

What Every Principal Needs to Know About New Requirements for the Certificate of Completion

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The emphasis in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) on providing all students with equitable access to grade level content standards has been a key catalyst for clarifying the criteria for earning a Certificate of Completion (COC). Currently, the COC is awarded to a student with an individualized education plan who has been taken off of the diploma path, but has completed the special education program recommended by a case conference committee. Beginning in the 2018-19 school year, the new criteria for earning a Certificate of Completion will be required of all incoming freshman.

A COC Course of Study was designed to mirror the regular diploma requirements in that 40 credits and/or applied units must be earned by the time a student leaves high school. Students will be required to take courses in English, Math, Science, Social Studies, Health and Wellness, and Employability. These courses may be for credits or for applied units and can be taken in either a general or special education setting. The students will also be required to take at least seven general education or special education electives and develop a transition portfolio that demonstrates the work experience, credentials or work certificates a student has completed during high school.

Different from a credit bearing course, the applied courses are all about working *toward* a standard, rather than *meeting* the standard. Any student with a disability can earn an applied unit that is individualized based on the student's IEP goals. The changes are not, however, designed to encourage schools to remove students from a diploma path. In fact, most students with disabilities, given appropriate services and supports, are capable of earning a high school diploma and should not be taken off of a diploma path.

Although this may be a change in framework for most high schools, it is not a change in the expectations for providing a free appropriate public education. In 2014 the Indiana Alternate Assessment shifted focus from functional to academic skills. Prior to this change, the DOE along with partners from Project Success began offering training and guidance to teachers who now were required to focus on academic instruction based on Alternate Achievement Standards. This training continues throughout the state with a renewed focus on the Certificate of Completion changes.

The COC requirements are high school specific, but the need for raising expectations for students with disabilities begins as early as preschool. Elementary and Middle School Programs must also prepare *each and every student* to meet challenging, yet achievable goals aligned with grade level standards.

School counselors are tasked to promote and support the success of all students, including those with disabilities, and must be prepared to provide the services and assistance needed to reach their full potential. Utilizing leadership and collaboration skills are two ways in which school counselors may develop and implement programming to meet the unique needs of students with

disabilities. It is essential for school counselors and special education teachers to communicate any potential changes to promotion, graduation, and testing in order to ensure all parties are meeting the needs of students and their academic goals. Working collaboratively is key to providing the best services and support for the student and family.

In November, over 40 new applied course descriptions will be presented to the State Board of Education for approval. Several school corporations and teachers have been working with Project Success to anticipate needed infrastructure changes. School Counselors who attended regional trainings this fall have received more in depth information and a statewide electronic transcript committee has been tackling some of the logistics for operationalizing the new requirements.

Several guidance documents, including an FAQ, are posted on the DOE website at <https://www.doe.in.gov/student-services/student-assistance/coc>. As schools begin scheduling for next year, new applied unit courses should be offered for the incoming freshman class. As is the reality of most special education programs, more than one class may need to be taught at the same time by the same teacher and any teacher licensed as a special education teacher can teach any of the applied courses. If you have additional questions, please feel free to check out the resources above or contact the Office of Special Education at specialeducation@doe.in.gov or 317-232-0570 or 877-851-4106.