

The following email was sent to Christina A. Samuels, author of a January 2014 Education Week article, "Graduation Disparities Loom Large for Students With Special Needs"

Link to the original article: http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/01/29/19grad_ep.h33.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+EducationWeekSpecialEducation+%28Education+Week%3A+Special+Education%29

Dear Ms. Samuels:

I recently came across your article for Education Week, "Graduation Disparities Loom Large for Students with Special Needs". I was surprised that your article did not address the IDEIA requirement that all students with disabilities be considered for services through their 21st birthday year. Although by itself this would not account for the entirety of the referenced gap, it is a significant factor in comparing graduation rates from year to year. As an example, New Jersey adopted the new federal formula beginning with the graduating class of 2011. In this formula students who take more than four years to graduate are calculated for the graduation rate in the same way as a dropout would factor. Please reference the attached review of the federal graduation formula by the Education Law Center: <http://www.edlawcenter.org/news/archives/secondary-reform/what-you-should-know-about-new-jerseys-new-high-school-graduation-rates.html>.

This is an important concern that warrants attention. Students with disabilities require consideration for services through their 21st birthday year in order to provide the best opportunities for transition to post-secondary life. School districts who conscientiously and cooperatively work with adult students and their families should not be perceived negatively for providing students with the services to which they are entitled and which they require to meet the four outcomes promised by the IDEIA: (1) equal opportunity (2) full access to the community (3) economic self sufficiency and (4) independent living. Taken together, the mandates of IDEIA and the graduation formula create directly opposing federal expectations as it concerns students with disabilities.

It is our hope that you will see fit to provide a follow-up to your January article and report on this important aspect related to the appropriate education of students with disabilities.

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