

# The Personal Curriculum

## A Tool for Modifying the Michigan Merit Curriculum

### Educational Development Plan (EDP) Overview

#### What are the Essential Elements of an EDP?

No specific form or format is required for an EDP. Schools may custom design EDPs that work best for their local needs. The following are some essential elements to include in any EDP.

- **Personal Information:** This usually includes the student's name, date of birth, and grade level in school. The school could use a personal identification number for each student to maintain confidentiality when sharing information among staff or publishing information online. The EDP is a learning and planning document and should be maintained with the same policies governing other student records, as required in the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- **Career Goal(s):** Each student should identify a career pathway and goals for achieving success. These may be more general in middle school and become more specific as the student progresses through high school.
- **Educational/Training Goal(s):** Each student should identify the level of educational preparation that will be needed to meet his or her career goal. This encourages the student to think beyond high school graduation and to set long-range goals. Options include on-the-job training, military service, certificate programs, two-year associate degree programs, apprenticeship programs, trade or technical education, four-year university programs, and advanced university degree or professional preparation programs.
- **Assessment Results:** The student may summarize the results of various assessments, highlighting information that is relevant to making career decisions. Assessment data may include formal and informal data such as: career interest surveys, aptitude testing, informal observations, student projects or hobbies, academic achievement, values assessments, and extra curricular activities. From this information, students will be able to identify individual interests and strengths. They may also set improvement goals. Over time, students will be able to use this information to confirm career decisions or adjust goals.
- **Plan(s) of Action:** The action plan should include high school course selections, projected completion date, desired degree, certificate or other credential, timeline for college application, financial assistance deadlines, and employment opportunities. The plan may also identify special resources and supports needed for the student's success in the Personal Curriculum. For example, an EDP might contain a personal literacy plan to aid students who are struggling readers, or a prevention plan for students who have been identified as at risk of dropping out. Activities may include volunteer or work-related experiences, including job shadowing, mentorship programs in community businesses, or part-time employment in areas related to the career goal(s).

The scope of student planning may include career awareness or exploration activities, work-based activities, and course selections that will prepare her or him for greater understanding of career options and achievement of career goals. Students may also investigate educational programs available within the school or college curriculum that will provide opportunities to become more aware and skilled in a career pathway (e.g., an internship in a community agency or intensive project-based learning in a particular course). The student should also take the time to explore the opportunities for earning college credit while still in high school through Advanced Placement (AP) courses, dual enrollment, International Baccalaureate, and other programs.

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### EDP Overview *continued*

- **Parent Consultation/Endorsement:** Parents/guardians should have the opportunity to review and endorse their child's EDP. This will give parents access to information about emerging careers and employment trends so they can help their children prepare for the future. Parents/guardians may also need to discuss assessment results and may need assistance with interpreting them. Students should be encouraged to discuss career-related issues with their parents and share their goals and action plans.

### How Does the EDP Coordinate with Other Plans

- **IEP/EDP Alignment—Transition:** The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) 2004 states the IEP shall contain "appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals ... related to education, training, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills; (and) the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals..."

"Transition services are a coordinated set of activities ... that focus on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities..." and "includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment, and other post-school adult living objectives ..." Thus, the EDP and the IEP are distinct documents with the common goal of improved postsecondary outcomes.

For students with disabilities, the EDP fulfills many of the secondary transition requirements of IDEA 2004 long before the federal mandates take effect. Since the EDP addresses education, career goals, strategies, and classes, it makes sense to complete the initial planning for students with disabilities by incorporating training goals and adult living goals as appropriate. This helps create alignment between the essential accountabilities of both general and special education.

As described above, during the EDP process, students identify education, pathway, and career goals in planning for the courses they will take throughout high school. For students receiving special education services, this may fulfill (at least in part) the IDEA requirement to identify courses of study. The EDP outlines the "academic course of study" and the IEP identifies the supports, accommodations, and services that are necessary to support the student's success toward the EDP goals. The IEP should refer to the EDP when addressing courses of study. If the EDP contains the essential elements outlined in the next section, it creates an important and necessary link required by the Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC) legislation. The EDP can provide support and documentation for a Personal Curriculum (PC) modification. Students with a disability are allowed a Personal Curriculum modification only if "the modification is consistent with both the pupil's Educational Development Plan ... and the pupil's Individualized Education Program." To show alignment with these documents, it will be necessary to clearly specify a student's postsecondary goals in his or her IEP using the same or similar language as used in the EDP.

The role of the IEP is to support the student's progress in the general curriculum, not to make exceptions to it. The statute is specific about modifications to the MMC made through the Personal Curriculum, indicating that modifications must be consistent with both the EDP and the IEP.

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### EDP Overview *continued*

- ***Universal elements of quality planning may be blended with the current EDP process including the:***
  - 1) Development of postsecondary goals in education, training, employment, and adult living (when appropriate).
  - 2) Identification of student preferences, interests, strengths, and needs.
  - 3) Review of academic performance, learning style, and effective support strategies for students K-8.
  - 4) Identification and coordination of course(s) and support and possible consideration of a PC.
  - 5) Annual review.

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### Diploma vs. Completion Without a Diploma

With a high school diploma a student may be eligible for:

- Entering any branch of the U.S. military and armed forces.
- Attending a community college or four-year university.
- Entering a trade or vocational school.
- Applying for scholarships and financial aid (certain test scores such as the MME, ACT, and SAT are also considered).

With a high school diploma a student may be eligible for:

- Michigan Promise Scholarship.
- Tuition Incentive Program (TIP).
- GEAR UP Michigan Scholarship (federal funds).
- Robert C. Byrd Honors Scholarship (federal funds).

Without a diploma a student may:

- Enter trade or vocational school ("Ability to Benefit" admission method which is usually based on the results of a standardized test such as the ACT, SAT, Work Keys, etc.).
- Attend most community colleges ("Ability to Benefit" admission method which is usually based on the results of a standardized test such as the ACT, SAT, Work Keys, etc. Most community colleges also require students to take placement exams).
- Enter certain branches of the U.S. armed forces—
  - ◇ The U.S. armed forces will accept applicants who possess a "Certificate of Attendance." These are sometimes called certificates of competency or completion, but they are based on course completion rather than a test such as the GED or CHSPE. These applicants are called Tier II candidates.
  - ◇ Less than 1% Air Force enlistees are Tier II candidates each year. Approximately 10% of Army and Navy enlistees are Tier II candidates. Approximately 5% of Marines enlistees are Tier II candidates.
- Apply for scholarships and financial aid such as:
  - ◇ Michigan Competitive Scholarship
  - ◇ Michigan Tuition Grant
  - ◇ Michigan Nursing Scholarship
  - ◇ Children of Veterans Tuition Grant
  - ◇ Adult Part-Time Grant
  - ◇ Michigan Educational Opportunity Grant
  - ◇ Michigan Work-Study
  - ◇ Federal Title IV Student Aid (Pell Grant, Supplemental Grant, Perkins Loan, Stafford Student Loan, Federal Work-Study)

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### Diploma vs. Completion Without a Diploma *continued*

#### Abbreviations

**TIP:** Tuition Incentive Program

**MME:** Michigan Merit Exam

**ACT:** American College Testing Program

**SAT:** Scholastic Aptitude Test

**GEAR UP:** Program that targets middle school students in urban areas. The mission of GEAR UP is to significantly increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education

**GED:** General Education Diploma

**CHSPE:** California High School Proficiency Exam

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### Students With an Individualized Education Program (IEP)

#### Allowable Modifications for a Student With an Individualized Education Program

The parent or legal guardian of a student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) may request a personal curriculum (PC) to modify the requirements of the Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC) not otherwise allowed, providing the PC:

- Incorporates as much of the subject area content expectation as practicable for the student within the context of the MMC requirements.
- Aligns with the EDP and is consistent with the IEP.
- Modifications directly address the effect the student's disability has on his or her ability to access and/or demonstrate progress in the content.

Additionally, the PC:

- May modify components of the content expectations within each credit requirement.
- May modify the credit requirements.
- Should reflect student strengths and outline how those strengths will be enhanced and utilized.

#### Potential Adverse Effects of Using a Personal Curriculum

Parents and students should understand the possible consequences for modifications of the MMC credit requirements or high school content expectations. Personal curriculum modifications that reduce the number of content expectations mastered by the student, may affect the student's:

- Performance on the Michigan Merit Exam (MME)
- Admission to college
- Eligibility for college scholarships
- Access to Michigan Promise scholarship money
- Admission to a trade school
- Ability to secure a job in the career of choice
- Eligibility for NCAA athletic programs

Modifications that erect barriers to student success may impact the district's ability to:

- Achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).
- Meet improvement targets informed by the Continuous Improvement and Monitoring System (CIMS), the State Performance Plan (SPP), and the Annual Performance Report (APR).

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### Frequently Asked Questions *continued*

**20. Q: How does a district uphold the rigor of the Michigan Merit Curriculum and the integrity of the high school diploma while offering the personal curriculum option?**

**A:** One underlying assumption of the Michigan Merit Curriculum is that all students can learn and achieve at high levels. This does not mean, however, that all students learn in the same way or on the same timeline. The personal curriculum acknowledges that while we must maintain high expectations of all students, we cannot have a one-size-fits-all approach to ensuring that all students meet these high expectations.

There are many instructional strategies that can and should be utilized to differentiate and individualize instruction for students within the traditional MMC. The intent of the personal curriculum is that students are provided yet one more way of individualizing the rigor and relevance of the educational experience so that they can access and achieve the standards and expectations set by the MMC. The limited scope of allowable modifications under the PC serves to support students in their ability to complete the MMC rather than undermine its integrity.

**21. Q: How should the quarterly communication between parents and teachers be structured for students with a PC as required by 1278b(5)(d)?**

**A:** Local districts have many options in determining how this communication may best take place. Districts may find that it is a helpful function of the PC committee to set up methods and dates of communication in conjunction with the development of the personal curriculum so that all parties have advance notice and can ensure their participation in future progress monitoring activities. Written communication journals, phone conferences, and email are but several alternatives to traditional face-to-face conferences. Local schools and districts tend to know which methods are most successful at maximizing parent participation within their school community.

### Part V: Students with an IEP

**22. Q: Does an IEP supersede the Michigan Merit Curriculum?**

**A:** No. The MMC legislation establishes state requirements for a diploma. The IEP is a written statement for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with the IDEA. While the two documents are distinct in the purposes, the IEP provides for the child's involvement in and access to the general education curriculum. (See section 300.320 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act for a more complete definition of the IEP.) Together, the MMC credit requirements and the High School Content Expectations define the general education curriculum for each pupil in the state. The IEP as a separate document provides specific supports to help the student make progress and achieve in the MMC.

**23. Q: Does a student with an IEP automatically receive a personal curriculum?**

**A:** No. Every effort must be made to provide students with an IEP full access to the MMC before making modifications. The majority of students receiving special education services will not need a personal curriculum, as differentiated instructional strategies and interventions do not require a PC.

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### Frequently Asked Questions *continued*

When it is determined that a student with an IEP needs a PC, the modifications contained therein should be specific and targeted and NOT based solely on eligibility. It must be the student's disability and not the instructional environment that creates the barrier to access or proficiency. If additional instructional supports and interventions, flexibility in demonstrating proficiency, and additional instructional time will allow the student to meet the expectations, these supports and accommodations should be implemented before resorting to a PC.

**24. Q: How do a student's IEP, EDP, and PC work together to support academic achievement?**

**A:** The first planning tool for a student preparing for high school is the Educational Development Plan (EDP). The EDP outlines the educational pathway including the course of study that provides access to the learning experiences necessary for preparation for success in postsecondary activities (work, community, and continuing learning). The PC is a documented and agreed-upon change to the requirements of the MMC. The PC modification must align with the EDP. The EDP and the PC are the educational plan that outlines the requirements for a diploma. Once a student has established their plan for achieving a diploma, the IEP should support the learning of the requirements necessary for the achievement of a diploma.

**25. Q: Can a student with an IEP receive a PC in the 8th grade in anticipation of starting high school?**

**A:** A student with an IEP may request a personal curriculum at any time, but it cannot take effect until the student begins high school. A personal curriculum allows the modification of Michigan's high school graduation requirements. It cannot be used to modify learning requirements at the elementary or middle school levels.

With the exception of a very small percentage, students with an IEP are required to take the Michigan Merit Exam, which assesses the content covered in the Michigan Merit Curriculum. Students who do not get access to the content of the Michigan Merit Curriculum are unlikely to demonstrate proficiency in that content. If students are denied access to content assessed on the MME, their chances of earning scholarships or demonstrating college readiness are diminished. Therefore, assumptions about a student's capabilities should be carefully considered given the possible negative impact modifications could have on equitable access to the curriculum and postsecondary outcomes.

With targeted interventions and supports, students may surpass the expectations stated in a PC developed in middle school. It is imperative that student progress is monitored to allow students to meet as much of the MMC content as practicable in preparation for success beyond high school.

**26. Q: How much of the Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC) requirements can be modified for a student with an IEP?**

**A:** Based on current evidence and research, a majority of students receiving special education services will not need a personal curriculum. They will be able to meet the graduation requirements if provided with appropriate supports and instructional interventions.

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### Frequently Asked Questions *continued*

Every effort must be made to provide students with an IEP full access to the MMC before making modifications. Modifications to state (MMC) standards and expectations may affect a student's preparation for postsecondary success, ability to perform well on the Michigan Merit Exam, achieve a college ready score on the ACT, access Michigan Promise Scholarship money, and the opportunity to earn a diploma.

For a student with an IEP, the personal curriculum modifications must:

- Incorporate as much of the subject area content expectation as practicable for the student.
- Align with the Educational Development Plan (EDP) and be consistent with the Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Be based on the impact the student's disability has on accessing or demonstrating proficiency in meeting the expectations.

The modification is allowable if it is determined to be based on the student's disability and how that disability affects performance in the general curriculum.

- Translation – it is the student's disability and not the instructional environment that creates the barrier to access or proficiency. The student's response to supports and interventions needs to be taken into account when determining the appropriateness of any modification.

Modifications are limited to the extent made necessary by the disability.

- Translation – modifications should be specific and targeted and not based solely on eligibility.

Additionally, the personal curriculum modifications should:

- Facilitate progress along the student's career pathway and the achievement of postsecondary goals.
- Enhance the relevance of the student's educational experience.
- Provide access to MMC content knowledge, processes, and skills.
- Provide full access to statewide assessments.
- Provide a gateway to employment and productive adult living.
- Maintain the integrity of the diploma.

The PC must maintain the same number of credits required under the MMC. Modifications to the content must be based on the High School Content Expectations.

**27. Q: Does a student with a 504 plan qualify for the same modifications within a PC as a student with an IEP?**

**A:** No. The provisions in the MMC that allow for the consideration of modifications beyond what the personal curriculum allows for general education students are not available to students with 504 accommodations, as they do not meet the federal IDEA 2004 definition of a student with a disability. A student with a 504 plan may, however, request a PC for Algebra II or to take additional courses in English Language Arts, Math, Science, or World Languages as allowed for all students.

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### Frequently Asked Questions *continued*

**28. Q: What is meant by “modification not otherwise allowed”?**

**A:** It means that exceptions to the limitations on the personal curriculum stated in the law (e.g., no modifications of ELA, Science, online, etc.) may be allowable for a student with an IEP. However, it is not permissible to create an alternative pathway to graduation. Modifications that erect barriers to progress along the student’s career pathway or jeopardize the achievement of postsecondary goals need to be carefully considered. Ultimately, decisions regarding performance standards for earning MMC credit (i.e., the definition of proficiency in meeting the content expectations that define required MMC credits) and determination of the credit associated with each course, are local district/board decisions. See question 8 for additional information.

The expectation is that the PC will include as much of the High School Content Expectations in the particular subject area as possible.

**29. Q: What modifications are appropriate for a student with an emotional impairment?**

**A:** The committee convened to develop the student’s PC is responsible for making that determination.

Often, a student with an emotional impairment may benefit from an instructional setting or delivery that is different from the traditional classroom. Keep in mind that schools have flexibility within the MMC to vary the method or setting of instructional delivery without impacting the student’s least restrictive environment (LRE) as defined in their IEP. For example, the student may be able to earn a number of credits toward the MMC through a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program or online learning, and these alternatives may be offered without a PC.

**30. Q: Will a personal curriculum allow a student with a cognitive impairment to earn a diploma?**

**A:** The personal curriculum only modifies the Michigan Merit Curriculum. If a student with a cognitive impairment has an IEP that identifies the MMC as his or her course of study, then it would be possible for him or her to have a personal curriculum in place that, like all PCs, should be developed with the intent that it lead to a diploma. If, however, the student’s IEP identifies a course of study other than the MMC, a personal curriculum would not be applicable.

**31. Q: Can a student with an IEP develop a personal curriculum that exempts him or her from Algebra II altogether?**

**A:** A student with an IEP may have a PC that modifies Algebra II beyond the standard 0.5 credit modification allowable with a PC for general education students. The student’s PC may reduce the number of Algebra II content expectations on which the student must demonstrate proficiency.

It is the responsibility of the PC committee to determine what is practicable for the student, while maintaining the rigor of Algebra II and the MMC. Using information about the student’s current ability in the area as well as limitations determined by the disability, and other information in the EDP and IEP, the committee must determine which, if any, of the Algebra II

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### Frequently Asked Questions *continued*

HSCE the student can reasonably be expected to master if provided appropriate and targeted supports and interventions.

The PC committee is also responsible for determining the course placement that will best offer the opportunities for meeting as many of the expectations or as much of the content as practicable. For some students, the practicable Algebra II content (e.g., the equivalent of less than half of the Algebra II content) may be best accessed through other courses (e.g., statistics, a special support class, or in a CTE program). The PC should indicate how/where the reduced number of Algebra II expectations will be met and should provide rationale for how the placement supports postsecondary goals.

#### **32. Q: Can local boards of education establish separate diploma requirements?**

**A:** No. The legislation clearly stipulates that a diploma shall not be awarded unless the pupil successfully completes all of the credit requirements in MCL 380.1278a and 380.1278b. This does not prevent districts from issuing alternative certificates such as a GED or certificate of completion for students who do not meet all of the requirements of the MMC. A certificate of completion, however, has no legal standing as a substitute for a diploma. For students with a disability, only a diploma ends the entitlement to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Further, the personal curriculum option is not meant to be used as a convenient escape door for schools to shy away from providing access to the general curriculum for students who are more difficult to reach and teach.

#### **33. Q: What are the implications of completing high school without earning a diploma?**

**A:** The significance of completing high school without earning a diploma depends on career choice, future employment requirements, and plans for education beyond high school. For example, students who complete high school without earning a diploma may enter trade schools, community colleges, and the armed forces. A student may not enroll in a four-year college or university without a diploma, however, and eligibility for the Michigan Promise Grant and other scholarship programs may be compromised. Further, a certificate of completion has no legal standing and does not end a student's right to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

### **Part VI: Transfer Students**

#### **34. Q: Can a previously home-schooled student request a personal curriculum upon enrolling in a public high school?**

**A:** Yes – as long as the student has completed the equivalent of two years of high school credit before enrolling in a Michigan public high school or public school academy. This school or district may use "appropriate assessment examinations to determine what credits, if any, the pupil has earned...."

#### **35. Q: Does a personal curriculum follow a student if he or she moves to a new public school or district within Michigan while in high school?**

**A:** No. Because the law states that the superintendent of the district must agree to the PC, a personal curriculum cannot automatically transfer from one district to another. The student