



Merit Preparatory Academy School Completion and Diploma Policy

Board Approved: 3/21/23

1. Purpose:

Merit Preparatory Academy Board of Trustees approves this policy to specify standards and credit requirements for high school graduation and shall issue differentiated diplomas or certificates of completion consistent with state law and rules.

DEFINITIONS

"Accredited" means evaluated and approved under the accreditation standards of the State Board of Education.

"Concurrent Enrollment" means enrollment by public school students in one or more college or university courses for credit by a high school student who continues to be enrolled in Merit Preparatory Academy.

"Dual enrollment" means a student who is enrolled simultaneously in Merit Preparatory Academy and another accredited public school. (eg; Springville High School, an online school, etc.)

"Early Graduation" means any secondary public school student, with the approval of the student, the student's parent or guardian, and an authorized local school official, who has completed all required courses or demonstrated mastery of competencies, graduates prior to the conclusion of the twelfth grade.

"Transcript" means an official document or record generated by one or several schools which includes, at a minimum; the courses in which a secondary student was enrolled, grades and units of credit earned. The transcript is usually one part of the student's permanent or cumulative file which also may include birth certificate, immunization records and other information as determined by the school in possession of the records.

"FAPE" means free appropriate public education

2. Procedure:

2.1 Diplomas and Completion Certificates

2.1.1. Merit Academy shall offer a differentiated high school diploma to all students who successfully complete all state and School course requirements for graduation.

2.1.2. A Certificate of Completion may be awarded instead of a diploma for students who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and will be continuing their education in a specialized program post-graduation. (See Section 7 - Students with Disabilities)

2.1.3. An Alternative Diploma may be awarded instead of a diploma for students who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) with a specific route to graduate according to USBE's Alternative Diploma standards (USBE Board Rule R277-705-5(1)(b)). (See Section 7 - Students with Disabilities)

2.2. Academic Requirements for High School Graduation: Students in grades 9 through 12 must earn at least the minimum number of credits designated by the student's high school through course completion or through competency assessment consistent with Utah Administrative Rule R-277-705 and School policy.

2.2.1. Merit Academy graduation requirements are established by the Merit Academy Board in accordance with the Utah State Board of Education standards. This plan must be developed for a student in collaboration with a parent/guardian, counselor, school administrator, and student after it is determined that the student requires alternative services. Students are eligible for early graduation if they meet all of the graduation requirements.

2.2.2. Traditional School Diploma requirements are in addition to Merit Academy Diploma requirements as determined by the Utah State Board of Education and enumerated by Merit academic standards. All high schools require the same core classes although they may vary in elective credit requirements.

CREDITS REQUIRED FOR GRADUATION:

- A. Language Arts 4.0 units of credit
- B. Mathematics 3.0 units of credit
- C. Science 3.0 units of credit at a minimum, two selected from the four science foundation areas
- D. Social Studies 3.0 units of credit
- E. Directed Coursework • Fine Arts 1.5 units of credit • Career and Technical Education 1.0 unit of credit • Digital Studies 0.5 units of credit • General Financial Literacy 0.5 unit of credit
- F. Physical and Health Education 2.0 units of credit
- G. ASK course 0.5 units of credit
- H. Electives as determined by the high school
- I. Any other credits necessary for graduation in regards to the Alternative Diploma.

3. UNITS OF CREDIT

3.1. A unit of credit or fraction thereof shall be given upon satisfactory completion of a course or learning experience in compliance with state course standards.

3.1.1. Course Grade Forgiveness (R277-717-3). A student wishing to improve a course grade has the following options:

- a) repeat the course one or more times
 - i) Merit Academy can only grant complete grade forgiveness and/or issue a replacement grade for a student retaking the exact same course, the exact same term that they are intending to replace the grade for. The course must be taught by a Merit Academy teacher
- b) enroll in and complete a comparable course.
 - i) a student can receive complete grade forgiveness and/or a replacement grade for an equivalent course taken through the BYU Independent Study High School Suite that Merit issues the grade for.
 - ii) A student must choose to either replace a grade or receive an extra unit of credit. A grade for an additional unit of credit does not change a student's original course grade for purposes of this section.
 - iii) The student will be responsible for any course fees or costs.
- c) Grade forgiveness cannot be granted for grades received at any other institution. Students can contract with another institution to replace a grade at that institution using one of the two methods listed above, only if that institution agrees to issue a grade replacement on the

student's transcript when Merit Academy sends a copy of the student's new Merit transcript to them.

3.1.2. Repeating a course: If a student repeats a course, Merit Preparatory Academy:

a) shall adjust the student's course grade and grade point average to reflect the student's highest grade and exclude a lower grade;

b) shall exclude from the student's permanent record the lower course grade; and

c) may not otherwise indicate on the student's record that the student repeated the course.

3.1.3. Enroll in a comparable course: If a student enrolls in a comparable course the student shall, at the time of enrolling in the comparable course, inform MPA of the student's intent to enroll in the course for the purpose of improving a course grade. MPA, prior to enrollment, confirms with the student that the comparable course fulfills the same credit requirements as the course the student intends to replace. At the completion of the comparable-course Merit Preparatory Academy:

a) shall adjust the student's course grade and grade point average to reflect the student's highest grade and exclude a lower grade;

b) shall exclude from the student's permanent record the lower course grade; and

c) may not otherwise indicate on the student's record the course or comparable course for which the student received the lower grade.

d) an extra unit of credit will not be awarded to the student if the original grade is replaced.

3.2. Merit may grant credit from among the following:

3.2.1. Successful completion of a course offered at Merit; approved by MPA taken outside of the regular school day or school year; approved by the school for concurrent enrollment and offered by an accredited post-secondary institution; or offered by correspondence or extension that is approved and accredited by the State of Utah.

3.2.2. Demonstrated proficiency by way of a school approved assessment. Parents/guardians are responsible for the cost of assessment.

3.2.3. Successful completion of a course from an accredited secondary school, accredited special purpose school, accredited supplemental education school, or other approved online course.

3.2.4. Students enrolled in grades 7-12 will be allowed to earn credit by enrolling in and completing courses offered by state approved and accredited programs. The number of allowable online credits each academic year are 6 credits per year. (R277-726-2)

4. HOME INSTRUCTION

Students released for home instruction do not earn Merit Preparatory Academy credits.

5. EARLY GRADUATION OPTION

The option for early graduation is available to any secondary student who has completed all graduation requirements for the Traditional School Diploma as outlined in School policy.

6. CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT

Students who can demonstrate readiness for college level work may be eligible for the Concurrent Enrollment program. This program allows students to earn college credit while attending high school. All credit earned in concurrent enrollment courses will count toward high school graduation.

7. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

A student with a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) shall satisfy high school completion or graduation criteria, consistent with state and federal law and the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Merit may modify graduation requirements consistent with the student's IEP (R277-770). The IEP team must refer to the USBE Graduation Guidelines for Students with Disabilities for additional information regarding modifying graduation requirements and IEP substitutions. Students with disabilities are entitled to participate in graduation. (Letter to Runkle, OCR 1996).

7.1. There are three graduation options for students with disabilities in Utah:

- 1) Graduate with a regular high school diploma,
- 2) Graduate with an alternative diploma, and
- 3) Earn a certificate of completion. Earning the alternative diploma, a certificate of completion, or a GED does not end Merit's responsibility of FAPE; therefore, a student may continue to receive special education and related services until age 22.

7.1.1. Graduation with a regular high school diploma constitutes a change of placement, requiring written prior notice (WPN). The obligation of Merit to provide FAPE ends when a student under IDEA is issued a regular high school diploma. Students with disabilities shall meet graduation requirements with appropriate documented (a cumulative record) accommodations, curricular modifications, substitutions and amendments as determined by their IEPs. The student's transcript must not identify special education classes.

7.1.2. Students with disabilities may earn an alternate diploma if the student accesses grade level core standards through the Essential Elements; the student's IEP team makes graduation substitutions with an Essential Elements course or another USBE or Merit approved course; and the student meets all graduation requirements prior to exiting school at or before age 22 (277-705-5). An alternate diploma issued by the LEA may not indicate that the recipient is a student with a disability.

7.1.3. Students with disabilities may graduate with a certificate of completion if they have completed their senior year; but, have not met the graduation requirements and whose IEP Transition Plan (beginning at age 14) includes a Post-High School Program. A certificate of completion indicates a record of completed competencies and does not constitute a change of placement, until the student ages out (age 22) and/or exits the program. This certificate may not identify the student as a student with a disability.

7.1.4. Students with disabilities may earn a Career Development Credential (CDC) if: the student meets the requirements of a career focused work experience prior to leaving school; consistent with state and federal law; and the student's IEP or 504 plan. See USBE R277-705- 6 for more information. A student can earn a CDC in conjunction with a regular high school diploma or the alternate diploma.

8. TRANSFER AND WITHDRAWN STUDENTS

8.1. MPA will approve credits and grades received from an accredited public or private school. Credit earned at a school accredited by the USBE or AdvancEd is accepted at face value at Merit.

8.2. Students enrolling during the fourth (4th) term of their senior year shall have their graduation status coordinated by the administration of the new school and the sending school.

8.3. Students who have withdrawn from public school before graduating may not return to public school once they have turned 18 years old and their class has graduated.

9. FOREIGN EXCHANGE AND PRIVATELY PLACED FOREIGN STUDENTS

The intent of the Foreign Exchange program is to provide a cultural experience in an American high school without the pressure of meeting the same set of standards expected of our students. As such, Foreign Exchange (J-1) students are not eligible for a Merit Academy high school diploma.

9.1. Foreign students shall not be allowed to enroll if they have already graduated in their home country or they are 18 years of age and above.

9.2. Foreign students with J-1 and F-1 status will not be considered for graduation and are therefore not eligible to receive a high school diploma. They may receive a transcript and certificate of completion and participate in graduation ceremonies if approved by school administration.

9.3. Foreign students with J-1 and F-1 status who intend to submit transcripts in languages other than English, must bear the responsibility and cost for translation of their transcripts. Transcript evaluations for all foreign students will be completed by the School counseling coordinator.

10. GRADUATION CEREMONY

Merit Academy recognizes that a student's graduation is a culmination of years of planning and successful completion of state and school requirements. The wearing of the cap and gown and participation in the ceremony awarding the certificate of completion or diploma shall be reserved for students who have met those requirements. The Board recognizes the importance of the completion of the requirements for a certificate of completion, Merit diploma or traditional high school diploma and views it as an achievement that improves the community as well as the individual. The Board wishes to recognize that achievement in a publicly celebrated graduation exercise.

10.1. Participation in the graduation ceremony is an opportunity and not a protected property right.

Participation may be denied as a disciplinary measure, or if a student refuses to comply with graduation ceremony standards established and developed at the individual school site.

10.2. Participation in the graduation ceremony is optional and is not required.

10.3. Caps and gowns will be worn in the proper manner as designated by the school administration.

10.4. Students with special needs shall be provided with the opportunity to participate in ceremonies utilizing criteria based upon their unique circumstances as outlined in section 8 of this policy.

11. SEAL OF BI-LITERACY

Available for students who meet proficiency standards in speaking, listening, writing and reading in English and a second language. Students may request information from their school counselors.

REFERENCES

Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1-603 - Duties of State Board of Education.

Utah Code Ann. § 53A-1-611 - Standards and assessment processes to measure student performance - Basic Skills Competency Test.

Utah Code Ann. § 53A-13-108.5 - Acceptance of credits and grades awarded by accredited schools.

Utah Administrative Rule R277-700 - The Elementary and Secondary School Core Curriculum and High School Graduation Requirements.

Utah Administrative Rule R277-705 - Secondary School Completion and Diplomas Courses meeting the criteria for graduation requirements beginning with the Class of 2011.

Utah State Board of Education Special Education Rules - III.X Graduation.