



## Connecticut High School Graduation Requirements Unpacked

### Brief 2: Elements of Effective Instruction

**New Graduation Requirements:** (c) “Commencing with classes graduating in 2023, and for each graduating class thereafter, no local or regional board of education shall permit any student to graduate from high school or grant a diploma to any student who has not satisfactorily completed a minimum of twenty-five credits, including not fewer than: (1) Nine credits in the humanities, including civics and the arts; (2) nine credits in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; (3) one credit in physical education and wellness; (4) one credit in health and safety education, as described in section 10-16b; (5) one credit in world languages, subject of the provisions of subsection (g) of this section; and (6) a one credit mastery-based diploma assessment.”

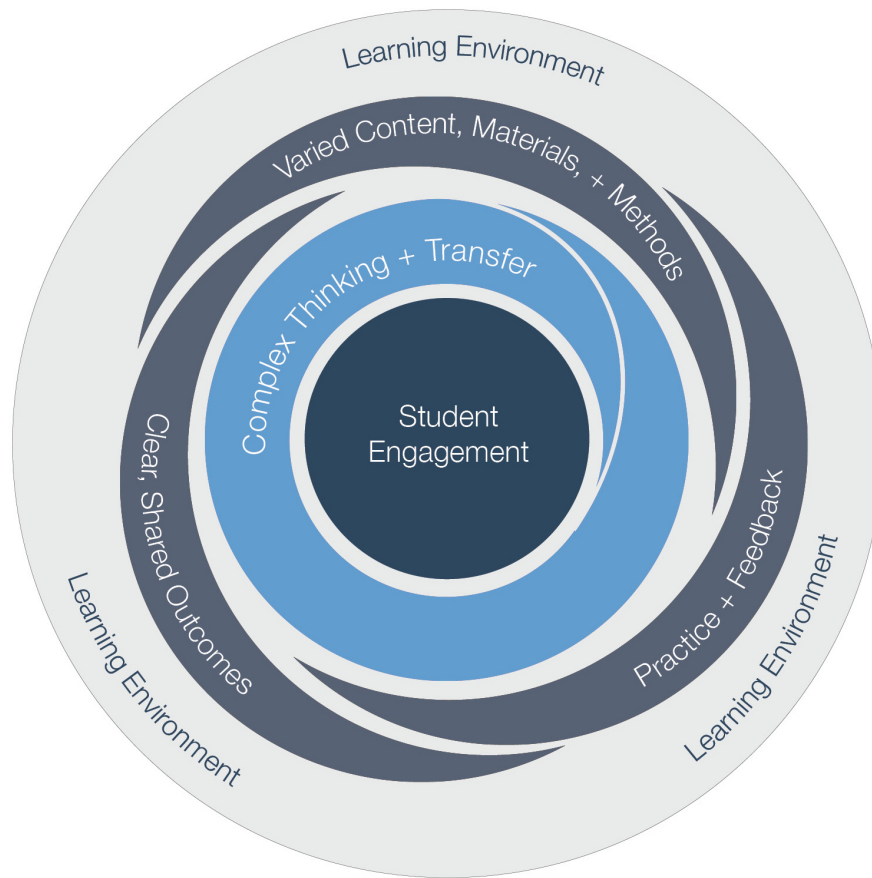
—Public Act No.17-42; Sec. 1 (c)

One of the most significant changes in this iteration of the state high school graduation requirements statute is the shift from specific course requirements to broader, integrated, content area requirements with a corresponding increase in the number of credits required. While the statute addresses the spread of credit requirements across larger and more flexible content areas, a single reality remains the same as ever: the daily quality of classroom instruction impacts student learning more than any other factor under the control of the teacher, the school, or the district. This brief focuses on the foundational elements of instructional practice that foster increased student engagement and ownership as well as increased equity and rigor.

All of the briefs in this series are built around the belief that a change to graduation expectations – like all change processes – must be grounded in a shared, collaboratively created vision of success for all students in your district. While this brief focuses specifically on instruction and creating a shared understanding of quality instruction, all instruction is in service of supporting students to achieve a shared vision of knowledge and skills. Schools, districts, and communities can define that vision through work on a Portrait of a Graduate – the north star document that defines the skills and knowledge that every graduate of your system needs to be successful throughout their lives.

The framework below outlines five intertwined elements of instructional practice grounded in the understanding that student engagement depends on students feeling safe in their learning environment, understanding what they are learning and why it matters, having opportunities to practice, receiving clear feedback on their work, and engaging in complex, meaningful thinking. [This Elements of Effective Instruction document](#) includes these five elements as well as the specific supporting beliefs and key traits that educators can use to design and facilitate learning experiences.





**Student Engagement**  
*a result of effective instruction*

**Engaged students are curious about and invested in their learning. They make choices about what and how they learn and can explain the relevance and importance of their work. Genuine engagement leads to deeper learning and improved outcomes.**

**Elements**

1. **Learning Environment:** The learning environment supports all students to take risks, ask questions, and make and learn from mistakes. The physical space, routines and procedures, and development of positive relationships create a physically, socially, and emotionally safe environment.
2. **Clear, Shared Outcomes:** The learning outcomes are shared and internalized by teachers and students. These outcomes anchor and guide the choices of instructional activities, materials, practice assignments, and assessment tasks. Outcomes are understood and used by students to set goals, guide learning, and prompt self-reflection.
3. **Varied Content, Materials, and Methods of Instruction:** Students explore ideas and information in varied ways and access learning through multiple entry points. Teachers select content and materials to engage and meet the needs of all learners.

4. **Feedback and Practice:** Students have opportunities to practice what they are learning and are given timely, specific feedback based on their current performance in relation to the desired outcomes.
5. **Complex Thinking and Transfer:** Students are coached and taught to engage in higher order thinking through instructional activities and practice tasks. Curriculum, instruction, and assessments are designed to prompt complex thinking, integration of concepts and ideas, and application of learned skills to new material or novel situations.

These foundational elements, supporting beliefs, and key traits are critical guardrails to begin creating more flexible graduation requirements. The Elements of Effective Instruction can serve as an organizing document for professional learning, teacher-feedback, and for engaging with the broader district community. This document can be used for establishing and solidifying common beliefs across the buildings in your district and in your communities, it can serve as a self-assessment for educators, and it provides a set of principles to check on classroom practice, environment, and assessment.

Designing every student learning experience around these elements ensures equity and access for all students. These organizing principles increase the likelihood that the flexibility required by this law will result in deeper learning opportunities for all students and an increase in ownership and engagement. As a critical first step, districts need to identify a shared set of beliefs, expectations, and aspirations in order to ensure equity while increasing flexibility; the elements of effective instruction can serve as a starting point for that conversation in your district.

### Design Questions for Consideration

1. How will your schools and districts ensure equitable student access and organizational commitment to deep, rigorous learning while increasing flexibility in learning pathways?
2. What are the foundational beliefs and principles that define teaching and learning in your district and schools?
3. How will your district and schools ensure that developing shared beliefs about teaching and learning will be the starting point before making the structural and policy changes required by this state policy?

### Additional Resources

1. [Elements of Effective Instruction](#)
2. [Elements of Effective Instruction Self-Assessment](#)

### For More Information

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