

## **21-UNIT DIPLOMA REQUIREMENTS**

*Regulation Code: 3460-R*

A 21-unit diploma is possible for a very limited number of students who, despite considerable and persistent efforts, have experienced a combination of risk factors that have placed the 28-unit diploma requirements beyond reach. Eligibility for the 21-unit diploma will be determined by the superintendent based on the recommendations and findings of a committee appointed by the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction.

### **Risk Factors**

In order to be eligible, the student must present sound evidence documenting the presence of five or more risk factors, although an exception may be made if a smaller number of risk factors are especially severe. According to North Carolina State Board of Education Policy GCS-Q-001, “A student at risk is a young person who because of a wide range of individual, personal, financial, familial, social, behavioral or academic circumstances may experience school failure or other unwanted outcomes unless interventions occur to reduce the risk factors. Circumstances which often place students at risk may include, but are not limited to: not meeting state/local proficiency standards, grade retention; unidentified or inadequately addressed learning needs, alienation from school life; unchallenging curricula and/or instruction, tardiness and or poor school attendance; negative peer influence; unmanageable behavior; substance abuse and other health risk behaviors, abuse and neglect; inadequate parental/family and/or school support; and limited English proficiency.”

In addition to risk factors, the student must also document persistent and significant efforts made in trying to attain the system’s 28-unit requirement, as well as evidence that the student can meet the 21-unit requirement within a reasonable period of time. It is expected that the student will have made good effort to seek remedial and supplemental support offered by the school and community.

### **21-Unit Requirements**

Application for the 21-unit diploma must occur sometime after the student’s third semester in high school, with the graduation date occurring at or beyond the expected graduation date for the student’s ninth grade cohort. All North Carolina graduation units must be met, including:

- 4 English
- 4 Math
- 3 Science
- 3 Social Studies
- 1 Health and PE
- 6-Electives (to include a career cluster)

If a student entered before 2009-2010, then the state required courses may vary but the units would not. The 21-unit diploma will be referenced in the school system’s annual publication that presents high school course offerings and graduation requirements. Students who think they are eligible should pick up an application from their high school guidance department.

**Application and Review**

The application process is initiated by the student's submission of a completed application to the student's assigned counselor. A school counselor who receives an application must first review the application for completeness and appropriateness. If the counselor questions the appropriateness of the application, the counselor should advise the student accordingly. However, the counselor should make clear to the student that the application will nevertheless be submitted upon student request, with a copy also routed to the principal. For a student under the age of 18 years, the counselor will also ensure that the student's parent or guardian is aware of the 21-unit diploma application, either by parent/guardian signature on the application or separate written notification.

After sharing a copy of the application with the principal, the counselor will send the application to the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. The assistant superintendent will then confer with the student's principal so as to establish a committee that includes:

- a school administrator;
- a school counselor;
- at least one teacher who has knowledge of the student;
- a special education representative and/or English As Second Language teacher if the student has been so identified;
- members of any community agencies that have had significant involvement with the student (such as the Department of Social Services, Department of Juvenile Justice, or a mental health agency/provider); and
- one or both parents or guardians whenever possible.

Documentation made available to the committee at the time of the meeting shall include:

- school transcripts to the extent available for the student's entire school career;
- information on attendance and retentions for the student's school career;
- any pertinent medical documentation;
- most recent IEP, where applicable;
- most recent Section 504 Plan, where applicable; and
- any further documentation considered pertinent.

The assistant superintendent of curriculum will serve as committee chair and lead the committee through review and deliberation regarding the student's eligibility for the 21-unit diploma. The student being recommended for the 21-unit diploma may be interviewed by the committee and asked to present his or her reasons for requesting a 21-unit diploma. Committee comments and each committee member's recommendation will be documented on the appropriate section of the student's application and then sent to the superintendent.

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The superintendent will review the application in its entirety and either approve or disapprove the request. The superintendent also has the right to return the application materials to the committee accompanied by a request for further information. Upon reaching a decision, the superintendent will provide written notification to the student's parent or guardian, or directly to the student if the student is at least 18 years of age, with a copy mailed to the student's principal.

**21-Unit Diploma Application**

*Note: This application and all supportive materials must be placed in an envelope labeled “Confidential: 21-Unit Diploma Application” and placed in the student’s cumulative folder.*

**SECTION 1—TO BE COMPLETED BY STUDENT AND DELIVERED TO COUNSELOR**

Name of Student \_\_\_\_\_ Application Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

Date Entered High School \_\_\_\_\_ Current High School \_\_\_\_\_

Total Semesters Enrolled \_\_\_\_\_ Anticipated Graduation Date \_\_\_\_\_

Total High School Credits Earned to Date \_\_\_\_\_

Risk Factors (check all that apply)—As a student I:

- have a history of chronic illness documented by a physician.
- have been retained two or more times during my school career.
- am an English as a Second Language (ESL) student with very weak English skills in middle or high school.
- have been a resident in more than one foster care home during the last five years.
- have experienced one or more traumatic events that have interfered with my grades or attendance, such as the death of a parent or a seriously ill parent or guardian.
- must work to contribute to family income (as documented by current financial records).
- am homeless and living in severe substandard conditions.
- have been adjudicated delinquent by the juvenile justice system.
- have a history of mental illness.
- have a history of serious learning disorder(s).
- have experienced multiple family moves within the past two years that have resulted in inconsistent instruction and loss of credit.
- am a teen parent who also serves as my child’s caregiver.
- have been the victim of, or witness to, significant domestic violence, sexual, verbal, or physical abuse.
- have been assigned to an alternative program or school for a total of one or more school years.
- have experienced an extreme lack of parental support.

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Explain how the above risk factors have limited your progress in meeting 28-unit diploma requirements:

List any other practical difficulties or personal hardships that have affected your educational progress:

What efforts have you made to overcome hardships and take advantage of special opportunities to advance your education?

Please attach any evidence that would substantiate the presence of risk factors or support your application.

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**SECTION 2—TO BE COMPLETED BY ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

Date Application Received \_\_\_\_\_

Date Reviewed by Committee \_\_\_\_\_

Major Findings from Committee Review:

**Committee member recommendations:**

Signatures	Title	Date	21-Unit Eligibility?	
_____	_____	_____	yes	no
_____	_____	_____	yes	no
_____	_____	_____	yes	no
_____	_____	_____	yes	no
_____	_____	_____	yes	no
_____	_____	_____	yes	no
_____	_____	_____	yes	no

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**SECTION 3—TO BE COMPLETED BY SUPERINTENDENT**

Superintendent Comments:

Final Action:

\_\_\_\_\_ Approved 21-Unit Diploma

\_\_\_\_\_ Disapproved 21-Unit Diploma

\_\_\_\_\_ Returned to Committee for Further Documentation

\_\_\_\_\_  
Superintendent's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date