

Subject:
Competency Assessment of Student Mastery

School Approval Standard:
Ed 306.04 and Ed 306.27(b) & (d)

This is the twelfth 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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II. Department comment:

Last Fall, 2005, the Board of Education charged a diverse committee of 48 New Hampshire educational practitioners from all parts of the state to develop parameters for districts to consider in the development of methods that demonstrate student mastery in high school courses. This mastery measurement is often called competency based assessment. The new rule regarding Extended Learning Opportunities requires competency based assessment, or the ability to evaluate student accomplishment in multiple settings. The new rules address the change that must take place from a system based on the Carnegie unit, (135 hours of classroom instruction to earn a high school credit applicable to graduation), to a system that uses demonstration of mastery to identify student achievement and academic completion.

This Technical advisory for School approval standard ED 306.04 and 306.27 (b) & (d) is issued in order to provide support to school boards, districts, schools, educators, and communities as they work to put competency assessments in place at the secondary level across New Hampshire. The following parameters are recommended:

Local vs. State Decisions:

State Standards indicate that local districts must have a competency assessment process and defined competencies in place by the 2008-2009 school year. The school approval standards state that local school boards may implement competency assessment of student mastery at the high school level at any time, but it is not required by the state standards until the 2008-2009 school year.

School districts will be asked by the State Department to certify and demonstrate that they have a process in place to assess competency for all courses at the High School level. The Department will look to known tools and processes, such as the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) in the High School Review process. It is not anticipated that actual course level competencies will be reviewed by the Department as part of the School Approval Process. The Department will require local districts to assure that a plan and method of assessing course level competencies has been developed and is supported by a policy that will include the implementation of the standards. Further, it will be expected that the plan and method will be regularly reviewed and evaluated for effectiveness.

In emphasizing the need for flexibility and autonomy for local school districts in implementing competency assessment, the state has left local districts the responsibility for developing policies relative to the state approval standards. It is the purview of the local school district to:

- ◆ identify or develop high school course competencies,
- ◆ decide on appropriate competency assessment methods, and
- ◆ define sufficiency (identifying necessary and sufficient evidence for students to demonstrate mastery).

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It is assumed that all High School courses now have standards in place for successful completion of those courses. This is an opportunity to review these standards for consistency, quality, and rigor. It is also assumed that local policies defining how competency assessment will be administered will utilize one or all of the following possibilities, or other methods appropriate to the situation: single or multiple tests, student demonstration of the use of specific academic skills, extended learning projects in the community or in a business setting.

While sufficiency of evidence and appropriate assessment methods are local responsibilities, the Department and the Committee encourage school districts to think of these as extending beyond a single test to multiple forms of assessment, for the following reasons:

- ◆ it is consistent with national research-based best practice;
- ◆ multiple forms of assessment allow for the use of formative assessment, encouraging students to learn and reach beyond current understanding and performance, and,
- ◆ multiple forms of assessment minimize the use of single tests to be used solely as a means to test out of courses perhaps inappropriately.

Districts and high schools are encouraged to focus, not so much on writing competencies on a course by course basis, but rather on defining and reaching a common understanding of the parameters and critical indicators of their competency assessment process. The Department will continue to identify templates and models for competencies, and start the process of collecting competencies to share with all districts and high schools in the state.

Definitions:

The Committee recommended three definitions for consistency purposes. The intent is to be less prescriptive at the state level and to encourage districts to use resources available nationally via the internet and through professional associations.

- ◆ Course Level Competencies – *The expected content, concepts, and skills to be mastered in a course.*
- ◆ Competency Assessment – *The process by which a student demonstrates sufficient evidence of learning.*
- ◆ Mastery – *This term indicates that a student has presented sufficient evidence of attainment of the required competencies.*

Related Recommendations Concerning Extended Learning Opportunities:

Given the close relationship to the implementation of Extended Learning Opportunities at the local level, the committee recommended that the following considerations:

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- ◆ Local school board policy may identify the specific courses or disciplines where an alternative acquisition of credits will apply, as long as the local school board policy meets the other requirements found in that section.¹
- ◆ Local policies may also determine whether an extended learning opportunity is subject to an acceleration plan, and this determination may help to define the competency assessment methodology for a specific course where extended learning opportunities are allowed.

Resources:

The Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment (CIA) Regional Groups are working with the NH Department of Education to collect, catalogue, and disseminate competencies and assessment procedures as they are developed and used in high schools. The Department of Education Website www.ed.state.nh.us contains a link to the Competencies and Assessment webpage, where resources will be found, including:

- ◆ FAQs
- ◆ recommendations
- ◆ resources, including the compilation of local definitions for district use
- ◆ tools
- ◆ models
- ◆ examples from schools
- ◆ guidance on competency assessment (how to build it and how to do it)

¹ 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:

a. Consist of activities designed to:

1. Provide credit or supplement regular academic courses; and
2. Promote the schools and individual students' educational goals and objectives;

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

1. Provides for the administration and supervision of the program;
2. Encourages that certified school personnel oversee an individual student's program;
3. Requires that each extended learning proposal meet rigorous standards, and be approved by the school prior to its beginning;
4. Specifies that credits can be granted for extended learning activities, including, but not limited to, independent study, private instruction, team sports, performing groups, internships, community service, and work study; and
5. Requires that granting of credits shall be based on a student's demonstration of competencies, as approved by certified educators;

c. Incorporate student participation in selecting, organizing, and carrying out extended learning activities;

d. Provide opportunities for students to acquire knowledge and skill development comparable to knowledge and skill development in courses offered at the high school; and

e. Be available to all students;

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The Department has a one year grant from the US Department of Education to help develop competency assessments and high school course competencies. Information and understanding developed from this process will be shared with other districts across the state.

III: For more information on this Technical Advisory, please contact:

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