

The Oregon Modified Diploma: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

This document is organized into seven topic areas:

General: Definition and general implementation information

Eligibility: Eligibility criteria

Decision-Making: Guidelines and procedures

Modification Decisions: Modification definition and information

Credit Requirements: Credit requirements, definitions, and proficiency levels

Additional Student Diploma Requirements

Post High School Implications: Impact on Post High School education, training and career options

GENERAL

1. What is a modified diploma?

A modified diploma is a high school completion document that may be earned by students who have demonstrated an inability to meet the full set of academic content standards required for a regular high school diploma, even with reasonable accommodations. To be eligible for a modified diploma, a student must have a “documented history”¹ of an inability to maintain grade level achievement due to significant learning and instructional barriers,² or a documented history of a medical condition that creates a barrier to achievement.

2. Why would a student earn a modified diploma instead of a regular high school diploma?

A student may not be able to meet the full set of academic content standards, even with reasonable accommodations, but may be able to fulfill all requirements for the modified diploma as described in state, district and school policies. The Modified Diploma requires 24 units of credit. Credits may be earned through modified courses, regular education courses (with or without accommodations or modifications), or a combination of these two types of courses.

3. When will the OAR for a modified diploma apply?

School districts and public charter schools were first required to make modified diplomas available to students during the 2008-2009 school year. *ORS 329.451*

Revisions to OAR 581-022-1134, Modified Diploma, were adopted by the State Board of Education on December 4, 2009. All students enrolling in the 9th grade for the first time must meet all the state’s criteria for a modified diploma.

However, if a student entered 9th grade prior to July 1, 2007, the student’s school team shall decide whether the student must meet the unit of credit requirements in

¹Evidence in the cumulative record and education plans of a student that demonstrates the inability over time to maintain grade level achievement even with appropriate modifications and accommodations. OAR 581-022-1134(1)(a)

²Significant physical, cognitive or emotional barrier that impairs a student’s ability to maintain grade level achievement. OAR 581-022-1134(1)(b)

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section (5) of OAR 581-022-1134 to receive a modified diploma or the unit of credit requirements specified by the school district or public charter school for a modified diploma when the student entered 9th grade. For students first enrolled in the 9th grade prior to July 2007 (primarily seniors), the student's team may decide to award a modified diploma based on the units of credit described in the school district's policies and procedures for a modified diploma, or the state's units of credits.

4. **When is a student considered “first enrolled in the 9th grade?”**

When ODE drafted the rule, they considered a student to have entered 9th grade at the completion of their 8th grade year, which would generally be prior to July 1. Therefore, the exception will apply to seniors during the 2010-2011 academic year.

5. **What are the next steps school districts must take to meet the requirements of the modified diploma rule?**

School districts must adopt policies and procedures to comply with OAR 581-022-1134. ODE has worked with the Oregon School Boards Association (OSBA) to develop an approved sample policy. ODE, together with the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA), has prepared an Administrators' Toolkit and an Educators' Toolkit for districts and schools to use in planning and implementing the Oregon Diploma; see www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/real/diploma/toolkits.aspx.

6. **Do all modified courses have to be taught by highly qualified teachers?**

According to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), a teacher who does not teach a core academic subject is not required to meet the requirements specified in ESEA. Core academic subjects include reading, and language arts, mathematics, sciences, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts (visual arts, music and drama), history, and geography. The same is true under IDEA.

7. **Can a student earning a modified diploma participate in the high school graduation ceremony?**

Yes, a student receiving a modified diploma **shall** be offered the option of participating in the high school graduation ceremony with the members of their class receiving a high school diploma.

8. **What else is a school district required to provide for modified diploma students?**

School districts must provide age appropriate and developmentally appropriate literacy instruction to all students until the student graduates with a diploma, modified diploma, extended diploma or alternative certificate. A district may choose to provide literacy instruction after graduation to students with a modified diploma who continue to attend school. The determination to provide literacy instruction after graduation to a student may be made by the student's IEP team or other school team.

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School districts must ensure that students have access to the appropriate resources to achieve a modified diploma at each high school in the school district.

9. Can school districts call the modified diploma something other than a "modified diploma"?

No. The ORS 329.451 states that school districts and public charter schools must offer a modified diploma. Furthermore, the Legislature has indicated their intent to have statewide uniformity for high school diplomas.

10. Does a parent need to be notified annually after grade 5 of the modified diploma option if the student is not taking alternate assessment?

No. Beginning in grade five and then annually, school districts and public charter schools are required to provide information to the parents or guardians of a student taking an alternate assessment of the availability of a modified diploma and the requirements for the modified diploma.

11. Does each charter school have to provide all diploma options?

Yes. Public charter schools must ensure that students have access to the appropriate resources to achieve a high school diploma (OAR 581-022-11300), a modified diploma (OAR 581-022-1134), an extended diploma (OAR 581-022-1133) and an alternative certificate (OAR 581-022-1135).

ELIGIBILITY

12. Is the modified diploma only available for special education students?

No. The modified diploma may be awarded to **any** student who has met the eligibility criteria and completed the state requirements for a modified diploma.

13. Who is eligible to earn a modified diploma?

The modified diploma is designed for any student who has:

- A documented history of the inability to maintain grade level achievement due to significant learning and instructional barriers; or,
- A documented history of a medical condition that creates a barrier to achievement.

Students who have demonstrated the inability to meet the full set of academic content standards, even with reasonable modifications and accommodations, and who fulfill all state requirements for the modified diploma as stipulated in OAR 581-022-1134 may receive a modified diploma.

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14. What is “documented history?” (Eligibility Criteria)

Documented history is evidence in the cumulative record and education plans of a student that demonstrates the inability over time to maintain grade level achievement even with appropriate modifications and accommodations.

15. What is an “instructional barrier?” (Eligibility Criteria)

An instructional barrier is a significant physical, cognitive or emotional barrier that impairs a student’s ability to maintain grade level achievement.

16. What is an example of an instructional barrier or significant learning barrier?

a) Instructional Barrier: Intermittent panic attacks that prevent the student from attending and participating in school on a regular basis and responding to instruction without significant modifications.

b) Instructional Barrier: The level of comprehension, either concrete or abstract. A student who functions on a concrete level and is unable to comprehend the abstract would not be able to maintain grade level achievement, particularly in math and science, unless content were presented concretely, even with intense instruction.

c) Significant Learning Barrier: A specific learning disability in math that would not allow the student to succeed beyond a certain grade level even with a variety of accommodations and modifications and intense instructional opportunities.

17. Who is NOT eligible to earn a modified diploma?

Students who are currently engaged in the use of illegal drugs or alcohol are excluded from consideration if the significant learning and instructional barriers are **due** to the use of illegal drugs or alcohol.

18. Can a student who graduates with a modified diploma continue public education to age 21?

Yes. If a student is on an IEP and graduates with a modified diploma, the student remains entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) through the age of 21.

If a student is not on an IEP and graduates with a modified diploma, the school district must admit the student through the age of 19 or until the student receives a regular diploma. A person whose 19th birthday occurs during the school year shall continue to be eligible for a free and appropriate public education for the remainder of the school year. A district may admit an otherwise eligible person who is not receiving special education and who has not attained 21 years of age prior to the beginning of the current school year if the person is shown to be in need of additional education in order to receive a high school diploma. (ORS 339.115)

19. Does a regular education student who cannot pass the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) test or demonstrate proficiency in certain

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essential skills through an approved local option, automatically become eligible for a Modified Diploma?

No. Failure to meet the requirements for a regular high school diploma does not automatically make the student eligible for a Modified Diploma. Students must meet the full set of eligibility criteria in order to receive a modified diploma, including having a documented history of the inability to maintain grade level achievement due to significant learning and instructional barriers, or a documented history of a medical condition that creates a barrier to achievement.

DECISION-MAKING

20. Who determines if a student is eligible for a regular diploma, modified diploma, extended diploma or an alternative certificate?

The student's school team decides if a student will work toward obtaining a regular diploma, modified diploma, extended diploma or an alternative certificate. The team membership is determined by a school district or public charter school, should include the student and must include a parent or guardian. In the case of students receiving special education services at a public charter school, the student's resident school district shall determine the team for that student. Typically the team for a special education student will include IEP team members.

21. Does a school district need parental permission to award a modified diploma?

A school district may award a modified diploma to a student **only** upon the written consent of the parent or guardian of the student during the school year in which the modified diploma is awarded. If a student is emancipated or has reached the age of 18, the school district does not need the written consent of the parent or guardian.

The school district should document the receipt of written consent and place the consent in the student's file.

22. Can a school team change the diploma decision for a student in their junior or senior year?

A student's school team may formally decide to revise a modified diploma decision. In addition, if the documented history of the student changes when the student is within 2 years of their anticipated exit from high school, the student's school team may decide to allow a student to work towards a modified diploma, even if the student had previously been working toward another diploma option.

23. How will students or parents know that high school coursework has been modified?

Both the student and parent must be notified if high school courses have been modified and a school district or public charter school must provide a transcript which clearly identifies modified courses that count toward a modified diploma.

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MODIFICATION DECISIONS

24. Must all the courses be modified for a modified diploma?

No. Students may earn units of credit through regular education courses (with or without accommodations), modified courses or a combination of regular and modified courses. When one or more courses that contain substantial academic content are modified, those courses may count toward a modified diploma but do not count toward a regular diploma.

25. What is a modified curriculum?

The level of modification is determined by the school district. Modifications are made to assist students in meeting academic standards. For one student, it may mean algebra with modifications that would allow the student to meet part of the algebra standards. For another student, it may mean completing all the requirements for a consumer math course or completing a basic math course on the 6th grade level. The purpose is to push the student to work towards their potential, while providing them with any accommodations and/or modifications they require.

CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

26. Is there a specific level of proficiency in math the student needs to acquire or just the required number of credits?

For a modified diploma, the student does not have to complete specific math courses such as algebra and above. Credit could be earned in such courses as consumer math, business math or basic math. Credit could also be earned in courses at a higher level of proficiency, but with significant modifications.

27. What are the graduation requirements for students receiving a modified diploma?

Students are required to earn 24 units of credit and complete the Personalized Learning Requirements (as described in OAR 581-022-1134), and demonstrate proficiency in the required Essential Skills (as described in OAR 581-022-0615).

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28. How do the credit requirements vary for a modified diploma as compared to a regular diploma?

See the chart below. For a modified diploma, the total cannot exceed 24 units of credit.

Academic Subject	Credits Required for Graduation with a Modified Diploma	Credits Required for Graduation with a Regular Diploma (Beginning with the graduates of 2010)	
English/Language Arts	3 ³	4	
Mathematics	2	3	(In the class of 2014, all credits must be Algebra I and above)
Science	2	2	(Increases to 3, with 2 of the credits requiring lab experiences for graduates of 2012)
Social Sciences ⁴	2	3	
Physical Education	1	1	
Health	1	1	
Second Languages/ The Arts/Career and Technical Education (CTE) ⁵	1	1	(Increases to 3 for graduates in 2012)
Electives ⁶	12	9	(Decreases to 6 for graduates in 2012)
TOTAL CREDITS	24	24	

29. What is “Career Development,” which is included in the list of 12 remaining credits to be earned for a modified diploma?

Career Development as used in the modified diploma rule aligns with OAR 581-022-1510 *Comprehensive Guidance and Counseling*. Career Development could be any coursework, including working in a career center or other career exploration work that would assist the student in preparing for the career of his/her choice. For a

³ Students shall have access to literacy instruction until the completion of school.

⁴ **Social Sciences** may include history, civics, geography and economics (including personal finance).

⁵ Second Languages/The Arts/Career and Technical Education (CTE) units may be earned in any one or a combination of courses.

⁶ School districts and public charter schools shall be **flexible in awarding the remaining 12 units of credit**. The credits must meet the needs of the individual student as specified in the **education plan** of the student with the expectations and standards aligned to the appropriate grade level academic content standards. These credits may include: (A) Additional core credits; (B) Career and Technical Education; (C) Electives; and (D) Career development.

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student with disabilities, career development would include transition services and the course of study the student would pursue in order to achieve his or her post secondary goal.

30. What is “Additional Core” which is included in the list of 12 remaining credits to be earned for a modified diploma?

Additional core are classes in English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Sciences.

31. Can a school district apply credits of Co-Operative Work Experience done during the summer towards the 12 Elective Credits for a student on a Modified Diploma?

If the school district’s policy is to use credits earned in the summer toward diplomas, then the school district may apply the credits of Co-Operative Work Experience toward the Modified Diploma. The OARs do not state when the student may earn the credits; local policy may determine when credits may be earned.

32. What is the “minimum” number of modified courses that a student can take that would still qualify the student to earn a standard diploma.

A student may take as many modified courses as he/she wants or needs; however, modified courses cannot be used as one of the 24 units of credit for the regular diploma. Only those courses taken under standard conditions, without modifications, can be counted toward the regular diploma. For example, the student may take algebra for the first time in his/her freshman year under modified conditions and the course does not count toward a regular diploma. However, the student may retake the course under standard conditions, without any modifications, and only the second algebra course would count toward a regular diploma. NOTE: Taking the original algebra course with modifications does not automatically require a student to work toward a modified diploma. If a student has successfully completed the requirements for a regular diploma, the school district must award the regular diploma to the student.

ADDITIONAL STUDENT REQUIREMENTS

33. Do students earning a modified diploma have to meet the other requirements in the Oregon diploma?

Yes. Each student is expected to:

- 1) Develop an **education plan** and build an **education profile**;
- 2) Be aware of the option to earn **credit for proficiency**;
- 3) Build a collection of evidence (or include evidence in an existing collection) to demonstrate **extended application** of the standards; and,
- 4) Demonstrate proficiency in essential skills before they are awarded the diploma (OAR 581-022-0615).

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34. What is the relationship or difference between an “Education Plan” and an Individual Education Plan (IEP)?

The language in the adopted OAR 581-022-1134 *Modified Diploma* mirrors the language in OAR 581-022-1130 *Diploma Requirements* for a regular diploma. Section (9) of the OAR for a modified diploma reads: “Each student shall develop an education plan and build an education profile as provided under OAR 581-022-1130.” For special education students, the IEP could serve as the education plan if it meets the criteria in OAR 581-022-1130.

35. What are the required Essential Skills?

The Essential Skills will be phased in over the coming years. Students first enrolled in the 9th grade in 2008 will need to demonstrate the Essential Skill of Reading. Students first enrolled in the 9th grade in 2009 will need to demonstrate the Essential Skills of Reading and Writing. Students first enrolled in the 9th grade in 2010 or later will need to demonstrate the Essential Skills of Reading, Writing, and Apply Mathematics. This timeline and all associated requirements apply to students receiving a modified diploma.

36. Are modifications allowed in demonstration of the Essential Skills?

Yes. See below for modification options.

For students on IEPs or 504 Plans:

School districts and public charter schools may administer modified work samples or OAKS assessments consistent with the requirements of the student’s IEP or 504 Plan. When modifying an OAKS assessment, the school district or public charter school must also ensure that the modifications are in compliance with section 4(d) of OAR 581-022-0610: Administration of State Tests. Modified OAKS assessments will remain invalid for purposes of school and district accountability.

For students who are not on an IEP or a 504 Plan:

School districts and public charter schools may only administer modifications to work samples that are consistent with the modifications the student has received during instruction. Students must have received those same modifications during instruction in the content area to be assessed and in the year in which the work sample is administered. These modifications must be approved in advance by the student’s school team responsible for monitoring the student’s progress. **Students who are not on an IEP or a 504 Plan may not receive a modified OAKS assessment.**

37. May modified OAKS assessments be used for accountability purposes?

No. Although modified OAKS assessments may be used to fulfill the Essential Skills requirement by students seeking a modified diploma, these modified assessments are still considered invalid for school and district accountability purposes (i.e., participation and performance). All of the implications associated with modifying assessments and curricula for the purpose of obtaining a modified diploma should be made clear to parents and decision-makers.

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38. For modified assessments, can districts adjust the cut score needed to pass OAKS or the level of rigor needed for a successful work sample?

Yes. Modifications, as described in OAR 581-022-0610, are changes to the achievement level, construct, or measured outcome of an assessment. This means that the IEP team or school team responsible for approving modifications for a student's assessment may adjust the administration of the assessment and or the assessment's achievement standard. For example, an IEP team could decide that successful demonstration would be a 220 on the OAKS Reading instead of the regular "meets" cut score of a 236, or require a student to get a minimum score of 9 on each work sample as opposed to the minimum of 12 for a regular work sample.

IMPLICATIONS

39. Will the modified diploma be accepted by four-year universities or community colleges?

Most four-year universities do not accept a modified diploma; however, an appeal may be considered by some universities. Community college courses are available to students who have a modified diploma. At the community college level, all new, non-transfer freshmen are required to take a placement exam that indicates course levels required in reading, language arts (comprehension and writing) and mathematics. Community colleges offer remedial courses that do not count toward college credit.

40. Will the modified diploma be accepted by the military?

Some branches of the military may accept a modified diploma. Acceptance depends on the current needs of the military; however, criteria may change quickly. Students and their parents should check with recruiters to determine if a modified diploma is currently being accepted. All branches of the service have minimum scores required for entry on a placement test called the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB).

41. Will students who receive a modified diploma be eligible for federal or state financial aid at a post-secondary institution?

In July, 2009 the United States Department of Education (USDE), responded to a written request from the Oregon Department of Education regarding whether the Oregon Modified Diploma meets the high school diploma requirement for Federal student aid eligibility.

The USDE stated that the Oregon Modified Diploma does not meet this eligibility requirement. However, as an alternative to having a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent, a student may establish eligibility for Federal student financial aid by passing an independently administered ability-to-benefit test approved by the Department of Education.

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Examples of USDE approved ability-to-benefit tests are listed in the table below.

<p>ASSET Program: Basic Skills Tests (Reading, Writing, and Numerical)—Forms B2, C2, D2, and E2 <i>Passing Score:</i> Reading (35), Writing (35), and Numerical (33)</p>	<p>Career Programs Assessment (CPAT) Basic Skills Subtests (Language Usage, Reading and Numerical)—Forms B and C <i>Passing Score:</i> Language Usage (42), Reading (43), and Numerical (41)</p>	<p>Combined English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA): Forms 1 and 2 <i>Passing Score:</i> CELSA Form 1 (90) and CELSA Form 2 (90)</p>
<p>COMPASS Subtests: Prealgebra/Numerical Skills Placement, Reading Placement, and Writing Placement <i>Passing Score:</i> Prealgebra/ Numerical (25), Reading (62), and Writing (32)</p>	<p>Computerized Placement Tests (CPTs)/ Accuplacer (Reading Comprehension, Sentence Skills, and Arithmetic) <i>Passing Score:</i> Reading Comprehension (55), Sentence Skills (60), and Arithmetic (34)</p>	<p>Wonderlic Basic Skills Test (WBST)—Verbal Forms VS-1 & VS-2, Quantitative Forms QS-1 & QS-2 <i>Passing Score:</i> Verbal (200) and Quantitative (210)</p>
<p>Descriptive Tests of Language Skills (DTLS) (Reading Comprehension, Sentence Structure and Conventions of Written English)—Forms M-K-3KDT and M-K-3LDT</p>	<p>Descriptive Tests of Mathematical Skills (DTMS) (Arithmetic)—Forms MK-3KDT and M-K-3LDT <i>Passing Score:</i> Reading Comprehension (108), Sentence Structure (9), Conventions of Written English (309), and Arithmetic (506)</p>	

According to David A. Bergeron, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, Planning and Innovation, Office of Postsecondary Education, USDE, “Oregon students who obtain a Modified Diploma may still be eligible for Federal student financial aid if they pass an independently administered test proving their ability to benefit from the training or instruction offered.”

Most Oregon Community Colleges and many Private Career Schools administer an approved Ability-to-Benefit Test as an entrance requirement. If students who receive a modified diploma achieve a passing score on these approved tests, they may be eligible for Federal student financial aid.

Recommendation: Contact the school of interest and ask about entrance requirements, including diploma requirements and ability-to-benefit testing before making final decisions.

42. Where can I find more information about the modified diploma?

More information about the modified diploma may be found at <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=2047> or contact Jackie Burr at (503)947-5639 or email Jackie.burr@state.or.us.