

**Colorado State Board of Education  
High School Graduation Guidelines  
DRAFT for Discussion  
April 10, 2013**

---

**Purpose of Setting Colorado High School Graduation Guidelines**

The purpose of these high school graduation guidelines is twofold: 1) to articulate Colorado’s shared beliefs about the value and meaning of a high school diploma; and 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 statute (section 22-2-106) requires the State Board of Education to adopt by May 2013 a comprehensive set of guidelines used by each school district board of education in establishing local high school graduation requirements. Local school boards may use their own locally developed high school graduation requirements so long as they “meet or exceed” any minimum standards or core competencies/skills adopted by the State Board. The law outlines several considerations that the State Board must take into account when adopting a set of guidelines, including:

- alignment with the description of postsecondary and workforce readiness;
- alignment with the postsecondary academic admission standards for public four-year institutions;
- recognition of multiple and diverse pathways to a diploma;
- articulation through a standards-based education system;
- attainment of skills necessary to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; and
- importance of academic and career planning.

In addition, the guidelines articulate minimum competency levels in math, English, science, and social studies for entrance to workforce, armed forces, and postsecondary education.

What once was a common belief in tiered performance expectations based on post-high school interests, has become, in a modern information dependent society, a new and higher belief in the need for a “floor” of competency regardless of future work interests.

---

## Guiding Beliefs of Colorado's High School Graduation Guidelines

- To be meaningful, a high school diploma should guarantee that students are: 1) prepared to enter credit-bearing courses in postsecondary education institutions; 2) prepared academically to enter military service; and 3) prepared to be productive entry-level employees in the workforce.
  - The Colorado high school diploma should signal proof of competency of the K-12 academic standards, rather than merely completion of seat-time requirements.
  - Postsecondary and workforce readiness requires content knowledge, the ability to apply content and skills in a problem solving context and long-term planning.
  - All students deserve the opportunity to engage in rigorous high school programs of study designed to prepare them for entry into postsecondary education, the military, and the workforce.
  - Students and their families should know as early as elementary school the requirements for successful high school graduation. They should know how their decisions regarding coursework impact their future education opportunities and career goals.
  - In preparing students for successful graduation, learning is the constant. Time is the variable. Students should be allowed to engage in and take the time needed to master rigorous content. Some students may need more time; others less.
  - Expectations should remain high for all students, regardless of their post high school plans. Colorado has clearly articulated an expectation that all students graduate ready for postsecondary AND the workforce. Students not going to college face equally challenging skill and knowledge requirements for successful entry into the workforce. All students should be prepared at high levels to thrive as engaged and productive citizens in a dynamic global economy.
  - Students and their families are full and equal partners in meeting these diploma expectations. Students have the responsibility to understand how rigorous coursework and experiences in which they participate prepare them for entrance to college, the armed forces and the workforce. The depth of a student's learning in elementary, middle and high school has a direct relationship to higher quality opportunities and income later.
-

## Colorado High School Graduation Guidelines

Colorado’s high school diploma is to be parallel with current entrance requirements for postsecondary education, military, and the workforce. Evidence that a student is ready for entrance signals eligibility for credit bearing college courses, proven academic workforce skills, and academic qualifications preferred for leadership in the armed forces. The following define local school board and Colorado State Board of Education responsibilities which clarify these high school graduation expectations.

### Local Board Of Education Responsibilities

Each local school district’s board of education retains the authority to develop its own high school graduation requirements, so long as those local high school graduation requirements meet or exceed any minimum standards or basic core competencies or skills identified by the Colorado State Board of Education based on skills students will need to be successful after graduation.

1. Local district high school graduation policies must state the minimum academic competencies needed for students to demonstrate postsecondary and workforce readiness and the types of measures that the district is using to determine such attainment. For the entering 9<sup>th</sup> graders in 2014 districts may use the state’s Minimum College and Career Ready Determinations as guideposts in setting those competencies. For the entering sixth graders of 2014, districts must meet or exceed the state’s Minimum College and Career Ready Determinations for their graduation as outlined below.

<b>DRAFT Minimum Colorado College and Career Ready Determination for 2012-13</b>				
<b>(Numbers in this chart are being validated)</b>				
Based on the state’s current assessments, higher education’s current remediation policies, and military entrance requirements, the state’s current minimum College and Career Ready Determinations for English, math, science and social studies are as follows:				
	<b>English</b>	<b>Math</b>	<b>Science</b>	<b>Social Studies</b>
TCAP	663	627	507	TBD
ACT *	18	19	XX	X
SAT *	430	460	XX	History TBD
AP	3 or higher	3 or higher	3 or higher	3 or higher
IB	3 or higher	3 or higher	3 or higher	3 or higher
Highest qualifying college remedial course	C-	C-	C-	C-
Non- remedial credit bearing, college course	C-	C-	C-	C-
ASVAB (military)	50	50	50	X
<b>Interdisciplinary proofs for Math/Science/English/Social Studies</b>				
Select, earned Industry Certificate	Awarded			
*Recognized for entrance into postsecondary institutions.				

- Any ONE of these, in each subject area, may be used as evidence of readiness.
- In 2014-15, the state will clarify readiness determinations for science and social studies in collaboration with the Colorado Department of Higher Education.
- Note that the ACT, SAT, AP, IB, and college credit determinations benchmark the current (Spring 2013) thresholds for “no need for remediation” set by the Colorado Higher Education Admission Requirement policy. They are under review by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education and may be revised later this year.

In 2015-16, these will be updated to include the Partnership for the Assessment of College and Career Ready (PARCC) assessments which will be the state’s assessments in English Language Arts and mathematics.

- While no single assessment above fully measures the new academic K-12 standards, the determinations begin the transition to a competency based, not seat time system.
- Local districts have the authority to adapt these determination levels, as appropriate, to accommodate for the unique needs of students with disabilities.

2. Local district high school graduation requirements must include student demonstrations of 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills in addition to the attainment of the minimum academic competencies. These skills are embedded in the Colorado Academic Standards. As a result, students’ successful completion of coursework and/or other learning experiences aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards may provide one method for students to demonstrate 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills. Student engagement in and completion of extracurricular activities, service learning experiences, capstone projects, and other student demonstrations are alternatives to this. Examples of these learning experiences beyond the classroom can be found at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/secondaryinitiatives/GraduationCriteria.htm>.
3. Local district high school graduation requirements must include successful completion of the Individual Career and Academic Plan, known as the ICAP. Required by state statute for every ninth through twelfth grade student, the ICAP is designed to assist a student and his or her parent or legal guardian in exploring the postsecondary career and educational opportunities available to the student, aligning course work and curriculum, applying to postsecondary education institutions, securing financial aid, and ultimately entering the workforce. ICAP attributes can be found at [http://www.cde.state.co.us/secondaryinitiatives/downloads/ICAP/ICAPitemsmatrix2011\(final\).pdf](http://www.cde.state.co.us/secondaryinitiatives/downloads/ICAP/ICAPitemsmatrix2011(final).pdf).
4. Local district high school graduation policies must allow students multiple, equally rigorous and valued ways to demonstrate competency of the knowledge and skills necessary for postsecondary education and meaningful careers.

5. Time is a variable. While not required, local districts may permit students longer or shorter time to earn their diploma.
6. Local school district high school graduation requirements must align with the postsecondary and workforce readiness definition and description adopted by the State Board of Education and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education in 2009. This description is at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdegen/downloads/PWRdescription.pdf>.
7. Local school district high school graduation requirements must align with the Colorado Academic Standards and the Colorado Career and Technical education standards. The standards can found at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/StandardsAndInstruction/ColoradoStandards.asp> and at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/contentareas/CareerandTechnicalEd.asp>.
8. Beginning no later than the sixth grade, districts must provide information to students and their families about the requirements for high school graduation and successful entry into college and careers. It is recommended that districts also share with each student their academic readiness for graduation beginning in elementary school. Such information might take the form of current grade level proficiency in math and reading, attendance rate and forms of a student's active participation in their own learning.

### **State Board Of Education Responsibilities**

The State Board of Education is responsible for establishing the definition of a meaningful high school diploma as guidance to local districts. These guidelines indicate the terms for the diplomas which determine college and career readiness signaling students ready for credit-bearing college courses, proven academic workforce skills or academic qualifications preferred for leadership in the armed forces.

1. The State Board of Education will establish minimum academic competency levels in English language arts (reading, writing, and communicating), mathematics, social studies, and science, known as the Colorado College and Career Ready Determinations. These determinations will include multiple measures of academic competency benchmarked where possible with the competency levels required for entry into credit-bearing courses at Colorado postsecondary institutions.
2. The Colorado State Board of Education and Colorado Department of Education will annually provide indicators of college and career readiness in order to help parents, schools, districts and local board members prepare students for life after high school. The data will also help school boards and district/school leaders refine and enhance their graduation requirements and policies to better assure and support students' college and career readiness. Such locally-specific and disaggregated data should include, but not be limited to:
  - a. Number of students reaching Colorado College and Career Ready Determination levels
  - b. Student proficiency rates on elementary, middle and high school state summative assessments
  - c. ACT scores trends
  - d. Trends for college readiness assessments
  - e. Concurrent enrollment
  - f. Advanced placement enrollment rate

- g. Graduation rates and dropout rates
  - h. College remediation rates
  - i. Later Colorado college-going degree completion rates
  - j. Number of students scoring above 50 on ASVAB assessments (officer training eligibility)
  - k. Applicable workforce data, as available
3. The State Board of Education will examine ways to augment the state's accountability system to include more measures that signal that students are graduating postsecondary and workforce ready. Bonus accountability points to schools and districts reaching specified readiness thresholds might include:
    - Increases in the number of students earning a 3 or higher on the Advanced Placement and/or International Baccalaureate exams
    - Increases in the number of students successfully participating in concurrent enrollment courses and college credit courses
    - Increases in the number of student earning career and technical education certificates
    - Increases in the number of students earning endorsed diplomas
    - Decreases in the number of students requiring remediation in college
    - Increases in the number of students scoring above 50 on ASVAB assessments (officer training eligibility)
    - Decreases in the number of students requiring retraining in the workforce (as available)
  4. The State Board of Education will work with the Colorado Commission of Higher Education, the armed forces and the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment to monitor entrance competencies, inform the revision of college remediation policy, quantify workforce benchmarks, and contribute to the college and career readiness cut point thresholds on future multi-state tests for students across the country.
  5. The State Board of Education will make available examples of possible demonstrations of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that local school boards may use as reference when determining required demonstrations. Examples can be found at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/secondaryinitiatives/GraduationCriteria.htm>
  6. The State Board of Education will make available examples of ICAP attributes that local school boards may use as reference when determining ICAP completion. ICAP attributes can be found at [http://www.cde.state.co.us/secondaryinitiatives/downloads/ICAP/ICAPitemsmatrix2011\(final\).pdf](http://www.cde.state.co.us/secondaryinitiatives/downloads/ICAP/ICAPitemsmatrix2011(final).pdf)
  7. The State Board will consider a way to establish with the Colorado Commission of Higher Education a model high school transcript which effectively captures high school competency and not merely seat time or course credit evidence.
  8. The State Board will regularly review the College and Career Readiness Determinations in order to incorporate changes in the current measurable thresholds and add other eligible methods as advances in competency demonstrations become more standardized.

## Context for this Policy

Colorado's Department of Education, with the Colorado Graduation Guidelines Advisory Council, has carefully considered Colorado's current and future high school graduation results and their long term implications for our students' college and career success. This includes analyzing state, district and individual Colorado high school student results over time and tracking Colorado college performance of these individuals after graduation.

Research about other state high school graduation policies and participation in cross-state discussions on competency-based approaches informed our observations. More than 40 meetings with interested Colorado educators and constituents also occurred to solicit feedback and shape the development of a coherent recommendation about successful high school graduation.

---

## Observations That Inform Us

1. With the help of the Colorado Department of Higher Education, the Department of Defense and emerging wage data from the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, it is clear that **the requirements for minimum college, military and career completion success are higher than too many of our high school students can currently meet.** What these consumers of our high schools expect is rising.

When pressed to describe this, each sector shares three common needs of a basic high school graduate: information knowledgeable, problem solving oriented and able to assess the "big picture" with others in order to get the job done.

In fact, basic academic entrance requirements, once tiered depending on job complexity, are now almost indistinguishable among sectors in a modern time which requires overall more math, literacy and critical thinking expertise. Technical work, agriculture, and small businesses require people to know more and to solve complex problems. The armed forces, now a sophisticated tactical technology enterprise, have raised minimum academic cut scores for enlisted personnel to thresholds of effort which are approximately correlated to a 17 on the ACT. They cannot afford the costs of significant retraining.

Current admission requirements for students to enter a Colorado college ready to take credit bearing classes (i.e., not needing remediation) are an ACT score no lower than an 18 English, 19 Mathematics, 470 on the SAT, C minus on a college credit bearing course or the earning of an industry certificate. **Currently, more than a third of our 11<sup>th</sup> graders cannot meet minimum academic entrance requirements for military, or for "remediation free" college.** <http://www.cde.state.co.us/SecondaryInitiatives/GraduationGuidelines.htm>

The Colorado Workforce Development Council is beginning this year to benchmark its 14 key industry sectors by what is academically required for employment consideration.

2. Nearly all states have high school graduation policies, and yet, national high school graduation rates average about 71%. Colorado's on-time graduation rate has been rising and is 75.4%. <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdereval/gradcurrent.htm>
3. 75.4% of our high school seniors graduate with a diploma in four years. The rate rises to 78.5% when students are given three more high school years. 48% of these Colorado high school graduates will enroll in two or four year Colorado colleges and a third will need remediation. <http://higher.ed.colorado.gov/i3/Statewide.aspx>
4. Recent Colorado Department of Education and Department of Higher Education research shows Colorado high school graduates who persisted in obtaining a two year Colorado college diploma had actually averaged no less than a **22** on their high school ACT test and when in a four year degree program, no less than a **24** ACT. The 22 and 24 scores are higher than what the average Colorado junior scores each year which is now a **21**. Students who entered Colorado two year colleges but did not persist had an actual **18** average on the ACT; four year college dropouts had an actual **22** average ACT score. See more at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/SecondaryInitiatives/GraduationGuidelines.htm>
5. Only 33% of all Colorado high school graduates who attend two or four year Colorado colleges (which is typically about half of the Colorado graduating class and regardless of their need for remediation) will complete Colorado college in four years. <http://www.cde.state.co.us/SecondaryInitiatives/GraduationGuidelines.htm>

---

## Why Is This Happening?

### High School

High school credit on a student transcript is awarded based on a "credit hour" system. The hypothesis has been that by attending class, "enough" academic content will be obtained. A diploma is granted in Colorado by a local district and is traditionally given for the number of credits accrued. Each district (all 178) sets its own graduation requirements. College and military entrance, athletic eligibility, school funding, school and district accreditation and common employment terms reinforce this model.

Has this proposition produced high school graduates which employers need and college and technical schools require?

Unfortunately, the data suggests that the credit-based systems work for some but not enough of our students. Far too many students are leaving high school having taken classes but are not functionally knowing and applying the information and skills at levels needed to be ready for success in the postsecondary education or the workforce.

Also, despite quality counseling and teacher messages, students are not necessarily taking the most rigorous classes or realizing the connection between the choices they make today and future opportunities.

### Before High School

Local educators and state policy leaders tell us what CDE/DHE research also indicates: successful high school completion requires proficiency at each of the early and middle grades. Making sense of the new high school academic standards in class without the benefit of foundational proficiency in prior years was never intended and attempts to “catch up” students are difficult and not typically successful.

CDE/DHE longitudinal data show 75% of Colorado 6th grade students who are **below** proficient on CSAP/TCAP will later need remediation in their first year of college. (On average, half of the students needing college remediation do not complete a college degree.) Read more at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/Communications/download/FactSheets/LatestFindingsfromColoradoStudentData.pdf>.

**If proficient** or above on CSAP/TCAP, **86%** of sixth graders will not need remediation in their first year of college and for these students more than **73%** will complete a Colorado college degree. Districts have these long term data down to the individual student regarding historical 6th grade CSAP/TCAP scores, past and current ACT scores and, now, remediation rates to determine success of their high school graduates once in Colorado colleges.

The lesson emerging about high school graduation success is grounded here: most students who can get to grade level in elementary and middle school stay “on track” and are often “no remediation needed” eligible for college, military or the workforce.

A comprehensive high school graduation policy must recognize that preparation for successful exit from the system begins in elementary school.

---

## The Endorsed Diploma

Recently, all 11 public Colorado institutions of higher education governing boards approved the criteria for an Endorsed Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Diploma. The criteria outline the minimum academic qualifications for admission to and eligibility for (subject to additional institutional review of other admission and placement qualifications) placement into credit-bearing courses at all open, modified open, or moderately selective public institutions of higher education in Colorado, as well as priority consideration for admission into Colorado’s selective and highly selective institutions. To view the adopted criteria document go to [http://www.cde.state.co.us/SecondaryInitiatives/PWR\\_Endorsed.htm](http://www.cde.state.co.us/SecondaryInitiatives/PWR_Endorsed.htm).

The criteria are based on four readiness indicators:

1. Student is college ready in math and English language arts.
  - As evidenced by satisfying Higher Education’s Admissions Requirements and demonstrating no need for remediation on college placement or comparable exams
2. Student completes the Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP).
  - As evidenced by the creation and maintenance of an ICAP
3. Student demonstrates 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills.
  - As evidenced by completion of coursework and extracurricular experiences that demonstrate competency in: information literacy, invention, collaboration, critical thinking, and self-direction
4. Student demonstrates mastery of academic content in three content areas.
  - As evidenced by completion of coursework and maintenance of specified grade point average and other mastery demonstrations in three of the following areas: 1) reading,

writing, and communicating; 2) mathematics; 3) social and behavioral sciences; 4) natural and physical sciences; 5) world languages; 6) arts and humanities; and 7) career and technical education.

The specific criteria have been reviewed by business and community leaders and frequent feedback has been that considering the modern expectations within any sector these might well serve as terms for a general education diploma. While these thresholds may not work for all students, the message was clear that these components and the expectations of accomplishment are becoming necessary in both college and career settings.

The endorsed diploma is both a college and a career ready signal for accelerated advancement. The endorsed diploma was created not to honor and identify academically elite student, but to offer a very realistic stretch expectation with benefit to the majority of our students.

---

DRAFT