With a few exceptions, eligible institutions may admit as regular students only persons who have high school diplomas or recognized equivalents. A recognized equivalent of a high school diploma is either a GED or a state certificate.

In 2010, the Department adopted rules that require schools to develop and follow procedures to evaluate the validity of a student’s high school diploma. In order to meet the administrative capability standard to participate in the federal aid programs, schools are required to develop and follow procedures to evaluate the validity of a student’s high school completion if the school or the Department has reason to believe that the high school diploma is not valid or was not obtained from an entity that provides secondary school education. Beginning in 2011–2012, the Department added questions to the FAFSA form that ask first-year undergraduates for the name of the high school the student graduated from and the state where the school is located. There is a drop-down list of both public and private high schools, which is derived from National Center for Education Statistics data. Schools should review any diploma that they have reason to believe is not valid.

There continue to be problems with the use of diploma mills. In 2016, the Department amended its false certification regulations to provide for federal student loan discharges in instances in which schools certified non-high-school graduates as eligible for aid based on either high school graduation status falsified by the school or high school diplomas falsified by the school or a third party to which the school referred the borrower. As of March 2019, no final rule has been published, and the 2016 rules are in effect.

The Department issued guidance for cases in which schools discovered that students who are already enrolled did not in fact have valid high school diplomas. The Department advised schools in these cases to contact the “School Participation Team” and have information available about the circumstances under which the school initially accepted the student’s high school diploma status and the types and amounts of assistance received.

Schools’ use of ability-to-benefit tests as an alternative eligibility measure to high school diplomas is discussed in § 1.6.1 [1], supra.

Footnotes


274 [274] 34 C.F.R. § 600.2.


276 [276] 34 C.F.R. § 668.16(p).

277 [277] 75 Fed. Reg. 34,806 (June 18, 2010).

278 [278] 34 C.F.R. § 668.16(p).

279 [279] See § 13.3.2.6 [2], infra.

280 [280] See §§ 10.4.2.5 [3], 13.3.2.6 [2], infra.

1.7.1.5 Admissions Standards


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