



Question: What kind of diploma options do students with disabilities have in Nebraska?

Answer: The Individual Education Program (IEP) team is responsible for determining whether a student has completed a course of study that makes him/her eligible to receive a signed, regular diploma. Even if the student with disabilities will continue his/her education program until the end of the school year in which s/he reaches age 21, the IEP team may recommend that the student would benefit from participation in the graduation ceremony with peers. Since this has often been a source of confusion for families and districts in Nebraska, legislation in 2008 (LB 1153) addressed this issue, resulting in the following state law.

Certificate of Attendance and Participation in High School Graduation Ceremony

Nebraska State Statute 79-770, enacted July 18, 2008, states: At the request of a parent or guardian, a school district shall issue a certificate of attendance to a student who receives special education services under the Special Education Act, who has reached seventeen years of age, and who has not completed his or her individualized education plan. A school district shall allow a student who receives a certificate of attendance under this section to participate in the high school graduation ceremony of such high school with students receiving high school diplomas. A student may receive only one certificate of attendance and may participate in only one graduation ceremony based on such certificate. The receipt of a certificate of attendance pursuant to this section shall not affect a school district's obligation to continue to provide special education services to a student receiving such certificate.

This section does not preclude a student from receiving a high school diploma by meeting the school district's graduation requirements established pursuant to section 79- 729 or in his or her individualized education plan or receiving a diploma of high school equivalency under section 79-730 upon completing the requirements of such section. The school district may allow a student who has





previously participated in a graduation ceremony based on a certificate of attendance to participate in an additional graduation ceremony when such student receives a high school diploma.

Graduation Options

Prior to the enactment of LB 1153, the Nebraska Department of Education's Transition Advisory Committee developed the following information regarding best practices in graduation options for students with disabilities. These options are still valid and it is recommended that this issue be addressed in the district's graduation and/or school board policy, and district policy handbook. Upon completion of a course of study that meets the following requirements, the student will be awarded a regular diploma using any of the following program options:

Option 1

A student completes a standard course of study based upon meeting all requirements for graduation and IEP/Transition goals. The student would be eligible to receive a signed, regular diploma and participate in the graduation ceremonies.

Option 2

A student completes the standard or modified course of study, but not the IEP/Transition goals. The student may participate in graduation ceremonies with his/her peers without receiving a signed regular diploma. The student may continue to receive services and supports from the school district until the IEP/Transition goals are met or until the student completes the school year in which s/he reaches the age of 21. At this time, the student will receive a signed, regular diploma.

Option 3

A student completes his/her IEP/Transition goals, but not the standard course of study. When a student's disability prevents him/her from completing the standard course requirements for graduation, the IEP team must identify IEP/Transition goals for graduation that are consistent with the student's individual needs. Upon completion of those goals, the student will be allowed to





graduate with a signed, regular high school diploma. A student may elect to participate in graduation ceremonies with peer classmates or upon completion of his/her course of study.

Graduation Considerations

- It is recommended that graduation be addressed in all transition plans. Plans for graduation should be considered in development of the course of study and reviewed annually.
- The receipt of a signed, regular diploma terminates the service eligibility of students with special education needs.
- It is recommended that all diplomas awarded by a school district be identical in appearance, content and effect, except that symbols or notations may be added to individual student's diplomas to reflect official school honors or awards earned by students.
- A student who receives a document such as a certificate of attendance, unsigned diploma, or blank folder is eligible to continue receiving special education services until receipt of a signed, regular diploma or until the end of the school year in which the student turns 21.
- It is recommended that the IEP team review and document that all requirements for receipt of a signed, regular high school diploma have been met.

