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## Proficiency Diplomas

### Guidance for Students with Disabilities

Updated February 23, 2017  
(Responses to questions 2 and 3 were updated)

The Maine Department of Education is providing guidance on the following questions from the field:

**1. Question: Can the level of “rigor” of the standard be changed for students with disabilities, depending on the disability?**

**Answer:** For certification of proficiency, the complexity of the thinking must be at the same level of cognitive demand required by the reporting standard and its performance indicators. So for example, a standard that requires a student to “classify” cannot be changed to a requirement to “recall” or “identify”.

**2. Question: Can the IEP define the threshold for proficiency (less than high school), for example, 2.7, vs. 3?**

**Answer:** No. With regards to the proficiency level for certification of standards in the content areas and guiding principles of the system of learning results for a proficiency-based diploma, the proficiency level must be the same for all students, both in the certification of high school standards and in the use of a consistent threshold value for all students. It is not within the authority of the IEP to change the proficiency-based diploma expectation for proficiency of high school standards to proficiency of standards at a different grade span.

**3. Question: In the law it states “maintains the integrity of the standards as specified in the IEP”. Clarification: the IEP can define the performance tasks and accommodations, but not articulate the standards, correct?**

**Answer:** Correct. The IEP cannot change the complexity of the thinking or the conceptual understandings or skill level the standards are requiring for the proficiency-based diploma. We recognize there are times when a child’s performance may not be at the high school level. In these cases, the IEP is written at the present level of performance to honor where the child is functioning and articulates the accommodations and methods for gaining and demonstrating proficiency (e.g., pathways, types of evidence) with the intent to continue to support growth towards proficiency at the high school level. This intent recognizes the growth in complexity and conceptual understandings within the progression of learning from elementary standards, to middle school standards, to high school standards and recognizes students will need the opportunity to learn and demonstrate proficiency in the earlier grade spans before they are ready to learn and demonstrate proficiency of the high school standards.

**4. Question: Is “performance tasks” meant to be an example of preponderance of evidence, or is that the only way? Then what is a performance task?**

**Answer:** The reference to performance tasks is a recognition of the multiple ways in which a student might demonstrate proficiency. It is recognition of an appropriate way of gathering evidence. It should not be interpreted as requiring a preponderance of evidence to come from performance tasks. It is just a reference to one tool among many that might be used for gathering evidence of student proficiency.

**5. Question: Can the performance indicators vary for a student, but the standards must be kept the same?**

**Answer:** For certification of proficiency, when we say standards, we mean reporting standards with a list of performance indicators that support that standard. A student does not have to meet all of the performance indicators but must have enough of a body of evidence from the performance indicators to demonstrate proficiency in the conceptual understandings and skills required of the reporting standard. The question is “Do the chosen objective(s) represent the integrity of the standards sufficiently for a teacher to have confidence that the student has the enduring understanding and skills supporting that understanding?”

**6. Question: Can the IEP trim the number of indicators that feed the standard score?**

**Answer:** The performance indicators were intended to provide guidance regarding the breadth and depth of the content standards/reporting standards. Each reporting standard has a statement that describes the enduring understanding this reporting standard contributes to the content area. If an IEP Team decides to select performance indicators from a set of performance indicators for a reporting standard, they are encouraged to check to be sure the selected performance indicators will provide the student with the opportunity to learn and demonstrate the enduring understanding of the reporting standard.

**7. Question: Can a content area be waived?**

**Answer:** No.