

Wyoming Graduation Requirements

Chapter 31

STATEMENT OF REASONS

2015 SEA No. 87 (2015 Session Laws, Chapter 179) eliminates the requirement that the State Board of Education (SBE) rules require that a high school diploma provide an endorsement level (tiered diploma) on the student's transcript and eliminates the district assessment system (DAS) annual review and reporting requirement. During the past ten months, emergency rules eliminating the tiered diploma endorsement requirement and the district assessment system annual reporting and review requirement have been approved by the Governor. However, through consultation with members of the Governor's staff, the Attorney General's Office staff, and the Legislative Services Offices staff, we recognized that more comprehensive revisions were necessary to address the requirements in the law. The iteration of Chapter 31 presented here is intended to meet the will of the legislature to remove unnecessary complexity for the school districts, honor the requirement to provide students with an "equity of opportunity" during their educational experience, and recognize the authority of each school district to decide the method(s) through which the requirements herein are met.

The Department used the expertise of outside advisors to consult with the SBE liaison, WDE staff, and district leadership including superintendents, curriculum and assessment directors, and high school principals to revise Chapter 31 Graduation Requirement rules. The purpose of this consultative process was to develop revised rules, comporting with the plain language of the law, to establish minimum requirements for receipt of a high school diploma and a process for SBE consultation with school districts on the establishment of high school diploma policies. Emergency rule review documents published by the Legislative Service Office (ERR15-025 and ERR16-008) including relevant statutory language were used to guide comprehensive revisions to Chapter 31. Draft documents were developed and presented to stakeholders for consideration and feedback. The District Assessment System Steering Committee, a twelve member committee of district, University, and Department administrators was established in 2012 to provide leadership, expertise, and guidance related district assessment system development. This steering committee served as the primary consultative group.

This rule has two primary substantive sections:

Section 4 – High School Diploma Requirements

The proposed revisions outline the SBE-defined minimum requirements for any student to receive a high school diploma from any Wyoming school district. These minimum requirements are to be incorporated within each district's high school diploma policy. The proposed rules address the elimination of the tiered diploma system. The revisions include a list of district policy requirements which, at a minimum, must be in place, as well as specific actions districts must take with regard to the establishment and implementation of high school diploma requirements.

The statutory requirement for course completion as measured by the district assessment system has been addressed by providing districts with four (4) choices in measurement approaches that represent widely-established methods for using assessment data in determining when a student should be awarded course credit: 1) course-based, 2) course-based with common assessments, 3) common assessments – stand alone, and 4) a mixed model approach for measurement through the district assessment system. These options support the SBE's objective of providing flexibility at the district level in order to demonstrate adherence to this statutory requirement. This menu of options was developed by the Department with

significant input from district representatives more than eight (8) years ago, and were codified in the District Assessment System Handbook (2008). Because these approaches have been recognized by the Department, detailed in Department guidance and related materials on district assessments, and used by local school districts for some time, the level of detail provided in this rule is sufficient to guide district policy.

The minimum requirements for district high school diploma policies include a requirement that students meet the Standards for Graduation, including satisfaction of the Component Completion Requirement. Both terms are defined in these rules. The Uniform Student Content and Performance Standards establish what students are expected to know and be able to do by the time they graduate in mathematics, science, language arts, social studies, and in any other content areas as the SBE may undertake to define such expectations. These expectations are provided as frameworks that support a *progression of learning* from the time early learners enter Wyoming public schools until they complete high school and earn a diploma.

It is important to note that not every set of standards that currently make up the Uniform Student Content and Performance Standards is written to reflect a progression of learning from kindergarten to college- and career-readiness; this is intentional for certain content areas. Fine and Performing Arts (FPA) is an example of such a content area. As stated in the most recent FPA standards document, the FPA standards reflect the desire for all Wyoming students to receive a uniform and consistent art education in order to prepare them for success in and out of the classroom; however, they do not presume that the standards will be implemented at every grade level. Instead, they are organized by grade bands to provide specific guidance about what students need to know and be able to do in each discipline at the end of 4th, 8th and 11th grades ([2013 Wyoming Fine and Performing Arts Content and Performance Standards](#), p. 2). As with the other eight (8) content areas, districts have a responsibility to provide students with opportunities and access to FPA courses, and they must offer avenues for students to demonstrate a progression of learning based on the FPA standards, but students are not required to participate in FPA programs in order to progress from one grade level to the next or to graduate from high school.

Students entering high school are not initiating their education for the first time in a 9-12 system; instead, they are continuing their educational experience in a comprehensive K-12 system. Therefore, the Standards for Graduation are based, in part, on the acquisition of knowledge and skills that logically rely upon the foundations for learning acquired throughout a student's entire K-12 experience, including high school. In order to provide such foundations and to ensure an educational program is in compliance with W.S. 21-3-110(a)(xv), it is incumbent upon local school boards to align curriculum, assessment, and instruction to the Uniform Student Content and Performance Standards. The requirements for receipt of a high school diploma set out in this rule compel local boards of trustees and district leaders to develop a strong working knowledge of the Uniform Student Content and Performance Standards and the expectations established therein for what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade level, where applicable, including by the time they graduate. Additionally, W.S. 21-2-304(a)(iii) directs school districts to identify and provide courses which students must complete to earn a high school diploma, develop and implement assessments to measure student learning, and establish minimum thresholds for student performance as evidence that the standards have been met.

Performance level descriptors provided in the Uniform Student Content and Performance Standards help teachers determine where students are performing in relation to the standards and include expectations through 12th grade. The following excerpts from the Uniform Student Content and Performance Standards, which can be found [here](#), are examples of how they incorporate expectations of what students should know and be able to do by the time they graduate high school:

1. [2012 Wyoming Mathematics Content and Performance Standards](#)

- The Standards for Mathematical Practice are embedded at every grade level to establish habits of mind which will empower students to become mathematically literate. (p. 3)
- The Standards for Mathematical Content are grade-level specific kindergarten through grade eight and conceptual category specific in high school. They provide a scaffold that allows students to become increasingly more proficient in understanding and using mathematics with a steady progression leading to college and career readiness by the time students graduate from high school. (p. 3) The mathematical standards for high school are provided on pp. 58-83.
- Performance Level Descriptors help teachers judge where students are performing in relation to the standards. They describe student performance at various levels of proficiency. To consider a standard as “met”, students are required to perform at the “proficient” level. (p. 3) Performance Level Descriptors are provided on p. 5.
- Each grade level in the K – 8 standards is prefaced with an explanation of instructional focus areas for that grade level. Each conceptual category in the high school standards is prefaced with an explanation of the implication of that category to a student’s mastery of mathematics. Making mathematical models is a Standard for Mathematical Practice, and specific modeling standards appear throughout the high school standards indicated by a star symbol (★).

2. 2016 Wyoming Science Content and Performance Standards

- The standards . . . provide the necessary foundation for local school district decisions about curriculum, assessments, and instruction. Implementation of the new standards will better prepare Wyoming high school graduates for the rigors of college and/or careers. In turn, Wyoming employers will be able to hire workers with a strong science and engineering base – both in specific content areas and in critical thinking and inquiry-based problem solving. (p. 3)
- Content Standards: Content standards define what students are expected to know and be able to do by the time they graduate. They do not dictate what methodology or instructional materials should be used, nor how the material is delivered. (p. 3)
- Benchmarks: Benchmarks (also called “performance expectations” in this document) specify what students are expected to know and be able to do at the end of each of the benchmark grade levels. These benchmarks specify the skills and content students must master along the way in order to demonstrate proficiency of the content standard by the time they graduate. In this standards document, you will find these are broken out into individual grades for Kindergarten through 5th grade and then banded by grade bands for middle school/junior high school and high school grade levels (6-8 and 9-12). (p. 3)
- Students in high school continue their learning from the middle school grades to develop more complete understanding of these four areas: Physical Science, Life Science, Earth and Space Science, and Engineering, Technology, and Applications of Science. These standards and benchmarks include the most fundamental concepts of science, but are intended to leave room for expanded study in upper-level high school courses. The high school performance expectations allow high school students to explain more in-depth phenomena across the science disciplines . . . (p. 172)

3. 2012 Wyoming Language Arts Content and Performance Standards

- The Language Arts standards reflect the culmination of an extended, broad-based effort to fulfill the charge issued by the states to create the next generation of K–12 standards in order to help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school. (p. 13)
- They are written to individual grade levels in kindergarten through grade 8, and two-year bands in grades 9–12. Ninth grade students work toward the achievement of the tenth grade

standards; eleventh grade students work toward the achievement of the twelfth grade standards... (p. 4)

- The CCR standards anchor the document and define general, cross-disciplinary literacy expectations that must be met for students to be prepared to enter college and workforce training programs ready to succeed. The K–12 grade-specific standards define end-of-year expectations and a cumulative progression designed to enable students to meet college and career readiness expectations no later than the end of high school. The CCR and high school (grades 9–12) standards work in tandem to define the college and career readiness line—the former providing broad standards, the latter providing additional specificity. Hence, both should be considered when developing college and career readiness assessments. Students advancing through the grades are expected to meet each year’s grade specific standards, retain or further develop skills and understandings mastered in preceding grades, and work steadily toward meeting the more general expectations described by the CCR standards. (p. 14) The CCR and high school standards for grade spans 9-10 and 11-12 are provided on pp. 38, 45, 50, 54-55, 61- 62, and 64-66.
- Performance Level Descriptors are statements that describe how well students must perform the standards. (p. 5) Grade 12 Performance Level Descriptors are provided on pp. 8-9.

4. 2014 Wyoming Social Studies Content and Performance Standards

- The social studies standards specify the essential learning that students must master providing a K-12 framework to assist school districts, schools, and communities in developing and strengthening curriculum. It is not intended to prescribe courses, materials, or instructional methodology. Content and performance standards are identified for grade spans K-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12 with benchmarks at grades two, five, eight, and twelve. Teachers, parents, and students work toward the achievement of the benchmarks at the completion of each grade band level. (p. 4)
- Content Standards: what students are expected to know and be able to do by the time they graduate. (p. 4)
- Benchmarks: specify the skills and content students must master in order to meet the content standards by the time they graduate. (p. 4) Benchmarks for the 9-12 grade span are provided on pp. 6-7 for Content Standard 1; p. 10 for Content Standard 2; p. 13 for Content Standard 3; pp. 16-17 for Content Standard 4; pp. 20-21 for Content Standard 5; and p. 26 for Content Standard 6.
- Performance Level Descriptors: determine student performance of the benchmarks. (p. 4) Performance Level Descriptors for the 9-12 grade span are provided on p. 9 for Content Standard 1; p. 12 for Content Standard 2; p. 15 for Content Standard 3; p. 19 for Content Standard 4; p. 25 for Content Standard 5; and p. 29 for Content Standard 6.
- Descriptors help teachers assess where students are performing in relation to the benchmarks, and ultimately, the content standards.

During consultation, district leadership emphasized local control in designating courses meeting these requirements, with alignment to the Uniform Student Content and Performance Standards and a logical sequence and progression of instruction included in the definition of Component Completion Requirement.

Section 5 – Consultation with Local School Districts

Section 5 establishes the requirement for SBE consultation with local school districts and details the review process that will take place to support districts as they develop and implement the new requirements of these revised rules. The SBE recognizes the November 1 statutory reporting requirement to provide evidence that the district is compliant with high school graduation standards (W.S. 21-3-110 (a)(xxv)). The requirement within these rules for the SBE to offer feedback applies as of November 1, 2017 and takes into consideration the timing of the rules promulgation process and provides a reasonable timeframe for implementation.

In summary, the proposed revisions to Chapter 31 provide guidance to districts related to the minimum high school diploma requirements, the SBE consultative process with local boards of trustees in establishing graduation requirements, and meet the plain language requirements of the law and legislative intent. There is merit in combining Chapters 10 (Wyoming Content and Performance Standards) and 31 (High School Diploma Requirements) in the future. However, given the revisions to Chapter 10 currently taking place, this is not the appropriate time to consider this change.