Oklahoma High School Diplomas: Side-by-Side Comparison of Standard and Alternate Diplomas

This table compares Oklahoma's standard (regular) high school diploma with the Oklahoma state-defined alternate diploma.

Category	Standard (Regular) Diploma	Oklahoma State-Defined Alternate Diploma
Federal Basis	Required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to be fully aligned with State academic content standards.	Allowed under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA); States may define and adopt an alternate diploma designated for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.
Academic Standards	Aligned with State academic achievement standards, the Oklahoma Academic Standards (OAS); may NOT be aligned with alternate academic achievement standards.	Aligned with Oklahoma's alternate academic achievement standards, the Essential Elements.
Assessment System	Students participate in general State assessments through the Oklahoma State Testing Program (OSTP) and the College and Career Readiness Assessments (CCRA).	Students participate in the Oklahoma Alternate Assessment Program (OAAP).
Eligibility	Students who do not use alternate academic achievement standards; students who participate in courses aligned to the OAS whose performance is measured by the OSTP and CCRA.	Students who participate in the OAAP whose performance is measured by alternate academic achievement standards.
GED or Certificates	Must not include GED, certificate of completion, or certificate of attendance.	Is a full diploma, NOT a certificate or GED, and meets ESSA state-defined criteria: standards-based; aligned with Oklahoma requirements for the regular high school diploma; and obtained within the time for which the State ensures the availability of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).
Graduation Age	Typically around age 18, at the end of 12th grade, depending upon completion of credits for a regular/standard diploma.	Often earned around age 18 upon completion of 12th grade and the required credits for the alternate diploma.

Category	Standard (Regular) Diploma	Oklahoma State-Defined Alternate Diploma
IDEA & FAPE Obligation	District's obligation to provide FAPE ends when student earns a regular/standard diploma.	District's obligation to provide FAPE continues after alternate diploma is earned.
Post-Graduation Services	Student exits special education services permanently; is not eligible to return to public school.	Student may continue receiving services (FAPE) up to maximum age of 22.
Continued Enrollment	Not permitted once a regular/standard diploma is earned.	If student has not turned 22 by Sept. 1, district must offer continued enrollment.
Length of School Day/Week	Full day/week as determined by district.	Same length of day/week as age/grade peers unless IEP team determines otherwise.
Return to School	Not applicable; student cannot return; FAPE ends upon receipt of a regular/standard diploma.	Decision made by the IEP team; student is not required to return.
Number of Years After Graduation	No additional years available.	No required number of years; continued enrollment may be 0-4 years, depending on individualized need and IEP team decision.
IEP Team Role	Ends with graduation.	IEP team, including student/family, determines whether continued enrollment is appropriate.
Student & Family Choice	Graduation ends services.	Heavily based on student and family preferences and the student's postsecondary goals.
Purpose	Signals full completion of general education requirements.	Provides a meaningful diploma while maintaining access to further special education and transition services (FAPE).

Key Takeaway

The biggest difference between the two diplomas is FAPE under IDEA:

- A Standard Diploma ends special education services.
- An Alternate Diploma allows services to continue up to age 22, based on IEP team decisions.

In Oklahoma, the alternate diploma ensures students with significant cognitive disabilities can both graduate with a legitimate diploma and continue receiving transition-focused educational services if needed.

More Alternate Diploma Information

Visit the Alternate Diploma webpage on the Oklahoma State Department of Education website for additional information and resources (oklahoma.gov/education).

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