



State Requirements for High School Life-Skills Courses

Purpose

This Iowa Civic Analysis Network (I-CAN) report compares life-skills curriculum requirements for high-school graduation across states and the District of Columbia.

The States

In addition to curriculum in core educational areas such as math, English, and the sciences, some states mandate that students take courses in: 1) technology; 2) financial or economic literacy; and 3) career skills in order to graduate from high school. Those reading the state-by-state breakdown included at the end of this report, which was compiled from the legislative and/or education-department web sites of each state, should consider that:

- State requirements are usually measured by a Carnegie educational unit, sometimes called a credit hour. Students attending a class that meets for one hour (often shortened to 50 minutes) for each of the five weekdays earn .5 of a Carnegie credit for an entire semester, 1 Carnegie credit for an entire year of such a class, and so forth. For example, since most state legislatures have decided students should receive four years of English education, they require 4 Carnegie credits in English. Most states mandate between 16-20 total high-school credit-hours for graduation. All credits have been converted to their Carnegie equivalent for the purposes of this report.¹
- The requirements included in the chart below are minimums as dictated by each state. Many school districts within the states also adopt life-skills course requirements on top of the state mandates. Some states also have “either/or requirements,” where students can choose a technology, financial/economic literacy, or career-skills course among other options to fulfill certain elective-credit requirements; because they are not necessarily mandatory for graduation, those requirements are not included below.
- Fifteen states have multiple degree programs, affording students the option of taking more classes, including life-skills courses, in order to qualify for and graduate with an advanced high-school diploma. Some states also mandate life-skills courses, not required for a general diploma, for students who wish to be admitted to a college or university in the state. Finally, some states offer an alternative diploma for students who plan to forgo

¹ <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/about/sub.asp?key=17&subkey=1874>

higher education and enter a technical profession; some of those diploma routes have life-skills course requirements that those seeking a general diploma need not meet. Again, only those requirements necessary for the most basic diploma in each state are included in this report.

The table below states the requirements of the 50 states and the District of Columbia regarding the three main life-skills course areas: technology, financial or economic literacy, and career-skills. While the official names of the requirements may differ—e.g., “technology/computer science” in Connecticut is termed “computer technology” in Georgia—they are grouped together here because they serve to accomplish the same ends.

Life-skills areas for which states do not require coursework, but instead mandate demonstrated proficiency through standardized testing or other means, are also included (because no course is required, Carnegie education units are not provided in the table for these requirements). For a list of all life-skills and non-life-skills courses required for high-school graduation, see the legislative websites of each state.

State	Course Requirement (Carnegie units)		
	<i>Technology</i>	<i>\$ Literacy</i>	<i>Career Skills</i>
Alabama	computer applications* (.5)		
Alaska			
Arizona			vocational education** (1)
Arkansas	technology (1)		
California			
Colorado			
Connecticut	technology/computer science (.5)		
Delaware			career-oriented courses (3)
D.C.			vocational education (1)
Florida		economics (.5)	
Georgia	computer technology# (1)		
Hawaii			career-oriented courses (.5)
Idaho			
Illinois		consumer education# (.25)	career-oriented courses^ (1)
Indiana			career-oriented courses (3)
Iowa			
Kansas			
Kentucky	demonstrated competency=		
Louisiana			
Maine	computer skills (.5)		
Maryland	technology education (1)		
Massachusetts			
Michigan	on-line learning experience=		applied arts^^ (1)
Minnesota		economics (.5)	

Mississippi		economics (.5)	
Missouri		personal finance (.5)	practical arts (1)
Montana	technical education+ (1)		vocational education+ (1)
Nebraska			
Nevada	computers (1)		
New Hampshire	computer education (.5)	basic business/economics education (.5)	
New Jersey	demonstrated technological literacy=		practical arts (1)
New Mexico		economics (.5)	practical arts** (1)
New York			
North Carolina	demonstrated proficiency= ++		courses appropriate for career pathway (4)
North Dakota		economics (.5)	
Ohio			
Oklahoma			
Oregon			demonstrate career-related knowledge/skills=
Pennsylvania			
Rhode Island			
South Carolina	computer science (1), technology education (1)	economics (.5)	
South Dakota		economics or personal finance (.5)	
Tennessee			
Texas		economics (.5)	
Utah	computer technology (.5) or competency exam	financial literacy (.5)	
Vermont			
Virginia			technology education** (1)
Washington			occupational educational (1)
West Virginia			
Wisconsin			
Wyoming			

Exceptions:

= No credit-hour requirements; means by which proficiency must be demonstrated vary by state

* Students may test out of this course

** Can replace with fine arts course[s]

Can replace with fine arts or career/preparatory course[s]

Can test out via the Illinois Consumer Education Proficiency Test

^ Can replace with art, music, or foreign language course[s]

^^ Can replace with visual or performing arts course[s]

+Students need 1 unit of technical education or 1 unit of vocational education or a combination of the two, not both

++Unneeded if choosing College/University Prep diploma option

This report was prepared in December 2007 by the Iowa Civic Analysis Network (I-CAN), a non-partisan public policy undergraduate research group at the University of Iowa. For additional research on this or other issues, please visit our website at <http://www.uiowa.edu/~ican> or contact us at studorg-i-can@uiowa.edu.