

GUIDANCE FOR ACCESSING THE CCGPS FOR STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

The State Board rule, IDA(3)160.4-2-.48 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDENTS ENROLLING IN THE NINTH GRADE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE 2008-09 SCHOOL YEAR AND SUBSEQUENT YEARS, provides new opportunities for all students . This includes students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The rule puts into place specific course requirements that students must complete to earn a diploma. For students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, these are courses aligned to the CCGPS to assure that all students have access to the curriculum. Courses for students with the most significant disabilities provide access to course content at an entry or prerequisite level.

Who is eligible to participate in access level courses?

Access level courses are for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are participating in the Georgia Alternate Assessment (GAA) in middle school and high school and who require instruction through an integrated curriculum in order to access the standards and learn relevant life skills. Students who participate in access level courses are those students for whom it is anticipated that even with the very best instruction they will require support services as an adult to be employed and live in the community.

Access level courses are not for those students who are merely below grade level and in need of additional support to approach attainment of grade level content. These students may need remedial or additional instruction to acquire grade level skills. There are many elective courses in the approved course list that would be appropriate for a student with this type of need; an access level course would not.

What courses are required for students with significant cognitive disabilities?

All students must complete a minimum of 23 units of credit, which must include required courses listed in State Board Rule IDA(3)160.4-2-.20 STATE FUNDED K-8 AND 9-12 COURSES FOR STUDENTS ENTERING NINTH GRADE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 2008 AND SUBSEQUENT YEARS. Access level courses meet the requirements for students who participate in the GAA. These students must receive credit for each required high school course in the core content areas and electives as defined in the rule.

What does access level instruction look like?

Students will have a schedule of courses that include access level instruction for core curriculum areas as well as other relevant skills. IEP goals will still define critical and necessary skills related to student's present level of academic, developmental and functional performance. IEP goals reflect skills needed to access curriculum activities. **IEP goals are not to restate the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards that are already defined as the curriculum for all Georgia students.** Many IEP goals will define relevant life skills, often referred to as functional skills. These goals address life skills that are a part of the student's day and are necessary skills to participate in the educational and post school environments. High quality instruction for

students with significant cognitive disabilities is most often activity based instruction. Students will be provided access to the grade level standards for the courses in which they are enrolled as well as instruction in IEP goals and objectives. The instruction for IEP goals is embedded into the academic activities. These activities will be relevant to the lives and needs of the students, relate to other events in the day and week and will have application beyond the classroom. For a student with the most significant cognitive disability, an example IEP goal might be to grasp and hold objects needed to participate in a variety of activities. The criteria may be individually specified as to number of activities, length of time, prompt levels, etc. Another goal may be to choose the item needed for an activity by eye gaze, reaching toward the item, etc. Another might be to answer questions about an activity by indicating the correct response from a choice of two objects or symbols. These are just a few examples of objectives that can be addressed in both curriculum access activities and everyday life experiences.

Just as the high-quality instruction will remain the same, IEP goals and objectives will not differ from previous years. The goals and objectives will focus on the particular needs of the students, and take into consideration the individual functional and developmental needs of the student. As with other high school students, the transition plan will contain activities that the student must complete to facilitate achieving a regular diploma and the desired post-school outcomes.

Access level courses are aligned to general education courses with the same course number and focus on providing access to the content of that course at an entry or pre-requisite level. All instruction (utilizing assistive technology as needed) should embed the mastery of IEP goals and objectives so that skills are not developed in isolation, but within the context of the course content. Related skills for independent living, employment and self-determination are developed within the course content. **ALL ACCESS LEVEL COURSES MUST REFLECT THE COMMON CORE GEORGIA PERFORMANCE STANDARDS.**

Course schedules for students enrolled in access level courses must be flexible and with cross-scheduled time slots to be effective. For instance, although a student's schedule may list 9th Grade Literature and Composition during third period, one would expect to see not just English Language Arts instruction taking place during that time, or that to be the only time that English Language Arts is offered. For example, a teacher may be presenting a thematic unit on a novel such as *Animal Farm*. While the language arts standard of acquiring new vocabulary may be addressed by identifying the characters or concepts in the story and possibly also character attributes, students can also access elements of standards associated with Access to Biology I, such as relating animal adaptations, including behaviors, to the ability to survive stressful environmental conditions. This can be as simple as starting with instruction on what animals need to survive. Additionally, access to Mathematics I can be addressed through Standard MM1A3. Students will solve simple equations through prerequisite skills of one to one correspondence, counting, etc., determining how many animals are in the story, adding and subtracting when characters come and go, etc.

Access to United States History can also be addressed with *Animal Farm* by comparing events in the story to causes of a revolution. The concept is most relevant when applied to the country where the student lives, so the discussion might be on the American Revolution. The story can lead to student recognition of the qualities of a good leader. What could cause a government to

be overthrown? In the eyes of our students, are these good or bad traits /behaviors? If a leader does ____, is that “good” or “bad.”; what kind of behavior displayed by a leader can make people mad? Do you want that person to be in charge? Looking in comparison to rule by the British of the American colonies, what kind of things might a leader do make you unhappy? Communication objectives can apply to these discussions, e.g. a good opportunity to use “yes” and “no”, choice making, etc. Some students may be able to write words to describe these concepts about the story (another aspect of language arts), but some students can participate in writing activities by choosing appropriate symbols, words, or objects that are glued on a worksheet to describe their chosen concepts. These same concepts could apply when providing access to World History.

The standards for access level courses such as economics and math may also be taught during community-based and vocational activities in order to strengthen generalization of these skills. In addition to the academic classes, students may be registered in courses and engaged in activities to increase their independent living skills and vocational skills training, such as provision of access level instruction in courses related to the student’s chosen career pathway. This can include daily living skills such as appropriate dressing, choosing appropriate clothing, laundry skills, housekeeping, planning meals, shopping, and meal preparation. It is important that self-determination skills be embedded into all aspects of the curriculum. This instruction can include active participation utilizing assistive technology and augmentative communication to communicate choices.

Students who are enrolled in access level courses must remain in school until their 22nd birthday or until such time as they transition to their desired post-secondary activities where the support is provided by an agency other than the school system. This will most likely extend beyond the traditional four year sequence of CCGPS courses. Students who are enrolled in access level courses will more than likely accrue credits beyond the minimum 23 required for graduation.

Job training skills can be taught in the workplace setting as the student works to learn skills needed to transition from the school to the community. The student’s schedule may reflect registration in courses in a designated Career Pathway to accommodate this vocational training. Additionally, students may participate in general elective courses such as art, music, drama, fitness, etc. to assist in development of leisure skills. Because students will remain in school until they reach the age of 22, there is plenty of opportunity for students to participate in access level core courses as well as career and life skills courses prior to graduation.

What materials should be used to teach access level courses?

Choice of materials is dependent upon the needs of the individual student, keeping in mind that academic material must be aligned to the general education curriculum. Materials should be adapted from those used in general education courses, using assistive technology, tactile objects, picture symbols and manipulatives, always keeping age appropriateness in mind.

Course Names and Numbering for Students Assessed by the GAA

Students assessed by GAA will continue to receive instruction in the high school courses at the access level, but the courses will no longer be called "Access to...." on transcripts. The courses will have the

same name as the general education courses. The documentation that a student is to be assessed by the GAA will be the GAA flag in FTE. The GAA flag designates that the student is receiving instruction at an access level.

An 8 as the first numerical digit to the right of the decimal (XX.8)indicates that the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) has placed them in a general education course but in a special education setting and the student is being taught by a certified special education teacher. Students in these classes are earning Carnegie unit credit.

A 9 as the first numerical digit to the right of the decimal (XX.9) indicates that the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) has placed the student in a general education course in a general education setting but with a specified amount and model of special education support listed on the IEP. Students are taught by a certified general education teacher and also receive the identified IEP support by the appropriately certified special education personnel. Students in these classes are earning Carnegie unit credit.

Any course may be reported with a XX.8 and a XX.9. If a course number contains a XX.8 or XX.9 and the student is also participating in the GAA, then the student's instruction "aligns" with the standards for this course. The standards will not be addressed with the same depth and breadth as they will be for other students, and the IEP will address other instructional needs as well.

Two important things to remember:

1. The XX.8 and XX.9 course number does not distinguish between a high functioning student with a disability who is addressing all standards at the same "depth and breadth" as all other students and a student with a significant cognitive disability participating in the GAA. It is the GAA flag that is the indicator of the level at which the standards will be addressed, not the course number.
2. The XX.8 and XX.9 course numbers should not appear on transcripts.

This rule is at this website: <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-Policy/State-Board-of-Education/SBOE%20Rules/160-4-2-.20.pdf>. Page 6 discusses the courses for students assessed by GAA. The graduation rule allows an IEP to determine if a student must have more than 3 math courses. For students on GAA, the IEP team can determine if they need access to another math course. (Students on GAA do not take Math Support classes because of the significant modifications at the access level.) For all other courses, the number of required courses should mirror the requirements of general education students to receive a diploma.

If students meet these requirements do they get a regular diploma?

Yes, students who earn credit for each required course, earn credits for the appropriate number of electives, obtain a proficient score on the GAA in high school and either remain in school until they are 22 or transition prior to age 22 to the desired post school outcome with supports in place will receive a regular diploma.

In the event that a parent decides to withdraw a student who is assessed on the GAA and working toward a diploma prior to the receipt of a regular diploma, the special education diploma or a high school certificate is still an option. However, the IEP team should meet to

emphasize to the parent and the student that the student is still entitled to FAPE until such time as the student receives a regular diploma or reaches the 22nd birthday, whichever comes first.

What if a student wants to change the course of study?

If a student is working to earn a regular diploma through the GAA and participation in access level courses and then later decides to move to the traditional course of study, he or she must remain in school long enough to earn all of the required credits. Credits earned in access level courses will not transfer to the traditional course of study. The student would be eligible to remain in school until he or she earns the diploma or reaches the age of 22, whichever comes first.

For specific questions or more assistance regarding Access Courses please contact either Debbie Reagin (dreagin@doe.k12.ga.us or 404 232-1607) or Lynn Holland (lholland@doe.k12.ga.us or 404 657-9960).