

## **Determining the Validity of a High School Diploma**

According to 34 CFR 668.16 (p), institutions have a role in checking the validity of a student's high school completion. Institutions are required to develop and follow procedures to evaluate the validity of a student's high school completion if the institution or the Secretary has reason to believe that the high school diploma is not valid or was not obtained from an entity that provides secondary school education.

An institution is in compliance with 34 CFR 668.16 (p) if it establishes and follows a process to evaluate the validity of a student's high school completion that includes

- (1) receiving documentation from the secondary school that confirms the validity of the student's diploma, and
- (2) confirming with or receiving documentation from the relevant department or agency in the state in which the secondary school is located.

According to the Federal Student Aid Handbook, to receive Title IV funds, students must be qualified to study at the postsecondary level. In order to be qualified to study at the postsecondary level, students must:

- have a high school diploma (this can be from a foreign school if it is equivalent to a U.S. high school diploma);
- have the recognized equivalent of a high school diploma, such as a general educational development (GED) certificate or other state-sanctioned test or diploma-equivalency certificate;
- have completed homeschooling at the secondary level as defined by state law;
- have completed secondary school education in a homeschool setting which qualifies for an exemption from compulsory attendance requirements under state law, if state law does not require a homeschooled student to receive a credential for their education; or
- have completed one of the ability-to-benefit (ATB) alternatives and are either currently enrolled in an eligible career pathway program or first enrolled in an eligible postsecondary program prior to July 1, 2012.

The procedure below explains Hinds Community College's process to validate the integrity of a student's reported high school completion and diploma.

The goal of this procedure is:

1. To identify a standard set of criteria that validates or invalidates a high school completion and diploma as legitimate in order to establish a best practices model relative to general college admission as well as in the context of 34 CFR 668.16 (p).
2. To define the role of Hinds Community College in validating high school credentials.
3. To establish the High School Validation Committee and describe procedures by which it operates.
4. To establish criteria for validating high school completion and high school transcript.

Hinds Community College endorses the following list to determine if a high school credential is judged as valid. The following criteria will apply both to admissions and to eligibility to receive Title IV funds.

Level I lists criteria for determining that the credential is valid, and that a student is eligible for admission and is eligible to receive Title IV funds. If Level I is not met, then Level II can be used to consider if a credential is valid.

Level I: Criteria for valid credentials:

1. All public high schools within the U.S. or U.S. territories
2. Previously validated private high schools by Hinds Community College High School Validation Committee
3. Regionally accredited high schools and their diplomas bearing the school seal, logo, or watermark
4. High schools accredited through agencies approved by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) such as the Distance Education and Training Council (DETC)
5. All U.S., U.S. territory, and military issued GEDs/HSEs
6. Foreign high school transcripts evaluated by a National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES) affiliate as equivalent to a standard high school diploma (Hinds currently accepts transcripts from the following evaluators: Global Credential Evaluators, Inc., International Education Research Foundation Inc., Josef Silny & Associates Inc., World Education Services Inc., and SpanTran, Inc.)
7. International Baccalaureate diplomas

\*Note: All high schools that are entirely online will need to be initially reviewed by the Validation Committee and a determination regarding validity made.

Level II: Steps to consider if a credential not meeting Level I is valid:

1. Determine if any court judgments, administrative or orders, or complaints have been filed against the provider by a state/federal government agency, consumer protection agency, or the Better Business Bureau.
2. Review the website for additional information regarding the high school issuing the diploma and its accreditation or lack of accreditation.
3. Contact the Department of Education in the state in which the diploma was issued to determine if the school listed on the diploma is on the state's list of recognized schools.
4. Contact the high school to obtain documentation that confirms the validity of the high school diploma, including transcripts, written descriptions of course requirements, or written and signed statements by principals or executive officers at the high school attesting to the rigor and quality of the coursework at the high school.

If transcripts cannot be validated, or if the decision is challenged, the student will be directed to obtain a state-issued GED/HSE or pursue other Title IV alternatives. All institutional determinations are final.

1. The Hinds Community College High School Validation Committee will include the following:
  1. Vice President of Student Services
  2. Vice President of Finance/Chief Financial Officer
  3. Vice Presidents of Instruction
  4. Registrar
  5. Director of Student Finance
  6. Director of Admissions

The purpose of the High School Validation Committee is to:

- Review the High School Invalidated Transcript list, a partial list of non-recognized schools for purposes of admissions and receiving Title IV funds, which is maintained by the Hinds Community College Office of Admissions. A partial High School Invalidated Transcript List will be included on the Hinds Community College website.
- Review the High School Approved Transcript list, which will be maintained by the Hinds Community College Office of Admissions.
- Maintain a record when a student is admitted through Level II validation.

If any member of the High School Validation Committee seeks to challenge the completed validation, Level II will be used to consider if a credential is valid. The prevailing validation will be added to the appropriate list (Invalidated Transcript List or Validated Transcript List) with notation that it was a committee decision. The dropdown menu of educational institutions will be updated as needed with high schools that are validated by the High School Validation Committee.

The Hinds Community College High School Validation Committee will adopt the procedure set forth above as a guideline for meeting the requirements of 34 CFR 668.16 (p) to ensure all students are treated equitably. Hinds Community College acknowledges that this procedure does not apply to home education students who apply for admission as having graduated from a home education program and present a valid home school transcript.