



New Hampshire

# Department of Education *Technical Advisory*

*Serving New Hampshire's Education Community*

Subject: High School Course-Level Competencies Validation

School Approval Standards:

Ed 306.04; 306.24; 306.27

*This is the twentieth in a series of Technical Advisories issued by the Department to clarify the School Approval Standards.*

## I. Actual Text:

### **Ed 306.04 Policy Development.**

(a) In accordance with Ed 303.01, the local school board shall adopt and implement written policies and procedures relative to:

(14) How a credit can be earned, as provided in Ed 306.27(d);

### **Ed 306.27 High School Curriculum, Credits, Graduation Requirements, and Cocurricular Program.**

(b) The required curriculum content shall comply with the following:

(4) If a district chooses to offer extended learning opportunities, the extended learning opportunities shall:

b. Be governed by a policy adopted by the local school board that:

5. Requires that granting of credits shall be based on a student's demonstration of competencies, as approved by certified educators;

(d) By the 2008-2009 school year, the local school board shall require that a high school credit can be earned by demonstrating mastery of required competencies for the course, as approved by certified school personnel. Until the 2008-2009 school year, the local school board shall require that a high school credit can be earned as provided in (1) or (2) below, or both:

(1) Attendance at a course scheduled to meet for no less than 135 clock hours of instructional time if the school operates on an 8-period schedule or for no less than 150 clock hours of instructional time if the school operates on a 7-period schedule; or

(2) If a competency assessment is in place as provided in (i) below, by demonstrating mastery of required competencies for the course, as approved by certified school personnel.

(i) If the local school board adopts a policy that would allow students to graduate from high school as a result of demonstrating mastery of required competencies, the policy shall require students to meet both state and local standards. By the 2008-2009 school year, the local school board shall require that a high school have in place competency assessments for all courses offered through the high school.

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## **Ed 306.24 Assessment.**

(a) The local school board shall require that each school:

- (1) Provides for the ongoing assessment of learning outcomes through the use of local assessments that are aligned with state and district content and performance standards as provided in (b) below;
- (2) Participates in the state-wide education improvement and assessment program as provided in (c) below; and
- (3) Selected by the United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics participates in the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP).

(b) The following elements shall be used as evidence by the department in determining whether a school complies with the requirements of (a) above:

- (1) The school maintains a policy that articulates the process for the selection, use, and interpretation of local assessment instruments;
- (2) The school supports the authentic assessment of student learning outcomes through multiple formative and summative assessment instruments, including, but not limited to:
  - a. Teacher observation of project-based learning, including off-site learning projects;
  - b. Competency-based assessments; and
  - c. Teacher-designed quizzes and tests;

## **II. Department comment:**

State Standards indicate that local districts must have defined competencies in place as of the 2008-2009 school year. The school approval standards state that local school boards are required by the state standards to implement competency assessment of student mastery at the high school level as of the 2008-2009 school year.

The intent of Ed 306.27 and the related rules excerpted above is that as of the 2008-2009 school year, credit toward graduation for all students in NH must be based on student demonstration of mastery of course-level competencies. Until that time, schools had the option of applying seat time or competency-assessment in the determination of credit for courses. The option of credit based on seat time or Carnegie Unit for a course is no longer available, per Ed 306.27 and related rules. In addition, Ed 306.27 states that by the school year 2008- 2009 high schools shall have in place competency assessment for all courses offered through the high school.

Though the appearance of two options for the awarding of credit is contained in Ed 306.27 (d), careful reading reveals that option 1, based on seat time has expired.

It was the opinion of the Department that schools needed time between the passing of the rule requiring course level competencies in all courses and the rule requiring student demonstration of mastery of course level competencies and the implementation of these rules. The State Board of Education granted

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three years for schools to fully implement the rules related to competencies and competency assessment. Those three years expired as of the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year.

In order to assist schools in these endeavors the Department provided for the development of model competencies in a wide variety of content areas, involving educators from around the state, content professional associations, and expert facilitators including the Concord Area Center for Educational Support (CACES). Valid and reliable methods of competency assessment for both classroom and out-of-school competency assessment were developed and piloted through an Extended Learning Opportunities initiative. Common assessment tools are being piloted. Support for grading reform in a competency based environment has also been developed. Statewide professional development was presented for all schools.

The Rules, as written, allow for individual school development of course-level competencies. While this affords schools and districts great leeway in writing course level competencies based on local trends and expectations, it has had the unexpected consequence of reducing the consistency of competencies statewide.

For this reason, the Department has provided for the development of a Competencies Validation Rubric that outlines and explicates the continuum of strength for course-level competencies. Well written course level competencies should be clearly worded, transparent, and portable to a variety of settings. The Competencies Validation rubric is meant to be used by individual schools and their departments, by groups of schools working together, and by the Department in its School Approval process to review and refine course level competencies for use in teaching, learning, demonstration of mastery, and other assessments.

### III. Competencies Validation Rubric development and use

In order to assure that course level competencies in NH have the opportunity to reach the highest level of quality and comparability across schools, a validation tool based on research-based practices in the field of curriculum and assessment was developed. The Department convened a committee of educators, department heads, and administrators from Manchester, Newfound, Belmont, Claremont, Rochester, Laconia, Franklin, Milton, and Bow under the leadership facilitation of an experienced educator and administrator from Concord Area Center for Educational Support to write the rubric. The competency validation rubric was field tested for validity and reliability against local competency statements with the participation of over two hundred teachers statewide. The rubric was shown to have a high degree of reliability with comments and suggestions to promote greater reliability incorporated into the final version of the rubric.

The competency validation rubric is an analytic rubric for the elements of *Relevance to Content Area*, *Enduring Concepts*, *Cognitive Demand*, and *Relative to Assessment*.

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- Relevance to Content area: To what extent does the competency statement align with standards, leading students to conceptual understanding of content?
- Enduring Concepts: To what extent does the competency statement reflect enduring concepts?
- Cognitive Demand: What depth of knowledge does this competency statement promote?
- Relative to Assessment: To what extent does the competency statement promote opportunities for students to demonstrate evidence of their learning?

The four elements of the rubric are further supported with detailed descriptors in a four point rubric with levels one and two representing the weaker end of the continuum and levels three and four representing the strongest end of the continuum.

A competency is best reviewed with this tool in a collaborative setting. Using a four point rubric for each of the elements, teachers can determine if a competency is weak or strong in each of the elements. The tool was not designed to arrive at a total score based on the four elements.

We understand and acknowledge that course competencies are independent yet work together in defining course outcomes. The overall set of course competencies should be judged as 'strong' using the Competency Validation Rubric while understanding that each individual competency contributes to the expectations of student learning defined by the course. It is suggested that each competency statement meet the criteria as a strong statement in the elements of competency design.

A glossary of terms used in the Competency Validation Rubric was developed for ease of use and shared understanding and common interpretations of the descriptors used in the rubric. The terms and descriptors were based on national research-based documentation.

## Definitions and Explanations:

**Academic Rigor** "Thorough, in-depth, mastery of challenging tasks to develop cognitive skills through reflective thought, analysis, problem solving, evaluation, or creativity". (International Center for Leadership in Education, 2007)

**Alignment** Where the Competencies Validation Rubric refers to a competency statement aligning with national, state, and/or local standards, alignment does not imply that *each* competency will align with *all* content standards. However, *taken with other competency statements*, it may align with all relevant content standards.

**Competency Assessment** The process by which a student demonstrates sufficient evidence of learning. (N.H. Department of Education, 2006)

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**Bloom's Taxonomy** Developed by Benjamin Bloom to classify levels of learning, described as: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

**Cognitive Demand** How content interacts with process to explicitly require appropriate cognitively demanding work. This is directly related to the number and strength of connections of concepts and procedures that a student needs to make to produce a response on the way to learning, including the level of reasoning required. (New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont Department of Education. (2004). Draft Tri-State New England (TSNE) Mathematics Test Specifications. New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont Department of Education., 2004)

**Course Level Competencies** The expected content, concepts, and skills to be mastered in a course. (N.H. Department of Education, 2006)

**Enduring Concepts** Concepts that we want students to understand, know, and be able to apply in the future, after details are forgotten. (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005)

**Enduring Understanding** "Such understandings are generally abstract in nature and often not obvious, they require un-coverage through sustained inquiry rather than one-shot coverage. " (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005)

**Mastery** This term indicates that a student has presented sufficient evidence of attainment of the required competencies. (N.H. Department of Education, 2006)

**Metarubric** The criteria for judging the quality of rubrics; a rubric for a rubric (Assessment Training Institute, 2004)

**Performance Assessment** A student's demonstration of academic rigor through application of learned knowledge and skills, and requiring transferability. Performance assessment is designed to measure a student's ability to directly demonstrate particular knowledge and skills, and is scored using established criteria for acceptable demonstration.

**Transferability** Successful use of one's knowledge and skill in situations of importance

**Webb's Depth of Knowledge** Developed by Norman Webb et al to describe four depths of knowledge: Recall, Skill/Concept, Strategic Thinking, Extended Thinking (Wisconsin Center of Educational Research, 2006)

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### Frequently Asked Questions:

*1. Why should I use the Competency Validation Rubric (CVR)?*

Many competency statements were written several years ago by authors having different orientations in using competencies in the high school classroom. The CVR provides a tool, based on best practices in the areas of curriculum and assessment, to review competency statements.

*2. Why are there four elements to the CVR?*

A competency statement is used to unpack the assessment and learning within a unit of study. By looking at these four critical elements, one can determine if the assessment tasks in a unit of study are measuring the appropriate demonstration of student learning.

*3. What are the four elements of the CVR?*

The four elements are: 1) relevance to content area; 2) enduring concepts; 3) cognitive demand; and, 4) relative to assessment. A competency statement should be reviewed for each of these elements independently.

*4. How do I use the CVR?*

It is recommended that course competencies are best reviewed collaboratively by teachers using them in a particular course. Before validating the rubric, teachers should share what units of instruction the competency statement is connected to within the course. In then reviewing the competency statement, teachers would take each element and discuss the competency statement in light of that element to determine where the competency statement is represented along the continuum of weak to strong. If a statement scores at a 1 or 2, it should be noted that either the competency statement will need to be reworded, or an instructional element within the course should be addressed. For example, if two teachers are discussing whether or not a competency statement is aligned to standards, they would talk about the content standards that are addressed in a unit of study using the competency. When comparing this information to a Grade Span Expectation, one or more of the teachers may decide that they will be adjusting the content in the unit of study to more closely align with the learning expectation. In this case it is the instructional plan associated with the competency that allows for alignment to standards. If any of the competency statements for a course do not specifically reference state, national or local standards, the statement would be deemed a 1 or 2 and would need to be redesigned to reflect this alignment.

*5. How do I know if I have designed a strong competency statement?*

A strong competency statement is one that scores a 3 or 4 in each of the elements of the CVR.

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6. *How often should the CVR be used?*

The process of reviewing competencies with the CVR is a good starting point in the dynamic review of course expectations and high quality assessment systems. Teachers may find that annual review will provide a good check in for the development of course syllabus documents.

7. *What if one of my course competencies is deemed strong, but another one is viewed as weak on the continuum when examining more than one element.*

At times, it is necessary to look at the totality of the competencies for a course. Ideally, each competency statement should be strong in each element. However, there may be a competency that scores at a 1 or 2 in one element. After discussion, teachers may decide that it is important to keep the competency because of its strength in the other elements and that other course competencies are stronger in that one element.

### Resources:

The Department of Education Website [www.education.nh.gov](http://www.education.nh.gov) contains a link to the Competencies and Assessment webpage, where resources will be found, including:

- ◆ FAQs
- ◆ Competency Validation Rubric
- ◆ Competency Validation Rubric Glossary
- ◆ recommendations
- ◆ resources, including the compilation of local definitions for district use
- ◆ tools
- ◆ models
- ◆ examples from schools

### IV: For more information on this Technical Advisory, please contact:

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