

## Introduction

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The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is committed to ensuring that all students receive recognition for their educational achievements. This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) provides answers to common questions about the Maryland Certificate of Program Completion (MCOPC) Endorsements. The FAQ addresses key topics, including how Endorsements are recorded, how parents are informed, the role of observations in Standard and Competency attainment, and the impact of Endorsements on students' post-secondary opportunities. Additionally, it outlines procedures for opting in or out, selecting appropriate Endorsements, and ensuring all relevant parties—such as IEP teams, educators, and school counselors—are informed and engaged in the Endorsement process.

MSDE's goal is to provide clarity and guidance to students, families, educators, and stakeholders as they navigate the Endorsement process.

## Documentation

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### **1. WHAT DOCUMENT WILL BE GIVEN TO THE EXITING STUDENT TO IDENTIFY THE ENDORSEMENT(S) THEY RECEIVED?**

The attained Endorsement(s) should be documented on a student's transcript. Additionally, Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and Public Agencies (PAs) can also document/recognize the earned Endorsement(s) in other ways such as by adding them to the Maryland Certificate of Program Completion (MCOPC) or issuing an additional certificate or letter of recognition. MSDE has also developed a form that can be used, the Endorsement Certification Form.

### **2. HOW WILL THE PARENT KNOW THE STUDENT HAS EARNED A SPECIFIC ENDORSEMENT?**

LEAs and PAs should determine how they will communicate the achievement of an Endorsement with the parents. If a student earns an Endorsement at age 14, or at the early stages of the process, IEP Teams should consider whether the Alternate Framework is, in fact, appropriate for this student.

### **3. MOVING FORWARD INTO FUTURE YEARS, WILL AN OBSERVATION FORM BE REQUIRED FOR EACH COMPETENCY WITHIN THAT ENDORSEMENT, OR CAN WE DEEM COMPETENCY THROUGH OTHER DATA COLLECTION METHODS (I.E., IEP GOAL AND TRANSITION ACTIVITY PROGRESS)?**

In future years, an Endorsement Competency Observation will be one of several tools for collecting data, and will not be required to demonstrate attainment for all Competencies. In future years, LEAs/PAs can determine Competency attainment using pre-existing or established data such as class assignments, assessments, IEP Transition Activities with noted progress and attainment, Work-based Learning progress reports, etc. While an Endorsement Competency Observation will not be required to earn every Competency, an Endorsement Competency Observation will be a required component of overall Endorsement attainment. For example, if a student is working towards a Post-Secondary Education Endorsement and the team is evaluating their progress in the Self-Advocacy standard, they may opt to complete an observation for competencies 1.1 and 1.2, while using classroom data for competencies 1.3 and 1.4.

**4. WHEN AND HOW CAN PARENTS OPT OUT OF THE MCOPC ENDORSEMENTS FOR THEIR CHILD?**

There is no deadline for parents to opt out. The LEA/PA would need to obtain a written statement from the parent that they are choosing to opt their child out of MCOPC Endorsement participation. This could be by letter, an email, or a form that the LEA/PA provides. This written request must be filed in the student's cumulative folder. The MSDE does not collect this form/correspondence.

**5. SHOULD THE PARENT INFORMATION SHEET ONLY BE SHARED WITH THE 24/25 COHORT OR ALL STUDENTS ON THE ALTERNATE FRAMEWORK?**

Information regarding the MCOPC Endorsements should be shared with all parents of students participating in the Alternate Framework, especially those students in middle and high school. The Parent Information sheet is available in English and Spanish on the [MSDE website](#).

**6. WHERE ARE THE COMPETENCY NUMBERS LOCATED?**

The Competency numbers can be found in the MCOPC Endorsement Attainment Rubric, alongside their corresponding standard.

**7. DO PARENTS GET A COPY OF THE OBSERVATION SUMMARY?**

The LEA/PA should provide the parent with a copy of the Observation Form if the parent requests it or if the LEA/PA chooses to do so. If the LEA/PA decides to distribute observation summaries, then this practice should be applied to all students going through the Endorsement process.

## Observation

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### **1. CAN MORE THAN ONE COMPETENCY AT A TIME BE EVALUATED DURING AN OBSERVATION?**

Yes, if all criteria for each Competency observed are documented separately within the observation summary.

### **2. CAN MORE THAN ONE STUDENT BE OBSERVED AT A TIME?**

Best practice is that Endorsement Competency Observations be individually conducted by one staff member. However, if you have more than one student working towards the same Competency and you have additional staff members trained in the observation process, it would be possible to conduct more than one student Endorsement Competency Observations within a culminating group activity.

### **3. CAN OBSERVATIONS BE CONDUCTED OUTSIDE OF THE DEFINED SCHOOL DAY?**

Yes, if the adult is trained in the observation process, employed by the school district, and knows the student.

### **4. HOW IS “ADULT SUPPORT” DEFINED?**

For the purposes of Endorsement Competency Observations, adult support is defined as anyone who provides verbal or physical prompting for a student to complete a task. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines adult support in special education as a service that can help a student participate in a less restrictive environment and make satisfactory progress.

### **5. HOW MANY COMPETENCIES CAN BE DONE IN ONE OBSERVATION?**

There could be more than one Competency targeted through instruction and demonstrated through an Endorsement Competency Observation. The Endorsement Competency Observation should clearly indicate all Competencies targeted with evidence of the Look Fors confirming Accuracy, Independence and Application.

## Participation

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### 1. WHEN ARE ENDORSEMENTS FORMALLY AWARDED?

The final decision about earning a Maryland Certificate of Program Completion versus a Diploma is not made until a student's last year of school. As such, Endorsements cannot formally be awarded until that time. However, the team can collect evidence of Endorsement attainment throughout a student's secondary career.

### 2. WHAT HAPPENS IF AN IEP TEAM DETERMINES A STUDENT HAS MET THE REQUIREMENTS TO EARN ONE OR MORE ENDORSEMENTS EARLY IN THEIR HIGH SCHOOL CAREER, SUCH AS 9<sup>TH</sup> OR 10<sup>TH</sup> GRADE?

If a student has already shown the skills needed to earn Endorsements in 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade, the IEP team should have a serious discussion around whether the student should be participating in the Alternate Framework. The Endorsements are rigorous and attaining them early in one's high school career may indicate participation in the Alternate Framework is not appropriate for that student.

### 3. WHAT SHOULD AN IEP TEAM DO IF A PARENT DOES NOT WANT THEIR CHILD TO PURSUE AN ENDORSEMENT?

Parents may opt out of MCOPC Endorsement participation at any time by providing a written statement to the LEA/PA, which may be in the form of a letter, email, or a designated form provided by the LEA/PA. This written request must be filed in the student's cumulative folder, but it is not collected by the MSDE.

### 4. WILL ENDORSEMENTS IMPACT THE SERVICES STUDENTS RECEIVE FROM THE DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES ADMINISTRATION (DDA)?

For students exiting school with a certificate and Endorsements in the areas of Post-Secondary Education, Career and Work Readiness, and Community and Citizenship, that information is not to be used for eligibility determinations. However, individuals and families should provide Endorsement information when service plans such as DDA's Person-Centered Plan (PCP) and the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE) are being created to ensure the plans focus on the development of additional skills.

### 5. WHAT IS THE REAL-WORLD BENEFIT FOR STUDENTS RECEIVING A CERTIFICATE OF PROGRAM COMPLETION ENDORSEMENT VERSUS THOSE WHO OPT OUT?

An Endorsement serves as verification the student has acquired specific skills and knowledge in preparation for a successful transition to post-school outcomes. It provides tangible evidence of readiness in employment, education/training, and/or independent living.

### 6. AT WHAT AGE/GRADE CAN STUDENTS BEGIN EARNING COMPETENCIES TOWARD ENDORSEMENTS?

Students can begin working toward Endorsements during the school year the student turns 14 years old.

### 7. IS PARENT PERMISSION REQUIRED TO CONDUCT THE ENDORSEMENT COMPETENCY OBSERVATION? DOES IT NECESSITATE NOTICE AND CONSENT FOR ASSESSMENT?

No, the Endorsement Competency Observation is not a formal IEP assessment and as such does not require prior permission.

**8. IS IT EXPECTED THAT ALL STUDENTS GRADUATING WITH A CERTIFICATE OF PROGRAM COMPLETION WILL ACHIEVE AN ENDORSEMENT?**

No. COMAR requires that LEAs/PAs offer Endorsements, but this does not mean all students will attain one. Some students may attempt to earn an Endorsement but not achieve it.

**9. ARE THERE ANY STUDENTS WHO ARE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR ENDORSEMENTS?**

All students working on the Alternate Framework are eligible to pursue an MCOPC Endorsement. However, it is important to note that the final decision to award a Maryland Certificate of Program Completion is not completed until a student's final year of school. Pursuing an Endorsement does not preclude a student from earning a diploma; however, if a student earns a diploma, then they may not be awarded a MCOPC Endorsement.

## Process

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### 1. HOW WILL PEOPLE OUTSIDE OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM KNOW WHAT AN ENDORSEMENT MEANS?

Detailed information regarding the MCOPC Endorsement attainment process is public facing and located on the [MSDE website](#). The MSDE Secondary Transition team participates in numerous stakeholder groups in which information is shared about the rollout of the Endorsements.

### 2. WHEN CAN SCHOOLS START HAVING CONVERSATIONS WITH PARENTS ABOUT THE ENDORSEMENTS?

Right away! Use the resources provided by MSDE such as the MCOPC Parent Information Sheet and the MCOPC Endorsement Attainment Rubric to initiate the conversation. These resources are located on the [MSDE website](#).

### 3. DO PARENTS NEED TO OPT OUT EVERY YEAR?

No. Parents who opt out must do so in writing. This opt out remains in effect unless the parent changes their mind and decides to opt back in. If a parent opts back in, the school should ensure the parent understands that the timeframe for their child to earn the Endorsement(s) has been reduced so attainment may be more difficult.

### 4. WHAT IS THE DOCUMENTATION FOR INFORMAL OBSERVATIONS VERSUS THE ENDORSEMENT COMPETENCY OBSERVATION?

There is no documentation required for informal observations, only for the Endorsement Competency Observation. Informal observations should be authentic checkpoints throughout the instructional process to determine student skill attainment for the designated Competency.

### 5. IF THERE IS NO RESPONSE FROM THE FAMILY, CAN THE IEP TEAM MOVE FORWARD WITH THE CHOSEN ENDORSEMENT?

All students participating in the Alternate Framework are automatically considered Endorsement participants unless the parent opts out in writing. A minimum of three attempts to reach the parents should be made and attempts documented in the student's record.

### 6. HOW EARLY CAN THE IEP TEAM AND PARENT SELECT THE ENDORSEMENTS THAT A STUDENT WILL PURSUE?

The IEP team should discuss Endorsements as part of the Transition planning process for the student beginning at age 14. The earlier the IEP team determines which Endorsement(s) is most appropriate for the student, the more time the student has to gain the Competencies needed to earn the Endorsement.

### 7. CAN AN ENDORSEMENT BE ADDED, DROPPED, OR CHANGED AT ANY POINT?

Yes. As new information becomes available, teams should consider these data points.

### 8. ARE THE ENDORSEMENT COMPETENCIES A REPLACEMENT FOR TRACKING THE PROGRESS OF TRANSITION ACTIVITIES?

No, Secondary Transition activities must continue to be progress monitored quarterly with documentation of student progress. Endorsement Competencies can be Secondary Transition activities and must be monitored quarterly.

**9. WHO SHOULD BE OVERSEEING THE ENDORSEMENT PROCESS? TEACHERS, GUIDANCE COUNSELORS, SPECIAL EDUCATORS, IEP CHAIRS, OR TRANSITION COORDINATORS?**

The decision should be made by the LEA/PA; ultimately all school staff members working with the student should be knowledgeable about and actively supporting their MCOPC Endorsement selections.

**10. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR COMPLETING THE ENDORSEMENT ATTAINMENT PROCESS IF A STUDENT LEAVES THEIR HOME SCHOOL AFTER AGE 14 OR WILL ATTEND A SPECIALIZED 18-21 YEAR OLD PROGRAM?**

The service school is responsible for the Endorsement attainment process. The process for Competency attainment does not stop or change based on student program changes. It is important that an individual familiar with the student and the process oversees the Endorsements.

**11. DOES THE COUNSELING DEPARTMENT AT THE STUDENT'S SCHOOL NEED TO BE AWARE OF THE ENDORSEMENTS BEING EARNED BY EACH STUDENT?**

Yes. The school counselor should be involved with all students, including those who will receive a Maryland Certificate of Program Completion upon exit.

**12. WHAT IS THE DEADLINE FOR A STUDENT TO MEET THE CRITERIA FOR AN ENDORSEMENT(S) IN ORDER FOR IT TO BE REFLECTED ON THE STUDENT TRANSCRIPT?**

Determination of Endorsement attainment can be made and documented on a student's transcript up until final grades are due prior to graduation.