

# **Learning Disabilities Association of New York State**

## **Statement Regarding the Proposed Framework for New York State High School Exiting Credential**

*This past December, the New York State Education Department issued the Proposed Framework for the New York State High School Exiting Credential. After much careful review and discussion of the Proposed Framework, the Learning Disabilities Association of New York State (LDANYS) adopted the following position.*

LDANYS supports reform of the current practice of New York State schools issuing IEP diplomas to certain special education students. However, we do not support the SED proposed Certificate of Attained Skills and Experiences (CASE), as presented in the aforementioned proposal. Without comprehensive diploma reform that ensures all students with learning disabilities can earn a commonly recognized high school diploma, we cannot support the creation of this proposed exit credential.

Students with learning disabilities have a long history of not receiving an adequate education in the state's schools. Some students with learning disabilities are unable to earn a Regents diploma because of the lack of proper instruction and remediation, lack of access to appropriate educational testing accommodations, and lack of alternative assessments that replace high stakes testing. Access to appropriate compensatory and remediation programs is critical. Students with learning disabilities can achieve improved outcomes, but only if and when we embark on meaningful, effective, comprehensive curriculum and diploma reform. We must end the practice of leading students with learning disabilities to meaningless "exiting credentials" that are not recognized by employers, educational institutions or the armed services.

IEP diplomas were originally intended to be offered to a very small group of students with the most challenging disabilities and provided to just 1% of the student population. Unfortunately, far more students were tracked to receive IEP Diplomas, many with learning disabilities. These students and their families are often unaware of the limitations of the IEP Diploma, and tragically realized its limitations only after the student exited from school. This has resulted in many individuals with learning disabilities leaving school without access to employment, higher education, or military service.

The new proposed exiting credential similarly does not necessarily include the offering of a diploma to students completing high school. In addition, as proposed, it would now become a new educational track for potentially 35-40% of students, encompassing students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and disadvantaged minority students, especially from our large urban and rural areas.

We believe that far too many students will be guided to receive this new credential and discouraged from pursuit of a meaningful high school diploma. Others will be tracked

to receive this credential because the current diploma requirements, based on high-stakes testing and language-based curriculums, are not appropriate for students with learning disabilities.

We believe that employers, continuing education institutions and the armed forces will not recognize the proposed credential as the minimum standard required for hiring or acceptance. Thus, the well-documented misuse of the IEP Diploma will be repeated. We are also concerned that the new framework will result in a large increase in the number of students receiving this credential beyond the numbers of students now receiving IEP diplomas, and that this will also have a negative impact on students with learning disabilities. This new track will therefore result in discrimination and stigma in school, in adult life and limited earning potential.

Only a real and commonly recognized diploma is acceptable for students with learning disabilities. Students with learning disabilities need and deserve a high school diploma to access college, military, trade schools, and competitive employment. We cannot endorse creating a new certificate that does not support this goal. Instead, New York State needs comprehensive reform of high school graduation diploma requirements.

We therefore urge that the New York State Education Department develop additional pathways to earning a real diploma that is not based on high stakes tests, but rather provide for an alternative assessment of student achievement, including demonstrated skills for a wide range of career and technical careers based on current industry standards.