



# EDUCATION TRENDS

## TUNE IN.

Explore emerging education developments.



## High School Diploma Options That Meet Federal Graduation Rate Calculation Requirements

JENNIFER ZINTH

### What Is the ACGR?

Federal requirements stipulate that states and local education agencies annually calculate and report an Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate, disaggregated by student group.<sup>1</sup> The ACGR includes all students who graduate from high school in four years with a regular high school diploma, plus all students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are assessed using an alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards.<sup>2</sup>

Seven states offer two or more curricular pathways leading to a single diploma, while six states offer two or more diploma options that meet federal requirements.

Excluded from the ACGR calculation are students who complete a credential other than the regular high school diploma — such as a general equivalency diploma, certificate of completion, certificate of attendance, a diploma based on meeting Individualized Education Program goals or a diploma that sets requirements below the regular high school diploma.

States provide one or more of three differentiated diploma pathways to ensure that all high school graduates are included in the ACGR.

Adding endorsements/seals to the standard diploma is the most common pathway, a model adopted in at least 12 states.

## What Types of Diploma Pathways Meet ACGR Requirements?

A few state approaches provide differentiated diploma options that satisfy federal requirements and ensure all high school graduates are included in ACGR calculations. These options include:

- Offering two or more courses of study under a single diploma.
- Adding endorsements or seals to the standard diploma.
- Providing one or more diploma options above the standard diploma.

This resource provides details and examples of each of these state approaches.

### Offering Two or More Courses of Study Under a Single Diploma

At least seven states offer a single high school diploma, and allow students to choose from two or more curricular pathways — with varying credit requirements — to earn the diploma.

**Arkansas:** Students choose between the default Smart Core curriculum or opt in to the less rigorous Core curriculum.<sup>3</sup>

**Florida:** A student may earn a standard diploma by completing one of the following:

- Traditional 24-credit curriculum.
- International Baccalaureate curriculum.
- Advanced International Certificate of Education curriculum.<sup>4</sup>
- Eighteen-credit curriculum identified in statute.<sup>5</sup>

**Massachusetts:** MassCore is a recommended course of study for high school students, not a separate diploma.<sup>6</sup>

**Mississippi:** Per the 2017 Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards, students currently have the following pathways to a standard diploma:<sup>7</sup>

- Default 24-Carnegie-unit requirement (last available to incoming ninth-graders of 2017-18).<sup>8</sup>
- Career pathway option (last available to incoming ninth-graders of 2016-17).<sup>10</sup>
- 21-Carnegie-unit requirement, if the parent/guardian requests to opt the student out of the default 24-Carnegie-unit requirement (last available to incoming ninth-graders of 2017-18).<sup>9</sup>
- Early exit diploma (last available to incoming ninth-graders of 2018-19).<sup>11</sup>

## FURTHER READING

[\*Every Student Succeeds Act High School Graduation Rate Non-Regulatory Guidance\*](#)  
(U.S. Department of Education, January 2017)

[\*Considerations for Developing State-Defined Alternate Diplomas for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities\*](#) (National Center on Educational Outcomes and National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, updated March 2017)

Beginning with incoming ninth-graders in 2018-19, most students will complete the traditional diploma option; the alternate diploma option is for students with a significant cognitive disability. (See more details in the next section, “Adding Endorsements or Seals to the Standard Diploma.”)

**North Dakota:** A student and parent may complete a process to select the optional high school curriculum in lieu of the standard graduation requirements.<sup>12</sup>

**Oklahoma:** Students completing the college-preparatory/work-ready curriculum or the core curriculum are included in the ACGR calculation.<sup>13</sup>

**Texas:** Students fulfill either the foundation high school program requirements or a distinguished level of achievement under the foundation high school program.<sup>14</sup>

## Adding Endorsements or Seals to the Standard Diploma

At least eight states offer graduates in the Class of 2018 the opportunity to demonstrate advanced knowledge and skills in one or more areas through a designation added to the standard diploma. In four additional states, 2017 legislation or state board rulemaking calls for endorsements or seals to be added to the diploma at a later date.

These 12 states are in addition to states offering the state seal of biliteracy — which, for some, is offered statewide and, for others, at district discretion.

**California:** The Golden State Seal Merit Diploma insignia is affixed to the diploma and transcript of qualifying students.<sup>15</sup>

**Colorado:** A local education provider may grant a diploma endorsement in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); date of implementation is unknown.<sup>16</sup>

**Florida:** A scholar designation (additional academic requirements) and merit designation (attainment of one or more industry certifications from a state-approved list) may be added to the standard high school diploma.<sup>17</sup>

**Hawaii:** Academic Honors, Career and Technical Education (CTE) Honors and STEM Honors recognition certificates may be added to the Hawaii High School Diploma.<sup>18</sup>

**Mississippi:** Beginning with incoming freshmen in 2018-19, all students except those with a significant cognitive disability will complete the traditional diploma option, and they must additionally pursue one of three endorsements:

- Career and Technical Endorsement.<sup>19</sup>
- Distinguished Academic Endorsement.<sup>21</sup>
- Academic Endorsement.<sup>20</sup>

**Nevada:** Beginning with the Class of 2019, two state seals may be affixed to the diploma and noted on the transcript:<sup>22</sup>

- State Seal of STEM.
- State Seal of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics).

**North Carolina:** Students may earn one or more of the following:<sup>23</sup>

- Career Endorsement.
- College Endorsement.
- College/University of North Carolina Endorsement.
- North Carolina Academic Scholars Endorsement.
- Global Languages Endorsement.

**Ohio:** The OhioMeansJobs-readiness seal may be attached to the high school diploma and transcript.<sup>24</sup>

**South Carolina:** Students must be provided personalized pathways toward earning the uniform diploma, and students may earn endorsements, represented by seals that are added to the diploma. Legislation directs the state board of education to adopt regulations establishing these pathways and endorsements, but as of January 2018, it has not.<sup>25</sup>

**Tennessee:** Students will be recognized as graduating with state distinction by attaining a minimum B average and completing one of a number of achievements demonstrating academic, career/technical or musical achievements.<sup>26</sup>

**Texas:** Students are expected to earn at least one endorsement, in addition to completing the foundation high school program or distinguished level of achievement under the foundation high school program. Endorsement options include:

- STEM.
- Business and industry.<sup>27</sup>
- Public services.<sup>28</sup>
- Arts and humanities.
- Multidisciplinary studies.<sup>29</sup>

For a student to be eligible to graduate under the foundation high school program without earning an endorsement, the parent must submit written permission and meet with a school counselor after the student's sophomore year.<sup>30</sup>

**Virginia:** Students may have the following seals affixed to the Standard Diploma or Advanced Studies Diploma:

- Board of Education Seal.
- Technical Education Seal.
- Seal of Advanced Mathematics and Technology.
- Seal for Excellence in Civics Education.
- Seal of Biliteracy.<sup>31</sup>

Students who earn the Advanced Studies Diploma may be eligible for the:

- Governor's Seal.

## Providing One or More Diploma Options Above the Standard Diploma

At least six states offer one or more diploma options under which graduates are included in the state's ACGR. As required under federal guidance, all students in these states complete requirements that meet a common threshold; advanced diploma options in these states are additional layers above that threshold.

These diploma options are in addition to an alternate diploma option that may be awarded to students with a significant cognitive disability who participate in an alternate assessment aligned with alternate academic achievement standards.

**Louisiana:** Two diplomas are counted in the graduation rate calculation:

- TOPS University.<sup>32</sup>
- Jump Start TOPS Tech (aka Career Diploma).<sup>33</sup>

**Nevada:** Students may choose to complete:

- Standard Diploma.<sup>34</sup>
- Advanced Diploma.<sup>35</sup>
- College and Career Ready Diploma.<sup>36</sup>

**New York:** Diploma options for all student populations include:<sup>37</sup>

- Regents Diploma.
- Regents Diploma (through appeal).
- Regents Diploma with Honors.
- Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation.
- Local Diploma (through appeal).
- Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation with an annotation that denotes mastery in:
  - Math.
  - Science.
- Regents Diploma with Advanced Designation with Honors.

**Ohio:** Students may complete a standard diploma or an honors diploma. Honors diploma options include:

- Academic Honors Diploma.
- International Baccalaureate Honors Diploma.
- Career Tech Honors Diploma.
- STEM Honors Diploma.
- Arts Honors Diploma.
- Social Science and Civic Engagement Honors Diploma.<sup>38</sup>

**Virginia:** Students may earn a(n):

- Standard Diploma.
- Advanced Studies Diploma.<sup>39</sup>

**Wisconsin:** Students may earn a:

- Standard Diploma.
- Technical Education High School Diploma.<sup>40</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1. *Every Student Succeeds Act High School Graduation Rate Non-Regulatory Guidance* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, January 2017), <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essagradrateguidance.pdf>.
2. The U.S. Department of Education's non-regulatory guidance states: "For the purposes of calculating the ACGR, a 'regular high school diploma' is the standard high school diploma awarded to the preponderance of students in a State that is fully aligned with the State's standards ... The term 'regular high school diploma' also includes any 'higher diploma' that is awarded to students who complete requirements above and beyond what is required for a regular high school diploma."
3. "Rules for Governing Standards for Accreditation of Arkansas Public Schools and School Districts," Arkansas Department of Education, August 2015, [http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/rules/Current/FINAL\\_Standards\\_for\\_Accreditation.pdf](http://www.arkansased.gov/public/userfiles/rules/Current/FINAL_Standards_for_Accreditation.pdf).
4. Florida Statute § 1003.4282(1)(a), [http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&Search\\_String=&URL=1000-1099/1003/Sections/1003.4282.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=1000-1099/1003/Sections/1003.4282.html).
5. Florida Statute § 1002.3105(5), [http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&Search\\_String=&URL=1000-1099/1002/Sections/1002.3105.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=1000-1099/1002/Sections/1002.3105.html).
6. "College and Career Readiness: MassCore," Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, last updated August 3, 2016, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ccr/masscore/>.
7. *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards 2017* (Jackson: Mississippi Department of Education, revised January 24, 2018), [http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/docs/accreditation-library/2017-ms-public-school-acct-stds\\_20180124.pdf?sfvrsn=2](http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/docs/accreditation-library/2017-ms-public-school-acct-stds_20180124.pdf?sfvrsn=2).
8. See Appendix A-2 of the 2017 Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards.
9. See Appendix A-1 of the 2017 Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards.
10. See Appendix A-3 of the 2017 Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards.
11. See Appendix A-4 of the 2017 Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards.
12. North Dakota Century Code 15.1-21-02.3, <http://www.legis.nd.gov/cencode/t15-1c21.pdf#nameddest=15p1-21-02p3>.
13. Oklahoma St. Ann. 70 § 11-103.6(B) and § 11-103.6(C), <http://www.oklegislature.gov/osstatuestitle.html>.
14. Texas Education Code § 28.025(b-15), <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.28.htm#28.025>.
15. California Education Code § 51450-51455 [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes\\_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&division=4.title=2.part=28.chapter=3.&article=5](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&division=4.title=2.part=28.chapter=3.&article=5) ; and "Golden State Seal Merit Diploma FAQs," California Department of Education, last updated January 30, 2017, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/gsefaq.asp>.

16. Colorado Revised Statute § 22-7-1009.3, <https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/images/olls/crs2017-title-22.pdf>.
17. Florida Statute § 1003.4285, [http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&Search\\_String=&URL=1000-1099/1003/Sections/1003.4285.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=1000-1099/1003/Sections/1003.4285.html).
18. “Graduation Requirements,” Hawaii State Department of Education, accessed January 24, 2018, <http://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/StudentLearning/GraduationRequirements/Pages/Requirements.aspx>.
19. See Appendix A-7 of the 2017 Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards.
20. See Appendix A-8 of the 2017 Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards.
21. See Appendix A-9 of the 2017 Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards.
22. Nevada S.B. 241 (2017), [https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Session/79th2017/Bills/SB/SB241\\_EN.pdf](https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Session/79th2017/Bills/SB/SB241_EN.pdf).
23. “High School Diploma Endorsements,” North Carolina State Board of Education, June 2013, <https://stateboard.ncpublicschools.gov/policy-manual/Graduation-Related-Policies/high-school-diploma-endorsements>.
24. Ohio Revised Code § 3313.6112, <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc/3313.6112v1>; and “OhioMeansJobs-Readiness Seal,” Ohio Department of Education, last modified January 18, 2018, <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/New-Skills-for-Youth/SuccessBound/OhioMeansJobs-Readiness-Seal>.
25. South Carolina Code § 59-39-100, <https://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t59c039.php>.
26. Tennessee Rules of the State Board of Education, Chapter 0520-01-03-.06(1)(c) (3), <http://publications.tnsosfiles.com/rules/0520/0520-01/0520-01-03.20160329.pdf>.
27. This includes courses directly related to database management; information technology; communications; accounting; finance; marketing; graphic design; architecture; construction; welding; logistics; automotive technology; agricultural science; and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning.
28. This includes courses directly related to health sciences and occupations, mental health, education and training, law enforcement, and culinary arts and hospitality.
29. Texas Education Code § 28.025(c-1), <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.28.htm#28.025>; and Texas Administrative Code § 74.13, [http://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p\\_dir=&p\\_rloc=&p\\_tloc=&p\\_ploc=&pg=1&p\\_tac=&ti=19&pt=2&ch=74&rl=13](http://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=19&pt=2&ch=74&rl=13).
30. Texas Education Code § 28.025(b), <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.28.htm#28.025>.
31. Virginia Education Regulation 20-131-50(H), <https://townhall.virginia.gov/L/ViewXML.cfm?textid=12170>.
32. Louisiana Administrative Code § 2318, <http://www.doa.la.gov/osr/LAC/28v115/28v115.doc>.

33. Louisiana Administrative Code § 2319, <http://www.doa.la.gov/osr/LAC/28v115/28v115.doc>.
34. Nevada Administrative Code 389.664, <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/NAC/NAC-389.html#NAC389Sec664>.
35. Nevada Administrative Code 389.663, <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/NAC/NAC-389.html#NAC389Sec663>.
36. Created by Nevada A.B. 7 (2017), [https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Session/79th2017/Bills/AB/AB7\\_EN.pdf](https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Session/79th2017/Bills/AB/AB7_EN.pdf), and regulations from the state board of education are pending Legislative Council Bureau approval: <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Register/2017Register/R076-17RP1.pdf>.
37. "Diploma/Credential Requirements," New York State Education Department, revised February 2017, <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/gradreq/Documents/CurrentDiplomaCredentialSummary.pdf>.
38. Ohio Administrative Code 3301-16-02(K) through (P), <http://codes.ohio.gov/oac/3301-16-02v1>.
39. Virginia Education Regulation 20-131-50(B) and (C), <https://townhall.virginia.gov/L/ViewXML.cfm?textid=12170>.
40. Districts are not required to offer students this diploma option. Wisconsin Statute 118.33(1)(a) and (g), <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/118/33>.

## AUTHOR

Jennifer Zinth is director of high school and STEM at Education Commission of the States. When not plumbing the depths of high school graduation requirement policies, Jennifer enjoys spending quality time with her husband (and former Education Commission of the States employee), Kyle, and their son and infant daughter. Contact Jennifer at

© 2018 by Education Commission of the States. All rights reserved. Education Commission of the States encourages its readers to share our information with others. To request permission to reprint or excerpt some of our material, please contact us at 303.299.3609 or email [askinner@ecs.org](mailto:askinner@ecs.org).

Education Commission of the States | 700 Broadway Suite 810 Denver, CO 80203

