



STATE OF ALABAMA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Michael Sentance, J.D., LL.M.
State Superintendent of Education

April 14, 2017

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MEMORANDUM

TO: City and County Superintendents of Education

FROM: Michael Sentance *MS*
State Superintendent of Education

SUBJECT: *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* Guidance for Students With Disabilities Graduating in May 2017

Currently, students with disabilities who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) have three pathways that lead to an Alabama High School Diploma (AHSD). The pathways are the General Education Pathway, Essentials Pathway, and Alternate Achievement Standards (AAS) Pathway. Therefore, all students who meet the graduation requirements for their selected pathway will receive an AHSD.

Students with disabilities who completed all coursework on the General Education Pathway and who met all graduation requirements will earn and be awarded an AHSD. These students will count as graduates in the Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate

Students with disabilities who have an IEP and took coursework on the Essentials Pathway and on the Alternate Achievement Standards (AAS) Pathway that will exit in May 2017, will receive an AHSD. However, any student with an IEP who took a core curriculum course under these pathways will not be counted to the U.S. Department of Education as a graduate in the Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate. Those students are considered “non-graduates” as opposed to graduates or dropouts. They do not count in the school/school system drop-out rate.

For students who complete the General Education Pathway coursework, his/her AHSD is considered a regular diploma, as they have completed all the same requirements/contents as a student without a disability. Therefore, the student’s right to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) ceases upon completion of this pathway. Students who complete the AHSD through the Essentials Pathway or the Alternate Achievement Standards Pathway may participate in graduation ceremonies and activities with nondisabled, age-appropriate peers and then continue to receive a FAPE until he/she exits school or attains the age of 21, as these two pathways are not fully aligned with the Alabama Courses of Study. As stated

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previously, local education agencies are encouraged not to issue the AHSD until the student is truly ready to exit.

The Special Education Services (SES) staff is currently reviewing the entire SES Section of Chapter 290-8-9 of the *Alabama Administrative Code* (AAC) to determine what updates are needed to comply with current guidance. The SES staff is also exploring the Alternate Diploma option that the *Every Student Succeeds Act* allows.

For further information, please contact Ms. Cindy Augustine by e-mail at caugustine@alsde.edu or by telephone at 334-242-8114.

MS/CA/BJ

cc: High School Principals
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