

Tips Sheet for Students with Behavioral Health Challenges and their Families

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Basic Education Circular (BEC) entitled "Graduation Requirements for Students with Disabilities" a student with disabilities may graduate one of two ways:

"the fulfillment of high school graduation requirements set forth in Chapter 4 (relating to academic standards and assessment),
or
upon the completion of his/her individualized education program (IEP) goals."

The IEP team, which includes the student and their family, makes the decision of which way a student will graduate.

"Banking" a student's high school diploma

If a student would benefit from special education services after their fourth year of high school, up until age 21, the PA School Code allows the student to "participate in commencement ceremonies with the student's graduating class and receive a certificate of attendance." "A diploma is dated and awarded when the student with disabilities actually graduates." This is known as "banking" the diploma – it allows the student to participate in the commencement ceremony with their classmates, and receive additional transition-related educational services. Individualized services can be provided outside the school building, including work experience, exploring post-secondary options or taking class(es) at a community college, building independence in the community, etc.

What steps can I take?

Contact your child's school and request a virtual IEP meeting to discuss next steps for your child. If your child attends a school outside of the home school district, you may want to contact your home district as well. The student with a disability and their parent(s) must be an integral part of the IEP team decision-making about whether or not a student is ready to graduate with their class.

Considerations for the IEP team when making a decision about graduation:

- How does the student feel about graduating?
- What are the student's strengths and goals?
- What supports do they need to accomplish their goals?
- Is the student ready for graduation?
- Would the student benefit from "banking" their diploma and exploring vocational and post-secondary options?
- What accommodations can be made? For example:
 - Participate in graduation ceremonies, provided this is feasible under current situation, and receive a certificate of attendance, but continue to work on IEP-related Transition goals. When the IEP Team decides that the student is ready to graduate, they are awarded the official diploma.
 - 30 Credits from a College: Receive a regular high school diploma by completing 30 credits from a College, including a Community College. This is an official high school diploma, not a GED.

Tip for banking diploma: A student can participate in educational activities outside the school building that support their IEP goals. If the IEP team agrees that these activities are needed to achieve the IEP goals, the school should pay for any costs involved with the student's participation. Instructional costs may include: transportation, staff, accommodations, materials & supplies.