

## Participation in Graduation Activities for Students Eligible for Special Education

This is an update to the Vermont Agency of Education's guidance on participation in graduation ceremonies for students receiving IEP services who need more than four years to graduate. The AOE's guidance now includes a link to the [Vermont Graduation Readiness Tool](#), a resource that educators can use to help ensure that these students have met (or are on track to meet) the requirements for graduation.

### Considerations for Determining Eligibility

High school students who are eligible for special education occasionally require more than four years to graduate. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ends the entitlement to special education at either high school graduation or age 22. Vermont and many other states allow special education services to extend up to the 22nd birthday for those students who require additional time to graduate.

Two factors determine when a student receiving special education will graduate and whether more than four years are required: meeting local high school graduation requirements and having received reasonable and appropriate access to transition services. IDEA requires that transition goals be included in Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) beginning in the year that an eligible student turns 16. These goals must be age-appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals related to employment, post-secondary education and independent living (if appropriate). Because it is possible that a student receiving special education may need more than four years to graduate, it is important that IEP teams plan for that possibility and identify an anticipated date of graduation, monitor progress toward the scheduled graduation date, and revise the date when necessary. It is highly recommended that the IEP team utilize the [Vermont Graduation Readiness Tool](#) to help quantify the access to transition services the LEA has received. This should be part of the IEP team discussion beginning in the student's ninth-grade year and be a part of the transition planning process when the student turns 16.

### Expectations of Supervisory Unions and Districts

An important factor to be determined for those students who will not graduate in four years is when a student will participate in graduation ceremonies and activities. In Vermont this has been a local decision based on local school board policy. The following guidance regarding students receiving special education who require more than four years to graduate was originally released in 2010:

### Contact Information:

If you have questions about this document or would like additional information, please contact:

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- (1) Each school district that operates a high school shall permit a student who is receiving special education services described in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) pursuant to state and federal law and who will need more than four years of high school to complete the graduation requirements and IEP transition goals, the opportunity to participate in the graduation ceremony and activities after four years of high school attendance with his or her age-appropriate peers.
- (2) The student shall not receive a diploma and participation in a graduation ceremony under this section does not preclude a student from continuing to receive special education and related services pursuant to an IEP beyond the graduation ceremony.
- (3) Upon completion of the student's graduation requirements along with all of the items related to access to transition services and after the IEP team agrees based on the information in the graduation readiness tool, the student shall receive a high school diploma. If the student did not participate in a graduation ceremony with his/her age-appropriate peers, he/she may participate in graduation at the time of receiving a diploma.
- (4) Unless a school district determines otherwise, a student may only participate in one graduation ceremony.