
SPECIAL EDUCATION CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION POLICY

The purpose of this policy is to develop a non-diploma pathway to graduation allowing students with Individualized Education Plans (“IEP”) who have significant cognitive disabilities, to earn a Certificate of Completion (“COC”) from California Pacific Charter Schools (“CPCS”) based on federal and state mandates/legislation and California Department of Education (“CDE”) requirements. By developing a pathway that requires the same number of minimum state course requirements, students with disabilities can earn verification of school enrollment and engagement.

Not all students in California public schools are able to meet graduation requirements. California public school students have the option to pursue a non-diploma track that will earn an alternative form of certification that will permit participation in graduation and graduation related activities.

The U.S. Department of Education states, “...certificates of completion are used for students with IEPs who have not met state graduation requirements but still want to participate in graduation ceremonies with their class.” Additionally, state-defined alternate diplomas are permitted to be offered under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Pub. L. No. 114- 95 § 114 Stat. 1177 (2015-2016). Guidance from the U.S. Department of Education concerning eligibility states: “Only a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities is eligible for a State-defined alternate diploma, and only if the student has taken the State’s alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards under section 1111(b)(2)(D) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (“ESEA”) and met any other State-defined requirements. (ESEA section 8101(23)(A)(ii)(I)(bb), (25)(A)(ii)(I)(bb); 34 C.F.R. § 200.34(c)(3))”

The high school graduation course requirements in California include a set of 13 minimum courses required under the California Education Code, in addition to other coursework adopted by the Local Education Agency (“LEA”). Ed. Code §51225.3 provides that all pupils receiving a diploma of graduation from a California high school must have completed all of the following courses, while in grades 9 to 12, inclusive:

Unless otherwise specified, each course shall have a duration of one school year

1. Three courses/years in English
2. Two courses/years in mathematics, including one year of Algebra I (*EC Section 51224.5*)
3. Two courses/years in science, including biological and physical sciences
4. Three courses/years in social studies, including United States history and geography; world history, culture, and geography, a one-semester course in American government and civics, and a one-semester course in economics
5. One course/year in visual or performing arts, foreign language, and career technical education. For the purpose of satisfying the minimum course requirement, a course in American Sign Language shall be deemed a course in foreign language
6. Two courses/years in physical education, unless the pupil has been exempted pursuant to

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the provisions of EC Section 51241

7. Other coursework adopted by the local governing board of the LEA

However, students and families who are considering opting for a COC should consider the following limitations may and/or will apply:

1. A COC is not equivalent to a high school diploma or GED graduation equivalency test; it verifies school attendance only.
2. A COC is not usually accepted at higher institutions of learning; most colleges and trade schools require a high school diploma or its equivalent for entrance.
3. The Armed Services limits the number of COC and GED candidates allowed to enlist in the military each year (between 1% and 10% depending on the branch) and the minimum requirements for the Armed Forces Qualification Test are higher for COC holders as opposed to those with high school diplomas.
4. A COC may affect the student's ability to gain employment where a high school diploma is a job requirement.
5. To be eligible to receive federal student aid, a student must have either a high school diploma or a GED.

The California Education Code (EC) § 51225.3 specifies a minimum set of courses to meet state requirements to graduate from high school and receive a diploma. The governing boards of LEAs have the authority to supplement the state minimum requirements at the local level.

CPCS will ensure that its COC pathway has an effective, research based curriculum that includes life skills. Curriculum will be provided at a student's independent level with access to grade level general education curriculum and standards. The total number of credits required for a student who is working towards a certificate of completion is 130 credits.

If a student with an IEP is able to complete the prescribed courses in: ELA, math, science, social studies, PE, and transition/functional skills curriculum, a COC may be awarded by CPCS if the student has completed the following requirements:

1. Satisfactory completion of 130 credits of a prescribed alternative course of study as identified on the student's IEP
2. Satisfactory achievement of the student's IEP goals and objectives during high school as determined by the IEP Team
3. Satisfactory high school attendance, participation in the instruction prescribed in the student's IEP, and achievement of transition goals and objectives.

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Students with disabilities who qualify for a COC are eligible to participate in one graduation ceremony and any school activity related to graduation in which students of similar age without disabilities would be eligible to participate.

Completing the COC requirements and exiting high school with that certificate does not terminate Free Appropriate Public Education (“FAPE”) eligibility and does not serve to exit a student from special education.

Students who receive a COC may decide to return to high school and can do so through the age of 22. There are two events that end the school’s responsibility to a student with a disability.

1. Student earns and receives a high school diploma
2. Student turns 22

A student less than age 22, who earlier decided to exit school with a COC, can then change their mind and return to school until the end of the school semester of their 22nd birthday or until they earn a diploma, whichever occurs first. Given that the aforementioned is based on an IEP team recommendation, the IEP team must provide the parent/guardian of a minor student with Prior Written Notice (PWN). The IEP team will issue notice to the parent/guardian/adult student via the Special Education Information System form of its proposed action regarding the recommended course of study pathway prior to an IEP meeting.

Federal law requires schools to provide “specially defined instruction, and related services, at no cost to parent/guardian, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.” The law requires schools to provide disabled students with these special supports from age 3 until age 22, or until they graduate from high school.