

**WESTON BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**Weston, CT**

**Meeting Date:** December 16, 2019

**Information Only**

**Action Requested**

**Agenda Item Subject: Graduation Date Setting Class of 2020**

**Submitted by: William McKersie**

**Document Summary/Purpose and/or Recommended Action:**

Dr. McKersie will provide an update on plans to set the 2020 Graduation Date earlier than April 1 (the historic date allowed by Connecticut statute). As of the December 2019 BOE Meeting, the administration is not prepared to recommend the 2020 Graduation Date. We hope to be ready to recommend the date and the procedure around the date at the January 27, 2020 BOE Meeting. The following memorandum explains the current situation and factors essential to a wise decision.

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## *Setting 2020 Graduation Date – Early or Wait Until April 1*

**William S. McKersie, Ph.D.**  
**Update December 11, 2019**

### **Background**

A new Connecticut statute allows school districts to set a firm graduation date as early in the year as necessary; no longer waiting until after April 1 of the relevant school year. Knowing that several districts had taken advantage of the new law, BOE members, as well as parents of seniors (Class of 2020), have asked if Weston would follow suit.

In response, the Superintendent met with Lisa Wolak, Juli Givoni, Matt Filip and Mark Berkowitz to review what would be possible. The legal basis also was reviewed and area superintendents were polled.

### **Current WPS View**

As of the December 2019 BOE Meeting, the administration is not prepared to recommend the 2020 Graduation Date. We would hope to be ready to recommend the date and the procedure around the date at the January 27, 2020 BOE Meeting.

The reason for delaying a recommendation is three-fold.

First, and most important, WHS is not able to hold graduation when school is still in session. We can hold a wonderful ceremony on the final day—when we know all exams and activities are completely done for all students. We cannot hold a fitting ceremony if we still have exams, classes and other student obligations. Thus, we cannot set the date ahead of what would be the 180<sup>th</sup> day for all WHS students. With this in mind, if we recommend setting the date earlier than April 1, we likely would do so with the proviso that it would move one day for every school day lost due to inclement weather or other issues. We want to review this likely scenario with the BOE in the December 16, 2019 BOE Meeting. With that input, we should have a recommendation by the January 2020 BOE Meeting.

Second, the legal basis for allowing seniors to graduate ahead their 180<sup>th</sup> day of school is not fully understood. As summarized below, the law has changed, but we still lack the Commissioner's guidance on whether or not seniors would be required to return after graduation if they have yet to complete their 180<sup>th</sup> day. We should have this question resolved by the January 2020 BOE Meeting.

Third, only about half of area districts have taken advantage of the new law. Those who have not set a graduation date yet seem to share our concerns of logistics and legal flexibility. In short, we do not need to worry at this point that we are an outlier district in holding off on a decision—instead, we are typical with our current deliberative state.

## Remainder of Memorandum

The remainder of this memorandum provides information on the legal basis, as well as outreach to area superintendents.

### Legal Basis

Shipman & Goodwin included a statement on the new graduation law in its most recent summary of Education Legislation.

#### *Firm Graduation Date:*

*Section 10-16l of the Connecticut General Statutes had permitted boards of education to set a firm graduation date that fell no earlier than the 185th day noted in the school calendar adopted for that year, but also permitted boards to set a firm graduation date on or after April 1 that, at the time of its establishment, provided for at least 180 days of school. Effective July 1, 2019, Public Act 19-195 amends Conn. Gen. Stat. § 10-16l to permit boards to establish a firm graduation date at any time during the school year, provided that the date chosen falls no earlier than the 180th day noted in the school calendar adopted for that year. (Shipman's Education Legislation Summary 2019)*

What remains undefined is the Commissioner's guidance on whether or not seniors must return to complete the 180-day requirement, if indeed graduation occurs ahead of the 180<sup>th</sup> day of school. The former Commissioner, prior to the new law being passed, made this interpretation, "If a school has not been in session for at least 180 days at the time of graduation . . . seniors would be required to return to school after graduation to complete the 180 school days."

We continue to seek updated legal interpretation, possible via CAPSS, on the question of seniors having to return to satisfy the 180-day requirement.

### Decisions by Area Districts

I polled my SFCSA colleagues last week on what decisions their Boards have made this fall on their district's 2020 Graduation Date. Nine superintendents responded (as of December 11, 2019), with the results roughly a split between "we set the 2020 Graduation Date early" and "we are waiting until April 1 to set the Graduation Date" (the old timeline). The questions I posed are below, followed by a chart of the responses.

#### Poll Questions--

- 1) Have you set the Graduation Date for 2020?
- 2) If so, what is the date, and is it firm, or will it change based on lost school days in the interim?
- 3) If you have not set a date, are you planning to set one ahead of April 1 (the old flexibility date)?

4) Lastly, what will you do with the seniors after graduation if the 180-day requirement has not been met (due to lost school days for inclement weather or other reasons)?

5) What else should I be considering?

Responses--

Summary of Questions	Responses
<p><b>Graduation Date Set Early</b> -- Districts that have set a graduation date, replied as follows. (Amalgam of Questions # 1,2 and 4)</p>	<p><b>Bridgeport</b> has tentatively scheduled date of June 15<sup>th</sup>. They will be moving it if we get too many snow days.</p> <p><b>New Canaan</b> set graduation date for Monday, 6.15 (their 180<sup>th</sup> day), but have flexibility with a 182-day schedule. Set Tuesday, 6.16 as the rain date. Seniors will be considered finished as of graduation date. If lost school days result in classes being held on 6.15 (instead of ½ days with exams), adjustments will need to be made with graduation traditionally at 5:00 p.m. at NCHS.</p> <p><b>Stratford</b> set graduation date this fall. Has flexibility, similar to New Canaan, since scheduled for 182 days.</p> <p><b>Wilton</b> set graduation date this fall. Seniors will be considered finished as of graduation date.</p>
<p><b>Graduation Date Set in April</b> -- Districts that are continuing with April 1 (the old flexibility date), replied as follows. (Amalgam of Questions #3 and 4)</p>	<p><b>Fairfield</b> will set the date after April 1.</p> <p><b>Monroe</b> will set the graduation date on or near April 1. Will meet the 180-day requirement for seniors; have 182-day schedule, so could sacrifice two if lost school days due to weather make that necessary.</p> <p><b>Norwalk</b> continues to set graduation as of April 1, once snow days are known. There are several dates, rotated among the four high schools. Seniors do not return after graduation.</p> <p><b>Region 9</b> will continue to use the April 1 date to finalize its graduation day.</p> <p><b>Westport</b> will announce on April 1, as they have in the past.</p>