



High School Diplomas for Students with Disabilities

July 25, 2017

Diplomas open doors of opportunity and those doors are being opened for more students with disabilities. As a result of advocacy, changes to Louisiana laws and policies over the past few years have created pathways for every student to be eligible to earn a high school diploma. In addition, some former students with disabilities are eligible to receive high school diplomas retroactively! Most students with disabilities in Louisiana still do not have a diploma when they exit high school - but that is beginning to change.

Receiving a High School Diploma Retroactively

Former students with disabilities who were denied a high school diploma solely because they could not pass the state-required exit exams can ask the school system to issue them a diploma. Since 1993, Louisiana has required students to pass some form of exit exam as a condition of receiving a high school diploma. Last year the law changed, removing the exit exam requirement for all former Louisiana students with disabilities to receive a high school diploma. Now former students with disabilities in Louisiana can receive their high school diploma if they:

1. Were identified with a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; that is, they had an Individualized Education Program (IEP);
2. Passed all course work required for a diploma at the time they exited; and,
3. Exited without a diploma solely because they did not meet the required state score on the exit exam(s). Note: course work and exit exam(s) required for graduation have changed over time.

Eligible former students have **until the last day of this year, December 31, 2017** to petition their local school board for their diploma.

Graduation Pathways for Students with Disabilities

In 2014, Louisiana created pathways for every student with disabilities to be able to earn a diploma. Following examples of laws from many other states, Act 833 of 2014 grants the IEP team of an eligible student the authority to establish performance requirements for the student to earn a high school diploma. To be considered for this graduation pathway, a student would have had to not meet state-established benchmarks on the two most recent attempts of state-established assessments required for graduation. While eligibility for this graduation pathway is determined by performance on state-established assessments, the performance requirements for graduation set by an IEP team are not limited to the state exit exams (currently the end-of-course tests). Even students with the most significant disabilities (i.e., students

taught and tested on alternate standards) have a pathway to earn a diploma.

Follow the link below for guidance from the Louisiana Department of Education on the graduation pathways to a high school diploma for students with disabilities:

<https://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/students-with-disabilities/graduation-pathways-for-students-with-dissabilities.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

Contact Us

LaDDC News is the electronic newsletter for the LA Developmental Disabilities Council.

If there are any questions about the information above, contact the Council by replying to this email, or calling the toll free number listed below:

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