

States' Definitions of Credit

BACKGROUND

Carnegie Unit. The Carnegie unit was developed in 1906 as a measure of the amount of time a student has studied a subject. At that time, it represented a year's study in any major subject in a secondary school, or 120 sixty-minute hours of work that earned the student one "unit" of high school credit. Over 100 years ago, fourteen units (credits) were deemed to constitute the minimum needed for "four years of academic or high school preparation".¹

States' Credit Definitions. Twenty-seven (27) states define credits in terms of time; seventeen (17) states do not include a time requirement, and six (6) states do not define credit at the state level. Indiana recently (March 2009) waived its time-based requirement to grant additional flexibility to schools to increase a focus on student-centered learning.

Among the 27 states with a time-based requirement, only Louisiana, at 177 hours for a six-period day, exceeds Washington's 150-hour requirement. The most frequently occurring (modal) time-based definition is 120 hours (held by nine states, or 33%).

Credit Definitions for States with 24-Credit Graduation Requirements. Among the 12 states that require 24 credits, the definition of a credit ranges from unspecified (Hawaii, New Mexico, Utah) to 177 hours for a six-period day in Louisiana. The majority (seven states) require 140 hours or fewer. (See Table 1)

Table 1. Credit Definitions for States that Require 24 Credits to Graduate²

State	Time in Hours (if specified)	Definition for One Credit
Alabama	140	"A minimum of 140 clock hours of instruction for one unit of credit and a minimum of 70 clock hours of instruction is required for one-half unit of credit"
Delaware	135	"Credit means the acquisition of skills and knowledge at a satisfactory level as determined by the district and charter school boards through 135 hours (a Carnegie Unit) of actual classroom instruction or through locally approved options contained in Section 8.0" (Section 8 includes credit awarded for courses taken at colleges, voluntary community service, supervised work experience,

¹ Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching website <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/about/sub.asp?key=17&subkey=1874>; The History of the Carnegie Unit (1964). NASSP Bulletin. <http://bul.sagepub.com>

² Information taken from states' administrative codes

State	Time in Hours (if specified)	Definition for One Credit
		independent study, correspondence courses, distance learning courses, middle school courses, transfer credit from another high school, adult summer or evening courses, tutoring programs by certified teachers, or state agencies other than public schools)
Florida	135	"135 hours of bona fide instruction in a designated course of study that contains student performance standards"
Hawaii	None	"Credit shall be basically an expression of progress and learning rather than merely time spent. All approved courses in grades 9-12 shall have credit designations. Credits may be granted for other courses and programs as designated by Department regulations. Credit by Examination may be awarded in accordance with the regulations established by the Department."
Louisiana	132.75 to 177 (Varies by schedule)	"Since each school shall provide 63,750 minutes of instructional time per year, the minimum amount of instructional time required for one Carnegie credit to be earned shall be as follows: a. 10,620 minutes for a six-period schedule [177 hours] b. 9,103 minutes for a seven-period schedule [151.7 hours] c. 7,965 minutes for eight-period or 4 x 4 block schedules [132.75 hours] For other schedule configurations, a minimum of 7,965 minutes of instructional time must be met for one Carnegie credit to be earned."
Missouri	130.5	"A standard unit of credit is defined by a course that meets for 7,830 minutes during a school year."
New Mexico	None	
North Dakota	120 – 150 (Varies by discipline)	"Except as provided in subsection 2, each unit must consist of at least 120 hours of instruction per school calendar." (Subsection 2: "The following units must consist of at least 150 hours of instruction per school calendar: natural sciences, agriculture, business and office technology, marketing, diversified occupations, trade and industrial education, technology education, and health careers.")
Oregon	130	"Unit of Credit": Certification of a student's successful completion of classroom or equivalent work in a course of at least 130 clock hours, or equivalent as set out in OAR 581-022-1131.
South Carolina	120	"A class period is defined as a minimum of 50 minutes or an accumulation of the equivalency of 120 hours required for a Carnegie Unit of Credit."
Utah	None	"Unit of credit means credit awarded for courses taken consistent with this rule or upon school district/school authorization or for mastery demonstrated by approved methods."
West Virginia	135	"A county board of education that proposes to schedule class periods in a manner that results in fewer than 8100 minutes of instructional time allotted for a high school course credit must obtain a waiver from the WVBE prior to implementing such a schedule."

Competency-based Credit. Thirty-four (34) states, including Washington, have proficiency-based credit policies that provide students with ways other than classroom-based instruction to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.³ These policies may help students accelerate their education, move on to more appropriate levels of learning, or recover credit. The following snapshot provides a sense of the focus and breadth of current state policies.

Florida's policy is very explicit about an intent to accelerate learning, while Kansas' policy says nothing about intent; it simply gives license for students to demonstrate prior learning:

Florida. Credit by examination or demonstration of competence is listed as one of a number of articulated acceleration mechanisms intended to shorten the time necessary for a student to complete the requirements associated with the conference of a high school diploma and a postsecondary degree, broaden the scope of curricular options available to students, or increase the depth of study available for a particular subject.

Kansas. Individual students may be awarded credit based on demonstrated knowledge of the content of a course or subject, regardless of the amount of time spent by the student in the course or subject.

Some states limit their policies to certain subjects. For example, **Illinois** specifies proficiency credit for community service, consumer education, and/or world language; **Mississippi's** policy applies to keyboarding. **Georgia's** policy focuses on world language credit, particularly for nonnative speakers of English, although a local board "may apply to the state superintendent for a waiver to award alternative high school students credit based on demonstrated competency on course examination(s)." Other states mandate the opportunity for competency-based credit across subject areas; for instance:

Arizona. Upon request a local board **must** give the student the opportunity to demonstrate competence in subject areas in lieu of classroom time.

California. Local boards, with input from parents, administrators, teachers and students **must** adopt alternative means for pupils to complete the prescribed course of study which may include practical demonstration of skills and competencies, supervised experiences or other outside school experience, CTE classes offered in high schools, courses offered by regional occupational centers or programs, interdisciplinary study, independent study, and credit earned at a postsecondary institution.

Indiana. A student demonstrating proficiency in a course or subject area required for graduation or the academic honors diploma **must** receive credits for such regardless of whether the student has completed course work in the subject area. Proficiency may be demonstrated through one or more of the following methods: 1) Receiving a score that demonstrates proficiency on a standardized assessment "accepted by accredited postsecondary institutions. 2) Receiving a high proficiency level score on an end-of-course assessment for a course without taking the course. 3) Completing a similar course at an eligible institution under the postsecondary enrollment program under 1C 20-30-11. 4) Scoring 3, 4, or 5 on an Advanced Placement exam for a course or subject area. 5) Other methods approved by the state board.

³ Education Commission of the States Standard High School Graduation Requirements database. (2008). <http://mb2.ecs.org/reports/Report.aspx?id=735>

Michigan. The local board **must** award credit in any course to a high school student who is not enrolled in a course but has exhibited a reasonable level of mastery of the subject matter of the course by attaining a grade of not less than C+ in a final exam in the course, or, if there is no final exam, by exhibiting that mastery through the basic assessment used in the course which may consist of a portfolio, performance, paper, project, or presentation.

New Hampshire. By the 2008-2009 school year, local boards **must** allow high school credit to be earned by demonstrating mastery of required competencies for the course, as approved by certified school personnel, and must have in place competency assessments for all courses offered through the high school.

Utah. Utah **requires** districts to have policies and procedures to award credit based upon demonstrated competency. The state is in the process of working with districts to create standardized assessments in all subject areas needed for graduation. The tests are available at five testing centers throughout the state. Students pay a non-refundable fee of up to \$85.00 for each assessment section, and tests may have as many as three sections (multiple choice, constructed response, and essay/performance). Students receive a "P" for demonstrated competency on the assessment; no letter grade is given.

Finally, several states (e.g., Maine, Rhode Island) are moving toward competency-based graduation requirements.

Maine. Maine is moving toward a standards-based diploma beginning with the class of 2016. A Diploma Stakeholder Group has recently provided recommendations⁴ to the Commissioner of Education, including the following ideas.

- The diploma for each secondary school student would reflect credits earned in eight content areas, and would be based on standards established in Maine's *Learning Results* as measured by credits, with the definition of a credit being the "successful demonstration of the content standards in the Maine's Learning Results specified in units of study or syllabi."
- Although all students would have educational experiences in all eight content areas, in order to be awarded a diploma all students would need to meet standards in four common areas statewide: 1) English Language Arts, 2) Math, 3) Science & Technology, and 4) Social Studies. Students would select one additional area in which to meet the standards: 1) Health Education and Physical Education, 2) Visual and Performing Arts, or 3) World Languages. Students would need to meet the standards at least partially in the remaining two areas.

Rhode Island. Beginning with the class of 2008, students needed to demonstrate proficiency to graduate from high school; by 2012, all districts will be held accountable for the quality of their performance-based assessments.⁵ Under the Performance-based

⁴ Diploma Stakeholder Recommendations Report to the Commissioner of Education. November 25, 2008. <http://www.maine.gov/education/diploma/finalreport.pdf>

⁵ Personal communication, May 12, 2009.

Graduation Requirements, students must complete both standards-based courses (minimum 20 Carnegie Units) and diploma assessments that embed applied learning.

To meet proficiency, students must demonstrate achievement of state high school grade span expectations in oral and written communication, reading, mathematics and science and local expectations in social studies, the arts and technology. Additionally, students must complete two school-selected diploma assessments: graduation exhibition, graduation portfolio and/or performance-based end-of-course exams/common tasks. Students must also show evidence that they have mastered the applied learning skills of critical thinking, problem solving, research, communication, decision making, interpreting information, analytic reasoning and personal or social responsibility.

POLICY GUIDELINES

Washington's Definition of Credit. WAC 180-51-050 states that high school credit shall mean:

(1) Grades nine through twelve or the equivalent of a four-year high school program, and grades seven and eight under the provisions of [RCW 28A.230.090](#) (4) and (5):

(a) One hundred fifty hours of planned instructional activities approved by the district; or

(b) Satisfactory demonstration by a student of clearly identified competencies established pursuant to a process defined in written district policy. Districts are strongly advised to confirm with the higher education coordinating board that the award of competency-based high school credit meets the minimum college core admissions standards set by the higher education coordinating board for admission into a public, baccalaureate institution.

One 50-minute period x 180 days = 9,000 minutes or 150 hours.

Washington's Definition of Instructional Hours. RCW 28A.150.205, in the chapter on general provisions and referring to specific basic education sections of the chapter, defines instructional hours as follows:

"Instructional hours" means those hours students are provided the opportunity to engage in educational activity planned by and under the direction of school district staff, as directed by the administration and board of directors of the district, inclusive of intermissions for class changes, recess, and teacher/parent-guardian conferences that are planned and scheduled by the district for the purpose of discussing students' educational needs or progress, and exclusive of time actually spent for meals.

There is no WAC or RCW that defines instructional hours relating specifically to credits.

WSSDA's sample Board Policy #2410 notes, "A credit is defined as 150 hours of planned instructional activities excluding passing time."

Waiver of Instructional Hour Requirement. WAC 392-410-117 permits temporary exemption from course and credit requirements. In 2008-2009, 23 schools applied for exemptions from the 150 instructional hour requirement.

