

January 28, 2021

NJDOE releases broadcast on Bridge Year Pilot Program

On June 26, 2020, Gov. Phil Murphy signed a law establishing a “Bridge Year Pilot Program.” According to the law, the purpose of the program is to provide students in the graduating classes of 2021 and 2022 with the opportunity to “offset disruptions to learning opportunities and participation in extracurricular activities” caused by the COVID-19 pandemic building closures. The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) issued a [broadcast](#) and a [Bridge Year webpage](#) detailing the pilot on Jan. 21. More detailed guidance is also available in the NJDOE [Bridge Year Implementation Guidelines](#).

Overview

According to the NJDOE, under the Bridge Year Pilot Program, certain students in the classes of 2021 or 2022 who have met all their state and local graduation requirements may defer graduation from high school for one year to participate in an additional year of **academic courses and extracurricular activities** immediately following their senior year. This additional year will be known as the “bridge year.” During the student’s bridge year, the student must remain enrolled in the high school they attended as a junior.

Requirements for high schools

- All public high schools and charter and renaissance schools are required to offer the bridge year program to eligible students.
- Creation/designation of the **bridge year liaison position** at the high school, with the following responsibilities:
 - Receives notification of eligible students’ intent to participate by Feb. 15 of their senior year **(This deadline is looming for the Class of 2021)**.
 - Serves as the school’s point of contact for students interested in participating in the bridge year.
 - Facilitates planning of bridge year students’ academic services.
 - Regularly communicates with the respective county college regarding students’ academic progress.
 - Develops, in consultation with bridge year students, an [individual learning plan \(ILP\)](#) for each student. **(See Page 3 of the [Implementation Guidelines](#) for additional info on ILPs).**
 - Collects and reports attendance in accordance with the district’s policy for those students participating in classes not at the host high school, including:

ADVISORY

- Attendance for classes at the host high school should be collected and recorded in the normal course.
- Reports from an institution of higher education that a bridge year student attends at least quarterly, in a manner specified by the student's ILP, the student's academic progress and performance.
- Ensures that at the conclusion of each semester of the bridge year, the student's high school transcript reflects any high school and college credits earned during the bridge year in accordance with district policy.

Requirements for Students

Student eligibility:

- A member of the classes of 2021 or 2022.
- Meet all applicable graduation requirements by the end of their senior year of high school
- 19 years old or younger during the entirety of the bridge year (exceptions for students with disabilities).
- Maintain a 2.0 GPA during the bridge year.
- In each semester of the bridge year, participating students must take between nine and 12 credits:
 - **Fall semester** – Credits may be from host high school, credits from a county college located within the host high school's county, or a combination of the two.
 - **Spring semester** – All credits must be from the county college located in the same county as the host high school.
 - **Fall and/or spring semester** – Up to three credits offered by a four-year institution of higher education at any high school in the state or at any other location to fulfill the student's credit requirement.
 - The implementation guidance notes, "Districts that do not operate on the basis of fall and spring semesters should meet the spirit of the above academic and course requirements and ensure that bridge year students meet their total credit requirements for the entirety of the bridge year."

Under the law, public institutions of higher education are required to accept all applicable credits that a student who completes a bridge year earned during their bridge year. ***(See Page 5 of the [Implementation Guidelines](#) for additional info on tuition.)***

Extracurriculars (athletics and activities)

Enrolled bridge year students are eligible to participate in the following at their host high school:

ADVISORY

- A spring sport sanctioned by the New Jersey Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA).
- Students must otherwise meet other NJSIAA requirements, such as age and other requirements.
- Students are NOT permitted to participate in fall and winter sports sanctioned by NJSIAA.

The NJDOE will be releasing additional guidance in the coming weeks. Please reach out to bridgeyear@doe.nj.gov with questions.

Throughout the COVID-19 public health crisis, NJEA staff and leadership have been working tirelessly alongside and on behalf of our members and the students they serve. As further guidance from the NJDOE becomes available, we will update our resources for members. If you have any questions about this field advisory, please reach out to your UniServ field representative.