

1. What are the different types of diploma options that exist? What opportunities do each of these diplomas afford?

The state of Tennessee has four diploma options available to students graduating from a public high school: a regular high school diploma, a special education diploma, an occupational diploma, and an alternate academic diploma.

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

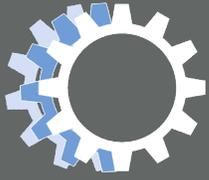
Students who graduate with a special education diploma are able to attend certain programs at community colleges or colleges of applied technology. Students who have a diagnosis of intellectual disability can also apply to college programs for students with ID known as Comprehensive Transition Programs, or CTPs. Many local universities have these programs designed specifically for students with ID.

Students who graduate with an occupational diploma are able to attend certain programs within a community college or a college of applied technology. They may also be eligible to attend college programs for students with intellectual disability if they have a diagnosis of an intellectual disability. The main difference between the special education diploma and the occupational diploma is the occupational diploma's emphasis on vocational and career outcomes.

Students who graduate with an alternate academic diploma (AAD) are able to attend certain programs within a community college or a college of applied technology. They may also be eligible to attend college programs for students with intellectual disability if they have a diagnosis of an intellectual disability. The AAD counts toward the school's high school graduation rate. Students may earn the AAD and an occupational diploma.

2. When does the IEP team need to make a decision about the diploma track that a student will take?

In order for a student to follow the regular 4-year high school diploma route, the IEP team should attempt to make this decision prior to the beginning of the student's freshman year of high school. It should be noted, however, that students can receive their special education, alternate academic or occupational diploma after four years and then continue working towards a regular education diploma until they reach the age of 22. The student and IEP team can determine whether the student will pursue the occupational diploma at the end of the student's 10th grade year or 2 years before the expected graduation date.



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3. How does the IEP team decide which diploma track a student should take?

Diploma options should be determined on an individual basis, taking a student's preferences, interests, needs, and strengths into account. Decisions should not be made based on disability type. The IEP team should consider how the student's educational pathway will lead him or her to meeting his or her postsecondary goals. For example, Giovanni is interested in going to a four-year college to get a degree in business in order to work in sales at a technology company. If he were to pursue a special education or occupational diploma, he would not be able to achieve his goal. In general, the regular high school diploma will give students the most options for postsecondary education and employment. Before the student and IEP team chooses to pursue an occupational, alternate academic or special education diploma, they should investigate whether these diplomas would be accepted for the careers they are interested in.

4. Which considerations should be taken into account when a student is deciding whether to pursue postsecondary education?

There is a lot to consider when a student is deciding whether to pursue postsecondary education. Some considerations may include:

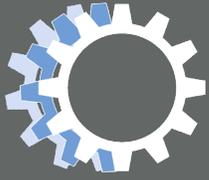
- Whether the student will be able to keep up with the academic rigor of their classes
- Which accommodations or modifications are available
- Whether behavioral supports could be implemented in the class
- Whether the student should disclose his or her disability when applying to schools
- If the school will accept a student with an intellectual disability
- If there are specific scholarships available for individuals with disabilities

5. How can I help students learn about postsecondary education options?

There are many ways to teach students about post-secondary education options. For example, you can take your class on a campus visit; have students research admissions requirements; take your class to college fairs; teach students about the kind of job or career you can get with different degrees; and set up meetings with school counselors to discuss post-secondary education.

6. Are there accommodations for students with disabilities in postsecondary settings? If so, how do students gain access to these accommodations?

Yes, there are accommodations for students with disabilities in post-secondary settings. The difference between receiving accommodations in public schools and post-secondary education lies in the laws that require that these accommodations be provided to students. In public schools, students receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. In post-secondary education, students are no longer covered under IDEA. Instead, students are covered under the Americans with Disabilities



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Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Both of these laws require that eligible individuals with disabilities be provided with reasonable accommodations if the individual discloses a disability to a covered institution.

The key here is that in order for students with disabilities to receive accommodations in post-secondary education, they must disclose their disability to the office of disability services. Post-secondary settings do not have to provide accommodations if a student has not disclosed their disability to the office of disability services. When disclosing, the family should be able to provide diagnosis information (e.g. assessments, official diagnosis documentation, etc.), types of accommodations received in the past and anticipated accommodations for the postsecondary setting, and a description of how the disability affects the student academically and/or socially.

It should be noted that accommodations for students with disabilities vary from campus to campus. To find out what different post-secondary settings offer, call their Disability Services office or look on their website. Further, accommodations are determined on an individual basis after a student discloses their disability.

7. Are there any postsecondary education options for students with intellectual disability?

Yes, Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTPs) are postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disability recognized by the US Department of Education. These programs often involve academic and life skills classes, internships, participation in extracurricular activities, and peer mentoring. Check out Think College to find a CTP program near you!

8. How can I prepare students for postsecondary education during the school day?

There are a number of different ways to prepare students for post-secondary education. Some examples include:

- Arranging field trips to various postsecondary schools
- Arranging trips to college fairs
- Having students explore the kind of job or career that they can get with different degrees
- Having students engage in activities about the different types of educational settings
- Having students research admissions requirements