



DIPLOMA PATHWAYS

In Tennessee, there are three different diploma options available to students graduating from a public high school. The three options include a regular high school diploma, a special education diploma, and an occupational diploma. Each of these diploma types has different eligibility requirements to fulfill as well as different implications for which pathways students can take when they leave high school. Each diploma type, its requirements, and its implications are outlined below.

Regular High School Diploma

The regular high school diploma is the traditional diploma earned by high school students.

Requirements:

- The student must successfully complete 22 credits, specified by course subject.
- The ACT or SAT exams must be completed during the 11th grade.
- The student demonstrates satisfactory attendance and conduct.
- The student earns at least a 70% in the overall course. All students are required to take the End of Course, or EOC, examination.

Implications:

- Students with a regular diploma are able to attend traditional postsecondary educational opportunities such as four-year colleges or universities, community colleges, and colleges of applied technology.
- This is the best diploma option for employment as it is the most widely recognized by employers.

Special Education Diploma

The special education diploma is a pathway for students who will not be earning a regular education diploma.

Requirements:

- The student will not be able to meet the requirements of a regular high school diploma.
- The student has received special education services and supports and the student has made satisfactory progress on their IEP.
- The student has exhibited satisfactory attendance and conduct.



Transition

T E N N E S S E E

Implications:

- Students will not be eligible to attend a traditional 4-year college or university.
- Students can attend certain programs at a college of applied technology or a community college.
- If the student has a diagnosis of an intellectual disability (ID), they can also apply to college programs for students with ID called inclusive higher education programs, which are sometimes referred to as Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTPs).
- Special education diplomas are not often recognized for employment.
- Students are able to continue working towards a regular education diploma until the age of 22.

Occupational Diploma

The occupational diploma emphasizes vocational and career outcomes. This diploma is for students who are on track to earn a special education diploma and will not earn a regular high school diploma. The student and IEP team can determine whether they want to pursue the occupational diploma at the end of the student's 10th grade year or 2 years prior to the student's expected graduation date.

Requirements:

- The student has received special education services and supports and the student has made satisfactory progress on their IEP.
- The student has exhibited satisfactory attendance and conduct.
- The student must complete at least 2 years of paid or non-paid work experience.
 - The two years of work experience will look different from county to county. The IEP team can determine what level of work experience they require from the student.
 - The student may participate in paid, unpaid, or a combination of work.
 - The setting for work can be within the school, off-campus, or a combination of within school and off-campus opportunities as determined by the IEP team.
- The student has completed the Skills, Knowledge, and Experience Mastery Assessment (SKEMA).

Implications:

- Students receiving an occupational diploma will not be eligible to attend a traditional 4-year college or university.
- Students can attend certain programs within a community college or a college of applied technology.
- If the student has a diagnosis of an intellectual disability (ID), they can also apply to college programs for students with ID called inclusive higher education programs, which are sometimes referred to as Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTPs).
- Students are able to continue working towards a regular education diploma until the age of 22.
- The student's two years of required work experience will likely be attractive to future employers.