

ACCESS COURSES FOR STUDENTS WITH THE MOST 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 GPS to assure that all students have access to the curriculum. Courses for students with the most significant disabilities which provide access to course content at an entry or prerequisite level are known as Access courses.

Who is eligible to participate in Access courses?

Access 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 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 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 (for example, Basic Reading and Writing) that would be appropriate for a student with this type of need; an Access 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-.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. Access 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. Because this rule only applies to students in the ninth grade for the first time in 2008-2009, a select number of access courses have been defined. Additional courses are being identified in the approved state course rule each year over the next few years. See State Board rule IDA(3)160.4-2-.02 List of State-Funded K-8 Subjects and 9-12 Courses for Students Entering Ninth Grade in 2008 for the complete list of current Access courses.

What does instruction based on Access courses look like?

Students will have a schedule of courses that include Access courses 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 the curriculum activities. **IEP goals are not to restate the 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 every day 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 Courses are courses which are aligned to general education courses with the same number and focus on providing access to the content of that course at an entry or prerequisite 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 COURSES MUST REFLECT THE GEORGIA PERFORMANCE STANDARDS.**

Course schedules for students enrolled in Access courses must be flexible and 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, nor that to be the only time English Language Arts may be 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 what animals need to survive.

Additionally, Access to Mathematics I can be addressed through Standard MM1A3, Students will solve simple equations and be accessed 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.

Social Studies standards addressed in 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 to 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 to Access to World History.

The standards for the Access courses such as economics and math may also be taught during community based and vocational activities 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 Access to Life Skills and Careers, Access to Family, Community, and Careers, 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 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 GPS courses. Students who are enrolled in Access 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 and the student schedule may reflect registration in vocational classes such as Career Technical Instruction I 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 courses as well as other needed life skills courses prior to graduation.

What materials should be used to teach the Access courses?

Choice of materials is dependant 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.

How will Access courses be identified?

Access course numbers are indicated by a “5” in the fourth place to the right of the decimal of the course number. Courses that were approved by the State Board on March 4, 2009 for the students with significant cognitive disabilities who enter ninth grade for the first time during the Fall of 2008 and subsequent years are:

English Language Arts
23.06150 Access to Ninth Grade
Literature/Composition
23.06250 Access to 10th Grade
Literature/Composition
23.05150 Access to American
Literature/Composition
23.05250 Access to English
Literature/Composition

Mathematics
27.08150 Access to Mathematics I
27.08250 Access to Mathematics II
27.08350 Access to Mathematics III

Science
26.01250 Access to Biology I
40.01150 Access to Physical Science
26.06150 Access to Environmental Science

Social Studies
45.08150 Access to United States History
45.08350 Access to World History
45.05750 Access to American Government/Civics
(1/2 Credit)
45.06150 Access to Economics/Business/ Free
Enterprise (1/2 Credit)
45.07150 Access to World Geography
45.07650 Access to Local Area Studies

Electives

20.01450 Access to Life Skills and Careers I
20.01451 Access to Life Skills and Careers II
20.01950 Access to Life Skills and Careers III
20.01951 Access to Life Skills and Careers IV
20.01550 Access to Family, Community, and Careers I
20.01650 Access to Family, Community, and Careers II
20.01750 Access to Family, Community, and Careers III
20.01850 Access to Family, Community, and Careers IV
20.43050 Access to Consumer Economics
20.41650 Access to Food, Nutrition, and Wellness
32.43350 Access to Workplace Readiness
32.81100 Career Technical Instruction I

53.01450 Access to Music Appreciation I
53.02450 Access to Music History and Literature I

Additional courses will be developed and submitted to the Board for approval in subsequent years. Systems who, as part of their local graduation requirements have local courses that are not included in the above list may utilize the “5” in the fourth digit to the right of the decimal to designate a locally developed Access course. This may only be used if the course follows the GPS for that course and provides access to the content at an entry or prerequisite level. All access courses must embed the students’ IEP goals and objectives in the instruction and must ensure that the content is relevant and stresses the connection of each activity to the next.

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.

Because obtaining a proficient score on the GAA is required for graduation, procedures are being developed to allow students to participate multiple times. Those procedures will be available by the time the students are enrolled in grade 11. However, a student does not participate prior to 11th grade. Only the results for those in 11th grade will impact a schools AYP rating.

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 tht 22nd birthday, whichever comes first.

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

If a student is working on the course of study to earn a regular diploma through the GAA and the Access Courses and later decides to move to the traditional course of study, he or she must remain in school long enough to earn all the required credits. Credits earned in an Access Course will not count toward credit for the course in 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 Kayse Harshaw (sharshaw@doe.k12.ga.us or 404 463-5281) or Lynn Holland (lholland@doe.k12.ga.us or 404 657-9960).