

## Bill would let special ed kids who fail MCAS walk at graduation

By **Emelie Rutherford**/ Daily News Staff  
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**BOSTON** -- Special education students who are not getting high school diplomas because they flunked the MCAS will still be allowed to take part in their graduation ceremonies with the rest of their senior-year classmates under a bill on Beacon Hill.

The Class of 2006 will be the fourth high school graduating class that must pass the English and math MCAS tests to receive a high school diploma in Massachusetts.

State Rep. Alice Peisch, D-Wellesley, said she has worried about how special education kids fare with MCAS since her days as a school committee member.

So she is sponsoring a bill, that has already passed the House, to mandate special education students who cannot pass the test be allowed to take part in graduation ceremonies and other senior-year festivities.

The students must meet criteria including good attendance. They would not be handed diplomas at graduation but "certificates of attainment," which students who fail the MCAS but meet other graduation requirements receive in Massachusetts.

Peisch said her bill is the "very least" lawmakers can do to help students who she says are at an unavoidable disadvantage when it comes to the high-stakes test.

"I have tried very hard to carve out an exception for special education students," Peisch said.

Many MetroWest school districts already allow students -- including special education students -- who fail the MCAS but meet other graduation requirements to take part in commencements.

Officials from 17 of 20 schools districts in the Framingham, Milford, Waltham and Dedham areas surveyed by Daily News reporters said they either already have allowed or plan to allow such special education students to walk at graduation.

Officials in just three districts -- Wayland, Northborough-Southborough and Norwood -- said they have no current plan or policy for this, because so far all special education students who have passed other graduation requirements have either passed the MCAS or filed successful appeals with the state.

Perhaps the most well-known school district that does not allow most special education kids who fail the MCAS to walk at graduation is Boston.

Education advocates did not know of other school systems with such policies.

Officials in some local school districts -- including Weston -- said they have not had any special education students not graduate because they failed the MCAS, but they still plan to allow any future special education students who flunk the test to walk at graduation.

"It's something that every district is going to have to deal with eventually," predicted Cheryl Maloney, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in the Weston public schools.

It is not clear if Peisch's bill will be voted on in the Senate this year.

Senate President Robert Travaglini "has been a strong supporter of MCAS and increasing the standards, but on this particular issue he has not taken a stand yet," said his spokeswoman, Ann Dufresne.

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