

Chapter 31 Wyoming Graduation Requirements

STATEMENT OF REASONS

2015 SEA No. 87 (2015 Session Laws, Chapter 179) eliminated the tiered diploma system, which required providing one of three endorsement levels on a student's high school transcript. The removal of the tiered diploma system required the State Board of Education to revise the Chapter 31 graduation requirements rules. The revisions to Chapter 31 are intended to set minimum requirements for graduation from any public high school within any school district of this state, identify the required components of each district's assessment system to measure student proficiency on courses taken for the attainment of a high school diploma, and establish a consultation process between the State Board of Education (SBE) and local school districts regarding the creation of local high school diploma requirements.

The primary substance of these rules is contained in three sections: Section 4. High School Diploma Requirements; Section 5. District Assessment System; and, Section 6. Consultation with Local School Districts.

Section 4. High School Diploma Requirements

The proposed revisions establish the minimum requirements for any student to receive a high school diploma from any Wyoming school district. The minimum requirements are to be incorporated within each district's high school diploma policy and include the following components: (1) minimum coursework in the content areas of math, English/language arts, science, and social studies; (2) a passing grade on an exam of the principles of the constitution of the United States and Wyoming; and, (3) evidence of proficient performance, as measured by the district's assessment system, in the courses students take to obtain a high school diploma. Section 4 also requires each school district to establish and implement policies for their local high school diploma requirements.

(a)(i) Coursework

The proposed rules contain three notable differences from previous versions. The first is the inclusion of computer science as an avenue for meeting the science graduation requirement. The second is the allowance of high school-level courses taken before grade nine (9) to count toward coursework required for graduation. The third is the allowance of "functional equivalents" to count toward coursework required for graduation. Examples of functional equivalents include (a) courses that offer the same content under a different course name (i.e. a local course called "Awesome Math" includes the same content as Algebra I), (b) courses that are more rigorous than a specific graduation requirement (i.e. "Pre-Calculus" relies on concepts from Algebra I, therefore it is a functional equivalent of Algebra I), or (c) courses that are aligned to specific standards in other content areas (i.e. a district's "Food Science" course might be aligned to 80% of the standards identified in Chemistry, so it is a functional equivalent of Chemistry). The third option described for functional equivalents does not take teacher certification requirements into account.

(a)(iii) Evidence of Proficient Performance

The minimum requirements for a student to earn a high school diploma include successful completion of the coursework prescribed by the SBE and local school districts. Chapter 31 directs each district to create a diploma policy that requires students to demonstrate *proficient* performance on the state standards in order to receive credit toward the attainment of a high school diploma. Determination of proficient performance is aligned to the parameters (i.e. benchmarks and performance level descriptors) set forth in the Chapter 10 Education Rules, “Wyoming Content and Performance Standards” (state standards). Benchmarks (what students should know) and performance level descriptors (how well they should know it) are described for each of the content areas. Together, the benchmarks and performance level descriptors (PLDs) provide a framework that supports a progression of learning from the time students enter Wyoming public schools until they complete high school and earn a diploma. The content and structure of the state standards in Chapter 10 Education Rules ensure equity of graduation requirements among all Wyoming high schools.

(b)(i) District Policy for Course Credit

Districts set their own policies for credit-awarding decisions. They have the autonomy to determine when and how to award credits, including credits for repeat courses, out-of-district transfer courses, college-level courses, and so on. The same autonomy is applied to competency-based equivalency exams described in (b)(ii).

Section 5. District Assessment System

In order to ensure an educational program is in compliance with W.S. 21-3-110(a)(xv), Chapter 31 directs each school district to design and implement an assessment system that is aligned to the state standards in all content areas. Additionally, a district’s assessment system must be applied uniformly across the grades and content areas. For high school, W.S. 21-2-304(a)(iii) directs school districts to identify and provide courses that are required to earn a diploma, to develop and implement a local assessment system to measure student learning in those courses, and to establish minimum thresholds for student performance as evidence that the standards have been met. As previously described, benchmarks and PLDs are the markers districts use to determine whether proficiency in the content areas has been met.

It is important to note that the law requires districts to design their assessment systems so that student-level performance can be determined in all *content areas* [W.S. 21-3-110(a)(xxiv)]. Content areas must be aligned to the state standards, but there is no statutory language directing districts to assess a student in every single grade level. In other words, a district may choose to assess students at specific points throughout their educational experience. For example, the current standards for English/language arts include the following benchmark in kindergarten reading: “[Students can] read common high-frequency words by sight (e.g., the, of, to, you, she, my, is, are, do, does).” The same content standard (reading) in third grade describes “[knowing and applying] grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words [to include] decoding multi-syllable words” as an appropriate benchmark. In this example, a district may choose to assess this particular reading standard (phonics and word recognition) once, twice, or any number of times between kindergarten and third grade to measure student learning relative to the standard. It is also important to note that an *assessment system* is comprised of more than just tests or exams. In Chapter 31, “assessment” is defined as a process that includes gathering and

analyzing evidence of what students know and are able to do. Evidence may come in the form of homework assignments, informal observations, hands-on projects, classroom speeches or demonstrations, essays, and so on. It is in this context that a district's assessment system is reviewed by the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) at least once every five years to ensure that the district has a systematic way to assess and evaluate how student is doing relative to the standards in a given content area.

In addition to the five-year on-site review, any district with schools that are "partially meeting expectations" or "not meeting expectations" under the Wyoming Accountability in Education Act (WAEA) may have its assessment system reviewed more often. In all cases, any deficiencies identified in a district's assessment system will be reported to the SBE and the district's accreditation status may be lowered as a result pursuant to the Chapter 6 Education Rules, "Accreditation".

Section 6. Consultation with Local School Districts

Section 6 establishes the requirement for the SBE to consult with local school districts as they develop and implement the new requirements of these revised rules. The SBE recognizes the November 1 statutory reporting requirement to provide evidence that the district is compliant with high school graduation standards (W.S. 21-3-110 (a)(xxv)). The requirement within these rules for the SBE to offer feedback takes into consideration the timing of the rules promulgation process and provides a reasonable timeframe for implementation.