

## State-defined Alternate Diploma Frequently Asked Questions for Families

**What is the new State-defined Alternate Diploma?** The State-defined Alternate Diploma is the diploma awarded to **students with the most significant cognitive disabilities** who were assessed using the alternate assessment aligned to alternate academic achievement standards.

**How is the State-defined Alternate Diploma different from a Regular Diploma?** While this diploma is standards-based and aligned with the state requirements for the Regular High School Diploma, it is not a Regular High School Diploma. A State-defined Alternate Diploma does not terminate a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who enroll in high school for the first time in Fall 2020 will be eligible for this diploma by meeting the criteria outlined in the following Board Rule: [here](#).

**Which students qualify for the new State-defined Alternate Diploma?** Only students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who take the Georgia Alternate Assessment (GAA) are eligible to receive the Alternate Diploma. The eligibility criteria for the GAA can be reviewed [here](#). These are the students who, due to their significant cognitive disabilities, are unlikely to access the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) even with the best instruction. The Alternate Content Standards are aligned to the GSE but do not cover the full depth and breadth of the GSE.

Instruction/Standards	Assessment	Diploma
Georgia Standards of Excellence	→ Georgia Milestones	→ Regular
Alternate Content Standards	→ GAA 2.0	→ Alternate



**Why did Georgia create a State-defined Alternate Diploma?** The creation of this State-defined Alternate Diploma: (1) addresses issues identified by the U.S. Department of Education during federal monitoring; (2) allows for better inclusion of students with significant cognitive disabilities assessed via the Georgia Alternate Assessment (GAA) 2.0 in graduation rates; and (3) creates a tighter alignment among the instruction received, assessment taken, and diploma for which a student is eligible.

**How will this diploma impact these students’ future postsecondary and/or transition opportunities?** For postsecondary and transition opportunities, many institutions will allow the credential for transition opportunities and, as with the Regular Diploma, there would most likely be additional admission criteria for postsecondary institutions. It should be noted that the Alternate Diploma and the Regular Diploma are **not equivalent credentials**.

**When will this new Alternate Diploma go into effect, and when will the first students graduate with this diploma?** The Alternate Diploma option will be available for students who entered ninth grade during the 2020-2021 school year and beyond. Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who were in high school prior to the 2020-2021 school year who take the GAA and complete other requirements will still receive the Regular Diploma.

**9th Grade Cohorts by Year/Diploma Type**

16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26	26-27
9th grade - REGULAR DIPLOMA										
9th grade - REGULAR DIPLOMA										
9th grade - REGULAR DIPLOMA										
9th grade - REGULAR DIPLOMA										
9th grade - ALTERNATE DIPLOMA										
9th grade - ALTERNATE DIPLOMA										

**How does the Alternate Diploma apply to four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) calculations?** Students receiving this State-defined Alternate Diploma will count toward the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate, regardless of the year they receive their diploma – provided they graduate within the time period for which the State ensures the availability of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities. In Georgia, this is when a student has reached age 22. We believe this is a positive change for students with significant cognitive disabilities and will allow schools to serve those students without being penalized if they do not graduate within their four-year cohort – which may not be what’s best for that individual student.

**What happens if a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities who takes the Georgia Alternate Assessment withdraws from school without receiving the State-defined Alternate Diploma?** If the student has not yet reached his or her 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, he/she will still have the opportunity to return to school and continue to receive a free appropriate public education until the 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday.

**When would a student receiving a State-defined Alternate Diploma participate in graduation ceremonies?** Participation in graduation ceremonies is determined by the local district. Please contact your district regarding local policy.