

June 19, 2014

Susan Haberstroh, Associate Secretary  
Education Supports and Innovative Practices  
Department of Education  
Townsend Building  
401 Federal Street  
Dover, DE 19901

**RE: Department of Education Proposed High School Graduation Requirements and Diploma Regulation [17 DE Reg. 1127 (June 1, 2014)]**

Dear Ms. Haberstroh:

The Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens (GACEC) has reviewed the Department of Education proposal to adopt amendments to its standards related to graduation and diploma eligibility. The DOE notes that the significant changes are in the following contexts: 1) requiring an advisement process to the student success planning; 2) modifying definitions; 3) revising the date for which diplomas may be awarded to the previous graduating class; and 4) addressing students in the custody of the Division of Services for Children, Youth and their Families (DSCY&F). At 1127. Council would like to share the following concerns.

First, the Department maintains a requirement (§4.1.4) that a credit in Mathematics shall be earned during the senior year. Council questions the justification for the requirement. Students must achieve four credits in math (§4.1) so why should it matter when the credits are obtained? There is no comparable requirement that an English or Science credit be obtained in the senior year. If a student earns a 4<sup>th</sup> credit through on-line learning or a summer program prior to the onset of the senior year, the student should not be penalized.

Second, §5.1 establishes the need for a Student Success Plan for students in grades 8-12. Council would prefer clarification that grade 12 encompasses students through the end of their eligibility for education. See Title 14 Del.C. §1703(d) which recites as follows: "Grade 12 is defined as enrollment until receipt of a regular high school diploma or the end of the school year in which the student attains the age of 21, whichever occurs first, as defined in Chapter 31 of this title." This clarification could be accomplished through the addition of a definition of "twelfth grade student".

Third, §5.1 requires the Student Success Plan (SSP) to incorporate the transition plan required by 14 DE Admin Code 925. The transition plan must also be incorporated in the IEP. See 14 DE Admin Code 925, §20.2. These competing directives may result in confusion. Council questions whether educators are to place the transition plan in the IEP or the SSP?

Fourth, §9.3 provides as follows: “Diplomas from one school year shall not be issued after ~~December 31~~ September 15 of the next school year.” Council recommends retaining the existing standard. What harm results from retention of the existing standard? Moreover, it is unclear what happens if a student completes credit requirements between September 16-December 31. Does the student receive a diploma in the fall or have to wait until the following calendar year? Delaying receipt of a diploma may affect job qualifications, qualifications to enter the military and qualifications to enter post-secondary education.

Fifth, in §10.2, it would be preferable to add an explicit standard that the districts and charter schools will defer to any full and partial awards of credit by DSCY&F educational settings. For example, the Ferris School for Boys [Title 31 Del.C. §5112] is a public school and the DSCY&F should be able to award credits which would be honored by other schools. Other DSCY&F settings also provide comprehensive full day education by certified teachers. See attached p. 44 from December 19, 2013 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among DSCY&F and the public school system. Also, the attached p. 18 of the same MOU directs schools receiving transfer students to “immediately apply full credits” while also encouraging the receiving schools to “accept partial credits to benefit the student”. It would be preferable to include similar guidance in §10.0.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments and recommendations. Please contact the GACEC office if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Terri A. Hancharick  
Chairperson

TAH:kpc

CC: The Honorable Mark Murphy, Secretary of Education  
Dr. Teri Quinn Gray, State Board of Education  
Dr. Donna Mitchell, Professional Standards Board  
Ms. Mary Ann Mieczkowski, Department of Education  
Ms. Paula Fontello, Esq., Department of Education  
Ms. Terry Hickey, Esq., Department of Education  
Ms. Ilona Kirshon, Esq., Department of Justice

Attachments