



Does My District Need to Amend Its Graduation Policy This Year?

Despite school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools are working hard to keep students on track to graduate. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is working with districts to ensure that seniors can graduate on time, emphasizing the use of alternative methods of earning course credit. DESE has exercised its authority to waive some requirements, extend timelines, and has made recommendations to the Governor's office to waive some statutory requirements. See

<https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/Testing-Cancelling-Graduation-Requirements.pdf>

In the meantime, districts are examining their graduation policies. As long as a provision is not required by law or DESE, the Board has the authority to waive any graduation requirement listed in Board policy. However, MSBA's standard Policy IKF already includes some flexibility. Here are some considerations:

1. There are no required end-of-course examinations.

MSBA's Policy IKF includes as a requirement of graduation that the student "[h]ave taken all required end-of-course (EOC) examinations." However, DESE has waived EOCs this year. Therefore, these examinations are not "required." This provision of the policy does not need to be waived in order for a student to graduate.

2. Proficiency credit is authorized.

DESE allows for students to earn credit if the student is able to demonstrate mastery of the competencies for a particular course, based on DESE standards. Policy IKF delegates to the superintendent or designee the ability to determine if competency has been met.

3. Earning credit by other means.

DESE is encouraging districts to think outside the box when it comes to earning credit in this unusual school year. Policy IKF allows for student to earn credit using alternative means "as approved by the Board and in accordance with law." Notably, Board approval would still need to be obtained.

4. Graduation requirements for a special education student are determined by his or her IEP Team.

Under federal law, the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team, not the Board or even DESE, has the authority to waive graduation requirements for a student receiving special education. Please note that the waiver needs to be necessary due to the student's disability.

5. *Transfer students may have some requirements waived.*

DESE guidance already gives districts some discretion to place and waive graduation requirements for transfer students. See "[Graduation Requirements for Students in Missouri Public Schools](#)". State statute allows for districts to waive the requirement to pass the civics examination as long as a transfer student has taken a civics course. §170.011, RSMo. Students who transfer due to the active military status of a parent or students in the foster care system are also allowed waivers of specific local requirements by law and may graduate with a diploma from the previous district if the student transferred in his or her senior year. §160.2000. Policy IKF gives the superintendent or designee the authority to assign credits to transfer students whose previous coursework does not match the district's.

6. *Get Board approval.*

While the state's requirements of a minimum of 24 credits to graduate still stands, DESE's regulations give school districts authority to issue variances and substitutions as long as those variances are issued consistently and authorized by Board policy. 5 CSR 20-100.190. Policy IKF allows students to "earn credit by other means as approved by the Board in accordance with law."

It is easy to call a special Board meeting and have the Board approve variances approved by the superintendent. This is an open session item and can be approved by a meeting held by teleconference, videoconference or even email. But given the importance of issuing a diploma, it is important that Board members are involved in this decision.