

COMMENCEMENT ACTIVITIES

The Somerville Board of Education endorses graduation activities and ceremonies. The date of graduation shall annually be recommended by the superintendent and approved by the board.

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

Successful completion of the program of studies in middle and high schools requires achievement of the instructional objectives set for each grade and course of study, demonstration of mastery of the proficiencies established for each grade and course, and a satisfactory attendance record.

Guidelines for Graduation Year Activities

Student 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.

The final decision shall be made by the superintendent.

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

Voting Information and Registration

Prior to graduation, the board of education shall provide a voter registration form and material describing the role of a citizen and the importance of voting to each eligible high school student.

Graduation Procedures and Ceremonies

No student shall be barred from participation in middle school promotion and high school graduation ceremonies for arbitrary or discriminatory reasons. A student who may be prevented from participation and his/her parents/guardians shall be so notified in advance and no later than six weeks prior to the close of the school year.

When a student 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. One year book;
- C. Other, as may be determined by the board.

COMMENCEMENT ACTIVITIES (continued)

Financial hardship shall be defined by eligibility standards for free and reduced price meals under the state school lunch program.

The board reserves the right to deny participation in graduation activities when extreme circumstances warrant it. Such denial shall be treated in the same manner as a suspension and the student 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

A board member shall present a copy of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States and the amendments thereto, and the Constitution of the State of New Jersey and the amendments thereto to each student upon graduation from elementary school.

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.

The board shall not prevent, or otherwise deny participation in, constitutionally protected prayer in any district school, consistent with guidance issued by the United States Department of Education and applicable judicial decisions interpreting the religion clauses of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Adopted: August 20, 1996, February 24, 1998  
 Revised: July 15, 2005  
 NJSBA Review/Update: March 2017  
 Readopted:

Key Words

Commencement Activities, Graduation Ceremonies, Voting, Voting Registration

**Legal References:** N.J.S.A. 18A:7C-5.1 Boards of education prohibited from excluding students from graduation ceremony or from obtaining yearbook for inability to pay fees  
N.J.S.A. 18A:11-1 General mandatory powers and duties  
N.J.S.A. 18A:36-18 Books containing organic laws at graduation  
N.J.S.A. 18A:36-27 Voting information  
N.J.S.A. 18A:37-2 Causes for suspension or expulsion of students  
N.J.S.A. 18A:54-20 Powers of board (county vocational schools)  
N.J.A.C. 6A:8-5.1 et seq. Implementation of Graduation Requirements  
N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.1 et seq. Student conduct

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

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

R.L. v. Kingsway Regional Board of Education, 95 NJAR 2d (EDU) 296

D.C. v. Parsippany Troy Hills Board of Education, 96 NJAR 2d (EDU) 697

DO'G v. Ridgefield Park Board of Education, 96 NJAR 2d (EDU) 820

COMMENCEMENT ACTIVITIES (continued)

R.F. v. Park Ridge Board of Education, 97 NJAR2d (EDU) 1

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

**Possible**

**Cross References:** \*5113 Attendance, Absences and excuses  
\*5114 Suspension and expulsion  
\*5126 Awards for achievement  
\*5131 Conduct/discipline  
\*6111 School calendar  
\*6115 Ceremonies and observances  
\*6141.2 Recognition of religious beliefs and customs  
\*6146 Graduation requirements

\*Indicates policy is included in the Critical Policy Reference Manual.