INFORMATION BRIEF
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State High School Graduation and College Preparation Requirements Compared

This information brief summarizes the state's new high school graduation rule and compares the requirements in that rule to the preparation requirements for Minnesota's four-year colleges and universities.

For more information on Minnesota's high school graduation rule, see the House Research information brief "Profile of Learning and the State High School Graduation Rule."

Minnesota's Previous High School Graduation Rule

Until the 1996-1997 school year, Minnesota's high school graduation rule required public school students to complete a total of nine credits in core academic areas: four English credits, one math credit, one science credit, and three social studies credits. School districts could require additional course work for graduation; those having sufficient financial resources and college-bound students often exceeded the state's minimum curricular requirements.

Critics of the credit-based rule argued that the graduation requirements:

- were too few in number and overly general;
- could be satisfied with various levels of the same course, including remedial, basic, general, and academic levels; and
- gave the same label to different content, despite the influence of curriculum guides and standardized subject matter tests.

They believed that students' mastery of particular subjects varied widely, in part because of differences in schools' curricular content and revenue disparities among school districts. They also thought that defining graduation requirements in terms of courses and credits based on time prevented schools from focusing on educational goals or preparing students to function in a competitive and complex society.

Minnesota's Current High School Graduation Rule

In 1992, the Minnesota Legislature committed itself to establishing a new high school graduation rule for the state's public school students by directing the State Board of Education (the board) to adopt in rule two types of graduation requirements: the basic standards tests and the profile of learning.

Required Basic Standards and ACT Tests

The reading and math basic standards tests became effective for students entering the ninth grade in the 1996-1997 school year and later. The written composition basic standards test became effective for students entering the tenth grade in the 1997-1998 school year and later. The state requires public school students to receive a passing score of 75 percent on the reading and math basic standards tests and three points out of a possible four points on the written composition basic standards test in order to graduate from high school. 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.

A passing test score on the basic standards tests is based on a statewide reading, math, or writing standard, requiring skills that most students should be able to master:

- the math test requires students to understand math through pre-algebra
- the reading test requires 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 in writing with short answers to two statements or requests for information

Students first take the reading and math basic standards tests in eighth grade and the written composition basic standards test in tenth grade. 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.

Districts must prepare a "learning opportunity and remediation plan" for each tenth grade student who has not passed the reading or math basic standards test. Students have multiple opportunities to pass the basic standards tests. The graduation rule allows school districts to exempt from test taking only those few students with disabilities or limited English proficiency for whom reasonable accommodations are required. Districts must note the altered level of performance on the students' records.

Minnesota’s four-year colleges and universities require students to take the ACT exam for admission. The ACT exam tests students in math through trigonometry, science reasoning, English, and reading. While some campuses set a minimum score for admission, most combine

the ACT score with a student's high school class rank. Students with a below average ACT score or class rank may still be admitted if they perform well on the other measure. The following table summarizes the K-12 basic standards and college testing requirements.

Basic Standards Tests* for High School Graduation		**Entrance Test Requirement U of M; State Universities; MN Private Colleges**
Reading	Students must read at a degree of difficulty equal to popular adult nonfiction.	ACT test is in four areas: math through trigonometry, English, science reasoning, and reading.
Math	Students must understand math through pre-algebra.	
Written Composition	Students must respond to an adult reader by writing a composition in response to a request for information.	

*Students must pass the basic standards tests in order to graduate from high school. A passing score of 75 percent on the reading and math tests and three out of a possible four points on the written composition test do not ensure that students are able to meet college preparation requirements.

Required Curriculum

In addition to the basic standards tests, the legislature directed the board to adopt the profile of learning as the second part of the state's high school graduation rule. The profile of learning contains high academic standards requiring students to expand their knowledge and skills beyond the state's basic competencies in reading, math, and writing. Beginning with the 1998-1999 school year, ninth grade students entering Minnesota's public high schools also must complete 24 content standards in order to graduate from high school.

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

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

Divided among the ten learning areas are 56 preparatory content standards for grades K-8 and 48 high school content standards for grades nine to 12. Students in grades nine to 12 must complete 21 of 47 content standards in learning areas 1 to 9, and at least three additional content standards as electives; learning area 10, world languages, is an elective.[1] Students must use computer

[1] The board has discussed the possibility of changing the status of world languages within the profile from an elective to a requirement. However, the state cannot ensure that all Minnesota school districts, which intend to fully implement the higher educational standards of the profile beginning in the 1998-1999 school year, have the capacity to offer world languages. Related questions also remain: should a world language requirement apply to elementary, middle, or high school students; and what impact will a world language requirement have on English as a second

technology in completing at least one required content standard in learning areas 2, 4, 5, and 6. Students may complete a content standard more than once in order to improve their score for that standard.

Districts may modify the performance requirements for students with disabilities and limited English proficiency. The state and districts use the performance scores of K-8 students on the preparatory content standards, measured as advanced, proficient, partially proficient, or basic, as diagnostic tools.

Minnesota's public and private four-year campuses require certain curricula as preparation for admission. While most private colleges have long had preparation requirements, the University of Minnesota, followed by the state universities, mandated these requirements beginning in the early 1990s. All campuses expect similar student preparation, emphasizing a strong core curriculum in English, math, sciences, and social studies. Students who do not complete these requirements may still be admitted, but must make up the coursework in college.

The table[2] on page five compares high school graduation standards that include the profile of learning and the college preparation requirements for four-year public and private colleges in Minnesota. As the table shows, the relationship between high school and college requirements is not entirely clear and may need more coordination to ensure that students meet the requirements of both systems. To address this issue, a number of school districts incorporate required content standards into existing credit-based courses.

language (ESL) programs?

[2] Community and technical colleges are excluded from the table because they are open admission institutions and do not require specific academic preparation.

Profile of Learning (Grades 9-12)			Preparation Requirements U of M; State Universities; MN Private Colleges
1. Read, View, and Listen in English	▸ Reading, listening, & viewing complex information	▸ Technical reading, listening, & viewing	Four years emphasizing writing and including reading, speaking, literary understanding/appreciation Recommended two to three years visual/performing arts; computer literacy/skills
2. Write and Speak in English	▸ Academic writing ▸ Technical writing	▸ Public speaking ▸ Interpersonal communication	
3. Literature and the Arts	▸ Literary & arts creation & performance	▸ Literature & arts analysis & interpretation	
4. Mathematical Applications	▸ Discrete mathematics ▸ Chance & data analysis ▸ Shape, space, & measurement	▸ Algebraic patterns ▸ Technical applications	Three years including one year each of algebra, geometry and higher algebra
5. Inquiry	▸ Math research ▸ Research process ▸ History of science ▸ History through culture ▸ History of the arts ▸ World history & cultures ▸ Recorders of history ▸ Issue analysis	▸ Social science processes ▸ Research & create a business plan ▸ Market research ▸ Case study ▸ New product development	
6. Scientific Applications	▸ Concepts in biology ▸ Concepts in chemistry ▸ Earth & space systems	▸ Concepts in physics ▸ Environmental systems	Three years including one each of physical science and biological science and one additional lab science
7. People and Cultures	▸ Themes of U.S. history ▸ U.S. citizenship ▸ Diverse perspectives	▸ Human geography ▸ Institutions & traditions in society ▸ Community interaction	Two to three years including U.S. history and, for the state universities, geography
8. Decision Making	▸ Individual & community health ▸ Career investigation	▸ Physical education & fitness ▸ Occupational experience	
9. Resource Management	▸ Economic systems ▸ Natural & managed systems ▸ Personal & family resource management	▸ Business management ▸ Financial systems ▸ Technical systems	
10. World Languages	▸ World languages (optional for students)		Two years in a single language