

## Family Tip Sheets:

# What Should I Know About Diploma Options?

### The Basics

Tennessee has four diploma options for students graduating from public high schools. Students have until the May following their 21st birthday to finish requirements for the diploma.

- The regular high school diploma is the traditional diploma for high school students.
- The special education diploma is for students who receive special education services and are not able to meet the requirements of the regular high school diploma.
- The occupational diploma focuses on job/career skills for students. It requires independent completion of certain tasks.
- The alternate academic diploma is an option for students who take the state's alternate assessments. It is aligned with the coursework load for a student getting a regular high school diploma.

### Who Can Help Me?

Talk to your student's teacher and the rest of the IEP team to make a decision about diploma options.

If you are concerned that your IEP team is not providing your child with the right supports or diploma path, contact Disability Rights Tennessee:  
1(800) 342-1660  
Gethelp@disabilityrightstn.org

### What Questions Should I Ask?

- Can my child complete the requirements for a regular diploma by the time he or she is 21?
- What supports and accommodations have the IEP team provided to help my child get a regular high school diploma?
- Which diploma will help my child meet their career or education goals?
- When can my child change their diploma option during high school?

### Myths

#### **Myth #1: My child has to choose between the occupational and alternate academic diploma**

Students can earn both the occupational and alternate academic diploma. Most students will work on the requirements for the alternate academic diploma first, before completing the two years of work experience needed for the occupational diploma.

#### **Myth #2: It doesn't matter which diploma my child gets**

The kind of diploma you earn will affect your job or college options. If you do not get a

regular high school diploma, you can't attend four-year colleges, universities, or community colleges. Special education diplomas are often not recognized by employers. An occupational diploma will help students build workplace skills.

**Myth #3: I need to make a decision on the type of diploma for my child in their first year of high school**

It's good to begin thinking about diploma options early. However, you don't need to make the decision on the diploma options during freshman year. The IEP team can't even decide about the occupational diploma until the end of sophomore year. You can revisit the diploma option during high school.