

PREPARING FOR LIFE

A Student/Parent/School Planning Guide
For Determining Diploma/Exit Options
For Secondary Students with Disabilities



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Introduction

This version of *Preparing for Life* is designed to provide guidance to students, parents, and school personnel as they plan the courses of study needed to meet transitional goals of students with disabilities. Transition planning should begin as early as elementary school as parents and teachers discuss the educational progress of students with disabilities. Part of that process is to begin discussions concerning future goals and the skills that are needed to support these goals. As the student reaches middle school, more definitive discussions should take place in the IEP meetings to determine appropriate coursework the student should pursue. During the year the student turns 13, the IEP Team must address the transition service needs that focus on the student's course of study. Part of that process is to begin discussions of diploma/exit options. The student must be invited to attend transition IEP meetings beginning the year he or she turns 13 or younger if appropriate.

As part of the IEP meeting for students entering the ninth grade, the IEP Team determines the most appropriate diploma option to be pursued depending on the student's transitional goals related to employment and community living. The IEP Team is encouraged to consider the highest option feasible for the student to allow access to maximum post-school opportunities. The IEP Team will also plan the appropriate courses of study to be included on the IEP document as well as any additional transition services and needed accommodations and allowable modifications. At each annual IEP meeting, or more frequently as needed, the IEP Team, including the student, reviews the student's progress toward the selected graduation option. The graduation option selected may be adjusted through this process with the understanding that changing options may, in some cases, result in additional time needed to graduate.

Student Participation in Developing the Transition Plan

Beginning at age 13, or younger if appropriate, students with disabilities will be participating in the development of their individualized education programs. *During the eighth-grade IEP meetings, students should take an active role in selecting their graduation option and determining the needed courses based on their preferred post-school outcomes.*

Due to the importance of the student's active participation in making educational plans affecting his or her future, the student must learn and use self-determination/self-advocacy skills. Part of this process is to learn his or her own strengths and needs, understand his or her legal rights, and participate in career exploration and assessment activities. The following are some best practices for ensuring student participation in the IEP process:

Before or during the eighth-grade year:

- Provide instruction in the classroom setting on self-determination/self-advocacy skills and skills related to understanding the purpose of the IEP process.
- Discuss disabilities and how they may impact life.
- Provide instruction on the legal rights of students with disabilities.
- Provide instruction on the purpose of the transition requirements of IDEA.
- Work with school counselors in the development of the student's four-year educational/career plan.

Before the IEP meeting:

- Provide an opportunity for the student to describe his or her interests and preferences.
- Review the meeting notice, agenda, and draft goals and benchmarks with the student to familiarize the student with what will be discussed and how he or she might participate.
- Role-play IEP meetings to help students understand the IEP process and requirements.

During the IEP meeting:

- Sit back, relax, and allow the student to lead the meeting to the greatest extent possible.
- If necessary, encourage the student to greet and introduce meeting participants, talk about his or her interests and preferences, and discuss goals for the future.
- For a more reluctant student, ask questions that cannot be answered with a yes or no response and set aside time for the student to speak, being careful not to interrupt while he or she is talking. The student should be encouraged to ask questions about any part of the IEP that he or she does not understand.

After the IEP meeting:

- Encourage the student to monitor his or her progress toward the IEP goals.
- Reassure the student and parents that IEP meetings can be scheduled as needed to make changes to the individualized education program.

Resource: <http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/stuguide/ta2.pdf>

Planning Student Career Paths

Students will need guidance in middle and upper grades in career planning. The first step in this process is to assess the student for career interests and aptitude leading to the student's career path. This information will then be used by the IEP Team to begin planning for the appropriate courses of study. Once the career path is established and the IEP Team determines the appropriateness of programming with regard to the career path, a career plan should be developed.

Part of the minimum standards for school counseling and guidance programs in South Carolina is the development of a four-year educational/career plan. Beginning in the eighth grade, and annually thereafter, school counselors (Grades 8-12) are required to guide students in the development and annual revision of the four-year educational/career plan. The selection of the educational plan shall be approved in writing by the parents or guardians.

No Child Left Behind and a Focus on Standards

The following information is from the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition Web site: <http://www.ncset.org>.

Almost every state has developed academic content standards. These standards define what all students should know and be able to do in subject areas. States are required to have challenging academic content and student academic achievement standards in mathematics and reading/language arts. Beginning in the 2005-2006 school year, standards in science will also be required. In addition to identifying what is important for all students in each state to learn, these academic content standards also serve as the basis for state assessments. Writing academic content standards and designing ways to measure them are required by the Title I provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act. The No Child Left Behind Act requires that academic content standards (a) specify what all students are expected to know and be able to do, (b) contain coherent and rigorous content, and (c) encourage the teaching of advanced skills. This federal law also requires that schools assess the progress of all their students in achieving the standards and report their results.

The academic content standards that a state sets are for all students, including students with disabilities. This means that students with disabilities are to be held accountable to the academic content standards that have been established for other students. If students with disabilities are to be held accountable to the academic content standards, then they must also have access to the quality instructional strategies and curriculum materials that will help them reach those standards. Careful alignment of curriculum and instruction to the standards set for all students, along with the necessary learning supports, ensures that students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum and are held to high standards.

Planning for Student Post-School Outcomes

Beginning at age 13 or younger, if appropriate, the IEP Team must determine the student's post-school transition goals based on needs, preferences, interests, and appropriate transition and career planning assessments.

IEP Teams should choose one of the following or a combination of the following when identifying the **Employment Outcome** goal:

- Enrollment in postsecondary or vocational training
- Competitive employment with no need for support
- Competitive employment with time-limited support
- Supported employment with infrequent support
- Supported employment with daily support
- Day activity/training center

IEP Teams should choose one of the following or a combination of the following when identifying the **Community Living Outcome** goal:

- With parents or relatives
- Independent living with no need for support
- Independent living with time-limited support
- Semi-independent living with ongoing, infrequent support
- Semi-independent living with frequent support, but less than full time
- Group home with full-time support
- 24-hour supervision (residential care/nursing home)

Diploma/exit options should be considered in light of the **transitional goals** of the student, both in employment and community living areas. The IEP Team should address such questions as:

- What kind of employment interests does the student have?
- What kind of employment development services will be needed?
- What additional training and/or continuing education are envisioned?
- What forms of transportation will be used?
- What kind of financial management is needed?
- Where does the student want to live?
- Will the student need assistance with advocacy/guardianship issues?
- What community participation issues need to be addressed?
- What leisure and social activities are desired?
- What medical issues are to be considered?

Below are strategies that can be used to determine transition goals and course of study:

- Review the student's progress in school (e.g., grades, courses taken, assessment records, previous IEPs).
- Determine if clear transitional goals for employment and community living have been established.
- If undecided on IEP transitional goals, determine if additional assessments and/or data are needed (e.g., career interest and aptitude, situational assessments, social survival skills, student self-report measures).
- Once the transitional goals are identified, discuss and determine the appropriate diploma option and courses of study.

Selecting the Highest, Most Appropriate Diploma/Exit Option

1. Understand the diploma options.
2. Consider the student's functional transition assessment information.
3. Identify proposed diploma/exit option, least restrictive environment (LRE), and special education services.
4. Regularly monitor progress.
5. Make adjustments as necessary (adjust services before you lower LRE or diploma/exit option).

South Carolina High School Diploma/Exit Documents

The general education graduation options include:

- South Carolina High School Diploma (requires passing HSAP & earning 24 Carnegie Units)

In addition, students with disabilities, as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, may earn:

- South Carolina High School Graduation Certificate.
- Aiken County Employability Skills Diploma
- Aiken County Employability Skills Certificate

Individuals with or without disabilities who have exited school without a High School Diploma may continue to pursue a high school credential under:

- Adult Education
- High School Equivalency Certificate option (GED Program).

<p>SOUTH CAROLINA HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA</p> <p>Prepares students for many post-school options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Accepted by postsecondary institutions <input type="checkbox"/> Accepted by the military <input type="checkbox"/> Accepted by employers 	<p>Earn 24 Required Carnegie units</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 units English Language Arts 4 units Mathematics 3 units Science 1 unit U.S. History 1 unit Other Social Studies 1 unit Physical Education or JROTC ½ unit American Government ½ unit Economics 1 unit Computer Science 1 unit Foreign Language or Career & Technology Education 7 units Electives <p>Pass the HSAP High School Graduation Exam</p>
<p>SOUTH CAROLINA HIGH SCHOOL CERTIFICATE</p> <p>Prepares students for their post-school transitional goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Not generally accepted by postsecondary institutions <input type="checkbox"/> Not accepted by all military recruiters <input type="checkbox"/> May not be accepted by some employers 	<p>Earn 24 Required CARNEGIE UNITS for earning the SC High School Diploma</p> <p>Failure of the South Carolina High School Graduation Exam (HSAP)</p>
<p>AIKEN COUNTY EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS (ACES) DIPLOMA</p> <p>(available to students with disabilities as defined by IDEA)</p> <p>Prepares students for competitive employment and limited additional post-school options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Accepted by many employers <input type="checkbox"/> Accepted by the Technical College System in certain non-degree programs <input type="checkbox"/> May be accepted by the military on a case-by-case basis 	<p>Earn 24 Required CREDITS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 Employment Academics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment English I,II,III,IV • Employment Math I,II,III,IV 1 Science 4 Career Preparation I,II,III,IV 3 Employment Training (to include Employment Training I, II, and III), or credits earned in Career/Technical Education or a combination of both 2 Employment Practicum (competitive employment) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Health Education 1 Physical Education or JROTC 1 Computer Technology 3 credits Electives <p>CONTINUED REQUIREMENTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On campus Employment Training (30-50 hrs) - Off campus Employment Training (90-120 hrs) - Paid Employment (minimum 180 hours) - Attempt the HSAP High School Graduation Exam (Spring, 10th grade) - Employability Diploma Graduation Portfolio
<p>AIKEN COUNTY EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS (ACES) CERTIFICATE</p> <p>Prepares students for their post-school transitional goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Not generally accepted by postsecondary institutions <input type="checkbox"/> Not accepted by military recruiters <p>May not be accepted by some employers</p>	<p>Attend a minimum of 4 years of high school, meet the requirements outlined in the student's (IEP) Individual Education Plan, and meet the requirements for attendance</p> <p>CONTINUED REQUIREMENTS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School based training, Community based training, - Attempt the HSAP High School Graduation Exam or HSAP-Alt - Graduation Portfolio

Considerations for Desired Post-School Outcomes

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

- Students who plan to pursue postsecondary training in four-year colleges and universities should remain on a general education diploma option to meet the qualifications for admission.
- The Graduation Certificate is not generally accepted as entrance criteria for postsecondary training.

MILITARY

- The military generally requires a high school diploma or equivalency for admission.
- The military uses the scores on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) as entrance criteria.
- The military will consider students with an alternative diploma for selection on a case-by-case basis.
- Selection criteria may change depending on the need for recruits; therefore, the local military recruiters should be contacted for the most current information.

EMPLOYMENT

- Students with and without disabilities may participate in employment opportunities through Career/Technical Cooperative Education.
- The Aiken County Employability Program is designed to provide an additional course of study option for students with disabilities with the expected outcome of independent, competitive employment.
- The Department of Rehabilitation Services can provide support in employment areas to students who qualify.
- The Social Security Administration offers work incentives to encourage people receiving social security benefits to work and become independent without immediate loss of benefits.
- The Aiken County Employability Skills diploma and certificate are not general education diplomas and may or may not be recognized by some employers.

Age Requirements for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who have not earned a South Carolina High School Diploma and who have not reached their twenty-first birthday by September 1 are entitled to a free, appropriate public education up to age twenty-one, even if it means that instruction is provided in excess of 12 years. If a student turns twenty-one after September 1, but during the school year, that student is entitled to complete the school year.

This entitlement also applies to students with disabilities who have been awarded other diploma/exit options including the Aiken County Employability Program Certificate and Graduation Certificate. It is up to the IEP Team to individually determine the placement and appropriate goals and benchmarks.

Transfer of Rights

Beginning at least one year before the student reaches the legal age of majority under state law, his or her IEP must include a statement that the student has been informed of his or her rights that will transfer to the student on reaching the age of majority. In South Carolina, educational rights automatically transfer from parent to student at the age of eighteen. The only way for the rights not to transfer is for the parents to go to court and ask that the rights not transfer to their child. The transfer of rights section of the IEP must be signed by the student age 17 and older during the effective dates of the Individualized Education Program (IEP). Once the student turns 18, the local education agency must recognize that the educational rights have transferred from parent to student. However, the education agency must continue to provide notice to the parents any time notice is required.

Changing Graduation Options

When considering the graduation options for students with disabilities based on their stated transitional employment and community goals, IEP Teams should consider all possible graduation options and match the students' goals to the appropriate graduation option/course of study. When there is indecision regarding which graduation option would be the most appropriate for a student, the IEP Team is strongly encouraged to select the higher of the options being considered. The IEP Team should review the graduation option selected annually or more frequently if necessary, for changes needed to the student's course of study and/or program supports. **Please note, however, that changes in diploma options late in the student's high school program may result in additional time needed to obtain credits required to graduate.**

<p>Moving from the South Carolina High School Diploma to the Aiken County Employability Skills (ACES) Program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students should select the HSD option if the postgraduate transition goal is a university degree. • Students should select the A.C.E.S Program option if the IEP Team believes that this is the highest option feasible for the student and the student's postgraduate transition goal is immediate competitive employment. • A student may move from the HSD to the A.C.E.S Program and receive credit toward the A.C.E.S program for passing general education classes. • A student who moves from the HSD to the A.C.E.S must still master all the training components and the Career/Technical Education components. • Students on the A.C.E.S option who wish to pursue postsecondary education through the two-year college institutions and the military should take as many classes in the general curriculum as possible to obtain skills needed for the required entrance exams.
<p>Moving from the South Carolina High School Diploma to the South Carolina Graduation Certificate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students who pass the required courses for a HSD for graduation, but are unable to pass all parts of the HSAP Graduation Exam after the fall administration of their senior year have the option of earning the South Carolina High School Certificate.
<p>Moving from the A.C.E.S Program to the South Carolina High School Diploma</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a student moves from the A.C.E.S to the HSD, he or she will not receive credit for A.C.E.S courses toward the required credits in English, Math, Science, and Social Studies • Students may need to make up credits for the HSD which may require additional time needed for graduation.
<p>Moving from the ACES Certificate (District Certificate) to the ACES Diploma (district diploma)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may move from the ACES Certificate to the ACES Diploma and receive credit if the student has successfully completed ACES coursework. • Students must complete the required ACES training components and the Career/Technical Education components. • Students may require additional time in school in order to graduate.
<p>Split Track Plan (Split between HSD and ACES Diploma)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option for 9th grade students who are unclear of which diploma option to pursue • Student enrolls in both Employment English and Employment Math in addition to Eng I and Math Tech I • By end of 9th grade year, the exit diploma option to pursue is clear based on academic success

Planning for Modifications and Accommodations

Modifications are changes that are made to the course content. **Accommodations** are things we do for students with disabilities to lessen the impact of their disability in the teaching/learning environment. An example of a **modification** would be if the general education students were completing a math assignment of 25 multiplication problems, the student with disabilities would be working on addition problems or number recognition. An example of an **accommodation** for the same assignment would be that the student with disabilities was required to complete only 15 multiplication problems or was allowed more time to complete the work.

When course content is **modified**, the student is not pursuing the required content standards. In order for any student (including a student with a disability) to earn credit that can be applied toward obtaining a South Carolina High School Diploma, the content that is prescribed in the applicable South Carolina course of study must be taught. If the prescribed content is not taught, then credit may not be given for this course toward the South Carolina High School Diploma. When **accommodations** are made for the student with disabilities, the content standards are the same. Accommodations in secondary coursework will not prevent the student from receiving course credit toward the South Carolina High School Diploma.

NOTE: The guidelines on courses taken and credits earned toward a South Carolina High School Diploma prior to the ninth grade are as follows:

- The course must be taken in the eighth grade.
- The course must follow the course of study and be of high school content and rigor.
- The course cannot supersede required courses (i.e., eighth grade English cannot be substituted for high school English; eighth grade physical education cannot be substituted for the required unit of high school physical education).

For students pursuing the Aiken County Employability Skills Diploma, the content that is prescribed in the Employability Program's curriculum guide must be taught. If the prescribed content is not taught, then credit may not be given for this course in meeting the requirements. **Students may receive accommodations as specified in their individual education program (IEP); however, the content specified in the curriculum guide may not be modified if the student intends to receive an Aiken County Employability Skills Diploma.**

Students working toward the Graduation Certificate and the A.C.E.S Certificate **may receive** content modifications and accommodations in any state-approved diploma courses of study if the IEP Team specifies that such modifications and accommodations are appropriate. The student would not receive credit toward the South Carolina High School Diploma if content modifications are implemented.

Accommodations may also be provided on statewide assessments for students receiving accommodations within their courses. System test coordinators, counselors, and special education personnel can provide more information concerning the available accommodations.

Accommodations are also available for college entrance tests such as the American College Test (ACT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). See your school counselor for this information.