

Overview

Students must satisfy state and local academic standards and complete a minimum number of credits to graduate from a public high school.¹ Students are eligible to attend public school until they meet graduation requirements or reach the maximum age.

State Requirements

Academic Standards

Students enrolled in Minnesota public schools must show that they understand state academic standards in certain academic areas. An academic standard is a summary description of student learning in a content area. The academic areas with required state standards are:

- language arts;
- math;
- science;
- social studies, including history, geography, economics, and government and citizenship that includes civics; and
- physical education.

Students must also satisfy health and arts² standards but these are determined locally.

Each standard has benchmarks, specific knowledge or skills that a student must master to complete part of an academic standard by the end of the grade level or grade band. Each district or school develops or selects curriculum and instruction that allow students to meet the required standards.

The standards are reviewed and revised on a ten-year cycle and adopted in administrative rule by the commissioner of education. [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.021](#), provides the schedule and process for reviewing and revising the standards.³ The rules codifying the standards are in [Minnesota Rules, chapter 3501](#).

¹ “Public school” or “school” as used in this publication means school districts and charter schools. This publication does not address nonpublic schools.

² Art includes media arts, dance, music, theater, and visual arts.

³ Information about the standards and benchmarks, the status of the review and revision process, and opportunities for public comment are available on the department website at: <https://education.mn.gov/mde/dse/stds/>.

Credits

A credit is a school district determination that a student has successfully completed an academic year of study or mastered the applicable subject matter. Students must complete at least the following 21.5 credits to graduate from high school:

- 4 language arts credits
- 3 math credits, including an algebra II credit or its equivalent, and an algebra I credit by the end of 8th grade that satisfies the 8th grade math standards
- 3 science credits, including at least one credit of biology, one credit of chemistry or physics, and one elective credit of science, which may be fulfilled by an agriculture science or career and technical education credit that meets state academic standards
- 3.5 credits of social studies, including at least U.S. history, geography, government and citizenship, world history, and economics
- 1 art credit
- at least 7 elective credits

These credit requirements are codified in [Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.024](#), subdivision 1. The statute also provides alternatives for meeting the credit requirements, such as using a career and technical education credit to satisfy a math or arts credit requirement.

Assessments

Students must take the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments, standards-based state tests in reading, math, and science.⁴ Students may opt out of the tests if their parents submit the required forms. State law requires students to correctly answer 30 of 50 civics test questions drawn from the U.S. naturalization exam, though students can still graduate and receive their diplomas if they fail to do so.

Plan for Transition to Postsecondary Education and Employment

Starting no later than 9th grade, districts and schools annually must help students and their families prepare for postsecondary education or employment by developing an individualized plan that includes completing graduation requirements, exploring interests and careers, and setting appropriate goals.

Maximum Age

Students may attend public school for free until age 21. Once a student turns 21, the student remains eligible for free public school enrollment until one of the following: (1) the first September 1 after the student turns 21; (2) the student completes graduation requirements;

⁴ For more information on assessments, see [Minnesota Student Assessments](#), July 2022.

(3) the student withdraws from school and does not reenroll within 21 calendar days; or (4) the school year ends.

Additional programming is available for students who receive special education services and students identified as English learners with a limited interrupted formal education (SLIFE). Students who receive special education services may participate in transitions programming from ages 18 to 21 even if they have met graduation requirements. Transitions programs help students with disabilities transition from school to adult life; programs may include independent living skills, job training, and other supports for students, as determined by the student's individualized education program. Local policy determines whether students in these programs may participate in graduation ceremonies with their cohort even though they are not graduating. Students who qualify as SLIFE and who are 21 years old but not yet 22, may enroll in early/middle college programs which allow students to earn dual high school and developmental college credit for courses that prepare students for college-level work.

Local Requirements

Local requirements generally exceed state requirements. The local requirements may include additional standards and credits, including specific courses.

Academic Standards

Students must understand the local standards in health and the arts; a district may adopt the state arts standards instead of developing its own. Schools must also develop local career and technical education, and world language standards but these are not a state requirement for graduation.

Schools must develop a process for a student participating in a rigorous course of study to seek a waiver from a required state or local standard. The school may waive the standard if: (1) the student is participating in a program or course of study that is at least as rigorous as the corresponding required state or local academic standard; (2) requiring the student to achieve the standard would preclude the student from participating in the rigorous course of study; and (3) the student satisfactorily completes the requirements for the rigorous course of study, learning opportunity, or education program. For example, a student enrolled in Advanced Placement American Government may receive a waiver from the government and citizenship state standards.

Credits

Local minimum credit requirements generally exceed the state minimum; districts and charter schools require more credits and may require specific credits such as world languages, personal finance, or ethnic studies. Some districts and charter schools also require students to complete a minimum number of hours of community service or specific projects, such as a thesis.

Graduation Rates

The Department of Education reports four-, five-, six-, and seven-year graduation rates. The four- and seven-year rates are used to identify districts and schools for support in accordance with state and federal laws. The department calculates the rates based on when students begin 9th grade. For example, the cohort that began 9th grade in the 2018-2019 school year would have a four-year graduation rate based on the percentage of students in the cohort that graduated in the 2021-2022 school year; the seven-year rate would be based on graduation in the 2024-2025 school year and would include students in the cohort who graduated in the previous years.

The department reports graduation rates, including rates by student group, at the state, county, district, and school level. Student groups are based on racial and ethnic categories, income, English learner status, and disability status.⁵ Under ESSA, every three years, the department identifies for comprehensive support and improvement any high school where the adjusted average four-year graduation rate is below 67 percent or where the rate is below 67 percent for any student group required under Minnesota's ESSA plan. The adjusted average is calculated by averaging student group rates, with each group awarded equal weight. Minnesota's ESSA plan requires graduation rates to be reported based on race and ethnicity, income, English learner status, and special education status.



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⁵ The racial and ethnic categories are American Indian, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, two or more races, and white. The income category is based on a student's eligibility for free or reduced-price meals.