

Frequently Asked Questions Early Graduation

The Frequently Asked Questions document is to provide clarification regarding the amendment to 704 KAR 3:305 regarding Early Graduation criteria and incentives.

1. When does the regulation go into effect?

The regulation takes effect the academic year 2014-2015.

2. What about students preparing to graduate early in 2014?

Students, schools, districts and counselors should be aware of the changes to what has traditionally been called “Early Graduation” due to this regulation and communicate with potential early graduates about the effect that this and SB97 may have on their plans to graduate high school early.

3. Why is there an Early Graduation pathway?

The Early Graduation Certificate (SB 61) was enacted by the 2013 Kentucky General Assembly as a companion piece of legislation to Compulsory Attendance (SB 97). The intent of the statute is to create an accelerated pathway for students to be able to graduate in three years or less from high school, before age 18 and be college ready.

4. What do I have to do to graduate early?

Regulation guidance, The *Letter of Intent* and supporting documents can be found on the Kentucky Department of Education website.

5. I want to get out of high school early, who are potential candidates for early graduation?

This regulation is targeted for students who have shown high achievement, accelerated levels of academic success and express a desire to complete high school early and move on to college before the age of 18. Districts are recommended to have criteria and data to aid students and parents in the decision-making process; however the decision is ultimately up to the student and their family.

6. My parents don't support me doing in graduating early; can I do it without their signature?

The *Letter of Intent* requires student, parent/guardian, principal and superintendent signatures to be considered complete. Early Graduation participants and families are recommended to have an initial meeting with counselors to determine the likelihood of success. After starting the program, students, parents and counselors meet regularly to assess progress. Full use of the ILP is also recommended by the regulation. Difficulty in meeting any of the criteria would be an indication the student is not ready for college level work.

7. My counselor has discouraged me from trying early graduation, why?

Early Graduation is not a “loop hole” or “short cut” to getting a diploma. The four courses required; English II, Algebra II, Biology and US History have been determined as courses that prepare students for college success without remediation. The ACT college readiness exam scores have strong correlations with student success in college. Students who wish to pursue Early Graduation who have not shown academic success in prior coursework or do not indicate the ability to self-regulate or study independently may not be good candidates for the program.

8. What about the minimum required credits to graduate?

Early Graduation is an amendment to 704 KAR 3:305, Minimum Requirements for Graduation. In the amended regulation, Early Graduation is an alternative path to graduation that does not include the 22 minimum credits for graduation. (See Appendix E of the Early Graduation Guidance Document)

9. Can my district add requirements?

No, according to KRS 158.142, a local board of education shall not impose graduation requirements that prohibit a student who is pursuing an Early Graduation program from finishing high school in less than four years.

10. Do I get a diploma when I do Early Graduation?

Yes, early graduates receive a diploma from their local board of education. If districts have multiple levels of diplomas (e.g. general, alternative or honors), it would be a local school board decision as to which diploma the student receives.

11. Can I take high school courses in middle school?

Yes, KRS 158.622 states that each school district shall “Accept for credit toward graduation and completion of high school course requirements an advanced placement, a high school equivalent, or a Kentucky Virtual High School course taken by a student in grades 5, 6, 7, or 8 if that student attains performance levels expected of high school students in that district as determined by achieving a score of "3" or higher on a College Board Advanced Placement examination or a grade of "B" or better in a high school equivalent or a Kentucky Virtual High School course.” Make sure you have communicated with the high school before taking a course in middle school, online or in person, for which you want to earn high school credit.

12. Can I take End-of-Course exams in middle school?

Yes, with the communication and acceptance of the sponsoring high school that the course given was 1) taught by a teacher that was highly qualified and certified to teach high school level courses 2) the student had prior approval that any online course was acceptable to the high school for course credit 3) The End-of-Course exam is given either at the middle school or high school following the student having successfully taken the full and complete course prior to taking the exam.

13. Can I double up and take two of the same content courses at the same time?

Yes, you will need to plan a schedule with your counselor to ensure the school can accommodate your plans for acceleration.

14. What about taking the ACT exam early?

Students participating in Early Graduation may take their state administered ACT test in their Freshman or Sophomore years. Guidance includes instructions to counselors on adding student names to the ACT roster for testing before the junior year. If students wish to take the ACT independently, the student will be responsible for the cost of the test. It is the student’s responsibility to have the scores reported to the high school.

15. What if I have moved from another state and want to graduate early (after October 1st)?

The language of the regulation says to “indicate that intent to the school principal at the beginning of grade nine (9) or as soon as the intent is known. “ (Students must have attended a Kentucky high school for three years to be eligible for the KEES equivalent fourth year award. Otherwise, students are only eligible for KEES for the years they attended a Kentucky high school).

16. What if I am homeschooled or in private school? Can I graduate early?

This regulation establishes minimum requirements for a high school diploma in public schools in Kentucky. This regulation does not apply to current home-schooled or private school students, they are not eligible for the Certificate.

17. What if I intend to graduate but change my mind and want to stay in high school?

The *Letter of Intent* is not binding; a student may choose to stay four years in high school. Once the student exits Early Graduation, the student must be transitioned back to regular minimum graduation requirements and understands that they are no longer eligible for the Early Graduation Certificate.

18. What if I intend to graduate early but didn't meet proficiency in the End-of-Course (EOC) and/or my ACT scores are not close to benchmark for college readiness?

A key piece to this legislation is the constant and continual monitoring of student progress through counseling and use of the ILP. Students, families and counselors should review academic performance each grading period to make sure the student is on track. **If a student is unable to reach proficiency in either course or exams that is a strong indicator the student is not ready for college level work.** If an Early Graduate candidate successfully passes a course, but does not meet EOC benchmark, the student may complete an appeal process to the district board on the extenuating circumstances to re-take the EOC exam again. The DAC should keep the rationale for the retake on file. Refer to the District Assessment Coordinator's Guide 2014-2015 for more information.

Students may re-take the ACT as often as they choose (only one school sponsored administration is provided, additional administrations must be funded by the student).

Students may retake End-Of-Course exams but only after retaking the full and complete course itself (credit recovery is not an acceptable replacement) and may take the End-of-Course again (only once per course and only for Early Graduate candidates).

19. What if I graduate early and leave in December?

The Early Graduation Certificate funds would not be available until the fall of the year you graduate. You may attend college during the summer and wait for the Certificate to be applied during the fall term. If you graduate before you complete three full years of high school, you may not qualify for the KEES equivalent award. You should contact the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority (KHEAA) to see how graduating in December would affect your KEES earnings.

20. What if I intend to graduate early and move to another school in the district before I finish?

You should make sure that your new school receives and enters the *Letter of Intent* into Infinite Campus. Prior to moving schools, conversations should take place notifying the school of your alternative placement and jointly work out an accelerated pathway for the student in the new school.

21. What if I am doing Early Graduation and I move out of the state?

Early Graduation is a pathway for Kentucky students; it is not applicable in other states.

22. What if I complete Early Graduation, receive my diploma and then change my mind, can I return to high school?

No, once you exit the system with a valid diploma you may not return to high school.

23. I want to see what I might make on the ACT before intending to graduate- can I do this?

We want you to be as prepared and sure of this pathway as possible, taking the ACT early, at **your expense, is your choice.**

24. Can I take other college readiness exams other than the ACT?

The state sponsors one admission of the ACT to every Kentucky student because of the strong correlation between success on the ACT and success in college. While there are other college readiness exams available, the ACT is generally what colleges and universities expect to see for admission as an indication of the high level of knowledge and rigor needed at the college level.

25. How does graduating early affect my KEES award?

Students who graduate at the end of their third year at a Kentucky high school will be eligible for the equivalent of four years' worth of KEES. Students who graduate in two years will get two years of KEES. Additional questions about KEES should be directed to the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority at (800) 928-8926 ext. 67397.

26. What is the Certificate?

The regulation provides a financial incentive for students who both sign an intent and successfully complete the proficiency criteria to graduate early. The "Early Graduation Certificate" is awarded by the district and signed by the principal and superintendent, and makes the recipient eligible for a scholarship award equal to one-half (½) of the state portion of the average statewide per pupil guaranteed base funding level. This scholarship is to be used at a Kentucky public two or four year public or non-profit independent institution accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

27. How does the Early Graduation Certificate work?

After completing the Early Graduation pathway, students receive the "Certificate" when they work with both their district, KHEAA and the Kentucky two- or four- year public or non-profit school they are entering. The Certificate funds are awarded directly to the institution for the student.

28. Can I apply the certificate to out of state schools?

No, The Certificate monies may only be used toward a Kentucky public or non-profit two- or four-year institution.

29. Is this more rigorous than a general diploma?

The courses required English II, Algebra II, Biology and US History and the linked End-of-Course exams are demanding. When these four courses and the ACT taken earlier than most students and are taken in an accelerated pathway the curriculum is both rigorous and demanding.

30. I am in middle school, why should I worry about this now?

If you are interested in Early Graduation, thinking ahead to possible high school schedules and making sure that you have or will take the requisite courses to complete Early Graduation as a sophomore or junior would be beneficial. Families of students may need to have discussions prior to high school about student academic and maturity factors as well as financial issues that go with a student entering college early.

31. As a parent/guardian, what issues should I consider surrounding Early Graduation?

All students are unique, so as you think about Early Graduation; there are many factors which could affect the decision. Is your student emotionally mature enough to work independently? Is the student socially immature and would mind being in classes with students that are older? Is the student one who has a plan for the future? Does the student want to stay in high school to complete four years of activities, sports or competitions? Would the student benefit from taking advanced level, AP, IB or dual credit courses-gaining college credit while remaining in the high school environment? Are you ready financially to send a student to college as a sophomore or junior? Are there scholarships, academic opportunities or events in the high school that the student would benefit from by staying four years? Does the student have a career track that they can add onto their college readiness by staying four years? Early Graduation does not require two years of world language for a diploma, but many four-year undergraduate programs require that for admission, does Early Graduation adequately prepare your student for their academic plan? There are more questions but Early Graduation is a decision that should be agreed upon by the student and the family, followed by a conversation with the school counselor about criteria for success.

32. Why can't I graduate early without an Intent form?

The regulation's *Letter of Intent* and Early Graduation Certification are the release mechanisms to several financial incentives. The release of the Certificate funds to the graduated student's institution is tied to database systems which require advanced notice and the payment of KEES money are both tied to systems which require advance notice that this student is to receive the funds out of sync with the normal four year high school graduation.

If you are 18 and have completed the minimum requirements for graduation and fulfilled your district requirements, you may leave high school with a diploma. You are not however, considered an Early Graduate, as defined by this regulation, if you have not filed the *Intent* according to the regulation and will not be eligible for the Certificate.

33. What is performance based criteria?

A high school graduation credit may be awarded in either of two ways: Carnegie Units (defined as at least 120 hours of instructional time in one subject) OR performance-based credits. Students must show proficiency in a subject by demonstrating they know the subject through an End-of-Course exam. Performance based criteria are standards-based and aligned with expectations for all students to be college and career ready.