

Frequently Asked Questions

Updated January 2016

IS THIS A LOCAL DECISION?

Below are some of the most frequently asked questions about graduation requirements that must be answered at the local level. This is not an exhaustive list.

Is a school district allowed to set requirements of credit beyond the 22-credit minimum?

Yes. Local school boards or governing bodies may set requirements of credit beyond the minimum. (SD Administrative Rule 24:43:11:01)

What if a transfer student is unable to meet local graduation requirements that are beyond the 22-credit minimum?

Transfer students unable to meet graduation requirements set by a local school board or governing body because of time and scheduling constraints, but not due to course failure, may graduate on the basis of meeting state minimum requirements for graduation. (SD Administrative Rule 24:43:11:01)

A senior student transferred into our district from another state and will be unable to meet South Dakota graduation requirements on time.

What can we do?

The local school board or governing body may waive one or more graduation requirements for senior students who transfer from another state, who have met the standards in that state, and who are unable to meet the graduation requirements set by the state board because of time and scheduling constraints but not due to course failure. (SD Administrative Rule 24:43:11:01)

Is a school district required to accept credits for a student who transferred from another school district?

No. A school district can determine at the local level whether or not to accept credits for a student who transferred from another school district.

Can limited English proficient students be excused from taking required units of credit?

Yes. A student identified as limited English proficient, as defined in 20 U.S.C. § 7801 (25) (2002), may be excused from taking required units of credit if the student's parent or legal guardian and school counselor or administrator agree and the excuse is documented. (SD Administrative Rule 24:43:11:01) Documentation should be noted in the Language Acquisition Plan. If proper documentation is not included the request may be denied. As part of the documentation, it is required to include the name of team members involved in the decision.

When considering whether to excuse students from taking required units of credit, it is important to keep in mind their career and postsecondary goals.

Can dual credit courses be counted towards the 22-credit graduation requirement?

A local school district has the authority to decide if dual credit courses may count as credit towards the graduation requirement or be considered elective credit. For example, if a student takes Speech 101 for dual credit, it is a local decision whether that counts towards the Speech graduation requirement or counts as a Language Arts elective.

How many high school units of credit can be given for a dual credit course?

A local school district has the authority to determine how dual credit courses will equate to high school units of credit. In most cases, a 3-credit college course will equate to .5 credit up to 1 credit at the local high school.

Is a school district required to accept online course credits other than those offered through the South Dakota Virtual School (SDVS) (www.sdvs.k12.sd.us)?

No. A school district can determine at the local level whether or not to accept online course credits other than those offered through the South Dakota Virtual School.

Who pays for online (including SDVS) and dual credit courses for students?

This is a local decision. A school district may require students, parents or legal guardians to pay course fees for online (including SDVS) and dual credit courses.

What courses can students be excused from?

In the area of Mathematics, a student may be excused from taking Algebra II or Geometry, but not both. Students must still take three units of Math.

In the area of Lab Science, a student may be excused from the requirement to take Chemistry and/or Physics. Students must still take three units of Lab Science.

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. See the sample exclusion documents in the Appendix of this handbook.

What courses meet the definition of Lab Science?

A school district can determine at the local level whether a course meets the definition of a Lab Science course. A laboratory class is defined as a course providing opportunities for students to interact directly with the material world, or with data drawn from the material world, using tools that are not found in a library, media center, study hall, or classroom, and in which students use safe and appropriate laboratory techniques, as well as implement data collection techniques, models, and theories of science. (SD Administrative Rule 24:43:01:01)

May districts offer credit for extracurricular Fine Arts activities? If so, what are the parameters?

Yes, a district may choose to offer credit for extracurricular Fine Arts activities.

Students may be granted up to one credit in Fine Arts for participation in extracurricular activities. A maximum of .25 credit may be granted for each extracurricular Fine Arts activity each school year.

The local school 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. The documentation should be kept on file at the local school district.

PERSONAL LEARNING PLAN

Are students required to have a personal learning plan?

Yes. As a requirement of SD Administrative Rule 24:43:11:01 all students in grades 9-12 must have a personal learning plan (PLP).

What is a personal learning plan?

A personal learning plan is a plan based on a student's skills and interests that identifies the things a student can do and the courses he or she should take to reach his or her academic and career goals.

When developing a personal learning plan, students may include:

- Description of their personal life aspirations, specifically their education and career goals
- Self-assessment of their learning strengths and weaknesses
- Specific knowledge, skills and character traits the student would like to acquire
- Personal interests, passions, and hobbies and how they integrate them into their education
- Personal education program that allows them to reach their goals while also fulfilling school and graduation requirements
- Major accomplishments and milestones

Students can complete a personal learning plan on SDMyLife, a free online career development program for South Dakota students in grades 7-12. Infinite Campus also offers the Multi-Year Academic Planner in which a student can plan courses.

As students progress through high school, their interests and goals may change, so it is important that they revisit their personal learning plans regularly to make any necessary adjustments.

For more information about personal learning plans and SDMyLife, contact Megan Tatum (605) 773-4726.

CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

Is a school district allowed to set requirements of credit beyond the 22-credit minimum?

Yes. Local school boards or governing bodies may set requirements of credit beyond the minimum. (SD Administrative Rule 24:43:11:01)

Is "double dipping" allowed to meet graduation requirements?

No. "Double dipping" is when a course is counted for more than one content area. For example, Economics cannot meet both the Social Studies elective credit requirement and the Personal Finance or Economics credit requirement. It can only be counted for one of the content areas.

Can high school credit be offered before 9th grade?

Yes. School districts can apply for waivers to offer courses for high school credit before 9th grade. Districts must show that teachers of such courses are highly qualified to teach at the high school level. Such courses must also use the same standards used for high school content. See Appendix for Application for a Waiver from an Administrative Rule.

Are students who take a course for high school credit before 9th grade required to pass a state-approved end-of-course exam?

No. In November 2015, the state Board of Education approved changes to SD Administrative Rule 24:43 eliminating the requirement that a student taking a high school course from a qualified teacher before 9th grade pass a state-approved assessment before credit can be awarded. This allows the local school district to determine whether the student has met the criteria for passage of the course and awarding of credit. The changes also remove the Department of Education (DOE) requirements for state approval of end-of-course (EOC) exams. Districts may use EOC exams if they wish. DOE does plan to continue to offer EOC assessments in Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry, Spanish, Physical Science, and Civics/Government that districts may use if they would like.

TRANSFER STUDENTS

What if a transfer student is unable to meet local graduation requirements that are beyond the 22-credit minimum?

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LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS

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STUDENTS ON IEP

How do graduation requirements impact students on an IEP (Individual Education Plan)?

Students with disabilities should strive to meet the same course requirements as all students. The IEP team has the authority to modify the specific credits required for graduation. The IEP team must take into consideration the student's postsecondary goals along with the nature of the student's disability, which prevents the student from accessing the same curriculum with accommodations and supports. See Guidance Policy: Applying Graduation Requirements to Students with Disabilities at http://doe.sd.gov/oess/documents/sped_transition_GraduationQA.pdf.

Can a student graduate with Algebra I (1 unit), Geometry (.5 unit) and Algebra II (.5 unit) and waive the third Math unit?

Yes, if the student is on an IEP and the IEP team determines it is in the student's best interest. A district must keep in mind the student's postsecondary and career interests after high school. See Guidance Policy: Applying Graduation Requirements to Students with Disabilities at http://doe.sd.gov/oess/documents/sped_transition_GraduationQA.pdf.

ONLINE AND DUAL CREDIT COURSES

If a student takes a course via the South Dakota Virtual School (SDVS), should it be included on the student's transcript?

Yes. Local districts have the authority regarding transcribing credit. However, if the student does not pass the course, it is best practice to still record the course on the transcript.

Do courses taken through the South Dakota Virtual School count towards graduation requirements?

Yes. The South Dakota Virtual High School offers a variety of courses that students can take on their own time, all taught by qualified professionals and aligned to the state's content standards. Because the South Dakota Department of Education approves all courses, students can be assured that course offerings meet the state's academic standards.

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MATH and SCIENCE COURSES

What courses can students be excused from?

In the area of Mathematics, a student may be excused from taking Algebra II or Geometry, but not both. Students must still take three units of Math.

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What constitutes a Physical Science course?

Physical Science classes include courses such as those listed below.

<u>Course Code</u>	<u>Course Title</u>
03101	Chemistry
03102	Chemistry - Advanced Studies
03103	Organic Chemistry
03104	Physical Chemistry
03105	Conceptual Chemistry
03106	AP Chemistry
03151	Physics
03152	Physics – Advanced Studies
03155	AP Physics B
03156	AP Physics C
03159	Physical Science
03161	Conceptual Physics

What should happen if a student does not have Algebra I on his or her transcript, but has taken three units of Math?

The student does not need to take Algebra I if he or she has taken and passed Math courses that are more advanced than Algebra I. For example, if the student has completed Algebra II, Geometry and Pre-Calculus, the student would not need to take Algebra I.

The student needs to take Algebra I if he or she has not taken advanced Math courses beyond Algebra. For example, if a student took Pre-Algebra, Consumer Math and Geometry, the student would still need to complete Algebra I. The only exception is if the student is on an Individual Education Program (IEP), and the IEP team has made the decision to substitute different Math courses.

Can a student graduate with Algebra I (1 unit), Geometry (.5 unit) and Algebra II (.5 unit) and waive the third Math unit?

Yes, if the student is on an IEP and the IEP team determines it is in the student's best interest. A district must keep in mind the student's postsecondary and career interests after high school. See Guidance Policy: Applying Graduation Requirements to Students with Disabilities at http://doe.sd.gov/oess/documents/sped_transition_GraduationQA.pdf.

LANGUAGE ARTS

Can a student take Debate instead of Speech?

Yes. The rules state a student must 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.

CREDIT FOR EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Do athletic activities count toward Physical Education credit?

No, the state Board of Education did not approve extracurricular athletic activities to count towards Physical Education credit. For example, a student participating in basketball would not be able to count his or her athletic participation towards Physical Education credit.

May districts offer credit for extracurricular Fine Arts activities? If so, what are the parameters?

Yes, a district may choose to offer credit for extracurricular Fine Arts activities.

Students may be granted up to one credit in Fine Arts for participation in extracurricular activities. A maximum of .25 credit may be granted for each extracurricular Fine Arts activity each school year.

The local school 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. The documentation should be kept on file at the local school district.

How do I transcript 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.

HEALTH AND HEALTH INTEGRATION

What are the requirements regarding Health?

Beginning with students who entered 9th grade in 2013, .5 unit of Health is required for graduation. This is in addition to the .5 unit of Physical Education required.

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 courses 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 instruction 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 <http://doe.sd.gov/schoolHealth/Healtheducation.aspx>.) Typically, at the high school level, this is a .5 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. The course code 08016 can be used for courses that intertwine the content. Otherwise, school districts need to use two separate course codes.

What is Health Integration?

Health Integration is the process of incorporating key Health Education 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.

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 Education standards, identified by the Department of Education, into 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 into their subject areas through national health education days, weeks and months; for example, Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October. The benefit of using the national health observances is that free materials are often available from corresponding agencies and organizations.

If stand-alone Health or Health Integration is offered in middle school, what are the parameters?

There are two scenarios – both of which meet the graduation requirements.

Scenario #1: Meeting graduation requirement & offering high school credit

If a district offers stand-alone Health or Health Integration in 6th, 7th or 8th grade 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 9th grade (eg., 8th grade Algebra). See Appendix for Application for a Waiver from an Administrative Rule.

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. A district must re-apply after five years.

Scenario #2: Meeting graduation requirement but not offering high school credit

If a district offers stand-alone Health or Health Integration in 6th, 7th or 8th grade to meet the high school graduation requirement but will not offer high school credit for that work, the district must do the following:

- 1) Report in the Department of Education's Personnel Record Form (PRF) 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 Education standards. Keep this document 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 districts 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: Meeting graduation requirement & offering credit

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 SD Administrative Rule 24:43:01:01, which defines a unit of credit.)

The district must:

- 1) Report in the Department of Education's Personnel Record Form (PRF) 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 Education standards. Keep this documentation on file at the district level.
- 3) 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. 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: Meeting graduation requirement but not offering credit

If Health Integration is offered with no credit attached, the district must do the following:

- 1) Report in the Department of Education's Personnel Record Form (PRF) 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 Education standards. Keep this documentation on file at the district level.
- 3) Provide recognition of completion on the student's 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, must the teachers have a Health endorsement?

No.

If Health is offered for 6th, 7th or 8th graders 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 Karen Keyser, Health and Physical Education Specialist, at (605) 773-3261 or (605) 220-6453.

Stand-Alone Health and Health Integration - Effective 2013

Middle School (Grades 6, 7 or 8)

Meeting grad requirement & offering high school credit

- District must apply for waiver from Department of Education (see waiver in Appendix).
- Credit appears on high school transcript with letter grade.

Meeting grad requirement but not offering high school credit

- District must report via Department of Education's Personnel Record Form.
- For Health Integration only, district must document at local level how it plans to meet key Health standards.
- District must provide recognition of completion on student transcript. No grade earned; no credit assigned; doesn't count toward student GPA.

High School

Stand-Alone Health Meeting grad requirement & offering credit

- District transcripts course and credit as with any other course taken for credit.

Health Integration Meeting grad requirement & offering credit

- District must report via Department of Education's Personnel Record Form.
- District must document at local level how it plans to meet key Health standards.
- District must issue a grade that will be transcribed and included in the GPA calculation. If district chooses to offer on pass/fail basis, it must be noted on the transcript. If district chooses to offer on pass/fail basis, it must be noted on the transcript; it's up to the district to determine if it would be calculated in the GPA.

Health Integration Meeting grad requirement but not offering credit

- District must report via Department of Education's Personnel Record Form.
- District must document at local level how it plans to meet key Health standards.
- District must provide recognition of completion on student transcript. No grade earned; no credit assigned; doesn't count toward student GPA.