

# **Approved Facility Schools Graduation Requirements Guidance Document**

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# **Colorado Approved Facility Schools Board**

## **Members of the Colorado Approved Facility Schools Board**

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## **Introduction**

The information provided in this document is intended to assist approved facility schools in implementing the Graduation Requirements for approved facility schools as adopted by the Colorado Approved Facility Schools Board. This document will be revised as specific procedures and forms are developed. The revisions will be sent to each approved facility school and posted on the Facility Schools Office web page as they are completed.

## **General Information**

Students in facility school placements may seek to receive a diploma from either their home school or from the Colorado Approved Facility Schools Board. If the parent/student wishes to pursue a diploma from the home district, the facility schools staff should assist the student in compiling transcripts and working with the home district to obtain a credit evaluation. If the home district identifies requirements that have not yet been met, the facility school should work with the student and family to determine if the requirements can be met, the options available to gain the needed credits or requirements and the timelines needed to complete the requirements. Every effort should be made to provide the student/family with needed information so that appropriate decisions can be made regarding the next steps for the student.

Tools to support facilities and students in planning for graduation will be provided to each approved facility school and will be posted on the Facility Schools Office web page. Resources will include:

- Worksheets for recording accumulated credits from other placements and school districts
- Information and link to College in Colorado (CIC) and descriptions of what types of resources can be found there
- Links to district graduation requirements and how each district calculates credits

It is important to start graduation planning early – as soon as the student enters 9<sup>th</sup> grade or at age 14 – so that the student has the best opportunity possible to earn the credits needed to receive a high school diploma and be able to document their accomplishments.

If the student/family chooses to pursue a diploma issued by the Colorado Approved Facility Schools Board, the procedures described in this document in combination with the graduation requirements adopted by the Colorado Approved Facility Schools Board will be used.

## **Process**

### **Review Committee:**

A Facility Schools Graduation Committee will be established for the purpose of reviewing graduation application and waiver requests. This committee will make decisions regarding whether students have met the graduation requirements adopted by the Colorado Approved Facility Schools Board and whether any waivers to those requirements will be granted.

Educators from approved facility schools will be sought as volunteers for this standing committee. One or more representatives from public schools (high school counselors or Out of District Coordinators) will also be asked to participate. The initial members will develop the application procedures to be used and the operating procedures of the committee. These procedures and documents will be posted on the Facility Schools Office web page and made available to all approved facility schools. At least one voting member of the committee will be a staff member of the Facility Schools Office, Colorado Department of Education.

The operating procedures will include a process for rotating the membership of the Facility Schools Graduation Committee. The membership rotation process will address the need to maintain consistency as membership changes. The graduation application procedures will be reviewed periodically with input from the approved facility schools.

### **Graduation Application:**

A graduation application will be submitted by the Approved Facility School on behalf of each student wishing to receive a high school diploma from the Colorado Approved Facility Schools Board.

The application will consist of the information and completed forms as prescribed by the Facility Schools Graduation Committee and the Facility Schools Office. Applications will consist of documentation of attainment of the graduation requirements adopted by the Colorado Approved Facility Schools Board, such as transcripts, completed Independent Living Checklist, the student's Culminating Project or a description of the project and documentation of the student's achievement level in reading and mathematics.

As part of the graduation application process, timelines for the submission of applications will be specified along with a schedule of Facility Schools Graduation Committee meetings. Facility schools should plan on submitting the application for graduation at the beginning of the semester in which the student plans to graduate. However, alternate procedures will be in place for those

students who may enter the facility mid-semester but would be able to complete the graduation requirements by the end of that semester.

The Facility Schools Graduation Committee will review graduation applications and notify the requesting facility of its decision. A process for appealing decisions to the Facility Schools Board, including timelines for the submission of an appeal, will be available if the facility or the family disagrees with the decision of the Facility Schools Graduation Committee. The decision of the Colorado Approved Facility Schools Board will be final.

#### Waiver Applications:

A process for requesting waivers to one or more graduation requirements will be available. The Facility Schools Graduation Committee will determine the specifics of the waiver application process.

The waiver process is primarily intended for students whose disability prevents them from achieving specific graduation requirements even with appropriate instruction and accommodations. However, during the initial implementation of the state curriculum for facility schools prior to the 2015-2016 school year, the waiver process may also be used for students who may have sufficient credits, but may not have academic credits in the specific classes required due to inconsistencies in the scope and sequence of curriculum across facility schools.

The Facility Schools Graduation Committee will develop the process for waiver applications. This will include documentation of the student's disability or other special circumstances, a description of the instruction that has been provided to assist the student to achieve the graduation requirements and the rationale for the waiver request.

The Facility Schools Graduation Committee will review waiver applications and notify the requesting facility of its decision. A process for appealing decisions to the Facility Schools Board will be available if the facility or the family disagrees with the decision. The decision of the Colorado Approved Facility Schools Board will be final.

### **Graduation Requirements**

There are four components of the graduation requirements adopted by the Colorado Approved Facility Schools Board. They are:

- 1) Successful completion of prescribed Academic Credits
- 2) Completion of applicable Independent Living Checklist Activities
- 3) Completion of a Culminating and/or Reflective project
- 4) Attainment of a 5<sup>th</sup> grade Proficiency Level in Reading and Mathematics

### Academic Credits:

A total of 220 credits are required to receive a diploma from the Colorado Approved Facility Schools Board. A semester long class equals 5 credits, a year-long class equals 10 credits. One credit is earned for 14 seat hours and may also be earned by other methods. Guidelines for earning equivalent credits for each of the alternative methods will be provided.

This credit structure was selected so that students will accumulate full credits more quickly (as opposed to partial credits) and because experience suggests that students respond well to this structure when tracking their own credits.

The Facility Schools Curriculum (when it is developed) will include lists of options and resources for providing classes that are traditionally challenging for facilities, such as labs for science classes, higher level math classes, etc. Options such as on-line classes and creative instructional strategies would be included.

### Alternative methods of earning credits:

Work Study - Students in approved work study programs could earn the equivalent of 1 hour of seat time for each 3 hours of work. Total elective credits for work study are limited to 35.

Portfolios – The portfolio process appears to work better with students who are self-directed academically and may not be the best fit for most students in facilities. However, it is an option that teachers may choose for a particular student or group of students if they wish. Once the curriculum for facility schools is developed and adopted, content area specialists will be brought together to develop guidelines for using portfolios in facility classrooms. The guidelines will include information on helping students to develop portfolios and criteria for evaluating the portfolio for the purpose of awarding credits. The highly qualified content area teacher would determine if the student's portfolio meets the criteria and would award the credit.

Credit Recovery - Credit Recovery programs allow a student to move through course content at an individualized pace and may be particularly helpful for students who have participated in a portion of a class, but were not able to complete the class due to changes in placement. A credit recovery approach can provide instruction in the concepts that the student has not been exposed to, while moving quickly through content that the student has already mastered. A list of recommended or approved credit recovery programs will be provided as part of the facility schools curriculum when it is adopted by the Colorado Approved Facility Schools Board.

Assessment in Lieu of Class – Students may be awarded credit for a course if the student can demonstrate understanding of the course content through an approved assessment in lieu of participating in the course. This may be particularly helpful for students who have educational experiences for which no transcripts can be located. A list of approved assessments will be provided as part of the curriculum for facility schools as appropriate. In order to earn credit by through assessment in lieu of class time, a student will need to achieve an 80% or the equivalent score on an approved assessment.

Required academic credits are:

- **Language Arts – 40 credits**
  - 10 Literature
  - 10 Composition
  - 5 Speech/Communication
  - 15 Language Arts Electives
- **Mathematics – 30 credits**
  - 5 Geometry or integrated equivalent
  - 10 Algebra or integrated equivalent
    - o This would include problem solving, logical thinking, etc.
  - 5 Financial Literacy
  - 10 Math Electives
    - o This could include basic math, business math, consumer math or higher level math options such as calculus or trigonometry.
- **Social Studies – 30 credits**
  - 5 American History
  - 5 World History
  - 5 Government/Civics
  - 5 Geography
  - 10 Cultural Studies or social studies electives
- **Science – 20 Credits**
  - 5 credits – Life Science
    - o This could include introduction to Biology (for example, plants, animals, Biology I, Biology II, etc.)
  - 5 credits – Earth Science
  - 10 Credits – Physical Science
    - o This could include intro to Chemistry (for example, atoms, molecules, etc.)
- **Other Credits – 30 Credits** - For the following credit requirements, instruction must be provided by a licensed teacher, but these content areas are not addressed by the Title I, Highly Qualified Teacher

requirements. Therefore, teachers with the following teaching endorsements are not required. Teachers should have an appropriate level of expertise in the content they are teaching or may partner with community members or other facility staff to provide appropriate instruction in the following subject areas.

- P.E. – 10 credits
  - o This could include individual sports, team sports, fitness, leisure activities and exercise.
- Health/nutrition – 5 credits
- Computer/Technology Literacy – 5 credits -
  - o Training and assistance will be provided for teachers to assist with the development of strategies to teach needed technology skills while maintaining internet safety
- Fine Arts – 5 credits
  - o Training and assistance will be provided for teachers in the development of strategies and resources for this requirement.
- Service Learning – 5 credits
  - o The amount of credit allowed for service learning would be limited to 10 credits.
  - o Credits would be earned in the same manner as seat time – 14 hours spent in service learning would earn 1 credit.
  - o Service learning projects need to be aligned to the academic content standards.
  - o Facility schools are encouraged to combine service learning projects with job exploration opportunities outlined in special education students transition plans.
  - o Guidelines regarding service learning will be provided including information on the difference between service learning and volunteering. Volunteering may also be a worthwhile activity, but volunteering does not necessarily meet the criteria of service learning if the student is not learning skills related to academic standards in the process.
- Electives – 70 credits
  - o Electives can include academic electives, such as remedial classes designed to improve a student's skill level or they may be more traditional electives chosen by the student based on his/her interest.
  - o Guidelines for electives will be developed regarding what can be considered an educational elective.

Some colleges and universities may have admission requirements, such as foreign language, that are not included in the facility schools high school graduation requirements. For students planning to apply to a college or university, it will be important to select classes based on the college entrance

requirements. Suggestions will be provided for options to support students in accessing instruction in subject areas that are not part of the graduation requirements for facility schools (i.e. community college, on-line courses, etc.). Students who are not planning to attend college will be able to meet the graduation requirements with classes appropriate to their needs and interests.

### Independent Living Checklist

The Independent Living Checklist is intended to provide information and experiences to assist the student to be successful and contributing members of the community after graduation and facility placement.

It is not expected that every student would complete every item on the checklist. The checklist should be used as a guide in considering options which may be valuable for an individual student.

Assisting students with the items listed may be the responsibility of facility treatment staff, case workers, family or other responsible adults. Teachers or education staff are not required to be the adult responsible and the activities do not need to be completed during school time. Education staff should work together with the other service providers and responsible adults in the student's life to determine which items are a priority for each student and how each will be accomplished.

The means of collecting and storing important information for the student should be considered. Some information could be maintained on-line in the student's College in Colorado account. Other options include compiling information on a CD or jump drive.

### Culminating Reflective Project

The purpose of the Culminating Reflective Project is to give students the opportunity to reflect on their own educational experiences and to appreciate what they have learned, the skills they have gained and the challenges they have faced successfully. The project is intended to represent the celebration and rite of passage that high school graduation symbolizes. It is a way to bring focus to the student's education achievements that may have occurred in many locations and circumstances over the course of their academic career and to look forward to how those achievements might be used in the student's next steps.

The graduation committee will develop guidelines and a planning worksheet for approval by the Facility Schools Board. Students and staff will be able to use these supporting documents in the process of developing the project. The

worksheet will help to divide the project into manageable portions so that at least one portion of the project could be completed in a placement even if the length of stay is relatively short.

Education staff will need to assist the student in developing ideas and offering guidance in the process. The student can decide how they would like to present their project – it might be written, oral, a PowerPoint presentation, an artistic representation, video, dramatization or other means of demonstration. Staff should guide the student in decisions to ensure that the project is portable or accessible if the student changes placement prior to completion. The scope of the entire project should be something that could be completed in 2 or 2 ½ months during the student's senior year.

The student will also decide who he/she will present the project to – teachers, facility staff, other students, family? It would also be appropriate to consider inviting the student's case worker, GAL, client manager or other people who are important in the student's life. Depending on the method of expression, presentation of the project at the graduation ceremony might be considered.

Portions of the project could be incorporated into existing classes as assignments.

#### Minimum competency level in Reading and Mathematics

In order to receive a high school diploma from the Colorado Approved Facility Schools Board, the student will need to achieve a minimum of a 5<sup>th</sup> grade proficiency level in both reading and mathematics unless prevented by their disability.

This is intended to ensure that students have the basic skills needed to function independently after high school graduation.

A list of approved assessment tools will be provided for consistency among facility schools and documentation of the score and the test used will be submitted to the graduation committee as part of the graduation application.

### **Graduation Ceremonies**

For a student to participate in the graduation ceremony the student is required to have met the graduation requirements and earned the high school diploma.

A group graduation ceremony will be offered for those facilities that would like to participate. Individual facilities may continue to hold their own ceremonies if they wish. The Facility Schools Office, Colorado Department of Education will print

and keep a record of all diplomas issued by the Colorado Approved Facility Schools Board.

At least one member of the Colorado Approved Facility Schools Board will attend the Approved Facility Schools graduation ceremony and participate in the awarding of Approved Facility Schools diplomas.

### **Other Activities**

Special activities for seniors may be considered and planned if there is interest. Examples would include a senior day with a special outing or activity or an opportunity for seniors to present their Cumulative Reflective Projects. The Facility Schools Office can assist in facilitating plans and facilities may elect to participate if they choose.