

FALL 2025

CHANGES TO GRADUATION PATHWAYS

Summary: In the past, three high school graduation paths have been available for students in New Mexico: Standard, Modified, and Ability. In January 2025, the New Mexico Public Education Department changed its rules to broaden the course and competency requirements of the Standard Graduation Pathway—for example, expanding career technical education and work-based learning requirements and eliminating the Algebra II requirement. The new rules also narrowed alternative graduation pathways for students with disabilities. **The Modified Pathway will no longer be available starting with rising 9th graders in the 2025-2026 school year.**

What this means: If your student is currently on a **Modified or Ability Graduation Pathway**, they may be impacted by these changes. Specifically, it seems that more students with disabilities are likely to be placed on the Standard Graduation Pathway.

Under the Standard Pathway, a student receives a “regular high school diploma” (a diploma of excellence) and is no longer entitled to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE), including special education and related services, after getting their diploma.

| PATHWAY | DEFINITION/CHANGES | WHAT IT MEANS | QUESTIONS TO ASK |
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| <p style="text-align: center;">MODIFIED PATHWAY</p> <p>Requirements:</p> <p>Same number of individual credits as Standard Pathway</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a “regular high school diploma” • Ongoing right to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE), including special education and related services, after getting their diploma | <p>New Mexico has had a Modified Pathway for graduation, which focuses on employability and career development, with emphasis on the student’s career interests, and with benchmarks and performance standards determined by the student’s IEP team.</p> <p>Starting with incoming 9th graders for 2025-26 school year, the Modified Pathway is no longer an option.</p> | <p>“The modified program of study shall only be available to students with disabilities that began the ninth grade before the 2025-2026 school year. Students with disabilities entering the ninth grade in or after the 2025-2026 school year may not be placed on the modified program of study.”</p> <p>Have an ongoing right to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE), including special education and related services, after getting their diploma.</p> | <p><i>*What changes to my child’s IEP goal(s) and transition plan need to be made so that they can meet the standards and requirements of the Standard Pathway?</i></p> <p><i>*Are there changes that should be made to their ancillary services (OT, PT, SLP, social work, behavior supports, EA support, etc.)?</i></p> <p><i>*Do they need additional or different accommodations or modifications to meet the standards and requirements of the Standard Pathway?</i></p> |
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| <div>ABILITY PATHWAY</div> <div>Requirements:</div> <div>8 semesters of seat time equal to 4 years of high school.</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alternate standards and testing• Not a “regular high school diploma”• Ongoing right to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE), including special education and related services, after getting their diploma.</div> | <div>The new rules now define the Ability Pathway as being “for students with disabilities who are determined to have the most significant cognitive disabilities as the term is defined by [NMPED],” and the student’s IEP team “has the sole discretion to determine that a student has the most significant cognitive disabilities before placing the student on the ability program of study.”</div> <div>“Students with disabilities that began the ninth grade before the 2025-2026 school year currently assigned to the Ability Program of Study that do not meet the definition of a Student with the most significant cognitive disability must be moved to the Modified or Standard program of study within the first 20 days of the start of the 2025-2026 school year.”</div> | <div>If your child is in Tenth grade or higher in Fall 2025, and their IEP currently says that they are on the Ability Pathway for graduation, an IEP meeting should be set right away, during the first 20 days of the 2025-2026 school year, to decide whether the Ability Pathway continues to be appropriate for them and that they meet the new definition.</div> | <div><i>*What are the specific reasons why the Ability Pathway is/is not appropriate for my child? What test scores, evaluations, or other information supports this?</i></div> <div><i>*If my child is being moved to the Modified Pathway, how will they meet the standards and requirements of the Modified Pathway? How will their IEP goals change? What changes will be made to their IEP transition plan? Their ancillary services (OT, PT, SLP, social work, behavior supports, EA support, etc.)? Their accommodations/modifications?</i></div> <div><i>*If my child is being moved to the Standard Pathway (regular high school diploma), how will they meet the standards and requirements of the Standard Pathway? How will this impact: their IEP goals, IEP transition plan, ancillary services, accommodations/modifications?</i></div> |
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