



Budget Briefs from the Legislative Reference Bureau

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NEW ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND GRADUATION EXAMINATION

The biennial state budget act (1997 Wisconsin Act 27), signed by Governor Tommy Thompson on October 11, 1997, mandates that school boards adopt pupil academic standards in certain subjects by August 1998 and requires that most students pass a graduation examination in order to receive a high school diploma starting in the 2002-03 school year.

I. PUPIL ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Educational Goals and Expectations

Wisconsin public schools must currently provide instructional programs designed to develop various academic skills and knowledge, including basic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics, and knowledge of literature, fine arts, natural sciences and social sciences. The statutes also mandate a series of examinations designed to measure pupil achievement in the 4th, 8th and 10th grades. However, the test results are used primarily to assess a district's educational programs and how it can direct its resources in order to further pupils' progress.

Statewide Standards Being Developed

The 1997-99 budget requires that, by August 1, 1998, school boards must adopt pupil academic standards in mathematics, science, reading and writing, geography and history. The Governor's Council on Model Academic Standards is currently working on proposed knowledge and concept guidelines which are expected to be finalized in December 1997. Local school boards must either adopt the statewide standards or develop their own versions.

II. GRADUATION EXAMINATION ADDED TO GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Under current state law, in order to graduate from a Wisconsin public high school, a student must earn a minimum number of credits in certain subject areas specified by law: at least 4 credits of English, including writing composition; 3 credits of social studies, including state and local government; 2 credits of mathematics; 2 credits of science; and 1.5 credits of physical education. In addition, at least one-half credit of health education must have been completed during grades 7 to 12. School boards are encouraged to require an additional 8.5 credits selected from any combination of vocational education, foreign languages, fine arts and other

courses. Students enrolled in alternative education programs or those who demonstrate proficiency in all of the above subjects may also receive a diploma.

Schools Must Adopt a Graduation Examination

The budget continues these credit requirements and directs the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to develop a high school graduation examination to measure whether pupils meet the statewide academic standards. Each school board must either adopt the DPI examination or develop and adopt its own examination to measure achievement of the statewide or locally developed standards. Beginning with the 2000-01 school year, each school board must administer the high school graduation examination at least twice a year in the grades (from 9 to 12) it determines.

Students Must Pass Examination To Receive Diploma

Starting September 1, 2002, a student must pass the graduation examination in order to be granted a high school diploma. Pupils must be offered at least four opportunities to take the exam while in high school.

Exemptions

School boards may decide not to administer the standard high school graduation examination to a limited-English speaking pupil, may permit the pupil to be tested in his or her native language or may modify the examination or the testing process to accommodate such pupils. In addition, at the request of a pupil's parent or guardian, a school board must excuse the pupil from taking the examination. In order to qualify for graduation, excused pupils must earn the minimum credits in the required subjects as described above and must also satisfy alternative evaluation criteria developed by the school board.

III. FOR MORE INFORMATION

For copies of laws relating to educational goals and achievements, achievement tests, the new school standards and the high school graduation examination (Sections 118.01, 118.30 and 118.33, Wisconsin Statutes), contact the Legislative Reference Bureau at (608) 266-0342.

For information about the statewide academic standards, contact the DPI Division for Learning Support at (608) 266-3361; and for information about graduation examinations, contact the DPI Director of Educational Accountability at (608) 267-9111.