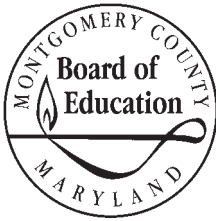


Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About

TRANSITION SERVICES & GRADUATION



Rockville, Maryland



VISION

A high-quality education is the fundamental right of every child. All children will receive the respect, encouragement, and opportunities they need to build the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be successful, contributing members of a global society.

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Transition Services

Q. What are transition services for students with disabilities?

A. Transition services are a coordinated set of activities designed for a child with a disability. The activities are focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child and facilitating the child’s movement from school to post-school life.

The activities include—

- postsecondary education,
- employment training,
- integrated employment (including supported employment),
- continuing and adult education,
- adult services,
- independent living, and
- community participation.

Transition services are based on the individual child’s strengths, preferences, and interests. Transition services include—

- instruction,
- related services,
- community experiences,
- the development of post-school employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and
- daily living skills.

Q. How are transition services implemented in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS)?

A. Transition planning is a process that may include the following:

- Identifying the student’s post-high-school goals.
- Assessing the student’s interests and abilities in relation to identified goals.
- Determining courses, experiences, and programs that will prepare the student to reach those goals.
- Supporting the student in transition-related activities.
- Determining the student’s anticipated adult service needs.
- Linking the student and family with potential adult services.

Q. When does transition planning take place?

A. Transition planning becomes a part of the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) process at age 14, or younger if appropriate. Transition planning begins by focusing on the student’s course of study. The parent(s)/guardian(s) and the student participate in the annual review and all transition-related discussions and decisions.

Diploma/Certificate

Q. Which students will earn a diploma?

A. Students earn a high school diploma based on fulfillment of four requirements: enrollment, course credit, high school assessments, and student service learning. Please visit www.mcpscours.org for a listing of these items.

Q. Which students will earn a certificate?

A. The Maryland High School Certificate is awarded by the state for completion of a special education program by students with disabilities who do not meet the requirements for a diploma, but meet the following standards:

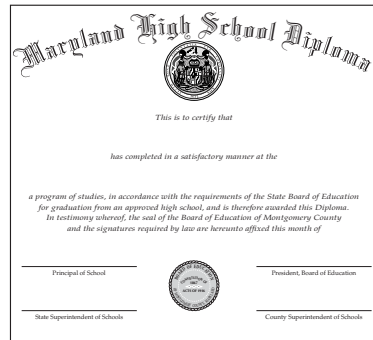
1. Has been enrolled in an education program for at least four years beyond Grade 8, or its age equivalency, and has been determined by the IEP team, with the agreement of the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the student with identified disabilities, to have developed appropriate skills to enter the world of work, act responsibly as a citizen, and enjoy a fulfilling life.

or

2. Has been enrolled in an education program for four years beyond Grade 8, or its age equivalency, and has reached age 21.

Q. What does the certificate look like?

A. The certificate looks like the Maryland high school diploma, with appropriate wording changes.



Decision Making

Q. Are all special education students entitled to the certificate option?

A. No. The special education student must be enrolled in an education program for four years beyond Grade 8, or its age equivalency. The decision to pursue the certificate is made by an IEP team.

Q. What should the IEP team consider when determining whether a student should pursue a certificate rather than a diploma?

A. Because the special education student population is diverse, there are no absolutes for decision making. However, the IEP team should consider the following items to determine what is in the student's best interest:

1. Realistic Exit Outcomes

What are the goals for this student after graduation?

Do student, staff, and parent(s)/guardian(s) agree that the goals are realistic?

What courses, programs, and activities will assist the student to reach his or her goals?

2. Maryland State Competency Tests and High School Assessments

How many times has the student taken the state assessments?

Has the student been provided with all appropriate test accommodations?

Have the test scores increased/decreased/remained the same?

Is it likely that continued remediation would result in the student passing the tests?

Would continued remediation limit the student's ability to acquire skills that the IEP team feels are essential?

3. Credit-bearing Courses

How has the student performed in credit-bearing courses?

Is the student able to meet the course objectives with accommodations and individualized goal-setting?

Would the student's needs best be served by providing alternative programming?

Is the student accumulating the appropriate credits and being promoted?

Q. When should the IEP team make the certificate decision?

A. The decision to award a student with disabilities a Maryland High School Certificate of Program Completion cannot be made until after the beginning of the student's last year in high school, unless the student is participating in the Alternative Maryland School Assessment program (Alt-MSA). Discussion should begin during the middle-school years and continue annually. Transition goals, course requirements, programming needs, and Maryland School Assessment results should all be considered with regard to student progress.

Q. What if the parent(s)/guardian(s) disagree with the IEP team's recommendations?

A. Parent(s)/guardian(s) can use the due process rights as stated in "Parental Rights Maryland Procedural Safeguards Notice" from the Maryland State Department of Education if they disagree with the IEP team's recommendations. For further information on due process rights, contact the Equity Assurance and Compliance Unit, 301-517-5864.

Programming

Q. How will the certificate program be designed and developed?

A. The overall student program will be based on selected outcomes, educational progress, assessment information, IEP goals and objectives, and career plans. Many students with disabilities will go directly to work and need skills to be successful in work and community settings. Students who choose to pursue postsecondary education or training should be prepared for those outcomes.

Students working toward a certificate may continue to take some credit-bearing courses. The student's certificate program is likely to include courses in English, reading, math, science, and social studies, with emphasis on functional objectives, career exploration, and in-school and community work experiences. The student's program will focus on courses and experiences that best prepare the student for work, responsible citizenship, and community participation.

Q. Are students who receive certificates required to complete Student Service Learning hours?

- A. The decision about the service-learning requirement should be made by the student's IEP team on an individual basis. The IEP team should consider the contribution of service-learning experiences as a significant part of the student's coordinated set of activities. If, due to the nature of the student's disability, it is determined that fulfilling the service-learning requirement is not appropriate for that student, a reasoned decision should be made by the IEP team, with the agreement of the parent or guardian; and that decision must be documented.

Graduation

Q. What if a student who is working toward a diploma appears unlikely to meet the criteria by the anticipated graduation date?

- A. As the date of anticipated graduation nears, the IEP team must determine the following:
1. Should the student continue to pursue a diploma or is a certificate the more appropriate option?
 2. Should the anticipated date of graduation be changed?
 3. Which courses and accommodations will assist the student in meeting the diploma or certificate requirements by the revised anticipated graduation date?
 4. Has the student met the criteria to earn a certificate?

Q. When does a student exit the school system?

- A. A student who earns a diploma exits the school system when he/she has earned the diploma. A student who earns a certificate is entitled to receive services until the end of the school year of the student's 21st birthday.

Postgraduation Options

Q. How should students complete application questions about high school graduation?

- A. Both those students who earn a diploma and those who earn a certificate answer "yes" when asked if they graduated from high school. Most applications do not ask whether a student earned a certificate or a diploma. If asked specifically, students who earned a certificate should explain that they completed an approved high school program of studies and earned a certificate.

Q. Can students who received a certificate earn a high school diploma after exiting the school system?

A. Yes. They may enroll in General Education Development (GED) programs and, upon passing the GED tests, earn a Maryland high school diploma.

Q. Can students who graduated with a certificate apply to college?

A. Yes. Students who graduate with a certificate may apply for admission to any Maryland community college, such as Montgomery College. Maryland community colleges offer a wide variety of credit and noncredit courses. To enroll in credit-bearing courses, students are required to take placement exams, submit SAT scores, and/or submit high school transcripts to provide evidence of ability to profit from college instruction. Students who do not meet minimum scores on assessment tests may be required to enroll in noncredit developmental courses until they are reassessed for placement in credit-bearing courses. Students should contact the admissions office of the college for specific school requirements.

Q. What further educational opportunities exist for students who receive a certificate?

A. Graduates may attend adult education classes offered by the Montgomery College Adult ESOL and Literacy–GED Program (www.montgomerycollege.edu). There also are trade schools and other training and technical programs where graduates may obtain specific skills needed for employment.

Q. What about apprenticeships?

A. Montgomery College offers apprenticeship programs in numerous different trades. At the completion of the program, the student receives a trade certificate with journeyworker status.

Q. How do potential employers feel about hiring students who have earned a certificate rather than a diploma?

A. Employers want workers who are reliable, can get along with others, and have good work habits. Employers realize that persons with varying degrees of academic skills can be valuable and effective employees.



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Rockville, Maryland

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