



In the Spotlight

Monthly Issues of Interest Presented By
The Learning Disabilities Association of New York State/ April 2010

Proposal to Replace IEP Diploma For Students With Disabilities Prompts Many Still Unanswered Questions

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As the legislature continues its focus on resolving the 2010-2011 state budget, another major issue is under discussion with respect to education policy in New York State. The issue being considered by the New York State Board of Regents is a new “exiting credential” that would replace the existing IEP (Individualized Education Program) Diploma option for students with disabilities. For years, parents and advocates for students with disabilities have been arguing that the IEP diploma drastically limits post-secondary and employment options for students with disabilities because it is not considered a regular high school diploma. The term IEP diploma has also mis-led many parents and students into thinking that because it had the word “diploma” attached to it, that it was considered a regular diploma, only to find out after the fact that it was not acceptable to the military, most institutions of higher learning and many employers. The data has also shown that far too many school districts across the state are tracking students with disabilities down the IEP diploma path too frequently and that many of these students, if given the right opportunities, access to the general curriculum with supports and services may be able to achieve a regular high school diploma. The New York State Education Department (NYSED) and the Board of Regents have heard the pleas of parents, students and advocates and have embarked on a process to create a new option for students with disabilities.

NYSED, through its special education policy division, known as VESID (Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities) has put together an internal group, solicited feedback from the public and convened a stakeholders group with diverse representation, to come up with a proposal which was recently unveiled to the Board of Regents, and to the public on a replacement exiting credential. The proposal is to establish a new certificate that would document a student’s level of achievement towards the state learning standards, specifically in the areas of career development, integrated learning and universal foundation skills. The certificate would not be considered a “diploma” for accountability purposes under the No Child Left Behind Act or Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act but would provide documentation on a student’s attained skills as measured in relation to the state Learning Standards including the State’s Career Development and Occupational Studies Learning Standards. According to NYSED some of the goals of the proposed policy are:

1. Provide an incentive to students at risk of dropping out and to continue work towards a regular diploma.

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The Learning Disabilities Association of New York State (LDANYS) was chartered by the New York State Board of Regents in 1958 and is a statewide 501c3 nonprofit, parent-driven organization that advocates on behalf of children and adults who have learning disabilities. LDANYS is the New York state affiliate of the Learning Disabilities Association of America. Our regional affiliates located throughout the state provide a variety of programs and services for children and adults with learning and other developmental disabilities and their families. For more information about our organization or about the content contained here, please contact our state office at 518-608-8992.

New Exiting Proposal – continued

2. Provide meaningful documentation of achievement of skills in preparation for employment of post secondary education that is recognized by employers and institutions of post-secondary education.

3. Promote student participation in work-based learning experience and service programs.

The proposal suggests that the new credential be called a Certificate of Attained Skills and Experiences (CASE). The certificate would be awarded using a template developed by the Commissioner that includes a clear notation on the front of what the certificate represents. NYSED’s proposal goes on to suggest what records would be needed for a student to be awarded a CASE, which students would be eligible to receive the certificate, what courses and work-readiness experiences would be required and what safeguards local Boards of Education would be required to put in place to ensure that students are provided the opportunity to earn a regular high school diploma.

The proposal includes a five-year phase-in period with the certificate being available to students exiting school in June of 2015 or earlier if districts meet the criteria sooner. The IEP diploma would no longer be avail-

able to students entering grade 9 on or after September 2011.

This proposal is now being circulated for additional feedback from the public and interested organizations. While the proposal represents a first attempt to address the shortcomings of the existing IEP diploma, it has prompted further questions and raised concerns as to whether it will be an adequate replacement for the IEP diploma (since it is still technically not going to be considered a regular high school diploma). Many question how students will be selected or identified for the CASE track; whether post-secondary institutions and employers will consider it acceptable for access into school or the world of work or whether it is just a re-packaged version of the IEP diploma and will ultimately be no more beneficial to students with disabilities. Many of these questions have yet to be resolved and will no doubt be fleshed out over the coming months as the Board of Regents, VESID and others concerned about this issue continue to flesh out the specifics.