

COMMENCEMENT ACTIVITIES

The board endorses graduation activities and ceremonies. The date of graduation shall annually be recommended by the superintendent and approved by the board.

Graduation shall not occur prior to completion of the required 180 days of student instruction.

Guidelines for Graduation Year Activities

Student participation in special graduation year activities will require conduct of the highest caliber in all school situations.

Criteria for exclusion from these activities concern consistent behavioral patterns and shall include, but not be limited to:

- Failure in two or more graded subjects and or absences in excess of board policy.
- Consistent involvement in disciplinary action(s);
- Suspension;
- Collaborative evaluation by the staff.

The final decision shall be made by the superintendent.

Students and parents/guardians shall be given advance notification of these criteria.

Graduation Procedures and Ceremonies

No student shall be barred from participation in graduation ceremonies for arbitrary or discriminatory reasons. A student who may be prevented from participation and his/her parents/guardians shall be so notified in advance and no later than seven days prior to the close of the school year.

When a student or his/her parents/guardians experiences financial hardship and is unable to pay the costs of participation in graduation ceremonies, the board shall assume the costs of the following items:

- Rental or purchase of cap and gown;
- One year book;
- Other, as may be determined by the board.

Financial hardship shall be defined by eligibility standards for free and reduced price meals under the state school lunch program.

The board reserves the right to deny participation in graduation activities when extreme circumstances warrant it. Such denial shall be treated in the same manner as a suspension and the student so affected shall be afforded the rights of review provided in policies of this board.

The board reserves the right to withhold a diploma and transcripts until all fines are paid.

Awarding of Diplomas

A board member shall present a copy of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States and the amendments thereto, and the Constitution of the State of New Jersey and the amendments thereto to each student upon graduation from elementary school.

The president of the board of education and/or another designated member of the board shall award the diplomas. Board members and former board members shall be afforded the opportunity to award

diplomas to their own children.

The board shall not prevent, or otherwise deny participation in, constitutionally protected prayer in any district school, consistent with guidance issued by the United States Department of Education and applicable judicial decisions interpreting the religion clauses of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Date reviewed and adopted: Reviewed: February 21, 2007; Adopted: March 26, 2007.

Key Words: Commencement Activities, Graduation Ceremonies

Legal References

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Mandated:

N.J.S.A. 18A:7C-5.1 requires the board to establish a policy addressing the cost of the graduation ceremony and yearbook for students with financial hardships. The board is forbidden to exclude any such student from participating in the ceremonies because of inability to pay fees.

Other Reasons:

It is advisable to have a policy approving graduation ceremonies and setting out any limitations on participation in them.

Commissioner's decision of August 20, 1990 found that a board may withhold a diploma from a student who has financial obligations due to loss or damage of property.

Policies permitting invocations and benedictions conducted by the clergy at graduation ceremonies have been held to be a violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution. Federal District Court of the Third Circuit (including New Jersey) also holds student-initiated prayers at graduation to be illegal. (See file code 6115 Ceremonies and observances and 6141.2 Recognition of religious beliefs and customs.)

Recommendation:

A policy as above.

Legal Referenc N.J.S.A. Boards of education prohibited from excluding students from graduation ceremony or from obtaining yearbook for inability to pay fees

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- N.J.S.A. 18A:11-1 General mandatory powers and duties
- N.J.S.A. 18A:36-18 Books containing organic laws at graduation
- N.J.S.A. 18A:37-2 Causes for suspension or expulsion of pupils
- N.J.S.A. 18A:54-20 Powers of board (county vocational schools)
- N.J.A.C. 6A:8-5.1 et seq. Implementation of Graduation Requirements
- N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.1 et seq. Student Conduct

Ballato v. Long Branch Board of Education, 1990 S.L.D. (August 20)

Lee v. Weisman, 112 S.Ct. 2649 (1992)

R.L. v. Kingsway Regional Board of Education, 95 NJAR2d (EDU) 296

D.C. v. Parsippany Troy Hills Board of Education, 96 NJAR2d (EDU) 697

DO'G v. Ridgfield Park Board of Education, 96 NJAR2d (EDU) 820

R.F. v. Park Ridge Board of Education, 97 NJAR2d (EDU) 1

American Civil Liberties Union v. Blackhorse Pike Regional Board of Education, No. 93-2651 (District Court, March 29, 1994)

Possible Cross References: *5113 Absences and excuses
*5114 Suspension and expulsion

- *5126 Awards for achievement
- *5131 Conduct/discipline
- *6111 School calendar
- *6115 Ceremonies and observances
- *6141.2 Recognition of religious beliefs and customs
- *6146 Graduation requirements

*Indicates policy is included in the Critical Policy Reference Manual.