



Grading Practices for Students with Disabilities

Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination in the implementation of grading policies, setting of graduation requirements, and awarding diplomas. The guidance provided here regarding modified grading practices is for informational purposes only and should not be taken as a legal interpretation.

Students graduating from an Arkansas Public School or Public Charter School must meet or exceed the minimum 22 graduation credit requirements as adopted by the Arkansas State Board of Education. Because we know how important it is to graduate all students ready to succeed in college and career, the Arkansas Department of Education has created an [Arkansas Graduation Requirements Handout](#).

[Arkansas Rules Governing Grading and Course Credit](#) state in 2-2.02 that student grades should reflect the knowledge and skills demonstrated by the student through class assignments, tests, presentations, and projects that reflect the Arkansas Academic Standards. The purpose of grading is to communicate how well a student has achieved the learning objectives or criteria for a class.

Local school boards have the authority to set grading guidelines, graduation requirements, and conditions for awarding diplomas as long as those requirements, guidelines, and conditions are aligned with Arkansas statutes and do not violate a student's civil rights. To ensure district practices are not discriminatory, districts must;

- establish clearly defined grading standards,
- provide appropriate advance notice of grading practices and procedures for awarding credit to allow reasonable time to prepare to meet the requirements or make informed decisions about alternative options,
- and consider the needs of individual students.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 states that a diploma based on meeting IEP goals will not provide a sufficient basis for determining that the student has met a State's grade-level academic content standards; rather, it will only demonstrate that the student has attained his or her IEP goals during the annual period covered by the IEP. Therefore, a diploma based on attainment of IEP goals, regardless of whether the IEP goals are fully aligned with a State's grade-level content standards, should not be treated as a regular high school diploma. ([Every Student Succeeds Act, High School Graduation Rate, Non-regulatory Guidance, January 2017](#)) However, IEP goals are developed to support a student in accessing and progressing in the general education curriculum based on the student's individual disability related needs and do not represent the curriculum itself which must be fully aligned with state standards. Providing accommodations and/or modifications should provide access to that curriculum, not replace it. IEP teams do not have the authority to decrease required credits below the state's minimum Arkansas Graduation Requirements unless a student is working toward a certificate of attendance or completion.

Neither ESSA nor IDEA dictate a specific grading system, but any unique grading methods or criteria established for a student with a disability, as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), must be determined by the IEP team. Parent(s) should be informed of these unique methods or criteria, how the student is functioning, and what progress is being made (which includes how the data is used to determine grading scales on a report card).

Districts frequently distinguish between general education curriculum classes and other types of programs and classes, such as advanced placement, honors, or remedial classes. Making similar distinctions on report cards would be consistent with the general requirements of Section 504 and Title II that individuals with disabilities may not unnecessarily be treated differently than individuals without disabilities. ([OCR Dear Colleague Letter: Report Cards and Transcripts](#))

Prior to making individual modifications to grading practices for a student with a disability, the IEP team should first support the educator to set up the course content in a manner to support a wide variety of learners' needs. IEP teams can assist general educators to support all student progress through utilizing principles of universal design for learning, differentiating the content, and supporting students to access the learning standards. IEP teams must also review existing services and accommodations to ensure that they are effective to support student progress in grade level content and make changes if needed to the services and accommodations before determining if grading modifications may be needed.

Questions and Answers:

<p>May a student with a disability who receives accommodations in a general education classroom be given modified grades?</p> <p>NO. Accommodations ensure access to course content for students with disabilities but do not fundamentally alter the standards or course expectations. Unless specifically modified on a student’s IEP, the student is presumed to be assessed for course content and graded like non-disabled students.</p>	<p>May a student in a general education classroom who receives modifications be given a modified grade?</p> <p>YES. Students with disabilities enrolled in general education classes may be given modified grades that are determined collaboratively between the general and special educators and outlined in the IEP when course content is modified. Districts may not modify grades because of a student’s special education status alone. If grades in general education classes are used for granting credit (rather than pass/fail), then students with disabilities enrolled in that class for credit shall receive grades.</p>
<p>May classes be identified as special education classes on the high school student’s transcript to indicate that the student has had a modified curriculum in the general class.</p> <p>NO. Words such as “Special Education English” or “Resource Math” should not appear on the transcript. Words such as “English Essentials,” “Practical Math Applications” or other descriptive phrases, that are not specifically associated with special education status, should be used.</p>	<p>May asterisks or other symbols or codes be used on the transcript to indicate a modified curriculum?</p> <p>YES. Modifications or exceptions may be identified on the transcript if grades and courses of all students, not just students with disabilities, are similarly treated and the denotation does not identify the student as having a disability or being in special education. For example, if the modification code system covers enhanced or greater difficulty course work by advanced students as well as students taking remedial courses, it may not violate 504.</p>

References:

[Office of Civil Rights Questions and Answers on Report Cards and Transcripts For Students with Disabilities Attending Public Elementary and Secondary Schools \[OCR-00050\]](#)

[Dunbar, D. \(1996\). Runkel, letter to \(grading/diplomas\). Office of Civil Rights, Region VIII, Vol. Issue 2504, Posting Date 19970226; 25 IDELR 387. Authors. \(1995\) Grades, graduation, and diplomas. Special education bulletin. Helena, MT: Office of Public Instruction](#)

[OSEP Dear Colleague Letter on Free Appropriate Public Education \(FAPE\), November 16, 2015](#)

[ESSA: Key Provisions, Implications for Students with Disabilities, CCSSO](#)

[Every Student Succeeds Act, High School Graduation Rate, Non-regulatory Guidance, January 2017](#)

[Oklahoma State Department of Education Special Education Services Policies and Procedures 2024](#)

[Colorado Department of Education, Office of Special Education, Grading and Transcripts, August 2024](#)

[Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2023](#)

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