

In 2009 in Oregon our state created Extended Diplomas that are available to students who receive IEP services and who have impacts from their disabilities that would make a modified diploma an unrealistic pathway. These diplomas require 12 credits and this equates to a student needing to take an average of two classes with content specialist teachers out of five each term to complete the pathway. Currently only modified diplomas count towards graduation for students who receive SPED services and these require students to take an average of four out of five regular education classes each term for four years. While Extended Diplomas exist they currently do not count as graduating and so they are underutilized and also do not benefit the students who earn them in an equitable way. OEA will be advocating for these diplomas to count towards high school graduation rates next year and if this idea becomes a reality we will create a pathway to meaningful graduation that is accessible for students with moderate to severe impacts from their disabilities and this will help to increase opportunities for inclusion in the state and help to improve our educational culture by rejecting the philosophy of ableism.

Our students learn a lot of important things in their special education classes. Some of them learn to communicate in a variety of modalities such as ASL or using sophisticated technology such as Touchchat or eye gaze communication systems. They learn to cook, shop, work, clean, and complete meaningful independent living skills that help them throughout their life. Some students increase their reading level later in life significantly and go from first or second grade reading levels to four or fifth during high school. They learn how to make friends and treat others with compassion. Some of them learn to walk better, stand and bear their own weight, or even drive power wheelchairs. The things our students with disabilities learn require just as much effort and matter just as much as the things other students learn. We should not penalize them for having a disability and say that their diploma doesn't count, especially when they often work as hard or harder than their typically developing peers. We should also lift testing requirements for students with moderate to profound impacts from their disabilities. If it passes this bill will open the door to the conversation that needs to happen with ODE. This conversation is needed and this is what equity in education looks like.