

Questions and Answers for Supporting the Educational Needs of Students Who Change Schools During a Disaster or Emergency Situation (7/24/2018)

While many students change schools at some point before reaching high school, some may need to change schools with greater urgency, such as when a disaster occurs or as a result of other emergency situations. Students who change schools due to emergency situations may encounter challenges in keeping their education on track. This document is intended to assist families, youth and school personnel in keeping students on track with grade advancement and high school graduation.

1. Q. How can grade level and education services be determined when transcripts and other records are not yet available?

A. When school records cannot be readily obtained from the student's prior school district, the enrolling school district may seek input from the parent/guardian and youth. Based on those discussions and any evaluative information, the district may place the student in classes in the grade that is consistent with the student's biological age and provide program services (e.g., [English Learners \(EL\)](#)) as needed. Input received from a parent/guardian and student may contribute to developing a class schedule.

For students with disabilities, input from the parent/guardian, as well as the district's planning and placement team may temporarily provide a program comparable to that which the student was last receiving. Districts must then follow Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requirements that support timely assessments, appropriate service provision and placement, and continuity of services for children and youth with disabilities.

2. Q. Can a student's grade level and/or educational services be adjusted after an initial placement?

A. Yes. Determining the appropriate needs for a new student is a challenge. However, once the student settles into a "familiar routine," teachers can assess the student's level and needs through both informal and formal classroom assessment. To adjust a student's grade level and/or program services after initial placement, teachers may provide evidence based on progress monitoring, especially for students who enter schools without academic transcripts, and determine a more accurate grade level placement and/or program services based upon a student's performance. Family engagement is an important aspect of this process, as is local board of education policy.

For students with a disability, a planning and placement team (PPT) meeting is required to change a placement or individualized education program (IEP). For information on PPTs and IEPs, go to [CSDE Special-Education Planning-and-Placement](#).

3. Q. Many students arrive from emergency situations in which they have experienced trauma that may impact their learning in the classroom. How can schools help?

A. Schools should make every effort to identify those students with trauma histories and, in consultation with the student and family, determine the best means by which the school can help. Student support services staff (school social workers, school counselors, nurses and school psychologists) are a valuable resource to teachers as student issues are identified. The school may also arrange for counseling to help the student resolve and recover from the trauma and its related impacts. The school might best serve the student by providing a trauma informed and sensitive environment to reduce any re-traumatizing. To find resources on providing trauma informed care to children and youth go to [Trauma Informed Care](#).

4. Q. What are the current Connecticut high school graduation requirements?

A. Connecticut General Statutes § 10-221a describes Connecticut high school graduation requirements. For classes graduating through 2022, to graduate from high school or earn a diploma, a student must satisfactorily complete a minimum of 20 credits (although many districts require more than 20 credits) including:

- A minimum of four credits in English;
- A minimum of three credits in mathematics;
- A minimum of three credits in social studies, including at least a one-half credit course on civics and American government;
- A minimum of two credits in science;
- A minimum of one credit in the arts or vocational education; and
- A minimum of one credit in physical education.

*Note: Commencing with classes graduating in 2023, a minimum of 25 credits will be required. See [Connecticut General Statutes § 10-221a](#).

To ensure that students stay on track for a high school diploma, please remember that every high school student must meet state content and credit requirements in addition to any local requirements. Graduation requirements should be detailed in the local school district's high school program of studies. School counselors are able to answer any questions you may have about what is needed to reach the goal of high school graduation.

5. Q. Can school districts use locally developed, board-approved assessments to award or recover high school credits?

A. Yes. Determination of eligible credits is at the discretion of the local or regional board of education. When a student is considered homeless under the federal [McKinney-Vento Act](#), districts are required to identify and remove any barriers that prevent these youth from receiving appropriate credit for full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed while attending a prior school. School districts may consider the following strategies to support students in accruing and recovering credits:

- Implement a process of awarding credit by demonstration of mastery of state standards consistent with [Connecticut General Statutes § 10-221a\(g\)](#) and local board of education policy.
- Complement regular classes with independent study programs that cater to a student's interests and target specific gaps in credits.

- Use technology to facilitate learning labs, online learning, and computerized modules for youth seeking to fill gaps in credits for high school graduation. The supervision and guidance of a certified teacher is critical to ensure a quality learning experience and the validity of credits earned in these virtual environments.
- Offer appropriate innovative and/or alternative programs that allow students to earn credits by participating in work experience programs, coursework designed to earn both high school and college credits, or dropout prevention and recovery programs.
- Consider implementing specialized programs such as the U.S. Department of Education’s federally funded [GEAR UP](#) or [TRIO Programs](#) that are designed to prepare youth to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.

6. Q. Are there other ways for students to meet all graduation requirements besides taking additional school day classes?

A. Yes. Not all students will achieve the standards in the same manner or at the same pace, particularly for students that may be impacted by emergency circumstances. A district may permit an alternative learning experience to enable students to fulfill the expectations set forth in their student success plan.

The Connecticut high school graduation requirements allow local school districts to design and/or approve educational experiences that serve as an alternative to traditional classroom instruction. Coursework may take the form of out-of-school or [project0-based learning](#) experiences, summertime learning options or a dual enrollment program with an institute of higher education.

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