

**RULES
OF
THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**CHAPTER 0520-01-03
ACADEMIC AND INSTRUCTIONAL REQUIREMENTS**

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0520-01-03-.06 GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS.

- (1) Students in Tennessee may earn the following diploma options:
 - (a) Traditional high school diploma;
 - (b) Special education high school diploma;
 - (c) Occupational high school diploma; or
 - (d) Alternate academic high school diploma.

- (2) In order to earn a traditional high school diploma, a student shall:
 - (a) Participate in the ACT, SAT, or other eleventh (11th) grade postsecondary readiness assessment as determined by the Commissioner of the Department of Education (Commissioner) unless the student qualifies for a limited medical exemption as defined by the Department;
 - (b) Have a satisfactory record of attendance and conduct;
 - (c) Earn at least one (1) credit of computer science in high school, if the student enrolled in the ninth (9th) grade in the 2024-25 school year or any subsequent year; and
 - (d) Earn twenty-two (22) minimum credits required for graduation, as follows:

English language arts	4 credits
Mathematics	4 credits
Science	3 credits
Social Studies	3 credits
Physical Education	0.5 credit
Lifetime Wellness	1 credit
Personal Finance	0.5 credit
World Language	2 credits
Fine Arts	1 credit
Elective Focus	3 credits

- (3) Computer Science
 - (a) Students may fulfill the Computer Science requirement in Subparagraph 2(c) by substituting computer science for the student's fourth credit of mathematics, third credit of science, or an elective focus credit as stipulated in the State Board Graduation Permissions and Substitutions Policy 3.103. Students may only use computer science as a substitution to fulfill one (1) credit in mathematics, or one (1) credit in science, or one (1) or more elective focus credits required for a traditional high school diploma` .

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- (b) Students who transfer from another state or country, or from a non-public school to a Tennessee high school during their twelfth (12th) grade year are exempt from the Computer Science requirement in Subparagraph 2(c).
- (4) To earn a traditional high school diploma, students with disabilities must earn the prescribed twenty-two (22) credit minimum. Students with disabilities shall be included in general education classes to the degree possible and with appropriate support and accommodations.
- (5) A special education diploma may be awarded at the end of the fourth (4th) year of high school to students with disabilities who:
 - (a) Have not met the requirements for a traditional high school diploma;
 - (b) Have satisfactorily completed an IEP; and
 - (c) Have satisfactory records of attendance and conduct.
- (6) Students who obtain the special education diploma may continue to work toward a traditional high school diploma through the end of the school year in which they turn twenty-two (22) years old.
- (7) An occupational diploma may be awarded at the end of the fourth (4th) year of high school to students with disabilities who:
 - (a) Have not met the requirements for a traditional high school diploma;
 - (b) Have satisfactorily completed an IEP;
 - (c) Have satisfactory records of attendance and conduct;
 - (d) Have completed the occupational diploma Skills, Knowledge, and Experience Mastery Assessment (SKEMA) created by the Department of Education; and
 - (e) Have completed two (2) years of paid or non-paid work experience.
- (8) The determination that an occupational diploma is the goal for a student with a disability shall be made at the conclusion of the student's tenth (10th) grade year or two (2) academic years prior to the expected graduation date. Students who obtain the occupational diploma may continue to work towards the traditional high school diploma through the end of the school year in which they turn twenty-two (22) years old.
- (9) An alternate academic diploma may be awarded to students with significant cognitive disabilities at the end of their fourth (4th) year of high school who have:
 - (a) Participated in the high school alternate assessments;
 - (b) Earned the prescribed twenty-two (22) credit minimum, including at least one (1) credit of computer science in accordance with subparagraph (2)(b) beginning with students who enroll in the ninth (9th) grade in the 2024-25 school year or any subsequent school year, either through the state-approved standards or through alternate academic diploma modified course requirements approved by the State Board;
 - (c) Received special education services or supports and made satisfactory progress on an IEP;

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- (d) Satisfactory records of attendance and conduct; and
 - (e) Completed a transition assessment(s) that measures, at a minimum, preparedness for postsecondary education and training; employment; independent living; and community involvement.
- (10) A student who earns an alternate academic diploma shall continue to be eligible for special education services under IDEA until he or she receives a traditional high school diploma or through the school year in which the student turns twenty-two (22).
- (11) The State Board of Education Approved High School Courses Policy 3.205 outlines courses that may be offered for credit in grades 9-12.
- (12) The State Board of Education High School Policy 2.103 further outlines graduation requirement expectations.
- (13) The State Board of Education Graduation Permissions and Substitutions Policy 3.103 identifies courses approved to meet required credits in areas that do not have defined course requirements (e.g., fourth math credit or third lab science) and as substitutions for certain graduation credit requirements.
- (14) The required four (4) credits of English are English I, English II, English III, and English IV. English III and IV may be substituted in accordance with the State Board of Education Graduation Permissions and Substitutions Policy 3.103.
- (15) Three (3) of the required (4) credits of mathematics are Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry, or the equivalent Integrated Math I, II, and III. The State Board of Education Graduation Permissions and Substitutions Policy 3.103 outlines fourth credit mathematics course permissions.
- (a) Beginning with students graduating in the 2024-25 school year and thereafter, students shall be enrolled in a mathematics course or courses that are approved course substitutions that count as meeting this requirement in at least three (3) years of high school.
 - (b) Students who complete any of the required math credits prior to the ninth (9th) grade shall receive graduation credit for that coursework; however, those students are still required to enroll in math for at least three (3) years of high school.
 - (c) Students with a qualifying disability who have deficits in mathematics as documented in the individualized education program (IEP) shall be required to achieve at least Algebra I and Geometry (or the equivalent Integrated Math I and Integrated Math II). The required number of credits in math will be achieved through strategies such as, but not limited to, increased time, appropriate methodologies, and accommodations as determined by the IEP team.
- (16) The three (3) credits of science shall include Biology, Chemistry, or Physics, and a third lab science. The State Board of Education Graduation Permissions and Substitutions Policy 3.103 outlines third lab science course permissions.
- (a) Students with a qualifying disability as documented in the IEP shall be required to achieve at least Biology I and two (2) other lab science credits. The required number of credits in science will be achieved through strategies such as, but not limited to,

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increased time, appropriate methodologies, and accommodations as determined by the IEP team.

- (17) The three (3) credits of social studies shall include United States History and Geography, World History and Geography, Economics, and United States Government and Civics.
- (18) Students must earn one-half ($\frac{1}{2}$) credit in Personal Finance. One (1) JROTC course may be substituted for one-half ($\frac{1}{2}$) credit of Personal Finance if the JROTC instructor attends the Personal Finance training conducted by the Department.
- (19) The three (3) elective focus credits may be earned in Advanced Placement, career and technical education, computer science, fine arts, humanities, International Baccalaureate program, science and mathematics, world language, or other areas designed to prepare students for the workforce and postsecondary and approved by the local board of education. Elective focus course selection shall be informed by conversation between the student and school-based staff responsible for advising and in development of the High School and Beyond Plan.
 - (a) Students must complete the three required credits in the same focus area, however, this rule does not prohibit students from switching from one area of focus to another as appropriate and in alignment with the student's High School and Beyond Plan.
 - (b) Students completing a CTE elective focus must complete three (3) credits in the same CTE career cluster or state-approved program of study.
 - (c) The director of schools or the director (or equivalent) of the public charter school may waive the third (3rd) credit requirement of the elective focus during a student's 12th grade year if the completion of the third (3rd) elective focus credit would prevent or delay graduation. This waiver option includes those students who transfer during the eleventh (11th) or twelfth (12th) grade year to a Tennessee high school from a school in another state or country, or from a non-public school.
- (20) The credit requirements for fine arts and/or world language shall be waived by the LEA's director of schools, or the director (or equivalent) of the public charter school if:
 - (a) Through development of the student's High School and Beyond Plan, and discussions between school-based staff responsible for supporting student advising, school leadership, the student, and the parent(s) or guardian(s) of the student, it has been determined the student would benefit from additional elective coursework either within their chosen area of focus or outside of the area of focus; and
 - (b) the student's parent or guardian has agreed to the waiver(s) in writing.
- (21) The Department shall develop guidance for LEAs and public charter schools to support implementation of the waiver process outlined in (20), including a standardized waiver template that shall be used for this purpose.
- (22) Districts shall connect elective courses directly to each student's High School and Beyond Plan, as detailed in State Board of Education High School Policy 2.103.
- (23) All full-time students in grades nine (9) through twelve (12) shall be enrolled each semester in subjects that produce a minimum of five (5) units of credit for graduation per year. Students with hardships and gifted students may appeal this requirement to the director of schools and

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then to the local board of education, or to the director (or equivalent) of the public charter school and its governing body.

- (24) Every local board of education shall develop a policy regarding the minimum and maximum units in any course or subject area for which a student may earn credit toward graduation.
- (25) A public high school student may complete an early high school graduation program through the Move on When Ready Program and be eligible for unconditional entry into a public two (2)-year institution of higher education or conditional entry into a public four (4)-year institution of higher education in accordance with T.C.A. §§ 49-6-8101 - 49-6-8106 and the State Board's High School Policy 2.103.
- (26) A student who does not participate in the Move on When Ready Program may still graduate earlier than the end of their 12th grade year of high school, provided the student meets all graduation requirements for a traditional high school diploma set forth in this Rule, the State Board's High School Policy 2.103, and any additional requirements for early graduation set by the LEA.
- (27) A variety of honors and distinctions may be awarded to graduating students meeting state or locally specified criteria. Each local school board shall develop a policy prescribing how students meeting honors and distinctions requirements will be noted and recognized.
- (28) LEAs may design student recognition programs that allow students to graduate with honors if they have met the graduation requirements and have attained an overall grade point average (GPA) of at least a 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale. LEAs may set a higher GPA at their discretion. LEAs may specify additional requirements, such as requiring students to demonstrate performance of distinction in one (1) or more areas.
- (29) Students who score at or above all the subject area readiness benchmarks on the ACT, or equivalent score on the SAT, shall graduate with "state honors."
- (30) Students shall be recognized as graduating with "district distinction" if they have met the graduation requirements for their diploma type, have obtained an overall GPA of at least a 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale, and have earned an industry credential that was on the list promoted by the Department of Education at the time the student earned it.
- (31) A student who earns a composite score of nineteen (19) or higher on the ACT, or an equivalent score on the SAT, and earns a capstone industry credential as promoted by the Department of Education, shall be recognized as a "Tennessee Tri-Star Scholar" upon graduation from high school. A student who fulfills the requirements of the Tennessee Work Ethic Distinction program shall also be recognized as a Tennessee Tri-Star Scholar upon graduation from high school. The public high school shall recognize the student's achievement at the graduation ceremony by placing an appropriate designation on the student's diploma, or other credential, or by providing a ribbon or cord to be worn with graduation regalia. The student shall be noted as a Tennessee Tri-Star Scholar in the school's graduation program.
- (32) Students will be recognized as graduating with "state distinction" by attaining a B or better grade point average and completing one (1) of the following:
 - (a) Earning an industry credential that was on the list promoted by the Department of Education at the time the student earned it;
 - (b) Participating in at least one (1) of the Governor's Schools;

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- (c) Participating in one (1) of the state's All-State Arts Organizations;
 - (d) Earning statewide recognition or award at a skill- or knowledge-based state tournament, convention, or competition hosted by a statewide student organization, and/or qualifying for national recognition by a national student organization;
 - (e) Being selected as a National Merit Finalist or Semi-Finalist;
 - (f) Attaining a score of thirty-one (31) or higher composite score on the ACT or SAT equivalent;
 - (g) Attaining a score of three (3) or higher on at least two (2) advanced placement exams;
 - (h) Attaining a score of E/e or higher in at least two (2) Cambridge International Education A or AS exams;
 - (i) Successfully completing the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme; or
 - (j) Earning twelve (12) or more semester hours of postsecondary credit.
- (33) LEAs shall recognize students who have attained a high level of proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in one (1) or more languages in addition to English with a "Seal of Biliteracy." Students receiving this recognition shall meet the following criteria:
- (a) Complete all English language arts (ELA) requirements for graduation with an overall grade point average of 3.0 or higher in those classes;
 - (b) Demonstrate English proficiency through one (1) of the following:
 - 1. Score at the on-track or mastered level on each ELA end-of-course assessment taken;
 - 2. Score three (3) or higher on an Advanced Placement English Language or English Literature exam; B1 or higher on a Cambridge International English exam; or four (4) or higher on an International Baccalaureate English exam;
 - 3. Score twenty-two (22) or higher on the ACT Reading subtest or four hundred eighty (480) or higher on the SAT evidence-based reading and writing subtest; or
 - 4. Attain the required score on the state-approved English language proficiency assessment listed in State Board English as a Second Language Programs Policy 3.207, if the student is an English learner; and
 - (c) Demonstrate proficiency in a world language through one (1) of the following:
 - 1. Score Intermediate-Mid or higher in all three (3) communication modes (interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational) on a world language proficiency assessment recognized by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL);
 - 2. Score three (3) or higher on an Advanced Placement world language exam; B1 or higher on a Cambridge International world language exam; or four (4) or higher on an International Baccalaureate world language exam;

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3. Score at the Intermediate level or higher on the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI: ASL);
 4. Pass a foreign government's approved non-English language exam, or score at a level comparable to Intermediate-Mid or higher on the ACTFL proficiency scale on another country's secondary level standardized exam in the country's non-English native language; or
 5. Score at a level comparable to Intermediate-Mid or higher on the ACTFL proficiency scale on an LEA-developed alternate model. Alternate models may only be used if the identified world language does not have an associated nationally recognized assessment and must address communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities.
- (d) Each school shall document and track students' progress toward the Seal of Biliteracy.
- (e) Each local board shall affix an appropriate insignia to the diploma of the qualifying student indicating that the student has been awarded a Tennessee Seal of Biliteracy.
- (34) Students who voluntarily complete at least ten (10) hours of community service each semester the student is in attendance at a public high school shall be recognized at their graduation ceremony.
- (35) Students graduating with a gold or platinum medal on the National Career Readiness Certificate (WorkKeys) shall be recognized at their graduation ceremony.
- (36) Students graduating with a district-developed work ethic distinction shall be recognized at their graduation ceremony.
- (37) Students who are interested in pursuing a career in a high-need, high-skill industry after graduation may earn an "Industry 4.0 diploma distinction." The student's school shall include on the student's transcript the Industry 4.0 distinction if the student fulfills all Industry 4.0 distinction requirements upon graduation.
- (a) Each public high school, including public charter high schools, shall notify ninth (9th) grade and tenth (10th) grade students enrolled in the high school of the opportunity to pursue an Industry 4.0 diploma distinction no later than ten (10) days after the first day of each semester of the school year.
 - (b) A high school student interested in receiving an Industry 4.0 diploma distinction shall, before the end of their tenth (10th) grade year:
 1. Notify the student's counselor or school principal of the student's intent to pursue an Industry 4.0 diploma distinction;
 2. Provide the student's counselor or school principal with documentation signed by the student's parent or legal guardian indicating that the student's parent or legal guardian is aware of the requirements for the parent's or legal guardian's student to obtain an Industry 4.0 diploma distinction and consenting to the student's participation;
 3. Register with a regional American Job Center or other career counseling or community partner approved by the student's school; and

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4. Enroll in at least one (1) work-based learning or dual enrollment course for the student's eleventh (11th) grade year.
- (c) Beginning in the student's eleventh (11th) grade year, a student pursuing an Industry 4.0 diploma distinction shall meet, no less than once per month, with a career coach who has been approved to provide career coaching services by the student's school. The career coach must:
1. Be an American Job Center career coach, a career coach from a career counseling or community partner approved by the United States Department of Labor's regional office for the state of Tennessee, or a licensed school counselor or an educator who holds a work-based learning certificate provided by the Department of Education; and
 2. Meet, no less than once per month during the school year, with students assigned to the career coach by the student's school principal to assist students in:
 - (i) Developing the personal attributes required for success in the workforce, which include, but are not limited to, time management, networking, communication, teamwork, creative thinking, and conflict resolution;
 - (ii) Applying for dual enrollment grants or other available financial aid opportunities, including, but not limited to, grants and scholarships administered by the Tennessee Student Assistance Corporation;
 - (iii) Identifying the best combination of dual enrollment, work-based learning, and internship opportunities available to the student; and
 - (iv) Preparing for standardized assessments such as the ACT.
- (d) Before the end of the student's eleventh (11th) grade year, a student pursuing an Industry 4.0 diploma distinction shall enroll in work-based learning or dual enrollment courses for the student's twelfth (12th) grade year.
- (e) A student receiving an Industry 4.0 diploma distinction shall successfully complete all coursework required for graduation for their diploma type.
- (f) A student pursuing an Industry 4.0 diploma distinction may earn at least one (1) science credit and at least one (1) math credit through course substitutions approved by the State Board in its Graduation Substitutions Policy 3.103, including, but not limited to, dual enrollment and work-based learning courses that are aligned to a student's chosen career path. Work-based learning course substitutions may only fulfill a student's third (3rd) credit of science and/or fourth (4th) credit of math. Pursuant to State Board Rule 0520-01-03-.03 and State Board Graduation Substitutions Policy 3.103, high schools shall accept dual enrollment courses as a substitution for an aligned graduation requirement course.
- (g) A student receiving an Industry 4.0 diploma distinction shall earn nine (9) credits of dual enrollment or work-based learning in grades nine (9) through twelve (12), which may be satisfied by the student's successful completion of dual enrollment coursework, work-based learning experiences, on-the-job training, or other mentorships or structured educational experiences that allow the student to apply the student's knowledge and skills in a work environment to develop an understanding of workplace expectations.

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Authority: T.C.A. §§ 49-1-302, 49-1-302(a)(2) and (13), 49-6-101, 49-6-201, 49-6-3001(c) and (c)(1), 49-6-3003, 49-6-3005, 49-6-3104, 49-6-3105, 49-6-6001, and 49-6-8101, et seq. **Administrative History:** Original rule certified June 10, 1974. Amendment filed July 18, 1974; effective August 17, 1974. Amendment filed June 30, 1975; effective July 30, 1975. Amendment filed July 15, 1976; effective August 16, 1976. Amendment filed February 28, 1978; effective March 30, 1978. Amendment filed January 9, 1979; effective February 23, 1979. Amendment filed October 15, 1979; effective January 8, 1980. Amendment filed April 14, 1980; effective May 28, 1980. Amendment filed April 13, 1982; effective May 28, 1982. Amendment filed September 28, 1982; effective December 15, 1982. Amendment filed January 19, 1983; effective April 18, 1983. Amendment filed September 28, 1983; effective December 14, 1983. Amendment filed January 6, 1984; effective April 15, 1984. Amendment filed June 28, 1984; effective July 28, 1984. Amendment filed June 28, 1984; effective September 11, 1984. Amendment filed May 12, 1985; effective August 13, 1985. Amendment filed October 3, 1985; effective January 14, 1986. Amendment filed March 25, 1986; effective June 14, 1986. Amendment filed May 28, 1986; effective June 27, 1986. Amendment filed July 10, 1987; effective October 28, 1987. Amendment filed July 22, 1987; effective October 28, 1987. Amendment filed September 20, 1987; effective December 29, 1987. Amendment filed November 18, 1987; effective February 28, 1988. Amendment filed April 18, 1988; effective July 27, 1988. Amendment filed May 13, 1988; effective August 29, 1988. Amendment filed October 18, 1988; effective January 29, 1989. Amendment filed November 22, 1988; effective February 28, 1989. Amendment filed November 16, 1989; effective February 28, 1990. Amendment filed June 5, 1990; effective September 26, 1990. 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Amendment filed July 17, 2009; effective December 29, 2009. Amendment filed February 24, 2010; effective July 29, 2010. Amendment filed February 6, 2013; effective July 29, 2013. Amendment filed June 18, 2013; effective November 28, 2013. Amendments filed September 6, 2013; effective February 28, 2014. Amendments filed October 7, 2013; to be effective March 31, 2014. However, the State Board of Education filed a withdrawal of the rule. Amendments filed November 27, 2013; effective April 30, 2014. Amendment filed May 8, 2014; effective October 29, 2014. Amendment filed October 13, 2014; effective January 11, 2015. Amendment to rule 0520-01-03-.06(1)(b) filed May 22, 2015; effective August 20, 2015. Amendment to rule 0520-01-03-.06(3) filed May 22, 2015; effective August 20, 2015. Amendments filed December 30, 2015; effective March 29, 2016. Amendments filed October 25, 2017; effective January 23, 2018. Amendments filed March 20, 2018; to have been effective June 18, 2018. However, on May 24, 2018, the Government Operations Committee filed a 5-day stay; new effective date June 23, 2018. Amendments filed January 11, 2019; effective April 11, 2019. Amendments filed August 20, 2020; effective November 18, 2020. Amendments filed January 6, 2023; effective April 6, 2023. Amendments filed July 11, 2024; effective October 9, 2024. Amendments filed September 25, 2025; effective December 24, 2025.