



Overview of the Change

The Iowa State Board of Education has amended Iowa's special education rules related to the graduation of individuals eligible for special education and the definition of a regular high school diploma. The state has made these changes to be consistent with the required language in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The term "regular high school diploma" must be fully aligned to state-required standards. In Iowa, the minimum graduation requirements are:

- four years of English,
- three years of math,
- three years of social studies, and
- three years of science (often referred to as 4-3-3-3 or '4 triple 3').

To earn a regular high school diploma going forward, all students, including students with disabilities, must meet their local school district's graduation requirements, which at a minimum, must include 4-3-3-3 and the completion of district PE expectations. Refer to the [Administrative Consideration for Changes in Definition of Diploma document](#) for more details about the requirements.

Implications for Districts and IEP Teams

The district may establish policies and procedures that permit students receiving special education services to complete 4-3-3-3 requirements in unique, individualized manners.

The IEP team's responsibility, beginning in 8th grade, is to develop a pathway to 4-3-3-3 and, ultimately, a high school diploma. It is essential that Iowa Academic standards are addressed.

The district may provide a certificate of completion/attendance to those students receiving special education services who do not complete 4-3-3-3. A student with a certificate of completion/attendance would still be eligible for FAPE, as determined by the IEP team, until age 21.

Progress toward completion of 4-3-3-3 should be communicated at least annually in the course of study section of the individual's IEP. The IEP team can choose to establish more frequent reporting to ensure timely completion of requirements and revision or provision of new supports. IEP teams will need to design processes to measure the student's progress toward meeting 4-3-3-3 and communicate this progress with key stakeholders, including the student and family.

The application of these graduation requirements begins in 2018 with the 9th grade cohort (Class of 2022). Additional guidance will be provided to support the transition of the current class to these new guidelines.



Important discussions to have surrounding this change

With students and families:

The change means it will no longer be permissible to award a regular high school diploma based solely on IEP goal attainment. The role of the IEP team includes determining how a student with a disability will be able to meet 4-3-3-3 in order to receive a regular high school diploma. Most students will be able to achieve 4-3-3-3 regular diploma or a regular diploma plus IEP goals.

- To achieve a regular high school diploma, a student must meet district graduation requirements with or without accommodations.
- A student needing modification to district requirements or using Iowa Alternate Assessment may graduate with a regular high school diploma plus IEP goals.

With teachers and principals:

Local education agencies will need to consider the continuum of services provided for students and develop processes that ensure alignment of the continuum to the 4-3-3-3 and their graduation policies.

Regarding District Policy:

Know your district policy and advocate for policies that offer flexibility for students' attainment of 4-3-3-3. Refer to this document for more details about the requirements.

Next Steps

The Iowa Department of Education is working with numerous stakeholders to provide tools and strategies to support districts and IEP teams as they implement this graduation change. A webinar detailing these supports is planned for January 22 from 1:00 – 3:00 pm. [Register to participate](#). Contact Kirsten Lane at kirstenlane3107@gmail.com with questions.

December, 2018