



## **Administrative Regulation 5128 GRADUATION / COMMENCEMENT Participation In Ceremony**

**Responsible Office:** Office of School Leadership

### **PURPOSE**

This Administrative Regulation establishes guidelines and practices related to participation in the high school graduation ceremony in the Washoe County School District (District).

### **REGULATION**

1. Participation in the Graduation Ceremony is the process of walking across the stage in a cap and gown at the school's official commencement ceremony. The commencement ceremony recognizes those students who have completed all requirements to be eligible to receive a high school diploma from the District.
2. Eligibility to Participate in Graduation Ceremony
  - a. The high school principal shall be responsible for determining if a student has met all requirements for graduation. To be eligible to participate in the graduation ceremony, students must meet the requirements for graduation while in full-time enrollment at a District school. For information related to graduation requirements, see Administrative Regulation 5127, High School Diploma Requirements.
  - b. In order to be eligible to participate in the graduation ceremony, a student must either:
    - i. Complete the minimum requirements for graduation which include, but are not limited to, successful completion of the number of credits required to receive a standard diploma, successful completion of all required courses, and satisfy all attendance requirements; or
    - ii. Be a certified Special Education student who has met all requirements of his/her Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and has completed the minimum number of credits required to receive a Standard or an Adjusted Diploma.
      - 1) If a student receives an Adjusted Diploma but returns to his/her home high school to work toward a Standard Diploma, the student, and his/her parent/guardian, may choose to participate in the graduation ceremony associated with the Adjusted Diploma or wait until completion of the

Standard Diploma. In either case, no student may participate in more than one graduation ceremony per earned diploma.

- c. Students, including foreign exchange students or students transferring from schools outside the District, who have not completed all credits and requirements of the District as outlined in Section 2(b) may not participate in the graduation ceremony.
  - d. Students who are concurrently enrolled must graduate at the District school of their full-time enrollment.
  - e. Foreign exchange students who have met all the requirements for graduation and have elected to receive a District diploma may participate in the graduation ceremony.
  - f. No student shall be allowed to participate in more than one graduation ceremony per earned diploma.
  - g. Students may only participate in the graduation ceremony of the high school they are attending at the time of graduation.
  - h. Students who complete the requirements to graduate during the school year shall be eligible to participate in the graduation ceremony the following June. For example, a fifth year senior who does not complete the graduation requirements during the summer but does complete the graduation requirements during the fall semester may participate in the graduation ceremony the following June.
3. Graduation/Commencement Ceremony
- a. The graduation/commencement ceremony recognizes those students who have completed all requirements to be eligible to receive a District high school diploma. Following are particular protocols related to the ceremony:
    - i. Expectations for Behavior
      - 1) Appropriate behavior is expected by both students and spectators. The use of beach balls, confetti, balloons, air horns and other items that would cause a disruption of the ceremony are prohibited and may result in the removal of the individual causing the disruption.
    - ii. Student Name

- 1) Ceremony Announcement and Program – The student’s name used on the diploma and in the graduation program may be the name used on a consistent basis by the student during their school career. Use of a name other than the legal first, middle, and/or last name must be requested by the student or their parent/guardian as part of the school’s graduation preparation process.
  - 2) Transcript – The name shown on the student’s final transcript shall be consistent with legal documentation such as the official birth certificate.
- iii. Student Attire - Each school may adopt standardized student dress requirements for use during the graduation ceremony, in accordance with the District’s dress code. These requirements are in no way an attempt to silence free expression but to create a productive, uninterrupted, and safe environment.
- 1) Cap and Gown
    - a. Each school shall select a single color for the cap and gown to be worn by students during the ceremony, generally one of the established school colors.
    - b. Schools may designate a specific cap and gown color to recognize students who have earned a significant academic achievement (e.g., Honors Diploma).
    - c. Cap and gown colors shall not be assigned by student gender or any other means which would tend to discriminate against one group of students.
  - 2) Medals, cords, sashes, and/or similar type items of District/School-sponsored academic programs or organizations may be worn on the gown. All such items must be approved by the principal or his/her designee.
  - 3) Caps shall be kept free of decoration outside of the graduation tassel, unless approved by the District based on recognition of a religious or cultural right or benefit.
    - a. For example, graduates of American Indian descent may affix an eagle feather to the cap in accordance with the American Indian Religious Freedom Act.

- 4) The District reserves the right to insist that the dress and grooming of students are within the limits of generally accepted good taste. Any item of clothing that could be a potential disruption to the graduation ceremony by being lewd, obscene, dangerous, destructive, or causing a substantial disruption to the graduation ceremony will not be allowed.
- 5) The District recognizes all cultures and ethnic groups as being important to our society and is committed to creating and fostering an educational environment that respects the cultural diversity of the various communities within the District. The District does not seek to restrict or ban a student's wearing of recognized religious clothing, with the exception of unprotected speech. Such items may be worn on the student's person but shall not interfere with or be a substantial disruption to the graduation ceremony.

b. Student Seating

- i. Although protocols related to the graduation processional and order in which students shall be seated will be established by the school, seating shall not be arranged based on gender or any other means which could tend to discriminate in a negative way against one group of students.

c. Student Speeches

- i. The graduation ceremony may include a student speech from one or more students.
- ii. Students who have been invited to deliver a speech at graduation shall be approved by and meet with the principal or designee prior to the occasion to discuss their rights and responsibilities regarding free speech and expression as follows:
  - 1) The rights of students to prepare speeches on their own without undue restrictions or interference.
  - 2) The process by which students may, if they so choose, obtain staff assistance in preparing their speech, e.g., research, writing, timing, and delivery.
  - 3) An explanation and definition of speech that is not protected by law or the First Amendment, e.g., obscene as to minors;

defamatory, including libel and slander; and materially and substantially disruptive of school activities.<sup>1</sup>

- 4) Information about the graduation ceremony and the student's responsibilities to the audience and the occasion.
- 5) A warning that students whose speech is determined to fall into one of the classifications as stated above, that is not protected by the First Amendment, may, depending on the nature and specific circumstances, be required to conclude or modify their presentation.

- iii. Student expression during a graduation/commencement speech that is protected by the First Amendment may not be prohibited absent a showing that the expression is unprotected and/or will materially and substantially interfere with the graduation ceremony or the rights of others.

#### 4. Denial of Participation in Graduation Ceremony

- a. Schools must have the ability to discipline students who are near the end of their academic career. Students slated to participate in the graduation ceremony shall be held to high standards of conduct and behavior until the conclusion of the academic year. Since some of the typical discipline measures that are approved for other students are not appropriate for these graduating students, such as suspension from school instruction, such students may be denied the right to participate in the graduation/commencement ceremony as an alternative disciplinary consequence. Such exclusion may be regarded as a school suspension in accordance with District policy and at the discretion of the principal and shall only be utilized for egregious behavior.
  - i. Appeal Process – The decision of the high school principal to deny participation in the graduation ceremony may be appealed to the Area Superintendent following the District's complaint resolution processes.

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<sup>1</sup> Although students have the right to express themselves freely, the Supreme Court has indicated that there are limits to the expression, particularly when there are minors involved. In *Bethel v. Fraser* (1986), the Court upheld that a student delivering a lewd speech to minors could be suspended: "Students do not shed their constitutional rights at the school door and may exercise their right to freedom of expression unless that right materially and substantially interferes with the requirements of appropriate discipline or conflicts with the rights of others in the school."

- b. Section 4(a) shall not restrict the ability of the administration to address severe behavior and/or conduct issues that may occur during the school year in any way.
  - c. A student who has completed the requirements for graduation shall not be denied a diploma as a disciplinary measure.
  - d. The District and/or its schools shall not deny a diploma nor shall it withhold items purchased by the student or his/her parent/guardian (i.e., cap and gown) based on fees and/or fines owed the school or District. The District reserves the right to seek such restitution through other means to include the civil court process.
5. Students Returning from Studying Abroad
- a. Students who return from studying abroad who have finished all of their credit requirements while studying abroad may be issued a diploma from their zoned high school provided:
    - i. A letter is received from the school abroad that clearly states that the student did not receive a diploma from the school abroad.
    - ii. The student has met all of the requirements for a District diploma outlined in Administrative Regulation 5127 High School Diploma Requirements.
    - iii. The letter is translated into English prior to being presented to the school.
6. Early Graduates
- a. A parent/guardian is entitled to have a student who graduates earlier than the student would normally graduate participate in the graduation ceremony at the time the student graduates, if the student completes the necessary requirements as described above.
7. Summer Graduates
- a. A District-wide summer graduation ceremony may be available to students who complete all of the credits and requirements as a result of summer programs (e.g., summer school, credit-by-exam, correspondence).
  - b. Alternatively, such a student may choose to wait until the following June to participate in the graduation ceremony of the high school issuing the diploma.

- c. A student who will complete graduation requirements during the summer may participate in graduation exercises during the summer when the requirements have been satisfied.
8. Baccalaureates / Invocations / Benedictions
- a. The District shall not sponsor or direct the performance of a formal religious exercise at a promotion or graduation ceremony.
9. Promotion Ceremonies
- a. The only official graduation ceremony of the District is that of a student earning a high school diploma. Grade-level ceremonies for students exiting kindergarten or advancing from elementary to middle or middle to high school shall be referred to as promotion ceremonies.

**LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS**

- 1. This Administrative Regulation reflects the goals of the District’s Strategic Plan and aligns/complies with the governing documents of the District, to include:
  - a. Board Policy 5150, Student Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Expression, and Right to Assemble;
  - b. Board Policy 5400, Student Attendance; and
  - c. Administrative Regulation 5127, High School Diploma Requirements.
- 2. This Administrative Regulation aligns with Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) and Nevada Administrative Code (NAC), to include:
  - a. Chapter 389, Academics and Textbooks.

**REVISION HISTORY**

Date	Revision	Modification
12/28/2017	1.0	Adopted: merged with Administrative Procedure 6641, Participation in Graduation Ceremony
10/9/2018	2.0	Revised: to remove references to assignment of cap/gown or seating by gender
03/28/2022	3.0	Revised: update format pursuant to Board Policy 9070 and clarified language.