

— Frequently Asked Questions —

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GENERAL AND IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

How are the new requirements different from the previous requirements?

Under the new requirements approved by the South Dakota Board of Education in November 2009, South Dakota will have just one set of minimum graduation requirements (as opposed to two pathways).

The major differences with the new requirements are as follows:

- 1) All students will be required to have a Personal Learning Plan.
- 2) A student may be excused from certain math and science requirements if it is deemed in the student's best interest.
- 3) Districts may choose to offer credit for Fine Arts extracurricular activities.
- 4) Effective Sept. 1, 2013, students will be required to take one-half credit of physical education and one-half credit of health. (NOTE: Schools will have the option of integrating health in lieu of a stand-alone health course.)
- 5) Effective Sept. 1, 2013, students will have the option of completing a capstone experience or participating in service learning, as part of a short menu of options. That menu includes:
 - Approved career and technical education courses
 - World languages
 - Capstone experience or service learning

When do the new requirements take effect?

Except where otherwise noted above, the new requirements begin with students entering 9th grade in the 2010-11 school year.

What graduation requirements do students already in high school need to follow?

Students already in high school – those who entered 9th grade in 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09 and 2009-10 – may continue following either of the old graduation pathways. Those pathways are the Standard Pathway and the Advanced Pathway.

Can students already in high school follow the new requirements – specifically exclusion from certain math and science courses, and earning credit for extracurricular Fine Arts activities)?

No. The new graduation requirements begin with students entering grade 9 in 2010-11.

PERSONAL LEARNING PLANS

What is a Personal Learning Plan?

A Personal Learning Plan identifies the specific coursework a student needs to take to reach his or her academic and career goals. It is based on the student's skills and interests. The new rules state that all students in grades 9 through 12 must have a Personal Learning Plan, which documents a minimum of 22 units of credit.

When does the requirement for Personal Learning Plans kick in?

The requirement begins with students entering 9th grade in the 2010-11 school year.

How do districts help students develop Personal Learning Plans?

A student can develop a Personal Learning Plan by using www.sdmylife.com. The Web site is an academic and career planning tool provided to all South Dakota school districts free of charge by the Department of Education.

Students create and store their Personal Learning Plans at this site. The department offers training on how to use sdmylife.com to create and implement Personal Learning Plans. For information regarding sdmylife.com, contact the Department of Education, at (605) 773-3134.

EXCLUSION FROM CERTAIN MATH, SCIENCE COURSES

What courses can students be excused from under the new requirements?

In the area of mathematics, a student may be excused from taking Algebra II or Geometry, but not both. In the area of lab science, a student may be excused from the requirement to take Chemistry or Physics. All students must complete three units of math and three units of lab science.

Under the new requirements, can a student graduate with Algebra I (1 unit), Geometry (.5 unit) and Algebra II (.5 unit) and waive to a third math class?

Yes, if it is in the student's best interest.

Can a student who entered high school under the old requirements use the new requirements to be excused from Algebra II or Geometry? Same question for the Chemistry or Physics requirement?

Students in this situation would follow the “old” graduation pathways. They would have the ability to move from the Advanced Pathway to the Standard Pathway. The student’s parent/guardian and a school administrator would still need to sign off on the Standard Pathway Program Agreement form.

Who decides when to excuse a student from one of the math or science requirements?

The decision to excuse a student from taking the required units of Algebra II or Geometry, and Chemistry or Physics is made at the local level. A student’s parent or legal guardian and school counselor or administrator must agree to the decision, and the excuse must be documented at the local level.

There is no requirement to receive approval from the Department of Education to excuse students from these courses. The excuse simply needs to be documented at the local level.

Sample exclusion documentation is included in the back of this book and on the department’s Web site. Districts are welcome to use this sample document.

CREDIT FOR EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

May districts offer credit for extracurricular activities?

Under the new rules, a district may choose to offer credit for extracurricular Fine Arts activities. A similar proposal related to athletic activities counting toward Physical Education credit was not approved by the state Board of Education.

If my district decides to offer credit for extracurricular Fine Arts activities, what are the parameters?

Students may be granted up to one credit in Fine Arts for participation in extracurricular activities. A maximum of one-fourth credit may be granted for each extracurricular activity each school year.

The local district decides which extracurricular Fine Arts activities may be used for credit. This decision must be a formal action by the local school board.

In order to grant credit for an activity, the district must document the alignment of the activity with South Dakota’s Fine Arts content standards. That documentation should be kept on file at the local school district. (A template can be found on the department’s Web site at www.doe.sd.gov/oatq/gradrequirements.)

There is no requirement to get approval from the Department of Education to offer credit for extracurricular Fine Arts activities.

How do I transcript extracurricular Fine Arts activities?

Credit granted for extracurricular Fine Arts activities must be graded, transcribed and included in the GPA calculation. If a district chooses to offer Fine Arts activities on a pass/fail basis, it must be noted on the transcript. However, it is up to the district to determine if it would be calculated in the GPA.

Can a student who entered high school under the old requirements utilize fine Arts extracurricular activities for the Fine Arts requirement?

No. Students who entered high school in 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09 and 2009-10 must follow the requirements in place when they started high school: the Standard or Advanced Pathway.

MENU OF COURSES:

CTE, CAPSTONE/SERVICE LEARNING, WORLD LANGUAGES

The new requirements include a “menu” of courses from which students must earn at least one credit. Explain that menu.

Beginning with students entering 9th grade in fall 2013, students will be required to take at least one unit of credit from the following (in any combination):

- Approved career and technical education courses
- Capstone experience or service learning
- World languages

How do changes to this “menu” impact school districts?

Under the old rules governing graduation, districts were already required to offer one unit of career and technical education courses and two units of the same world language. So, the major change for districts is that they will need to offer either a capstone experience or service learning.

The Department of Education realizes that some districts are not offering CTE courses. The expectation is that by Sept. 1, 2013, they will offer at least one unit of approved CTE. For ideas on how to meet this requirement, please contact the Office of Curriculum, Career and Technical Education at (605) 773-3134.

What constitutes approved career and technical education courses?

The state Department of Education approves CTE programs. An approved program must offer two units within the same career cluster. See the list of approved courses online at www.doe.sd.gov/oatq/gradrequirements.

To learn more, please contact the Office of Curriculum, Career and Technical Education at (605) 773-3134.

If the old “menu” is gone and the new “menu” requirement doesn’t kick in until 2013, what happens to students graduating in the interim?

For this interim period, students should choose electives that are in line with their Personal Learning Plan instead of choosing from the “menu.” Students must still earn 22 credits to graduate.

What about the requirement for a district to offer computer science?

That requirement goes away Sept. 1, 2013. Many computer science classes are CTE courses within the Information Technology cluster. To get your computer science classes approved as CTE courses, your district would need to apply to the Department of Education. Contact the Office of Curriculum, Career and Technical Education, at (605) 773-3134.

What is a capstone experience?

A capstone experience is a culminating high school experience designed to integrate knowledge, skills and concepts gained from a student’s previous years of learning. A capstone experience may be any of the following: senior experience, entrepreneurship experience, youth internship, and pre-apprenticeship.

Senior experience: Requires students to complete a research project, design and develop a product, assemble a portfolio, and complete an oral presentation before a panel.

Entrepreneurship experience: Requires students to research a new business opportunity, develop a business plan, assemble a portfolio, and complete an oral presentation before a panel.

Youth internship: Allow students to gain hands-on experience at a business, develop employability skills, learn technical skills, and complete a portfolio.

Pre-apprenticeship: Contractual partnership between an employer and a student that allows the student to gain initial training in a particular industry and formal classroom-related instruction.

What constitutes a credit for capstone?

The Department of Education has established a framework for each of the four capstone experiences noted above. In order to issue credit for a capstone experience, the district must follow the program criteria. See www.doe.sd.gov/octe/capstone/index.asp.

How do I transcript a capstone experience or service learning?

Credit granted for capstone experience or service learning must be graded, transcribed and included in the GPA calculation. If a district chooses to offer capstone experience or service learning on a pass/fail basis, it must be noted on the transcript. However, it is up to the district to determine if it would be calculated in the GPA.

When does the capstone/service learning requirement go into effect?

Effective Sept. 1, 2013, schools will be required to offer a capstone experience or service learning. This affects students entering 9th grade in 2013.

Who is certified to teach or facilitate a capstone experience?

Anyone with a valid South Dakota certificate. The department recommends that facilitators of capstone experiences go through specific training. Contact the Department of Education at (605) 773-3134 to learn more about professional development related to capstone experience.

Does a district have to offer both capstone and service learning?

No. The local district must offer one of the two, but could choose to offer both.

What is service learning?

The Department of Education is working on a framework to define the components of service learning. Information will be forthcoming.

HEALTH AND HEALTH INTEGRATION

What's the new requirement regarding health?

Effective Sept. 1, 2013, one-half unit of health will be required for graduation. This is in addition to the one-half unit of physical education required. That means students entering 9th grade in 2013-14 would be the first to fall under this requirement.

Starting in the school year 2013-14, a district can choose to offer a stand-alone health course or to integrate health at any time during grades 6-12 to meet this requirement.

The Department of Education recommends that districts which currently have stand-alone health courses should keep them in place. A stand-alone health course is the most effective for teaching students the skills they need to become healthy adults. Best practice would be to provide health in elementary, middle and high school – creating a sequential base of knowledge and skills.

Who is qualified to teach health education?

Any person who has a K-12 health endorsement is qualified to teach health.

What is a stand-alone health course?

A stand-alone health course is one that specifically focuses on health education standards. (See standards at www.doe.sd.gov/contentstandards/healthindex.asp.) Typically, at the high school level, this is a one-half credit course delivered in a traditional classroom setting or offered via the South Dakota Virtual School.

What if my district has a year-long wellness course that incorporates both physical education and health education standards?

The student's transcript would reflect both .5 unit of physical education and .5 unit of health education, as long as the standards for each area are met.

What is “health integration”?

Integrated health is the process of incorporating key health standards relative to maintaining and improving health, preventing disease, and avoiding or reducing health-related risk behaviors into existing courses that all students are required to take.

How do I know what the key health standards for health integration are?

The Department of Education will be working with school districts to determine interest in the health integration option. If sufficient interest exists, the department will proceed in developing a work group to identify key health standards to be used in the integrated health option. If you are interested in this option, call Karen Keyser, Coordinated School Health, at (605) 773-3134.

If my district chooses to integrate health into required courses, what might this look like?

Teachers of required courses would be expected to incorporate the key health standards, identified by the department, within their various content areas. The district would be required to assign a staff person to lead this effort. This person would be responsible for bringing together the team of teachers to determine where and how the key standards will be incorporated. Integration of key standards must occur in classes that all students are required to take.

Below are some examples of how to integrate health concepts:

Science – When students learn about microorganisms, they could also learn about how to prevent the spread of microorganisms that cause disease.

Math – Have students measure, record, graph, interpret and predict data about physical activity, heart and respiration rates, and blood pressure.

Social Studies – When studying the differences in eating habits among different cultures, have students discuss the factors that determine food choice.

Teachers can be encouraged to integrate health education material in to their subject areas through national health education days, weeks, and months; for example, breast cancer awareness month is October. The benefit of using the national health observances is that, oftentimes, free materials are available from corresponding agencies and organizations.

If stand-alone health or health integration is offered at middle school, what are the parameters?

There are two scenarios – both of which meet the graduation requirement of .5 unit of health, which begins on Sept. 1, 2013.

Scenario #1

If a district offers stand-alone health or health integration at grades 6, 7 or 8 to meet the graduation requirement and **chooses to give the student high school credit** for that work, the district will need to apply for a waiver from the Department of Education. This waiver process would be the same as any high school credit given to a student before grade 9 (eg., 8th grade Algebra).

In this scenario, per South Dakota Administrative Rule 24:43:08:12, students must pass a state-approved end-of-course exam in order to meet the requirement for graduation. Students must earn an 80 percent on the exam in order to receive credit. Credit for the course shall appear on the student's high school transcript with the unit of credit and a letter grade. A waiver is good for five years.

Scenario #2

If a district offers stand-alone health or health integration at grades 6, 7 or 8 to meet the graduation requirement **but will not offer high school credit** for that work, the district must do the following:

- 1) Report in Department of Education's Personnel Record Form (PRF system) if it is meeting the graduation requirement through stand-alone health or health integration. This will be a simple check-off in the PRF system.
- 2) For health integration only, document how the district plans to meet the key health standards. Keep this documentation on file at the district level.
- 3) Provide recognition of completion on the student transcript. No grade is earned; no credit is assigned; and therefore, it does not count toward the student's GPA.

What if I offer a stand-alone health course in high school?

Districts that offer a stand-alone health course in high school would transcript the course, and the associated credit, the way they do any other high school course taken for credit.

If health integration is offered at the high school level, what are the parameters?

There would be two scenarios for health integration at the high school level. Both would meet the graduation requirement of .5 unit of health. No waiver from the state is required for either scenario.

Scenario #1

If health integration is offered for credit, that credit would be earned in one of three ways: authentic assessment, end-of-course exam or 73 hours of seat time. (This is in accordance with South Dakota Administrative Rule 24:43:01:01, which defines a unit of credit as such.)

The district must:

- 1) Report in Department of Education's Personnel Record Form (PRF system) if it is meeting the graduation requirement through health integration. This will be a simple check-off in the PRF system.
- 2) Document how the district plans to meet the key health standards. Keep this documentation on file at the district level.
- 3) Must issue a grade that will be transcribed and included in the GPA calculation.

If a district chooses to offer health integration on a pass/fail basis, it must be noted on the transcript. However, it is up to the district to determine if it would be calculated in the GPA.

Scenario #2

If health integration is offered with no credit attached, the district must do the following:

- 1) Report in Department of Education's Personnel Record Form (PRF system) if it is meeting the graduation requirement through health integration. This will be a simple check-off in the PRF system.
- 2) Document how the district plans to meet the key health standards. Keep this documentation on file at the district level.
- 3) Provide recognition of completion on the student transcript. No grade is earned; no credit is assigned; and therefore, it does not count toward the student's GPA.

If my district is integrating health, do the teachers have to have a health endorsement?

No.

If health is offered at grades 6, 7 or 8 and used to meet the high school graduation requirement, does the teacher have to be a high school teacher?

In South Dakota, health education is a K-12 endorsement, so a teacher with this endorsement can teach at any level: elementary, middle or high school.

I need help with the health integration piece. Who can I call?

Call the Department of Education at (605) 773-3134 and ask for Karen Keyser, Coordinated School Health.

MISCELLANEOUS

Under the new rules, may a school district waive any graduation requirement they choose in order to meet the needs of ELL students?

Yes.

How do the new requirements impact students on an IEP?

The IEP team has the authority to modify the specific units of credit required for graduation, in order to meet the student’s best interests.

What constitutes a “physical science” course?

Under the new requirements, students must take three units of laboratory science, including one unit of any Physical Science. Physical Science classes include courses such as those listed below. If you have any questions regarding what constitutes physical science, please contact the Office of Curriculum, Career and Technical Education at (605) 773-3134.

Course Title	PRF Assignment Code
Environmental Science	03003
Physical Science	59401
Earth/Space Science	59501
Aeronautics	59502
Astronomy	59504
Geophysics	59505
Geology	59506
Meteorology	59507
AP Environmental Science	59510

Can a student take debate instead of speech?

Yes. The rules state that they have to have .5 unit of speech **or** debate.

Does a district have to offer both speech and debate?

No. The local district must offer one of the two courses, but could choose to offer both.