation Requirements Policy Booster: Board Policy Change Required**

The Iowa State Board of Education amended Iowa’s special education rules to conform with ESSA-required language related to the graduation of individuals eligible for special education. These new graduation requirements first apply to the class of 2022 (9th grade cohort in 2018-19 school year.) Much of the following comes from DE guidance posted here: <https://educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/Graduation-AdministrationHandOut10-18.pdf>

The definition of “regular high school diploma” now means the standard high school diploma awarded to the preponderance of students in the State that is fully aligned with State standards, and shall not be aligned to the alternate academic achievement standards described in section 1111(b)(1)(E) of the ESEA (federal law). School board policies in place before this change required meeting the expectations in the student’s IEP as the standard for graduation.

This amendment makes clear that a regular high school diploma must be fully aligned to State required standards and your local board policy must be amended to meet this expectation. In Iowa’s case, that would be the graduation requirements set forth in Iowa Code section 256.7(26): four years of English, three years each of math, social studies, and science (“4-3-3-3” which is pronounced *four triple three*). To earn a regular high school diploma going forward, a child with a disability must complete 4-3-3-3. District may not award a regular high school diploma based solely on IEP goal attainment. A child may either graduate based on 4-3-3-3 or based on 4-3-3-3 plus IEP goals. These state requirements do not mandate certain course work or certain hours spent in particular courses. The district retains the authority on the manner in which students receiving special education services may meet the 4-3-3-3 requirements. The district may establish policies and procedures that permit students receiving special education services to complete 4-3-3-3 requirements in unique, individualized ways, but regardless of that flexibility, the Iowa Academic Standards must be addressed.

The school district may provide a certificate of completion/attendance to those students receiving special education services who do not complete 4-3-3-3. Students who receive such as certificate remain eligible for special education services until they reach maximum age of 21. Of course it is important to have all students meet these expectations for their future success. It’s also important for state accountability; *these certificates will count against the district’s graduation rate as they do not meet the state graduation requirements subsequent to this change in administrative rules.*

We’ve attached sample Board Policies 524 and 610 as amended by these changes, for your reference, (two versions, with one showing the changes and the other with the changes incorporated.) Contact [margaret@iowaschoolfinance.com](mailto:margaret@iowaschoolfinance.com) with questions.

***The “dot your I’s and cross your T’s” disclaimer:*** *This Policy Booster is not a substitute for legal advice, but rather, the impetus to get the local ball rolling. Check with your local school attorney and consider the impact this policy will have on other policies, handbooks, bargaining agreements, administrative procedures and forms in the district.*

# 524 GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS (changes tracked)

The following are the requirements for graduation for students to earn a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Community School District High School diploma:

1. The accumulation of a minimum of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (\_\_\_) credits.  The specific course requirements are outlined elsewhere in the Policy.
2. A student may be eligible for graduation when the number of credits have been obtained, but not before the end of the third year of high school.
3. The high school principal/designee shall submit a list of persons eligible for diplomas or certificates of attendance to the Board for approval in the month of May each year.
4. The Home School Assistance Program Coordinator shall submit a list of persons eligible for certificates of completion to the Board of Directors for approval in the month of May each year.
5. Students must have successfully completed the District and state requirements for graduation to be eligible for participation in graduation exercises.  The only exception will be for extenuating circumstances involving unforeseen and unavoidable situations.  Such exceptions may be made at the discretion of the high school principal/designee.
6. Any student may, after four (4) years of attendance, make-up their failed classes through correspondence work or by returning to school.  When these failed classes have been made-up, the student may receive a regular diploma.
7. Required courses taken at a post-secondary institution, which are duplicates of courses offered at the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Community School District High School, will not count toward graduation requirements unless a course has been previously failed at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Community School District High School.
8. A maximum of four (4) elective courses taken at a post-secondary institution may be counted toward meeting the graduation requirements.  These courses must be approved in advance by the principal/designee.
9. Any post-secondary courses that are duplicates of courses offered at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Community School District High School will not qualify for funding under the Post Secondary Enrollment Options Act.

Graduation requirements for special education students will be in accordance with this policy, unless an individual student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) requires some other arrangement.  This may include additional services or courses, if those additional services or courses are determined by an individual student’s IEP Team to be necessary for a free appropriate public education (FAPE). The IEP Team may waive particular graduation requirements in this policy, based on a particular child’s disability-related needs. However, beginning with the graduating class of 2022, students receiving special education services shall meet the state requirement of completing four years of English-language arts, and three years each of mathematics, science, and social studies (known as 4-3-3-3), with support and accommodations as described in their IEPs for graduation with a regular high school diploma. An IEP Team may determine, based on a particular child’s educational needs, how the 4-3-3-3 requirements are met; however, an IEP Team may not waive this requirement.

According to the Iowa Administrative Rules of Special Education: “Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 14, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP team, and updated annually, thereafter, the IEP must include: a. Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills; and b. The transition services, including courses of study, needed to assist the child in reaching those goals.”

Prior to the special education student’s graduation, the IEP team will determine whether the graduation criteria have been met. The superintendent may provide a certificate of completion/attendance to those students receiving special education services who do not complete 4-3-3-3 based on their IEP. Students who receive a certificate of completion/attendance remain eligible for special education services until they reach maximum age of twenty-one.

**610 SPECIAL EDUCATION (Changes tracked)**

The board recognizes some students have different educational needs than other students.  The board shall provide a free appropriate education program and related services to students identified in need of special education.  Special education services will be provided from birth until the appropriate education is completed, age twenty-one or the maximum age allowable in accordance with the law.  Students requiring special education shall attend regular education classes, participate in non-academic and extracurricular services and activities and receive services in a regular education setting to the maximum extent possible appropriate to the needs of each individual student.

The appropriate education for each student shall be written in the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).  Special education students shall be required to meet the requirements stated in board policy as modified in their Individualized Education Programs (IEP) consistent with board policy, for graduation. However, beginning with the graduating class of 2022, students receiving special education services shall meet the state requirement of completing four years of English-language arts and three years each of mathematics, science nad social students, known as 4-3-3-3, aligned to state required standards, with support and accommodations as described in their IEP for graduation with a regular diploma. A student’s IEP Team may determine how a particular student meets 4-3-3-3.

The superintendent may provide a certificate of completion/attendance to those students receiving special education services who do not complete requirements for graduation with a regular diploma, including 4-3-3-3. Student who receive a certificate of completion/attendance remain eligible for special education services until they reach maximum age of twenty-one.

It shall be the responsibility of the superintendent and the area education agency director of special education to provide or make provisions for appropriate special education and related services.

Children from birth through age 2 and age 3 through 5 shall be provided comprehensive special education services within the public education system. The school district shall work in conjunction with the area education agency to provide services, at the earliest appropriate time, to children with disabilities from birth through age 2. This shall be done to ensure a smooth transition of children entitled to early childhood special education services.

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