



## High School Graduation Standards

### Wisconsin Statute 118.33

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118.33(1)(a) Except as provided in par.(d), a school board may not grant a high school diploma to any pupil unless the pupil has earned:

1. In the high school grades, at least 4 credits of English including writing composition, 3 credits of social studies including state and local government, 2 credits of mathematics, 2 credits of science and 1.5 credits of physical education.
2. In grades 7 to 12, at least 0.5 credit of health education.

118.33(1)(am) The state superintendent shall encourage school boards to require an additional 8.5 credits selected from any combination of vocational education, foreign languages, fine arts and other courses.

118.33(1)(b) A school board may not grant a high school diploma to any pupil unless, during the high school grades, the pupil has been enrolled in a class or has participated in an activity approved by the school board during each class period of each school day, or the pupil has been enrolled in an alternative education program, as defined in s. 115.28(7)(e)1. Nothing in this paragraph prohibits a school board from establishing a program that allows a pupil enrolled in the high school grades who has demonstrated a high level of maturity and personal responsibility to leave the school premises for up to one class period each day if the pupil does not have a class scheduled during that class period.

118.33(1)(c) A school board may require a pupil to participate in community service activities in order to receive a high school diploma.

118.33(1)(d) A school board may grant a high school diploma to a pupil who has not satisfied the requirements under par. (a) if all of the following apply:

1. 1. The pupil was enrolled in an alternative education program, as defined in s. 115.28(7)(e)1.
2. 2. The school board determines that the pupil has demonstrated a level of proficiency in the subjects listed in par. (a) equivalent to that which he or she would have attained if he or she had satisfied the requirements under par. (a).

118.33(1)(f) 1. By September 1, 2004, each school board operating high school grades shall develop a written policy specifying criteria for granting a high school diploma that are in addition to the requirements under par. (a). The criteria shall include the pupil's academic performance, and the recommendations of teachers. Except as provided in subd. 2., the criteria apply to pupils enrolled in charter schools located in the school district.

118.33(1)(f) 2. By September 1, 2004, each operator of a charter school under s. 118.40 (2r) that operates high school grades shall develop a policy specifying criteria

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for granting a high school diploma. The criteria shall include the pupil's academic performance, and the recommendations of teachers.

118.33(1)(f) 3. Beginning on September 1, 2005, neither a school board nor an operator of a charter school under s. 118.40 (2r) may grant a high school diploma to any pupil unless the pupil has satisfied the criteria specified in the school board's or charter school's policy under subd. 1. or 2.

118.33(2) The state superintendent shall:  
(c) Establish course requirements under sub.(1)(a) and approve any school board's high school graduation standards policy that is equivalent to the requirements under sub.(1).

118.33(2)(m) Adopt policies to accommodate pupils with exceptional educational interests, needs or requirements, not limited to children with disabilities, as defined under s.115.76(5).

118.33(3) By September 1, 1986, each school board operating high school grades shall submit to the state superintendent a report describing the school board's policies and guidelines on high school graduation standards, including a list of courses required under sub. (1)(a) and the number of hours in each school term required to earn one credit under sub. (1)(a) , and thereafter shall notify the state superintendent whenever changes are made in such policies or guidelines. The department shall make reasonable efforts to combine the reports required under this subsection with other required school board reports.

118.33(3m) A course taken at a technical college by a child attending the school part-time or in lieu of high school under s. 118.15(1)(b) , or attending the school under s.118.15(1)(cm), does not fulfill any of the high school graduation requirements under sub. (1)(a) unless the state superintendent has approved the course for that purpose. If a pupil satisfies all of the high school graduation requirements under sub. (1), the school board shall grant a high school diploma to the pupil regardless of whether the pupil satisfied all or a portion of the requirements while attending an institution of higher education under s.118.55 or a technical college.

118.33(4)(a) The state superintendent shall establish procedures for school boards to certify to the state superintendent whether they are in compliance with the requirements under sub. (1) and the rules promulgated under sub. (2).

118.33(4)(b) The state superintendent may periodically review school district high school graduation standards and shall notify any school board not in compliance with the requirements under sub. (1) or the rules promulgated under sub. (2), identifying the changes necessary.

118.33(5) The department shall include in its biennial report under s.15.04(1)(d) information on the status of statewide high school graduation standards. Section note: 1983 a. 411; 1985 a. 29; 1991 a. 39, 269; 1993 a. 223, 339, 340, 399, 491; 1997 a. 27, 113, 164; 1999 a. 9, 84, 185; 2001 a. 38, 109; 3003 a.n 33; 1983 Act 411 s. 1 provides:

SECTION 1. Legislative declaration. Statewide high school graduation standards and minimum credit requirements are intended to provide all children an equal opportunity for a basic education. It is a responsibility of both the state and the school board to provide all pupils with the instructional assistance necessary to meet the standards and to ensure that the standards are not implemented so as to hinder the successful completion of high school.

*For questions about this information, contact [Michael George](#) (608) 266-2364*

*Last updated on 9/1/2005 3:27:47 PM*



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## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. Do most states change graduation requirements for English language learners?

Most states do not change graduation requirements for English language learners. In some states and districts, English language learners may be exempted from a graduation exam (usually for one year), but still must complete coursework requirements.

### 2. Are re-testing opportunities available for English language learners?

With graduation tests there is often pressure to increase the number of opportunities for students to take the test, and to move the retest times closer to the time of instruction. If field test items are included in each administration of the test, there may be pressure to remove these items when students retake the test, thereby resulting in shorter forms of the test.

How re-testing interacts with issues that accompany learning English should be considered. Re-testing must be available to these students just as often as it is to other students. When accommodations are available to English language learners, they also must be provided during re-testing. Some states have found that decision makers request additional accommodations with each re-take, under the belief that more accommodations will give students the benefit needed to pass (or, perhaps, with the recognition that certain accommodations really are needed even though the student hoped not to need them). Changing rules about test format, administration procedures, or testing accommodations for re-testing must be addressed.

### 3. Do states have an appeals process available?

Students who do not pass the graduation test, even after taking the test on repeated occasions, are likely to follow one of three

pathways. First, they may drop out of school. Second, they may continue to re-take the test until they complete all their coursework. Third, they may bring a lawsuit. It is desirable to reduce the number of students doing either the first or the third of these options.

Dropout prevention strategies need to be addressed and implemented. In addition, an appeals process that ensures fair consideration of individual student needs may reduce the number of lawsuits. The nature of an appeals process should be defined before the need for the process arises.

#### **4. What are some suggestions for inclusive and fair diploma options and graduation policies for English language learners?**

There are several ways to make different types of diplomas fairer for all students. Four critical pieces are:

**(1) Have the same diploma options available to all students.** This implies that there would be no diploma option designated just for students who are learning English as a second language.

**(2) Recognize that not all students demonstrate high-level knowledge and skills in the same way, particularly through the use of traditional English.** This means that there must be other avenues to diplomas, such as an appeals process that is available for a small number of students. (It is advisable to obtain a good estimate of the possible number of students so that whatever is proposed for them is manageable.)

**(3) Give names to diploma options that correspond to the knowledge and skills demonstrated by the student.** These options should recognize, but not necessarily encourage, diverse ways of demonstrating knowledge and skills. Consideration should be given to how these cases are handled. For example, a Comprehensive Diploma might be awarded if the student can gather a body of evidence showing acquisition of the breadth of knowledge covered in required coursework. Another diploma option, such as a Certificate of Mastery, might be added to indicate completion of just the graduation test requirement.

**(4) Use the media to explain the diploma options to the public.** Develop brochures for schools to give to students and to forward with transcripts to post-secondary institutions and employers explaining the meaning of the various high school diploma options that are awarded. Such brochures should be translated so parents (and students who have low English skills) can have access to them. Also, states may want to

consider a video or audio presentation in native languages for parents and students who cannot read the native language and may not have access to a translator.

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This page was last updated on Monday, December 05, 2005.

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