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Profile of Learning and the State's High School Graduation Rule

In 1992, the Minnesota Legislature committed itself to establishing a "rigorous, results-oriented" high school graduation rule for the state's public school students. The legislature directed the State Board of Education (the board) to adopt two types of graduation requirements: the basic standards tests and the profile of learning.¹

Basic Standards Tests

The rules for the basic standards tests in reading and math became effective for students entering the ninth grade in the 1996-1997 school year and later. The rule for the basic standards test in written composition became effective for students entering the tenth grade in the 1997-1998 school year and later. Students must receive a passing score of 75 percent on the basic requirements tests in reading and math and three points out of a possible four points on the basic requirements test in written composition in order to graduate from high school. Passing scores are based on statewide standards requiring skills that most students should be able to master.

- ▶ Math tests require students to understand math through pre-algebra.
- ▶ Reading tests require students to be able to read at a degree of difficulty equal to popular adult nonfiction.
- ▶ The writing test requires students to respond to an adult reader by writing a composition in response to a request for information.

As with Minnesota's previous high school graduation rule based on Carnegie-unit credits, school districts may elect to exceed the state's minimum graduation requirements. Students first take the reading and math tests in eighth grade and the written composition test in

¹ Minn. Stat. § 120B.02 (1998) states in part, "[T]he state board shall set in rule high academic standards for all students. The standards must contain the foundational skills in the three core curricular areas of reading, writing, and mathematics while meeting requirements for high school graduation. The standards must also provide an opportunity for students to excel by meeting higher academic standards through a profile of learning that uses curricular requirements to allow students to expand their knowledge and skills beyond the foundational skills."

tenth grade. As the table below indicates, in the 1997-1998 school year, 71 percent of the eighth grade students tested throughout the state received a passing math score and 68 percent received a passing reading score.

**Statewide Basic Standards Tests
 8th Grade Public School Mathematics and Reading Results**

Data Source: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning

	School Years					
	1995-96		1996-97		1997-98	
	<u>Math</u>	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Math</u>	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Math</u>	<u>Reading</u>
Percent of 8th Grade Students Receiving a Passing Score of 75% or Higher	69%	53%	70%	59%	71%	68%
8 th Grade Student Enrollment	65,647	65,647	65,907	65,907	66,568	66,568
Number of 8 th Grade Students Tested	58,486	56,527	51,929	50,386	54,353	64,357
Number of 8 th Grade Students Who Must Retest	-	-	-	-	18,864 (29%)	20,546 (32%)

- Numbers not shown since a passing score of 70 percent applied in the 1996-97 school year only.

Districts must prepare a “learning opportunity and remediation plan” for each tenth grade student who has not passed the reading or math basic standards tests. Students have multiple opportunities to pass the test. Districts must make available reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities and students with limited English proficiency (LEP) and must note the altered level of performance on the students’ records.²

Profile of Learning

In addition to the basic standards tests, the legislature directed the board to adopt a profile of learning rule containing high academic standards for all students across a wide range of content areas, skills, and strategies. The profile of learning, also a requirement for graduating from high school, requires students to expand their knowledge and skill beyond the state’s basic standards. This year the board formally adopted the profile of learning rule, which becomes effective for students entering the ninth grade in the 1998-1999 school year and thereafter.

What follows describes the content and structure of the profile of learning, how the profile will be

² Minn. Stat. § 120B.30, subs. 1 and 3 (1998). The Department of Children, Families and Learning reports students’ test results in three ways: (1) each grade level by school and school district; (2) all students except those enrolling in a school or school district after January 1 of the previous school year; and (3) all students except those receiving limited English proficiency instruction.

implemented, and implementation issues the administrative law judge raised in his report on the profile of learning rule.

Content and Structure of the Profile

Statutory Parameters for the Profile

The statute³ governing the profile of learning requires that it:

- ▶ “measure student performance using performance-based assessments compiled over time that integrate higher academic standards and higher order thinking skills, and [apply] knowledge from a variety of content areas [; and]
- ▶ include a broad range of academic experience and accomplishment necessary to achieve the goal of preparing students to function effectively as purposeful thinkers, effective communicators, self-directed learners, productive group participants, and responsible citizens.”

Profile Composition

The profile of learning is composed of ten broadly defined learning areas:

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| 1. Read, view, and listen | 6. Scientific applications |
| 2. Write and speak | 7. People and cultures |
| 3. Literature and the arts | 8. Decision making |
| 4. Mathematical applications | 9. Resource management |
| 5. Inquiry | 10. World languages (optional for students) |

Divided among the ten learning areas are 56 preparatory content standards (grades K-8) and 48 high school content standards (grades 9-12). The learning areas and the corresponding high school content standards are shown on the chart on pages 6 and 7. Students in grades K-8 are expected to complete preparatory content standards.⁴ Public school students entering the ninth grade in the 1998-1999 school year and later must complete 24 high school content standards in order to graduate. The high school content standards within each learning area are divided into one to four groups, or clusters, as the chart shows. To graduate from high school, students must:

- ▶ complete one content standard within each group or cluster;
- ▶ complete two standards within learning area 6;
- ▶ complete at least 21 of 47 standards in learning areas 1 to 9;
- ▶ complete at least three other content standards as electives; and
- ▶ use computer technology in completing a required content standard in learning areas 2,

³Minn. Stat. § 120B.02 (1998)

⁴ Although no score is required when assessing student performance on preparatory content standards, the Department of Children, Families and Learning anticipates using a numeric score to indicate whether the performances of third and fifth grade students were advanced, proficient, partially proficient, or basic. The purpose of scoring student performance is to provide diagnostic information to state and school district officials.

4, 5, and 6.

Learning area 10, which involves learning a world language, is optional for students. School districts must offer the world language standard.

The graduation requirements for the profile of learning are outlined in the chart on pages 6 and 7.

Students in Kindergarten Through Grade 8 are Expected to Complete Preparatory Standards as They Progress toward High School Content Standards.

Preparatory content standards consist of primary (K-3), intermediate (4-5) and middle level (6-8) content standards that students are expected to complete as they progress toward high school content standards. Like the 48 high school content standards, the 56 preparatory content standards are divided among ten learning areas. The specifications for the preparatory standards appear in [rule parts 3501.0460 to 3501.0469](#).

High School Students must Complete Elective Requirements in Addition to the Distribution Requirements in Order to Graduate.

In addition to completing 21 of 47 content standards divided among learning areas 1 to 9,⁵ students must complete at least three other content standards as electives in order to graduate.⁶ With the exceptions of learning area 3, where students may complete the same content standards in multiple art areas, the world history and cultures standard in learning area 5 and learning area 10, where students may complete the content standard in more than one world language, students are prohibited from using the same content standards to fulfill both their distribution and elective requirements. The specifications for the elective requirements appear in [rule part 3501.0330](#), subpart 4.

Performance Requirements May Be Modified for Students Participating in a Rigorous Course of Study.

A district must waive a content standard for a student who requests it, with a parent's approval, if:

- ▶ the student is participating in a course of study at least as rigorous as that required by the graduation rule;
- ▶ obligating the student to complete the content standard being waived would prevent the student from participating in the rigorous course of study; and
- ▶ the student could not have reasonably completed the content standard earlier.

Districts must make a standard-by-standard determination whether to grant a waiver. Districts

⁵ Learning area 10, world languages, contains one content standard that students may complete as an elective.

⁶ School districts may elect to impose graduation requirements that are in addition to any statewide graduation requirements.

annually must inform the Commissioner of Children, Families and Learning about the waivers they grant and work with the commissioner to reduce the number of waivers. The waiver requirements appear in [rule part 3501.0330](#), subpart 7B.

Performance Requirements May Be Modified For Students with Disabilities.

An Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504 accommodation plan team must consider including all preparatory content standards in the IEP or Section 504 accommodation plan⁷ of K-8 disabled students. A team may modify preparatory content standards or may exempt a disabled student from the standards. Where a modification or exemption applies, the team must identify the modified content standard the student will pursue, or a different standard or goal specific to the learning area that is appropriate for the student's plan.

For disabled students who are 14 years old or entering the ninth grade, the IEP or Section 504 accommodation plan team must consider including all high school content standards in the IEP and transition plan, or the Section 504 accommodation plan. The team must determine whether the student will pursue unmodified or modified required and elective content standards, or whether the student is exempt from required or elective content standards. When the team adopts an exemption, it must decide whether or not to include in the student's plan a different standard or goal specific to the learning area.

The variations for students with IEPs or Section 504 accommodation plans appear in [rule part 3501.0340](#).

Performance Requirements May Be Modified For Students With Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

School districts must establish and maintain procedures to provide LEP students the opportunity to complete preparatory and high school graduation requirements. LEP students are subject to the same graduation requirements as all other students unless a team composed of designated staff, the LEP student's teachers and parents, and the LEP student develop an individual graduation plan that modifies the requirements. A team must annually review an LEP student's individual graduation plan. LEP students may not complete the content standards in learning areas 1 (read, view, and listen in English) and 2 (write and speak in English) in a language other than English.

An LEP student may refuse modified or exempted requirements and may pursue graduation by completing the state's required graduation standards.

The variations for LEP students appear in [rule part 3501.0350](#).

⁷ A student may be eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which provides educational services to some disabled children not covered by IDEA. If a child is eligible for such services, a team that includes appropriately trained personnel and the child's parents, develops a plan based on a comprehensive evaluation of the child, that contains, among other things, educational goals for that child.

Implementation of the Profile

Responsibility for Implementing the Graduation Standards

- ▶ The Department of Children, Families and Learning (DCFL) is the executive branch agency charged with administering the rule. The profile of learning rule the department adopted contains content standards stating what students must know and do.
- ▶ School districts must decide how to deliver instruction to meet students' needs. The content standards outline what students must know and do, but do not establish curricula.
- ▶ Classroom teachers are responsible for curricula and assessing student performance.

State Funding for Implementing the Graduation Standards

To help implement the profile of learning beginning in the 1998-1999 school year, the 1998 Legislature established graduation standards implementation revenue for fiscal year 1999 and later.⁸ The revenue amount for fiscal year 1999 equals \$52 per pupil unit for all school districts, plus an additional \$14 per pupil unit for districts electing to fully implement the profile of learning beginning in the 1998-1999 school year. All Minnesota districts elected to fully implement the profile in this school year even though state law provides two alternatives for phasing in the profile over a three-school year period.⁹

Districts must allocate to each site, on a proportionate basis, at least \$34 per pupil unit for programs that enhance the implementing of the graduation rule, including staff development training and decentralized decision making. Districts must allocate at least \$5 per pupil unit for gifted and talented programs integrated with the graduation rule. Districts must use the remaining \$27 per pupil unit for technology, class size reduction, additional staff development, or other gifted and talented programs related to implementing the graduation rule. About 190 school districts qualify in the 1998-1999 school year for an additional equity adjustment of \$34 per pupil unit that also must be used for these purposes.

Assessing Profile Standards

Beginning in the 1999-2000 school year, schools and school districts must use a test to assess students' performance that is aligned with the profile of learning and can provide comparable statewide data.¹⁰ In November 1997, the DCFL contracted with the American Institutes for

⁸ [Laws 1998, ch. 398](#), art. 1, § 31.

⁹ [Laws 1998, ch. 398](#), art. 5, § 9. The law allows districts alternately to implement the profile of learning according to a prescribed time line or a local plan.

¹⁰ [Minn. Stat. § 121.1113](#) (1998) directs the Commissioner of Children, Families and Learning to develop an assessment process that measures students' performance on the profile of learning beginning in the 1999-2000 school year.

Research to recommend what instruments and procedures the state should use to implement the state's graduation standards. The contractor's report suggested categorizing learning areas 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7 as "core" areas and learning areas 3, 5, 8, 9, and 10 as "other" areas.

The contractor suggested assessing students at various times in grades ten to 12 in the core learning areas — read, view, and listen, write and speak, math applications, scientific applications, and people and cultures — perhaps using commercially available standardized norm referenced tests. Students' performance in the "other" learning areas — arts, inquiry, decision making, resource management, and world languages — might be assessed in grades 11 and 12 on a rotating basis using other performance assessment approaches. By testing students over several years, the department hopes to establish student, school, and school district accountability and minimize the impact of testing on instructional time.

In the 1997-98 school year, school districts began administering the Minnesota comprehensive assessment to third and fifth grade students. These assessments are custom-designed, criterion-referenced tests that are based on profile of learning performance standards at the primary (K-3) and intermediate (4-5) levels. The math and reading tests contain multiple choice and open response items. The writing test requires students to write a composition on a designated topic.

Interim Requirement will Allow Students to Complete Adjusted Performance Packages.¹¹

School districts may adjust the difficulty or complexity of high school performance packages for students who are entering the ninth grade before the 2001-2002 school year. Students whose performance packages are adjusted in difficulty or complexity must complete all content standard activities to receive a passing score. Students who do not complete work on adjusted performance packages do not receive a score and do not satisfy the content standard requirements.

School districts also may adjust the difficulty or complexity of preparatory performance packages for students entering grades six, seven, or eight in the 1998-1999 school year. School districts are prohibited from adjusting the difficulty or complexity of performance packages for students entering kindergarten to grade five in the 1998-1999 school year and thereafter. School districts' decisions to adjust the difficulty or complexity of student performance packages require written approval from the student or the student's parent. The criteria for adjusting performance packages appear in rule part 3501.0360.

Profile Requirements For Scoring and Recording Student Performance.

In assessing student performance, school districts must:

- ▶ assess all student performance of preparatory and high school content standards using a state-developed, locally developed, or an adjusted performance package;

¹¹ The profile of learning rule defines performance packages to mean a locally adopted group of assignments and activities that students must perform in order to complete a content standard. The assignments and activities in each performance package ask students to demonstrate and apply their knowledge and skills.

- ▶ accept students' completed content standards and work from other school districts, post-secondary institutions, and out-of-state schools when verified on the students' transcripts;
- ▶ give students the chance to show that learning they acquired outside the district's curriculum enables them to complete content standards;
- ▶ list the activities students must complete to meet the specifications of a content standard; and
- ▶ score students' work using scoring criteria established in the rule.

School districts must score student work on a four-point scale where "4" means the student's work exceeds state performance standards, "3" means the student's work meets state performance standards, "2" means the student completed the required work but the work does not meet state performance standards, and "1" means the student completed the required work but the work is significantly below state performance standards.¹² For primary level (K-3) packages, outstanding third grade work is the basis for scoring student performance. For intermediate level (4-5) packages, outstanding fifth grade work is the basis for scoring student performance. For middle level (6-8) packages, outstanding eighth grade work is the basis for scoring student performance. For high school level (9-12) packages, outstanding 12th grade work is the basis for scoring student performance.

School districts record a score of "pass" for students who complete adjusted performance packages. Districts record a score of "pass-individual" for students who complete all the specifications of a modified content standard contained in an IEP or Section 504 accommodation plan. Students exempted from a content standard under an IEP or Section 504 accommodation plan are recorded as "exempt." LEP students receive a "pass-LEP" for completing the specifications of a content standard contained in an LEP individual graduation plan or for completing all specifications of a content standard in a language other than English.¹³

The scoring and recording requirements appear in [rule part 3501.0370](#).

Other Profile Requirements

The profile of learning rule also establishes other school district requirements: informing students and their families about students' progress in completing required content standards and the substance of and procedures for meeting or appealing those requirements; developing performance records for K-8 students and transcripts for high school students; periodically recording and reporting school district and student performance in meeting profile of learning requirements; and developing an implementation manual.

Other district requirements appear in [rule parts 3501.0380-3501.0430](#).

¹² A student who does not complete the work required to meet the specifications of a content standard does not receive a score and does not complete the content standard.

¹³ The "pass-LEP" designation does not apply when an LEP student completes work in a language other than English in learning area 10 (world language).

ALJ Rule Report Raised Cost, Assessment, and Record Keeping Issues Related to Implementing the Profile

As part of the formal process to adopt the profile of learning rule, an administrative law judge (ALJ) prepared a report in March 1998 on the need and reasonableness of the proposed rule. In his report, the ALJ found the proposed rule to be needed and reasonable and recommended that it be adopted with two changes, which the board made. Also in his report, the ALJ discussed a number of issues related to implementing the profile of learning that may be of importance to the legislature and DCFL, including the following.

Compliance costs. According to the ALJ report, the Augenblick and Myers 1997 cost impact study estimated that school districts would incur an additional \$76.1 million during the 1998-99 school year and \$72.3 million during the 1999-2000 school year for implementing the rule. Although the legislature appropriated \$66 per pupil unit, or more, in fiscal year 1999 to districts to fully implement the profile of learning during the 1998-99 school year, local funding resources may be insufficient to meet additional demands, and DCFL staff resources may be insufficient to permit the department to adequately assist the districts.

Student transfers; transferring credit for a partially completed content standard. The ALJ report notes that school districts must analyze the Carnegie-unit course grades on the transcripts of students transferring into a district from non-profile schools and determine what content standards the transfer students have met. The requirement that each district make its own determination may result in adjacent districts treating the same course work in different ways. Districts may benefit from having available a single methodology to assess what transfer students have accomplished. An alternative may be to require transfer students to complete a number of content standards commensurate with the number of years the transfer students are enrolled in districts in which students are assessed under the profile; transcripts would indicate that the transfer student completed fewer content standards.

According to the report, the rule also does not address how students may transfer between schools or districts the credit for partially completing a content standard. Transfer students may be obliged to take courses or to demonstrate their competency outside their planned course work if a needed content standard is available only in an introductory course.

Transition period. The ALJ report suggests that a transition period may help ameliorate the disruption that comes from introducing new teaching standards into the educational process. Many of the state's teachers have not been formally trained in implementing the profile of learning. The department needed additional time to complete many exemplars and rubrics required to implement the rule. Some districts and teachers have had difficulty embedding the rigorous content standards in their curricula.¹⁴ Limited resources sometimes have prevented the department from adequately responding to districts' requests for assistance. Giving districts much of the responsibility for applying the rule leaves uncertain what impact failing to complete a standard will have on students' ability to graduate or achieve academic goals.

¹⁴ As a condition of receiving state funding to implement the profile, all school districts filed implementation plans with the department that described, among other things, how to the districts intended to place the rigorous content standards within the curricula.

Fewer required content standards. The ALJ report suggests that 21 required content standards may create more breadth than depth in students' education and make it difficult to accommodate individual students' needs, abilities, and interest. Many who commented on the rule suggested that the board adopt 18 required content standards and six elective content standards, although none suggested which requirements should be dropped. In supporting its 21-and-three distribution of content standards, the board expects districts to "bundle" two or more content standards, allowing students to satisfy multiple standards requirements in a single course. Districts and teachers must have sufficient practical experience on a widespread basis to successfully embed multiple standards in single courses and record students' achievement in those standards. The one-course, one-standard approach some districts currently use may have the unintended consequence of increasing students' graduation requirements. One suggested alternative was to phase in the overall number of standards from 18 to 24 over a three-year period.

Uniform record keeping system. The ALJ report notes that districts must use a checklist and scoring criteria to "establish processes" for assessing students' efforts in completing content standards, including the efforts of those students who transfer into the district from another district, or complete standards in post-secondary institutions or through outside experience. The need to evaluate the curricula of other schools, districts, or states to determine whether a content standard is present increases districts' record keeping burden beyond merely equating Carnegie-system unit credits from other districts or states.

Students must demonstrate individual skills that teachers must record in a readily understood format so that other teachers who also assess the students can use that same format. The record keeping burden increases when students take a combination of courses to complete a single standard. Districts' different patterns of embedding standards in classes and writing local performance packages to assess the standards further complicate the record keeping problem. Many districts do not understand the expectations for record keeping and reporting students' results.

Scoring criteria. The ALJ report suggests that having the commissioner use the outstanding work of third graders at the primary level, fifth graders at the intermediate level, eighth graders at the middle level, and 12th graders at the high school level to set exemplars may be developmentally inappropriate for students in earlier grades. For example, measuring ninth grade work against excellent 12th grade work may result in low scores that will be difficult to explain to students and parents. Those who commented asked whether the board should use outstanding work from other grade levels as exemplars since students are capable of performing excellent work at all levels.¹⁵

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¹⁵ As school districts gain experience in placing content standards within the curricula, they may revise their scoring criteria to better accommodate students' outstanding work at all levels.