

Overview of Colorado's High School Graduation Guidelines

Colorado is implementing focused, strategic improvements in education to ensure that all students are prepared for success in a globally competitive workforce. Students earning a high school diploma need to be prepared for the expectations facing them the day after graduation: proceeding to college-level classes, entering military career training or earning a self-supporting salary without need for retraining or remediation.

Background on the Graduation Guidelines

House Bill 07-1118 was passed into law in 2007 requiring the development of statewide high school graduation guidelines that local school boards must meet or exceed. In response, the Graduation Guidelines Council was formed to develop recommendations for the state board to consider. While the council presented initial recommendations to the state board in 2008, the timeline for adoption of new guidelines was extended to May 2013 after the passage of Senate Bill 08-212. This extension allowed time for the revised academic standards to be developed.

In June 2012, a reconstituted Graduation Guidelines Council began meeting to build on the recommendations of the original council. Members were comprised of school administrators, higher education, workforce, parents, and community members. The council's final recommendations were informed by more than 40 statewide meetings, data from other states and relevant research.

In May 2013 the Colorado State Board of Education voted unanimously to adopt the graduation guidelines proposed by the council. In doing so, the board emphasized that the guidelines are a starting point for continued discussion and refinement as the state works toward full implementation of the guidelines in 2021.

Purpose of the Graduation Guidelines

Colorado's high school graduation guidelines have two purposes:

1. To articulate Colorado's shared beliefs about the value and meaning of a high school diploma

Implementation Timeline

2013-14

Districts are encouraged to review the state board approved graduation guidelines and consider adopting local graduation requirements that meet or exceed them.

2014-15

During the 2014-15 academic year, districts will enter the first phase of Graduation Guidelines implementation, which includes utilization of Colorado's Academic Standards, demonstrations of 21st Century Skills, and incorporation of ICAP as a college and career planning tool.

2015-16

Adoption of graduation requirements by each school district's board of education. Local policies must indicate the minimum academic competencies needed for students to demonstrate postsecondary and workforce readiness and the types of measures the district uses to determine attainment.

- For the entering 7th graders in 2015, districts must meet or exceed the state's minimum College and Career Ready Determinations.

2013- 2016

State board will refine the guidelines based on:

- Launch of new assessments
- Refinement of district capstone project concept
- Finalized requirements for college entrance from the Colorado Department of Higher Education
- Determination of qualifying industry certificates
- Availability of other standardized competency measures

CDE will continue to engage districts and key stakeholders in the iterations of the guidelines.

2. To outline the minimum components, expectations and responsibilities of local districts and the state to support students in attaining their high school diploma

State law outlines several considerations the state board took into account when adopting the graduation guidelines, including:

- Alignment with the description of postsecondary and workforce readiness
- Alignment with the postsecondary academic admission standards for public four-year colleges and universities
- Recognition of multiple and diverse pathways to a diploma
- Articulation through a standards-based education system
- Attainment of skills necessary to succeed in the 21st century
- Importance of academic and career planning

The guidelines also include minimum competency levels in math, English, science and social studies for entrance to workforce, armed forces and postsecondary education.

Local Board of Education Responsibilities

Each local board of education has the authority to establish its own high school graduation requirements, to meet or exceed the minimum expectations outlined in the graduation guidelines adopted by the state board.

The graduation guidelines include responsibilities for school boards when developing their local high school graduation policies:

- Must state the minimum academic competencies needed for students to demonstrate postsecondary and workforce readiness and the types of measurements used
- Must include student demonstrations of 21st century skills in addition to the attainment of the minimum academic competencies
- Must include successful completion of the Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP)
- Must allow students multiple, equally rigorous and valued ways to demonstrate competency of the knowledge and skills necessary for postsecondary education and meaningful careers
- May permit students longer or shorter time to earn their diploma
- Must align with the postsecondary and workforce readiness definition adopted in 2009
- Must align with the Colorado Academic Standards, Colorado English Language Proficiency Standards and the Colorado Career and Technical education standards
- Should recognize and acknowledge the importance of education in world languages, comprehensive health, physical education, music, dance, performing arts, visual arts, and career and technical education in strengthening student learning in other subjects and in supporting students' ability to succeed in the 21st century
- Beginning no later than the 6th grade, districts must provide information to students and their families about the requirements for high school graduation and successful entry into college and careers

Where can I learn more?

High School Graduation Guidelines: www.cde.state.co.us/postsecondary