

Policy

       Monitored  X   Mandated  X   Other Reasons

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### COMMENCEMENT ACTIVITIES

The Board endorses graduation activities and ceremonies. The date of graduation shall annually be recommended by the Chief School Administrator and approved by the Board.

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

#### Guidelines for Graduation Year Activities

Pupil 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:

- A. Consistent involvement in disciplinary action(s);
- B. Suspension;
- C. Collaborative evaluation by the staff.

The final decision shall be made by the Chief School Administrator.

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

#### Graduation Procedures and Ceremonies

No pupil shall be barred from participation in graduation ceremonies for arbitrary or discriminatory reasons.

When a pupil 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:

- A. Rental or purchase of cap and gown;
- B. 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 High School administration reserves the right to deny participation in graduation activities when

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**COMMENCEMENT ACTIVITIES (Continued)**

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extreme circumstances warrant it. Such denial shall be treated in the same manner as a suspension and the pupil 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**

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.

**Date: January 24, 2005**

**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. The Third Circuit Court of Appeals also holds student-initiated prayers at graduation to be illegal.

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| <b><u>Legal References:</u></b> | <u>N.J.S.A. 18A:7C-5.1</u>       | Boards of education prohibited from excluding students from graduation ceremony or from obtaining yearbook for inability to pay fees |
|                                 | <u>N.J.S.A. 18A:11-1</u>         | General mandatory powers and duties  |
|                                 | <u>N.J.S.A. 18A:36-18</u>        | Books containing organic laws at graduation  |
|                                 | <u>N.J.S.A. 18A:54-20</u>        | Powers of Board (county vocational schools)  |
|                                 | <u>N.J.A.C. 6A:8-5.1 et seq.</u> | Implementation of Graduation Requirements  |

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

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

American Civil Liberties Union v. Blackhorse Pike Regional Board of Education, 84 F.3d 1471 (3d Cir. 1996)

**Key Words**

West Orange Board of Education

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Date Revised

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Commencement Activities, Graduation Ceremonies