

Frequently Asked Questions

South Dakota Department of Education

End of Course Exams

Why does a school district need to request a waiver from the Department of Education to give an end of course exam?

A school district needs to request a waiver from the Department of Education when that district would like to be excused from following an administrative rule. Most commonly, districts request to be excused from Administrative Rules 24:43:11:01 and 24:43:01:01. These rules state that high school credit can only be earned in grades 9-12, and also that a unit of credit is earned by 146 hours of seat time (Administrative Rule 24:43:11:01). Also, many districts like to offer high school credit to students before ninth grade for courses such as Algebra I. In this instance, a district would need to request a waiver from Administrative Rule 24:43:11:01.

Can a middle school student ‘test-out’ of a course?

No, the administrative rules states that the waiver can only be applied to students in grades 9-12 who wish to ‘test-out’ of a high school level class for credit or that a student below 9th grade may earn a high school credit by actually taking the course **and** passing the end of course exam.

How does a district request a waiver?

A school district can request a waiver by obtaining the applicable waiver application form as located on the Department of Education website (http://doe.sd.gov/oatq/documents/Wavr_Exam.pdf) and submitting it to the appropriate staff, as noted on the application.

How long is a waiver valid?

A waiver is valid for five years.

Once the waiver has been approved, what are the next steps to give an end of course exam?

Information regarding the process can be found on the End of Course Exams Flowchart. The flowchart is included in this procedure manual and also on the Department of Education website at http://doe.sd.gov/oats/documents/EOC_Flwct.pdf .

In order to get high school credit for a course taken before ninth grade, students not only have to physically take the class but must also pass an end of course exam. Why?

The decision to require end of course exams was made by the South Dakota Board of Education as a mechanism to ensure rigor for those students taking any courses before grade nine. In addition, State Administrative Rule clearly states that credit for high school must be earned in grades 9-12, so

schools that wish to offer high school credit to students before ninth grade are requesting to be “excused” from a State Rule. This exception is what demands higher accountability.

May districts write their own exam in lieu of using the State exam?

Districts may choose to write their own exam. If a district chooses to administer a district-created exam, the district needs to follow a strict list of requirements that can be found in the procedure manual and on the website at <http://doe.sd.gov/oats/DistrictEOC.asp> .

Can the school district see a copy of a state-created exam prior to deciding whether or not to utilize it for student testing?

Because the end of course exams are considered to be “high stakes”, the exam is not released for viewing. However, a district may examine the standards covered and the exam item percentage from reviewing the exam blueprints, as located on the Department of Education website under documents <http://doe.sd.gov/oats/DistrictEOC.asp> .

Is the state-created exam based on South Dakota content standards and aligned to the test blueprints?

Yes, all state-created exams are based on, and aligned to, South Dakota content standards.

Where are the state-created exams located?

The end of course exams are housed in a program called SDAP. If you need assistance in scheduling a test please contact Viki Crichton in the Office of Learning and Instruction (Viki.Crichton@state.sd.us) or 605.773.8193.

Does the exam have to be taken on a computer?

Yes. All state-created end of course exams **must** be taken on a computer.

Is there a specific window of time in the school year during which the district must administer an end of course exam?

There is no specific time that districts must give an end of course exam. However, districts should consider school schedules in regard to other testing windows (ie: Dakota STEP). Also, the district would most likely consider administering the exam at a time which allows the students to gain as much knowledge as possible while also providing a window for the student to retake the exam, if applicable. **Students must pass the Credit Before Grade Nine exam before the student starts the next school year.**

Is there a specific amount of time that the student has to complete the exam?

The district must provide enough time for the students to complete the exam in one sitting. If this is not possible, the district must complete a Testing Irregularity Form and submit it to the Office of Learning and Instruction immediately following the conclusion of the exam. The Testing Irregularity Form is located in the appendix F in the procedure manual.

Can students use calculators on the exam?

Students can use calculators on the end of course exams. An approved list of calculators can be found in the procedure manual and online at http://doe.sd.gov/oats/documents/EOC_CalcU.pdf . The approved calculators are the same as those that are currently approved for use during the Dakota STEP test. If testing online within the SDAP, the calculator tool is available so bringing a calculator is unnecessary.

Are the students allowed to use formula sheets on the exam?

Formula sheets for Science (periodic table) and Geometry, and Physics are included in the procedure manual and online at http://doe.sd.gov/oats/documents/EOC_PrdcT.pdf . If formula sheets/periodic table sheets are used for a district-created exam they must be included with the submission of the exam.

When a student takes a course before ninth grade and intends to earn high school credit by passing the end of course exam, what letter grade/percentage and what grade level is recorded on the transcript?

The transcription of grades is a local district decision. The State requires that a student pass the end of course exam with a minimum proficiency. The local district may decide at which grade level is given the credit, according to their district policy and may also choose to list the actual percentage grade (letter grade equivalent) on the transcript or simply a “pass”.

Can a school district give two separate exams at semester breaks as opposed to administering a true end of course exam at the end of the school year?

Yes. However, the state has not created end of semester exams. If a district would choose to administer semester exams, the district would need to create the standards-based exam in alignment with the applicable end of course exam blueprint and submit that exam to the Department of Education for approval.

How many times can an end of course exam be administered?

The end of course exam that awards credit before grade nine exam can be taken up to two times with 80% proficiency. The course equivalency exam (testing out of a credit) exam may be taken only one time with 85% proficiency.

If a student took, and passed, a course for high school credit before grade nine in a school district that held an approved waiver, can that credit transfer to a district that does not hold such a waiver?

Yes, credit can be transferred if the student passed the end of course exam with at least 80% proficiency.

If a student does not pass the end of course exam in order to earn high school credit before grade nine for Algebra I, can the student still go on to the next math course in his/her district?

This is a local district decision. If the student does not pass the end of course exam, it simply means that no credit will be given. It does not prevent the student from going on to the next course or even from taking the same course again in high school to receive the credit.

Are there certain deadlines that must be met in order to give an end of course exam?

Yes. If the district is creating an exam, the exam (and all required materials) must be submitted to the SD Department of Education Office of Learning and Instruction no later than **February 1st**. The deadline for submitting the Reporting Form is July 1st. In addition, the Test Security Form must be received prior to the testing date. Note: **Test Security Agreement must be mailed. Faxes will not be accepted.**

If a district creates an end of course exam, what is the minimum number of questions that must be included on the exam?

There must be at least 60 questions for an end of course exam and the district must create two different versions of the test.