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Missouri
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GRADUATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: *A Parent Guide*

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Graduation for Students with Disabilities: *A Parent Guide*

Do students with disabilities have to meet the same graduation requirements as other students?

Not always. Graduation requirements for students with disabilities may be adjusted to meet their individual needs. While some students earn a standard diploma, others may follow a modified path that still allows them to complete high school successfully.

What determines how a student with a disability will graduate?

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) team—which includes parents, educators, and the student—determines the student's path to graduation. This decision is based on:

- The student's strengths, needs, and post-secondary goals
- The type and severity of the disability
- Progress on academic standards and IEP goals

What types of diplomas or exit options might be available?

Graduation options vary by state, but commonly include:

- Standard/Regular Diploma

The student meets all general education requirements, possibly with accommodations.

- Modified Diploma or Certificate of Completion

The student completes coursework based on modified standards, often tailored to their IEP. These may not meet college entry requirements but still show achievement.





- IEP or Alternate Diploma

The student meets goals set in their IEP instead of standard coursework. This path is typically for students with more significant disabilities.

- Certificate of Attendance or Completion

Issued when the student does not meet diploma requirements but completes their IEP program and attends school through age 21.

Who decides which graduation option is best?

The IEP team, with input from the student and family, makes this decision. Planning usually starts by age 14–16 as part of the transition services in the IEP. It is important to:

- Review graduation options early
- Understand how each path affects future opportunities
- Revisit the decision regularly during high school

Can a student switch graduation paths?

Yes. Graduation plans should be reviewed at least once a year. If the student's performance, goals, or abilities change, the IEP team can adjust the graduation path accordingly.

What's the impact of different diploma types?

Each option can affect the student's future plans:

- Standard diploma

Usually required for college, military, or competitive employment

- Modified or IEP diploma

May be accepted by some trade schools or supported employment programs but may not meet traditional college admissions criteria





- Certificate of attendance/completion

Recognizes effort and growth but does not equal a diploma

How can parents support their child through this process?

You play a key role in helping your child succeed. You can:

- Ask the school to explain all diploma or exit options
- Encourage your child to express their future goals

Help your child explore career, college, or training interests

Attend and participate in all IEP and transition meetings

Make sure the graduation plan aligns with your child's strengths and long-term goals

What happens if my child stays in school past age 18?

Students with disabilities have the right to special education services through age 21 (or until they receive a diploma, whichever comes first). If your child needs more time to develop academic, vocational, or life skills, they may continue to receive support even after their peers graduate.

How can I get help in my language?

Request interpreter services at your child's school or the school district's office. Request translated written information if needed. Information available to all parents in the school district should be available to you as well.

Tip for families

- Don't be afraid to ask questions!
- Request that the school explain how graduation decisions are made and how those decisions affect your child's future





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Graduation should reflect your child's individual progress and potential. Every student's journey is unique, and the goal is for your child to leave high school with the skills, confidence, and support they need to move forward.



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