

Connecticut High School Graduation Requirements Unpacked

Brief 4: Mastery-Based Learning

New Graduation Requirements: “(f)[...]For the purposes of this section, a credit shall consist of not less than the equivalent of a forty-minute class period for each school day of a school year except for a credit or part of a credit toward high school graduation earned (1) at an institution accredited by the Board of Regents for Higher Education or Office of Higher Education or regionally accredited, (2) through online coursework that is in accordance with a policy adopted pursuant to subsection (g) of this section, or (3) through a demonstration of mastery based on competency and performance standards, in accordance with guidelines adopted by the State Board of Education.”

“(g) Only courses taken in grades nine to twelve, inclusive, and that are in accordance with the state-wide subject matter content standards, adopted by the State Board of Education pursuant to section 10-4, as amended by this act, shall satisfy the graduation requirements set forth in this section, except that a local or regional board of education may grant a student credit (1) toward meeting the high school graduation requirements upon the successful demonstration of mastery of the subject matter content described in this section achieved through educational experiences and opportunities that provide flexible and multiple pathways to learning, including cross-curricular graduation requirements, career and technical education, virtual learning, work-based learning, service learning, dual enrollment and early college, courses taken in middle school, internships and student-designed independent studies, provided such demonstration of mastery is in accordance with such state-wide subject matter content standards”

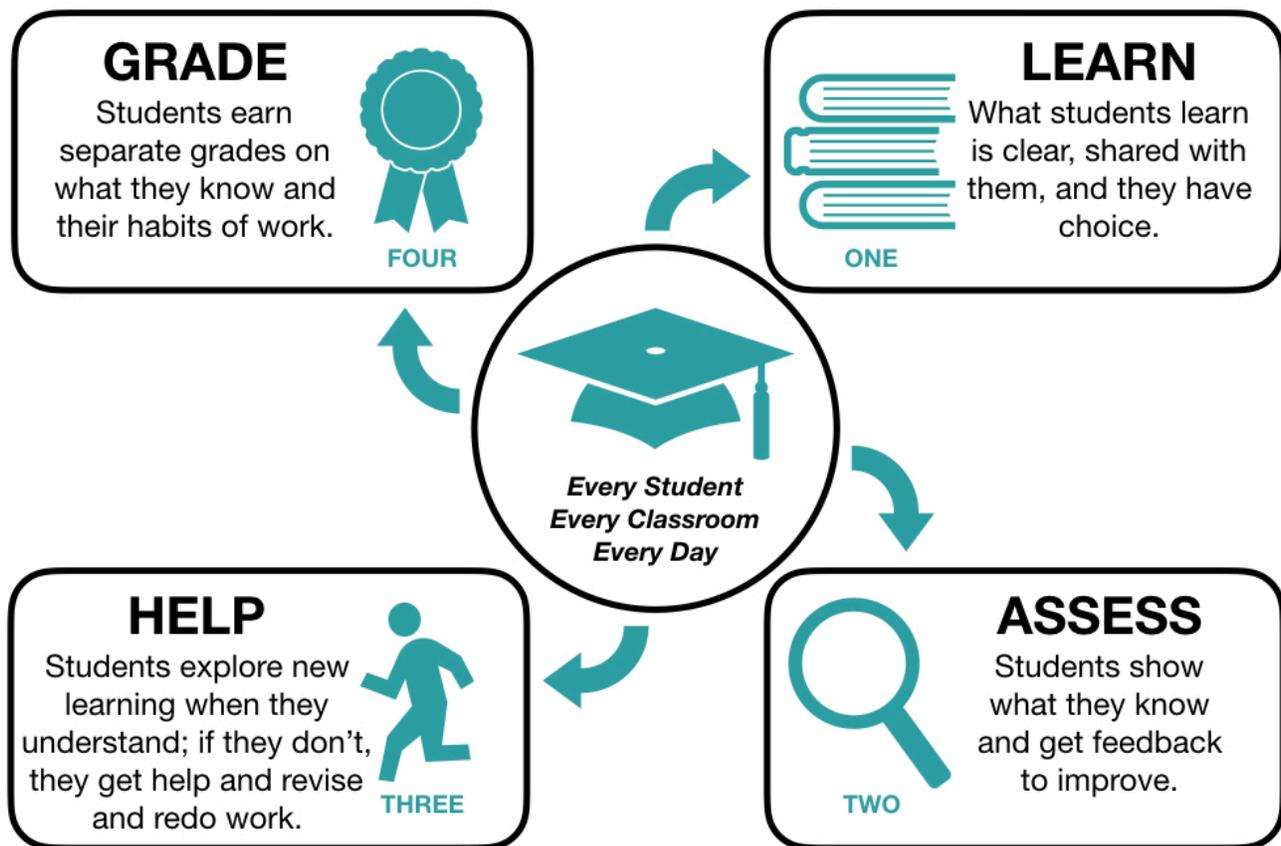
— Public Act No.17-42; Sec. 1(f)(g)

The revision to the graduation requirements maintains the provision from previous iterations of the statute that allows local or regional boards of education to award credits based on a demonstration of mastery of standards. This brief explores the process districts can use if they decide to transition to a mastery-based system. While the statute does not require that districts award credit based on mastery, the process of defining shared expectations for all students enables schools to expand on and create pathways while ensuring equitable outcomes for all students. As the graphic below details, mastery-based learning is not a specific grading system or a standalone intervention but instead requires schools to develop clear shared expectations for student learning, align assessments to those expectations, and create structures for feedback, interventions, and extensions to ensure that all students are able to achieve the shared high expectations.



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WHAT IS MASTERY-BASED LEARNING?



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Any change process begins with a shared foundational set of beliefs across your schools and community. These shared understandings increase commitment among stakeholders, but more importantly, ensure that the system your community creates is equitable, impactful, and effective. The Great Schools Partnership has a set of [Beliefs and Practices of Proficiency-Based Learning](#) that could serve as a helpful starting point for your school or district community outlining four beliefs, each paired with associated practices.

Belief 1: All students can and will learn when they feel included, respected, and valued by their learning community.

- Students are known as individuals and learners, and they are supported in developing positive relationships with each other and with adults in the learning community.
- The curriculum, classrooms, and structures of the school recognize and honor student identities and interests.
- The district and school communities have systems and structures that engage and include all students, families, and the broader community in meaningful ways.
- The district and school actively work to uncover and eliminate systemic inequities based on demographic groups and identity traits.

Belief 2: All students must be challenged, believed in, and supported to reach common, high expectations.

- Learning outcomes are clearly articulated and consistently applied to all students, including those that are long-term (graduation competencies and performance indicators), short-term (learning targets), and habits of work.
- All students engage in complex thinking and the application of skills and knowledge throughout the learning process within and across content areas.
- Interventions, extensions of learning, and opportunities to revise and relearn are systemic and provided regularly so that all students achieve common outcomes.

Belief 3: Student learning is enhanced by clear cycles of practice, feedback, assessment, and reflection.

- All forms of assessment are aligned to a common set of standards.
- Habits of work are assessed and reported separately from academic knowledge and skills.
- The continual use of formative assessment provides opportunities for students to practice, self-assess, and give and receive feedback.
- Summative assessments, evaluated against common scoring criteria, are used to evaluate a student's level of achievement on competencies and performance indicators at a given point in time.
- All forms of feedback (including grades) are used to adjust instruction and learning, to inform academic interventions, and to identify extensions of learning.
- Students regularly reflect on their learning progress and are taught to evaluate and use feedback.

Belief 4: Students are empowered and engaged by choice in their learning experiences.

- All learning pathways (courses, internships, extended learning opportunities, etc.) are aligned to a common set of standards.
- Learning in different ways and at varied paces is expected and planned for in all settings, requiring differentiation, student choice, and personalized learning options to meet common outcomes.
- Students make important decisions about their learning experiences and how they will demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

While the exact pathway for implementation will be decided based on the vision and context of your community, the [Proficiency-Based Learning Framework](#) website can provide a useful resources to guide your approach. Your district and community can work together to collaboratively create a Portrait of a Graduate that is informed by your context and represents your shared vision of the expectation for all of your graduates. In conjunction with your Portrait of Graduate, the Proficiency-Based Learning Framework outlines a rigorous and equitable system grounded in common learning standards, balancing the need for high expectations with the flexibility for students to personalize their learning. The Framework outlines a system that prepares all students for college, careers, and citizenship, not one that stifles creativity or becomes a burdensome instructional checklist.

Design Questions for Consideration

1. What are the foundational beliefs around which you will design your system?
2. How will you work to create a vision for mastery-based learning that is shared across the entirety of your school and community?
3. What structures will you develop to ensure that your system supports all learners to meet shared high expectations?
4. How will you develop your system to be grounded in standards while remaining flexible and practical for teachers and students?

Additional Resources

1. In addition to the resources captured in this brief, the [Connecticut State Department of Education](#) (CSDE) has additional resources about transitioning to a mastery-based system of awarding credits in their [Mastery-Based Learning Resource Center](#). It is particularly important to examine the CSDE guidance document, [Mastery-Based Learning Guidelines for Implementation](#).
2. The Great Schools Partnership [Beliefs and Practices of Proficiency-Based Learning](#)
3. The [Proficiency-Based Learning Framework website](#)

For More Information

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