

Adopted: February 18, 1997

District 77 Policy 535

Revised: May 4, 2026

Last Reviewed: March 24, 2026

535 COMMENCEMENT

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish expectations for student participation in commencement activities and to preserve the integrity and purpose of the graduation ceremony as a celebration of students who have met district graduation requirements.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

The school district recognizes that graduation ceremonies are intended to celebrate the academic achievements of students who have met district graduation requirements. Students who have successfully completed high school shall be granted diplomas.

III. PARTICIPATION IN COMMENCEMENT CEREMONIES

- i. If a student desires to be excused from graduation activities, they shall be excused from graduation activities upon making an application to their high school principal stating their reasons. If the student is under age 18, their parent/guardian shall be consulted and must consent to the student's non-participation.
- ii. Recognition of deceased students at commencement is not automatic and may occur only through the request and review process established by the district. Any recognition approved under this policy will be brief, respectful, and applied consistently across situations. The district will avoid memorial practices that substantially alter the structure, tone, or purpose of the graduation ceremony.

IV. RECOGNITION OF DECEASED STUDENTS AT COMMENCEMENT

A. Eligibility for Consideration

A deceased student may be considered for recognition at commencement if the student:

1. Was enrolled in the district as a member of the graduating class cohort; and
2. Died during their school enrollment in Mankato Area Public Schools prior to graduation.

B. Permitted Forms of Recognition

If approved through the process outlined in this policy, the district may provide recognition using one or more of the following:

1. Program Recognition: The student's name may be included in the graduation program under an "In Memoriam" or similar section.
2. Acknowledgment: The principal or a designated staff member may briefly acknowledge the student during opening or closing remarks.
3. Honorary Diploma: With approval of the superintendent or designee, the district may issue an honorary diploma recognizing the student's connection to the graduating class.
4. Symbolic Seat Recognition: A single chair may be designated during the ceremony to represent the student. A cap, flower, or similar symbolic item may be placed on the chair as a brief visual acknowledgment.

C. Limitations

To maintain consistency and preserve the focus of the ceremony:

1. Individual tributes, speeches, or presentations dedicated solely to the deceased student will not occur during the graduation ceremony.
2. The student's name will not be included in the sequence of names read for diploma distribution unless the student met graduation requirements prior to their death.
3. Personalized displays, photographs, or additional memorial arrangements will not be included beyond the limited recognition options described in this policy.

D. Request Process

Recognition under this policy must be requested and approved prior to the graduation ceremony.

1. A request may be submitted by a parent/guardian/family member of the student, a student, or a school staff member.
2. Requests must be submitted in writing to the building principal no later than 30 calendar days prior to the scheduled graduation ceremony, unless waived

by the superintendent for good cause.

3. The request should include:
 - a. The name of the student proposed for recognition
 - b. The relationship of the requester to the student or graduating class
 - c. A brief explanation of the request

E. Review and Approval

1. The building principal shall review the request and consult with the student's immediate family and the superintendent or designee.
2. The student's immediate family members may choose whether or not to have the recognition included in the graduation ceremony. No recognition will be included without the consent of the student's immediate family.
3. In determining whether recognition will be approved, the district may consider:
 - a. Eligibility under this policy
 - b. Consistency with prior district practices
 - c. The ability to maintain the purpose and tone of the graduation ceremony
4. The superintendent or designee will make the final determination regarding recognition.

F. Discretion

Recognition decisions under this policy are discretionary and do not create an entitlement to recognition at graduation ceremonies.

Legal References: None

Cross References: None