

PARTICIPATION IN HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION
CEREMONIES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

1. Is participation in the graduation ceremony a PPT decision?

Participation in the ceremony of graduation is different from actually graduating, i.e. receiving a regular diploma and no longer being eligible for services. The PPT, pursuant to the authority granted it under Section 10-221a, may modify the state requirements for graduation for students with disabilities when the PPT determines such requirements are not appropriate. The state statutes are silent on the issue of participation in graduation ceremonies. In some districts, participation in the ceremony of graduation is synonymous with actual graduation and the awarding of a regular high school diploma. If participation in graduation ceremonies is predicated on meeting the requirements for graduation, and the PPT may alter such requirements in the event it is determined that the requirements are not appropriate, the PPT could also set standards for a student to participate in the ceremony of graduation. Where the PPT may modify the requirements for graduation, it would not be unreasonable to expect that participation in the ceremony of graduation would also be discussed by the PPT.

This is not to say that students with disabilities should be held to a standard different from that of all other children. As you are aware, children with disabilities must be afforded the same opportunities to compete for a high school diploma, must be given adequate notice of the standards that must be met for the awarding of the high school diploma and generally must be provided with an equal opportunity to receive the benefits and services received by all students in the district's high school.

2. May a student with a disability participate in the public school's high school graduation ceremony with age appropriate peers, with the understanding that the student may continue eligibility for FAPE until twenty-one years of age or until receipt of a regular diploma?


The PPT may deliberately and with purpose map out a high school career that goes beyond the standard four years. If the PPT has established criteria that are different from the minimum requirements of Section 10-221a, participation in the ceremony of graduation should also be considered by the PPT, especially if it is contemplated that the student will remain eligible for services after the ceremony of graduation. Of course, a student can graduate (receive his/her regular high school diploma) anytime prior to the twenty-first birthday, assuming graduation requirements have been met.

3. May the PPT extend the credit or other requirements beyond the minimum standards for graduation under Section 10-221a?

The PPT may deliberately and with purpose map out a high school career that goes beyond the standard graduation requirements. If the PPT has determined that a free, appropriate public education for a student with a disability consists of meeting additional credit requirements, then graduation would not take place until all the requirements had been met.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Directors of Special Education and Pupil Services

FROM: George P. Dowaliby,  Chief, Bureau of Special Education and Pupil Services

SUBJECT: Participation in high school graduation ceremonies and related activities for students with disabilities

DATE: March 30, 2000

This issuance of this memorandum is in response to a letter submitted to Commissioner Theodore S. Sergi by the State Advisory Council on Special Education, as well as a number of calls from LEAs and parents, regarding the topic of students participating in high school graduation ceremonies while still maintaining eligibility for special education and related services. The Bureau of Special Education and Pupil Services continues to receive a number of calls from LEAs and parents related to this issue.

The purpose of the memorandum is to clarify the Bureau's position regarding the ability of students with disabilities to participate in graduation ceremonies and related activities when not receiving a regular diploma, and their continued eligibility for a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) under IDEA until such time a regular diploma is received or the student reaches age 21.

Both state and federal law are clear with regard to the awarding of a high school diploma. The following represent pertinent sections from state and federal statute/regulations:

1. Under IDEA Part B, Section 300.122(a)(3)(i) the LEA is not obligated to make FAPE available to a student who has graduated from high school with a regular high school diploma.
2. Under IDEA Part B, Section 300.122(a)(3)(ii) if a student graduates but is not awarded a regular high school diploma, such student maintains his/her eligibility for special education until such student ages out or is awarded a regular high school diploma. Under RCSA Section 10-76d-1(a)(7), if the student has not received a regular high school diploma, such student continues to be eligible for special education and related services until the end of the school year that the student turns twenty-one (21) years of age.
3. Under IDEA Part B, Section 300.122(a)(3)(iii) graduation from high school with a regular high school diploma constitutes a change in placement, requiring written prior notice.
4. Under CGS Section 10-221a, high school graduation requirements apply to any student requiring special education pursuant to Section 10-76a, **except when the planning and placement team (PPT) for such student determines the requirements not to be appropriate.**

Both state and federal law, however, are silent on the specific issue of allowing a student to **participate in graduation ceremonies and related activities** when they are not receiving a regular high school diploma.

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The Bureau's position on this issue is as follows:

- The state requirements for graduation or the awarding of a diploma are the successful completion of certain credit requirements under Section 10-221a. Each LEA may also have adopted the successful completion of additional credit requirements as a prerequisite for earning a regular high school diploma or graduating from its high school program.
- The PPT, pursuant to the authority granted it under Section 10-221a, may modify the state requirements for students with disabilities when the PPT determines such requirements are not appropriate for an individual student.
- Discussion surrounding these requirements and the anticipated date of graduation should be discussed with the parent and/or student, as may be appropriate, well in advance of the graduation date.
- For a student who will not be receiving a regular high school diploma, participation in graduation ceremonies and related activities should be discussed by the PPT well before the events take place. This decision should be based on the individual needs of the student as they relate to participation in such activities.

The Bureau recommends that LEAs establish a policy statement identifying the circumstances under which a student might participate in graduation ceremonies when not receiving a regular high school diploma.

If any LEA already has policy in place that addresses the issues discussed above, please forward a copy of the policy to Karen Halliday in the Bureau of Special Education and Pupil Services. Karen will share this information with other districts that are contemplating the development of such policy.

I trust that the above is clear. The attached question and answer page should help to clarify the Bureau's position on the issue. Please contact Karen Halliday at (860) 807-2020 if you have any additional questions.