SF 369 Civics Test Requirement for High School Equivalency Diplomas

Senate File 369 (SF 369) became effective on July 1, 2025. The civics test is to be administered beginning with the 2026–27 school year and program year.

2025 Iowa Acts, Senate File 369 directs the Iowa Department of Education to develop a multiple-choice test comprised of all questions from the most recent version of the civics test issued by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services and distribute the test to school districts, accredited nonpublic schools, charter schools, and adult education and literacy programs. The Department must update the test on or before Jan. 31 following a general election inclusive of a presidential election and may revise the test as needed.

Beginning July 1, 2026, school districts and accredited nonpublic schools must administer the civics test to students in grades 9–12. The test shall be offered annually at each grade level to provide multiple opportunities to achieve a passing score. Each student must attain at least one passing score as a condition of graduation. A passing score is defined as correctly answering at least 60 percent of the test questions. Students may retake the test as many times as necessary.

School districts, accredited nonpublic schools, and adult education and literacy programs may modify the civics test for students with an individualized education program (IEP), a Section 504 plan, or who are English learners. For students with significant cognitive disabilities, an alternate assessment may be developed and administered. All entities must report results annually to the Department by June 30.

SF 369 also establishes requirements for individuals seeking a high school equivalency diploma (HSED). Adult education and literacy programs must administer the civics test to all students earning an HSED prior to issuing a diploma and ensure each student attains at least one passing score.

The legislation also directs the Department to study the relationship between high school graduation rates and the number of students attaining a passing score on the civics test, with findings reported to the General Assembly by June 30, 2029.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Preparing for Success

1. What resources are available to support students in taking the test?

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has several resources that may be helpful to students. Students can utilize this test study guide.

Test Administration and Reporting

2. How should the test be delivered?

The test is available as a Google Form and PDF on the Department's Social Studies Instruction webpage. SF 369 requires school districts, accredited nonpublic schools, and charter schools to administer the multiple-choice test developed by the Iowa Department of Education. To support local implementation, the Department has provided the civics test in multiple formats. School districts, accredited nonpublic schools, and charter schools may determine the method of delivery, including use of a local platform (e.g., Microsoft Forms, Canvas), provided the Department-developed test content is used.

3. **Does the test need to be timed?**

   No. The civics test is not required to be timed.

4. **Does the civics test have to be proctored?**

   Yes. Regardless of the delivery format, the test should be proctored to ensure test security and appropriate administration practices, similar to the HiSET tests.

5. **In what grades can students take the test?**

   For students in grades 9 through 12, the test must be offered annually at each grade level, and students may take it at any time during those years. Individuals pursuing a high school equivalency diploma (HSED) may take the test at any time, provided they achieve a passing score prior to the awarding of the diploma.

6. **Can students retake the test if they don't pass the first time?**

   Yes. Students may retake the test as many times as needed to achieve a passing score.

7. **Can a parent "opt out" of the civics test requirement?**

   No. The civics test is a graduation requirement established by the Iowa Legislature in 2025. Under Senate File 369, there is no provision allowing a parent to opt a student out of this requirement.

8. **How do districts report student test results to the Iowa Department of Education?**

   Beginning in the 2026–27 school year, adult education and literacy program providers will report student results to the Department of Education no later than June 30 of each year. Data should include a field indicating each student's percent correct on the test.

9. **What should programs do to document student passage of the exam?**

   Programs have flexibility in how they document student passage of the exam, but documentation should include at a minimum: student name, unique student identifier number, date the test was completed, and test score [KC4]. Adult Education programs should also be aware of any additional reporting requirements set by Iowa Workforce Development (IWD) for compliance with federal Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) reporting.

Accommodations and Alternative Test

10. **For students with an accommodation or are English learners that complete the civics test in sections, does the civics test need to be administered within one year?**

    Yes. The test should be completed in one school year.

11. **What support may be provided to students with accommodations?**

    Senate File 369 provides that program providers may modify the test or develop and administer an alternate test for a student with an accommodation, a significant cognitive disability, or for a student who is an English learner.

    The college's accommodation team determines whether a modification is appropriate. Modifications may include administering the test in smaller sections or individual items while maintaining the security of the remaining test content. Regardless of any modification, student results must still be reported as a percentage.

12. **Can a student request an accommodation related to the civics test?**

    Yes, a student may use accommodations approved by the program. Accommodation policies for the exam are determined by the college.

13. **Is there an example of an alternate test for students participating in the alternate assessments?**

    Yes, for students that are participating in the alternate assessments, a sample modified test will be posted on the Department's social studies webpage.

14. **Is there a braille or large print version of the civics test available for districts to use?**

    Yes. Information on obtaining a braille or large print version of the civics test will be available on the Department's website.

15. **How does this graduation requirement apply to students participating in a 4+ program?**

    Students with IEPs who have not earned a regular high school diploma prior to July 1, 2026, and who have not achieved a passing score on the civics test (or an approved modified or alternate version), must do so in order to graduate with a regular high school diploma.

16. **What support may be provided to English learners?**

    SF 369 allows school districts and accredited nonpublic schools to modify the test or provide an alternative for students with an IEP or 504 plan, who have a severe intellectual disability, or who are English learners. For all students, including English learners, supports should align with accommodations routinely provided to the learner during instruction and assessment. If the test is modified, results should still be reported as a percentage.

Contacts

- For general questions about the civics test as it relates to the High School Equivalency Diploma, contact Lisa Gard at lisa.gard@iowa.gov or 515-418-3156.
- For general inquires regarding K-12 implementation of the civics test, contact Stefanie Wager at stefanie.wager@iowa.gov or 515-419-2876.
- For questions related to special education accommodations or students with significant cognitive disabilities, contact Jennifer Denne at jennifer.denne@iowa.gov or 515-326-5332.
- For questions related to English learners, contact Terri Schuster at terri.schuster@iowa.gov or 515-681-2492.
- For questions regarding data entry and reporting within TOPSpro Enterprise or expenses and allowable uses of different funding streams, contact adulteducation@iwd.iowa.gov.