

# LDA

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### **LDANYS Position Statement Regarding the Issuance of IEP Diplomas in NYS**

The Learning Disabilities Association of the State of New York, through its Education Policy Advisory Committee, has recently engaged in a number of discussions regarding the issuance of IEP Diplomas, and the stated intention of SED to reexamine this issue and seek public comment. We have also been working with other organizations that have been engaged on this topic, including Advocates for Children, the IDEA Partnership and the PTA of NYS. All agree that there are substantial problems with the current practice of issuing IEP diplomas, as outlined in Ms. Rebecca Cort's recent report to the Board of Regents. We support these efforts to offer constructive input to the Education Department regarding this problem and look forward to continuing to be engaged with them. However, our LDANYS Education Policy Committee also finds that there are a number of very unique issues associated with children with learning disabilities and the current practices of issuing IEP diplomas.

**The Learning Disabilities Association of New York State (LDANYS)** is a statewide 501(c) 3 membership association of parents, professionals and service organizations, now in its 50<sup>th</sup> year of advocacy on behalf of persons with learning disabilities and their families. LDANYS advocates for a broad range of community-based supports and services for people of all ages who live with specific learning disabilities and neurological impairments. LDA's mission is to work collaboratively with individuals, families and the community through its network of regional affiliates to empower and enable these children and adults to lead independent, productive and fulfilling lives. LDANYS is the only statewide organization specifically dedicated to advocacy on behalf of persons with learning disabilities. We have strong local Chapter representation in areas of the state where there is a high percentage of children receiving IEP diplomas, such as New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and in upstate rural areas. Our Chapter educational consultants work on a daily basis with these students and their schools.

The Learning Disabilities Association of New York State Board of Trustees recommends the name 'IEP Diploma' be discontinued and a multi-tiered approach to high school completion eliminating all references to the IEP and meeting the needs of all students must be implemented.

We base these recommendations on the following:

- Many students with learning disabilities, Aspergers, and mental health disorders have been misdirected to IEP Diplomas. As a result, their post-secondary options and opportunities are seriously limited. The long-term negative consequences are significant in all aspects of these students' lives. They are unable to go to community colleges, to the armed forces, or be hired by many employers. Their earning power, if they are able to obtain employment, is significantly lower. The IEP Diploma as presently designed is not a marketable diploma and is viewed as a certificate of attendance.
- The IEP Diploma is rarely if ever an appropriate alternative for a student with a learning disability. We agree that it should be limited to those who receive alternative assessments or less than 2% of the students receiving special education.
- At the same time, there are a group of students with and without disabilities that are not able to successfully meet the testing requirements for a Regents or Local Diploma. For them, alternative diploma tracks should be developed and available, including a Career-Tech High School Diploma that is at the same level as a Regents Diploma.
- We need to reduce the number of dropouts and the number of students who are misdirected to GED programs. Students should be encouraged to stay in school and be supported in diploma programs that can meet their needs. We must offer them the variety of instructors and curriculum that traditional students are offered.
- The student's IEP should have a clear direction regarding post-secondary plans. This should be carefully considered when planning the student's curriculum, classes, and programs each year. It should include a group discussion, not only with the student's guidance counselor, special education teacher(s) and parent(s), but also most importantly, the student. It is crucial that everyone involved has clearly stated information and understands the post-secondary options based on the planning. This discussion should start in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and be included, in detail, on the IEP. Currently, most IEP's simply state, "plans to attend...." This needs further articulation and summarization regarding specific planning to reach that goal.
- Many students with learning disabilities could be successful in Regents and local diploma tracks if they received the appropriate early identification, early intervention programs, especially in the areas of reading and language arts; in addition, with appropriate accommodations and compensatory strategies being taught, many more students would be able to meet the testing requirements of the Regents or Local diplomas.
- It is very important that students with learning disabilities and their parents receive appropriate information by guidance counselors, CSE Chairpersons, and School Administrators including,
  - Parental disclosure and sign off on the limitations of IEP Diploma
  - Training for parents, special education administrators and guidance counselors
  - The opportunity for students with disabilities to stay in school until 21, and
  - The opportunity to take 5 years to obtain a diploma.

The rights of students with learning disabilities to receive a free and appropriate education is intrinsically linked to these issues. We urge that the IEP diploma be discontinued and a new procedure fully reflective of the above recommendations and findings be implemented.