

The State Defined Alternate Diploma: What Do I Need to Know?

July 2021

Georgia's Systems of Continuous Improvement





Quick Quiz

- These are the credentials available to student with disabilities in Georgia:
 - High School Diploma
 - State-Defined Alternate Diploma
 - Special Education Diploma
 - High School Certificate
- Which of these credentials terminate a free appropriate public education (**FAPE**)?
 - High School Diploma

What is the State-Defined Alternate Diploma?

- The diploma awarded to students with the **most significant cognitive disabilities** who were **assessed using the alternate assessment** aligned to **alternate academic achievement standards**
- Standards-based and aligned with the state requirements for the regular high school diploma

What is the State-Defined Alternate Diploma?

- Intended for students instructed on alternate academic standards rather than the Georgia Standards of Excellence
- Not a regular high school diploma
- Does not terminate **Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)** for students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

When Did This Happen?

- State Board of Education approval was March 2020.
- Introductory webinar held January 2020, prior to State Board of Education approval
- Effective for first time 9th grade students beginning Fall 2020
- First potential graduates 2024

Why Do We Have An Alternate Diploma?

- Developed to meet the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requirements for including students in the graduation rate
 - 1) addresses issues identified by the U.S. Department of Education during federal monitoring;
 - 2) allows for better inclusion of students with significant cognitive disabilities assessed via the Georgia Alternate Assessment (GAA) 2.0 in graduation rates; and
 - 3) creates a tighter alignment among the instruction received, assessment taken, and diploma for which a student is eligible.

Timeline: State-Defined Alternate Diploma

- The State-Defined Alternate Diploma option will be available for students who entered ninth grade during the 2020-2021 school year and beyond.
- Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who were in high school prior to the 2020-2021 school year who take the GAA and complete other requirements will still receive the regular diploma.

9th Grade Cohorts by Year/Diploma Type

16-17	17-18	18-19	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26	26-27
9th grade - REGULAR DIPLOMA										
	9th grade - REGULAR DIPLOMA									
		9th grade - REGULAR DIPLOMA								
			9th grade - REGULAR DIPLOMA							
				9th grade - ALTERNATE DIPLOMA						
					9th grade - ALTERNATE DIPLOMA					

Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

- [According to State Board Rule 160-4-2-.48](#)
 - students with significant intellectual disabilities or intellectual disabilities concurrent with motor, sensory or emotional/behavioral disabilities who require substantial adaptations and support to access the general curriculum and require additional instruction focused on relevant life skills and participate in the Georgia Alternate Assessment (GAA)

Who are the students?

Students who have a disability or disabilities which significantly impact intellectual functioning AND adaptive behavior.



Intellectual Functioning and Adaptive Behavior

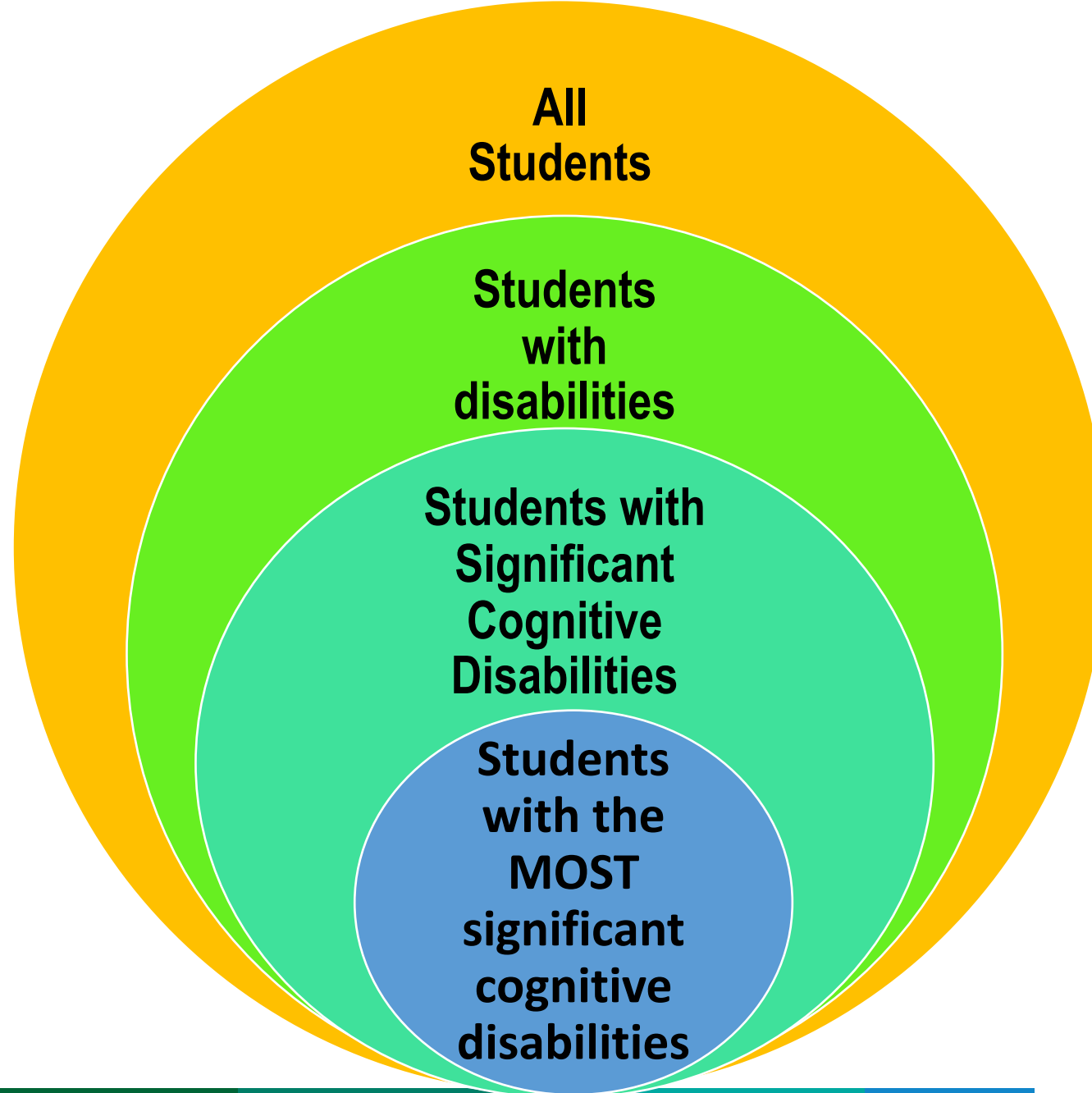
- A child with a disability or disabilities that are **not temporary** in nature and that significantly impact intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior(s).
- Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities are students who require repeated, extensive, direct, individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains across all content areas and settings.

Students with Significant Disabilities

- Most of our students with significant disabilities are eligible in the categories of intellectual disabilities, autism and multiple disabilities.
- These students typically enter special education during early childhood and continue special education services through their 22nd birthday.
- These students have varied receptive and expressive communication skills.
- High probability that these students will require significant supports across their lifespan.

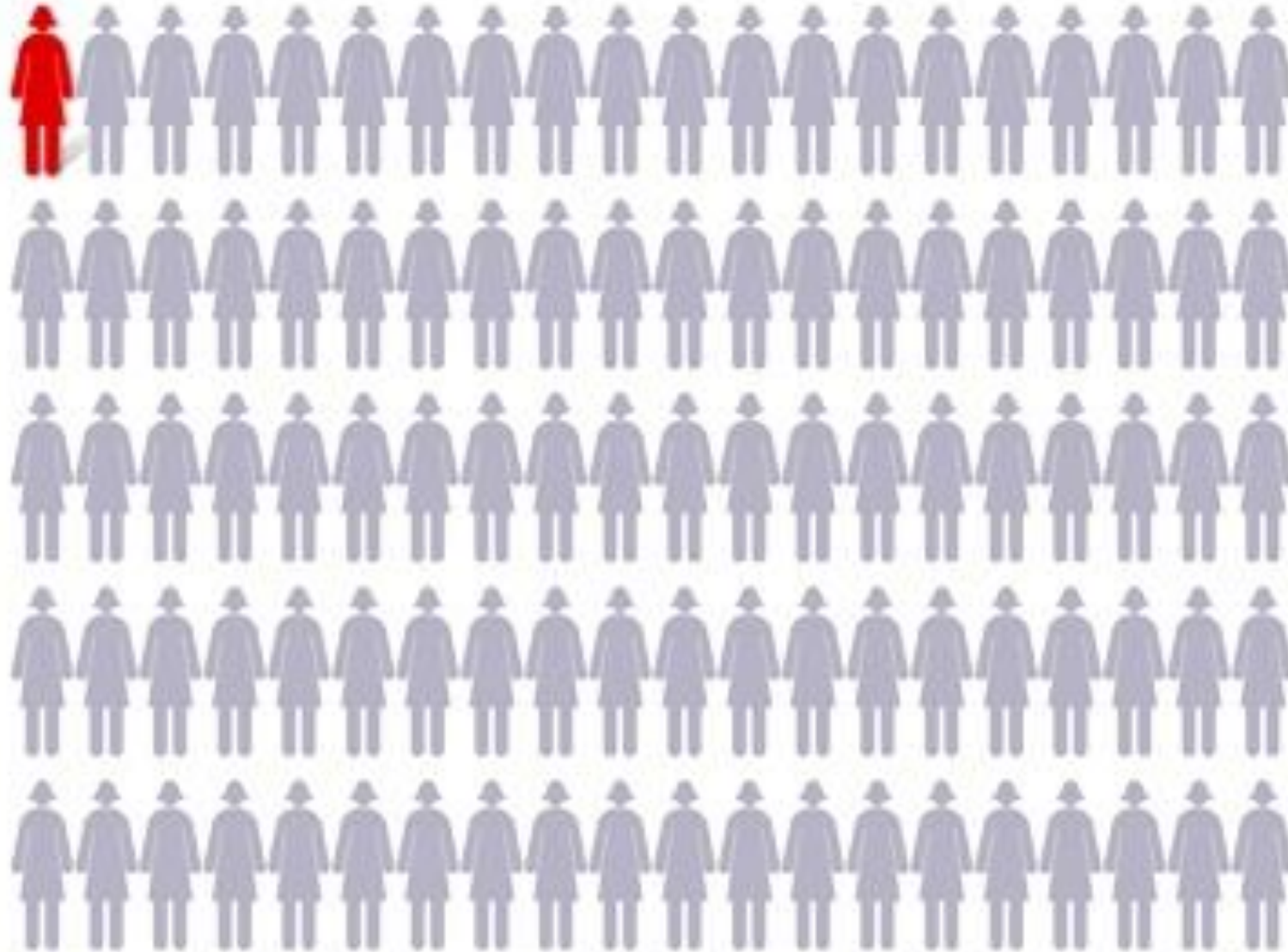
Some Common Characteristics

- Require supports in communication, adaptive behavior, assistive technology across all areas of school experience
- Likely to need significant supports for entire adult life



MOST Significant Cognitive Disability

1 →
out of
100



Aligned to Instructional Standards

Instruction/Standards	Assessment	Diploma
Georgia Standards of Excellence	→ Georgia Milestones	→ Regular
Alternate Content Standards	→ GAA 2.0	→ Alternate*

*Students with significant cognitive disabilities who entered school before the 2020-2021 school year who have taken the GAA can receive the regular diploma.

Eligibility Criteria for the Georgia Alternate Assessment 2.0 (GAA)

Step 1: Review the Eligibility Criteria for GAA

Prior to reviewing the eligibility criteria for GAA, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team must understand all assessment options, including the characteristics of each assessment and the potential implications of each assessment choice. The GAA 2.0 is intended for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Instruction for these students is based on alternate academic achievement standards, which are aligned to the Georgia Standards of Excellence at a reduced depth, breadth, and complexity. Beginning with students who enroll in ninth grade for the first time on or after the 2020-2021 school year, students who participate in the GAA 2.0 will be eligible for the state-defined alternate diploma rather than the regular high school diploma (SBOE 160-4-2-.48).

According to O.C.G.A § 20-2-281, school districts are required to follow the procedures specified in the applicable test administration materials. As a result, the IEP team must use this form to document its assessment decisions. If GAA is being considered, the IEP team must review the four criteria below and select **Yes** or **No** if applicable to the student. To be eligible to participate in GAA, the answer to all four of the questions below must be **Yes**. If the answer to any of the questions is **No**, the student is not eligible to participate in GAA and must participate in the Georgia Milestones Assessment System. Each **Yes** answer requires a justification that contains evidence that the student meets the criteria.

Student Name	Grade		
Eligibility Criteria	Sources of Evidence (check if used)		Justification
<p>1. Does the student require intensive, individualized instruction in a variety of instructional settings? The student needs specialized academic instruction and techniques over a period of time to ensure that he or she can learn, retain information, and transfer skills to other settings.</p>	<p><input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance <input type="checkbox"/> Anecdotal Notes and Observations <input type="checkbox"/> Benchmark Data <input type="checkbox"/> Progress Monitoring Data <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Characteristics Inventory <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____</p>	
<p>2. Does the student have a significant cognitive disability? A significant cognitive disability is determined by the IEP team and must be based on evaluation information</p>	<p><input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Results of Individual Cognitive Ability Test <input type="checkbox"/> Results of Adaptive Behavior Skills Assessment</p>	

Georgia Department of Education
Richard Woods, Georgia's School Superintendent

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Eligibility Criteria for the Georgia Alternate Assessment 2.0 (GAA)

Student Name			Grade		
Eligibility Criteria		Sources of Evidence (check if used)		Justification	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Learning Characteristics Inventory <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____			
<p>3. Does the student require specialized supports to access and participate in the grade-level Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) that require modifications based on the student's Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP)? Access to the grade-level curriculum is mandated by the federal government. A student with a significant cognitive disability requires access to the GSEs through prerequisite skills that are linked to the grade-level curriculum.</p>	<p><input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Results of Individual Cognitive Ability Test <input type="checkbox"/> Results of Adaptive Behavior Skills Assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Anecdotal Notes and Observations <input type="checkbox"/> Benchmark Data <input type="checkbox"/> Progress Monitoring Data <input type="checkbox"/> Results of language assessments including English Learner (EL) assessments, if applicable <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Characteristics Inventory <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____			
<p>4. Does the student require specialized supports to demonstrate age-appropriate adaptive behavior? A student with a significant cognitive disability needs specialized support throughout the day in areas such as expressing his or her needs, getting from place to place, eating lunch, negotiating social situations, and/or taking care of personal needs.</p>	<p><input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Results of Individual Cognitive Ability Test <input type="checkbox"/> Results of Adaptive Behavior Skills Assessment <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Characteristics Inventory <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____			

What Else Do You Need to Know?

- The State-Defined Alternate Diploma and the High School Diploma are **not** equivalent credentials.
- The alternate diploma option **is only available** for students who have the **most significant cognitive disabilities** and **participate in the GAA**.
- Students will count in the 4-year (and 5-year) cohort graduation rate in the year the student graduates.

What Else Do You Need to Know?

- The State-Defined Alternate Diploma doesn't terminate free appropriate public education (FAPE).
 - Receiving the High School Diploma terminates FAPE
- A diploma based solely on meeting IEP goals does not meet the criteria for receiving the State-Defined Alternate Diploma.
- The alternate diploma must be obtained within the period of FAPE availability.

What are the Graduation Requirements?

- The State-Defined Alternate Diploma is received when the student's IEP team determines that the student has:
 - completed an integrated curriculum based on the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) that includes instruction in Mathematics, English/Language Arts, Science and Social Studies as well as **career preparation, self-determination, independent living and personal care** to equal a minimum of 23 units of instruction, **and**

What are the Graduation Requirements?

- The State-Defined Alternate Diploma is received when the student's IEP team determines that the student has:
 - participated in the GAA during middle school and high school, and
 - has transitioned to an employment/education/training setting in which the supports needed are provided by an entity other than the local school system
- Requirements are unchanged from previous rule

What are the Postsecondary Opportunities?

- Many institutions may accept an alternate diploma for transition opportunities.
- There may be additional admission criteria for educational institutions.
- Institutions should be contacted directly for admissions criteria.

What Else Should I Know?

- Students who receive instruction for Alternate Academic Achievement Standards and participate in the alternate assessment will no longer be eligible to receive a regular diploma.
- The alternate diploma must be obtained within the period of FAPE availability.
- A diploma based solely on meeting IEP goals does not meet the criteria for receiving the State-Defined Alternate Diploma.
- The alternate diploma and the regular diploma are not equivalent credentials.

Context for Cohort Reassignment

- Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) acknowledges that students with disabilities may require longer to complete their high school education. As such, in Georgia, these students are allowed to remain in school until their 22nd birthday.
- In order for a student to count as a graduate in the 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR), he must earn a General diploma within four years.
- Cohort reassignment rules ease the four-year expectation for students with the most significant disabilities, allowing them up to the amount of time in their full FAPE timeline (age 22) to count as a graduate in a 4-year cohort.
- Simply put, cohort reassignment allows students with the most significant cognitive disabilities to count in the 4-year ACGR for their school even if they graduated in five, six, or seven years.

What is Cohort Reassignment?

- Beginning with the 2020 4-year cohort, US ED allows students with the most significant cognitive disabilities instructed using alternate achievement standards and assessed via the GAA to be **reassigned** to a future cohort.
- Students may be reassigned to the cohort of the student's final year of a free appropriate public education (FAPE).
- In Georgia, that is until age 22.

What is Cohort Reassignment?

- Based on SBOE Board Rule, in order to be reassigned to a future cohort in the Cohort Withdrawal Update Application, a student must
 - be flagged GAA in Student Record in high school; AND
 - have a GAA assessment in high school; AND
 - have a GAA assessment in middle school.

What is Cohort Reassignment?

- FAPE cohort reassignment will automatically occur when the student meets all three criteria per board rule:
 - flagged GAA in Student Record in high school; AND
 - have a GAA assessment in high school; AND
 - have a GAA assessment in middle school.
- Reassignment to a FAPE cohort can be verified by districts and schools in the Cohort Withdrawal Update application.

What is Cohort Reassignment?

- There will be exceptions/special circumstances.
 - Examples are students who were in 11th grade in 2020 when assessments were canceled; students moving in from out of state, private school, or homeschool; etc.
- There is an exceptions/special circumstances appeals process.

What is Cohort Reassignment?

- Process for exceptions/special circumstances
 - Special education directors and school administrators:
 - Work collaboratively to identify students in the current 4-year cohort who may be eligible for FAPE cohort reassignment;
 - Collect documentation needed to support an appeal for those students in the current 4-year cohort who did not automatically receive a FAPE cohort reassignment; and
 - Provide information to and work with district accountability point of contact (POC) to ensure process is completed for GaDOE.

What is Cohort Reassignment?

- Process for exceptions/special circumstances (continued)
 - District POC should
 - Work with GaDOE accountability specialist (and district superintendent) to submit appeals to GaDOE with documentation.
- Appeals committee reviews the submitted information to determine if the appeal is accepted based on SBOE board rule and the documentation provided.

Will this student receive an automatic FAPE Cohort Reassignment?

Scenario	MS Alternate Assessment	GAA Flag in HS SR	HS Alternate Assessment	Meets Requirements of Automatic FAPE Cohort Reassignment
Maria entered 9 th grade prior to 2020-2021 school year	Y	Y	Y	Y-Student is automatically reassigned to FAPE cohort based on 22 nd birthday. Student will count in the 4-year cohort graduation rate the year she graduates with a regular diploma or at the end of FAPE.
Darius entered 9 th grade on or after the 2020-2021 school year	Y	Y	Y	Y-Student is automatically reassigned to FAPE cohort based on 22 nd birthday. Student will count in the 4-year cohort graduation rate the year he graduates with an alternate diploma or at the end of FAPE.

Documentation for Appeals

- Documentation should answer the questions
 - *Why was this student not automatically reassigned?* and
 - *Why should he be reassigned?*
- Documentation for each scenario will be provided this year based on lessons learned last year.

Will this 2021 cohort student receive an automatic FAPE Cohort Reassignment?

Scenario	MS Alternate Assessment	GAA Flag in HS SR	HS Alternate Assessment	Meets Requirements of Automatic FAPE Cohort Reassignment	Documentation /Comments
John	Y	Y	N – enrolled in 11 th grade in 2020 when assessments were canceled	Y – assessments were canceled due to pandemic which led to this requirement in board rule being waived	This student should receive an automatic FAPE cohort. <u>If there is an issue</u> , the district could submit an appeal with documentation that the student was in 11 th grade in a Georgia public school in 2020. Documentation: enrollment record as reported in 2020 Student Record
Susan	Y	Y	N – enrolled in 11 th grade and opted-out of assessment in 2021 when assessments were administered	N – LEA can appeal; possible conditional reassignment to 2022 with expectation of completing GAA 2.0 in 2022	If student participates in GAA 2.0 in 2022, she will be reassigned. If she does not participate in 2022 GAA 2.0, she will count in the 2022 cohort.

Will this 2021 cohort student receive an automatic FAPE Cohort Reassignment?

Scenario	MS Alternate Assessment	GAA Flag in HS SR	HS Alternate Assessment	Meets Requirements of Automatic FAPE Cohort Reassignment	Documentation/Comments
Juan	N – student took alternate assessment in another state	Y	Y – student completed the GAA in 11 th grade	N – LEA can appeal and submit documentation from the other state	Documentation - Alternate Assessment score report from another state or IEP from another state with page number reference to student qualification for alternate assessment
Rey	N – student was supposed to take alternate assessment in another state but did not test	Y	Y – student completed the GAA in 11 th grade	N – LEA can appeal and submit documentation from the other state	Documentation – IEP from another state with page number reference to student qualification for alternate assessment
Kathy	N	Y	Y	N – missing middle school assessment and LEA can appeal if there were EXTENUATING circumstances (a life change)	Documentation – completed GAA 2.0 Eligibility Criteria Form and IEP with page number reference to support assignment to GAA and narrative explanation

Cohort Reassignment Next Steps

- Additional details are provided in the Cohort Withdrawal Update (CWU) application which is now open and closes on August 26th.
- Remember to download student level files from CWU and discuss the status of GAA students with the special education team.
- Contact your local accountability point of contact to assist you if you have questions as soon as they arise.

Resources

- ESSA State-defined Alternate Diploma for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities FAQs:
 - [For Practitioners](#)
 - [For Families](#)
- [Georgia Alternate Assessment 2.0](#)
- [Extended Content Standards](#)

Understanding the State-Defined Alternate Diploma

Session 1: Who are the students?

Session 2: Why is communication and assistive technology essential?

Session 3: What is the role of adaptive behavior?

Session 4: What is the State-Defined Alternate Diploma?

Session 5: What are best practices for transition to life?

Contact Information

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Feedback

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