



GRADUATION

MYTH: A student can graduate based on achieving IEP Goals if he/she fails classes and cannot graduate based on earning enough credits.

FACT: The IDEA does not address issues regarding specific criteria for graduation of students with disabilities but allows each State to develop their own policies. In Missouri, each LEA must have a school board policy governing graduation based upon guidance in the Department's Graduation Handbook, *Graduation Requirements for Students in Missouri's Public Schools* found at <http://dese.mo.gov/quality-schools/graduation-requirements>. This publication includes a section titled *Special Policy Consideration for Students with Disabilities* which states:

- Students with disabilities who meet the goals and objectives of their IEPs, as measured by the evaluation procedures and criteria specified in the IEPs, will have credit transcribed in accordance with the state definition of units of credit
- Any specific graduation requirement may be waived for a student with disabilities if recommended by the student's IEP Committee

IEP teams should be discussing graduation as part of transition planning. It would be expected that decisions regarding student's graduating on goals versus credits would be made well in advance of graduation to ensure that the goals on the IEP align with the various types of credits required for graduation. IEP goals that do not align with a required credit for graduation (e.g. math credit, fine arts credit, etc.) would not be considered eligible to be transcribed for that particular credit. It would also be expected that decisions to waive a graduation requirement be made well in advance of graduation and be based on unique circumstances and the student's disability. Failing to pass a class would not be considered a reason to waive a graduation requirement for a student with an IEP.

MYTH: Students with IEPs must graduate with a diploma since Missouri no longer offers a certificate of attendance.

FACT: The *Graduation Handbook, Graduation Requirements for Students in Missouri's Public Schools* still provides for students with IEPs to receive a certificate of attendance upon leaving secondary school when the following conditions are met:

- The student reaches the age of 21, or otherwise terminates their education
- The student has met the LEA's attendance requirements for graduation
- The student has not met the LEA's graduation requirements for credits

All other students with IEPs who graduate will earn a regular diploma.

MYTH: Students with IEPs can continue to attend school until they are no longer 21 years of age.

FACT: The IDEA requires special education be available to children with disabilities through age 21. These special education services may end when a student with an IEP meets the graduation requirements and is no longer eligible to attend secondary school. These special education services may end when the student turns 21 years of age; however, it should be noted that the LEA may decide to continue providing special education services to the student through the end of the semester or the school year in which the student turns 21. This would be a local LEA decision.

MYTH: Kaitlyn's Law requires students who will be returning to secondary school after four years of attendance to participate in the graduation ceremony with their age-peer classmates and be awarded their high school diploma at that time.

FACT: Kaitlyn's law requires districts adopt a policy that allows IDEA eligible students who have completed four years of high school to participate in the graduation ceremonies of their age-peer class even if they have not completed the district's graduation requirements if:

- the student's IEP includes services beyond four years of high school, and
- the IEP team determines the student is making satisfactory progress toward IEP goals, and
- participation in the ceremony is appropriate.

Note that Kaitlyn's Law only applies to participation in an event. A districts must continue provide FAPE for IDEA eligible students until they receive a high school diploma (by meeting local graduation credit requirements or achieving IEP goals/objectives) or until they reach age 21 regardless of participation in a graduation event. Once a student has received a diploma, that student is considered to have graduated from secondary school. Students with IEPs who have graduated are no longer eligible for special education services. The following link includes the full text of Kaitlyn's Law: <http://www.moga.mo.gov/mostatutes/stathtml/16200011251.html>