June 22, 2026

High School Education Program and Graduation Requirements

Offer-and-Teach/Graduation Requirements

The general accreditation standards require each high school (grades 9-12) to "offer-and-teach" certain subjects and specify a minimum number of units for each course—although each school district selects its own local curriculum, textbooks, and other classroom materials. This updated frequently asked questions document reflects changes made during the 2024 legislative session.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is offer-and-teach?

Offer-and-teach means that the school or school district must make students aware of the offering, employ an appropriately licensed teacher[1] to teach the course, and have the appropriately licensed teacher instruct the students. Licensure requirements are set by the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners. Not only must a course be offered and instructed by an appropriately licensed teacher, but at least one student needs to be enrolled in a course for it to meet the offer-and-teach requirement (Iowa Administrative Code r. 281-12.5(16)).

Offer-and-teach units may be met in the following ways:

- Direct instruction by a teacher on-site with an appropriate Iowa-licensed teacher;
- Whole-grade sharing pursuant to Iowa Code 282.10;
- Written agreement to jointly employ or share teachers pursuant to Iowa Code 280.15 (school districts only); and
- Through an agreement with community colleges pursuant to Iowa Code 279.50A. 261E.8 (concurrent enrollment program). *Secondary licensure is not required for community college employed instructors **or** a teacher employed by the school district, as long as the course is offered for college credit under the concurrent enrollment program. See the Senior Year Plus Guide for more information.

2. What are the minimum requirements for offer-and-teach and graduation?

All high schools (public and accredited nonpublic) must annually offer-and-teach a minimum program to meet state accreditation. In addition to offer-and-teach requirements, each student graduating from a district or state accredited nonpublic school must meet specific graduation requirements. Iowa Code sections 256.7, subsection 26 and 256.11, subsection 5 establish the minimum graduation requirements for students. Districts and nonpublic schools may require additional requirements for graduation. Graduation requirements are provided in Table 1 for school districts and in Table 2 for accredited nonpublic schools.

[1] Appropriately licensed means the individual has a current Iowa teaching license that is appropriate for the student's grade level and for the content area(s) being taught.

Table 1. Public District Offer-and-Teach and Graduation Requirements.

Content	Offer-and-Teach (Requirement of the district)	Graduation (Requirement of the student)
English-language arts	6 units	4 units
Social studies	5 units (must include 1 unit of American history and ½ unit of government)	3 units (must include 1 unit of American history and ½ unit of government)
Mathematics	6 units, as specified in 281—IAC 12.5(5)"c" (4 sequential units and 2 additional units) The two additional units of mathematics may include instruction related to agriculture, applied sciences, technology, engineering, or manufacturing, including transportation, distribution, logistics, architecture, and construction, which may be offered and taught through dedicated units of coursework or through units that also meet the requirements of the courses related to career and technical education in this service area.	3 units
Science	5 units (must include chemistry and physics, which may be offered in alternating years) The five units of science may include not more than two units of instruction related to agriculture, which may be offered and taught through dedicated units of agriculture coursework or through units that also meet the requirements of the courses related to career and technical education in this service area.	3 units
Health	1 unit	Local district decision
Physical education (PE)	1 unit	*1 unit, ⅛ unit per semester unless the student meets the excusal and/or exemption below.
Fine arts	2 units. This was lowered from 3 units to 2 units during the 2023 legislative session.	Local district decision
World language	2 units. This was lowered from 4 units to 2 units during the 2023 legislative session.	Local district decision
Vocational education/career and technical education (CTE)	12 units, as specified in 281—12.5(5)"i" (3 units each in at least 4 of the 6 service areas)	Local district decision
Computer science	½ unit. See the Computer Science Instruction webpage for additional information.	Local district decision

Content	Offer-and-Teach (Requirement of the district)	Graduation (Requirement of the student)
Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)	N/A	Every student must complete a CPR certification course for by the end of grade 12. See the Healthy Kids Act webpage for additional information
Financial literacy	½ unit. The one-half unit (course) may be a stand-alone course **or** the content may be integrated into units (courses) through existing coursework. Existing coursework could include science, mathematics, social studies, English or career and technical education. Iowa Code section 256.11 subsection 5.	Local decision
Civics test	N/A	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.

Table 2. State Accredited Nonpublic School Offer-and-Teach and Graduation Requirements

Content	Offer-and-Teach (Requirement of the district)	Graduation (Requirement of the student)
English-language arts	6 units	4 units
Social studies	5 units (must include 1 unit of American history and ½ unit of government)	3 units (must include 1 unit of American history and ½ unit of government)
Mathematics	6 units, as specified in 281—12.5(5)“c” (4 sequential units and 2 additional units) The two additional units of mathematics may include instruction related to agriculture, applied sciences, technology, engineering, or manufacturing, including transportation, distribution, logistics, architecture, and construction, which may be offered and taught through dedicated units of coursework or through units of coursework that also meet the requirements of the coursework required under paragraph “h”, subparagraph (1), subparagraph division (c).	3 units
Science	5 units (must include chemistry and physics, which may be offered alternating years) The five units of science may include not more than two units of instruction related to agriculture, which may be offered and taught through dedicated units of agriculture coursework	3 units
Health	1 unit	Local school decision
Physical Education	1 unit	*1 unit, ⅛ unit per semester unless the student meets the excusal and/or exemption below.
Fine arts	2 units	Local school decision
World language	2 units	Local school decision
Vocational education/CTE	5 units, as specified in 281—12.5(5)“j”	Local school decision
Computer science	½ unit. See the Computer Science Instruction webpage for additional information.	Local school decision

Content	Offer-and-Teach (Requirement of the district)	Graduation (Requirement of the student)
CPR	N/A	Every student must complete a CPR certification course for by the end of grade 12. See the Healthy Kids Act webpage for additional information
Financial Literacy	½ unit. The one-half unit (course) may be a stand-alone course or the content may be integrated into units (courses) through existing coursework. Existing coursework could include science, mathematics, social studies, English or career and technical education. Iowa Code section 256.11 subsection 5.	Local school decision
Civics test	N/A	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.

* Physical education exemptions and excusals include:

- Enrollment in academic courses not otherwise available to the student.
- Participation in a work-based learning program or other educational program authorized by the school which requires the student to leave the premises for specified periods of time during the school day. (Excusal)
- Participation in an activity that is sponsored by the school in which the student is enrolled which requires at least as much physical activity per week as one-eighth unit of physical education.
- Participation in a ROTC program. (Excusal)
- Participation in a legislative page program. (Excusal)
- Statement from a parent that physical education conflicts with the student's religious belief (This also applies to health courses, the Healthy Kids Act physical activity requirement, and the CPR requirement.) (Exemption)
- Statement signed by a physician that a student is not "physically able" to participate in physical education (This also applies to the Healthy Kids Act physical activity requirement, and the CPR requirement. (Exemption)
- Iowa Code 256.11(5)(g); 256.11(6)

3. What is a unit of instruction?

In grades nine through 12, a unit is a course that meets one of the following criteria:

- It is taught for at least 200 minutes per week for 36 weeks;
- It is taught for the equivalent of 120 hours of instruction;
- It requires the demonstration of proficiency of formal competencies associated with the course according to the State Guidelines for Competency-Based Education (CBE) or its successor organization; or

- It is an equated requirement as a part of an innovative program filed as prescribed in Iowa Administrative Code 281-12.9(256).

Fractional Unit

A fractional unit must be calculated in a manner consistent with Iowa Administrative Code 281-12.5(14), unless competency-based instruction is used, (see the Competency-Based Education webpage).

Regular and Block Scheduling

With "regular" scheduling, a year-long course is normally the equivalent of one unit of instruction. A semester-length course is normally the equivalent of one-half unit of instruction. With "block" scheduling, a block-length course taught for one semester is usually the equivalent of one unit.

4. Are offer-and-teach requirements met if the district or school only "offers" (and does not teach) a subject because no students are enrolled in the course? When is a subject considered offered? When is a subject considered taught?

No. It is not sufficient for a district to "offer" a course in the high school program and have no students receiving instruction. To meet the requirements of offer-and-teach, the course must also be "taught" (Iowa Administrative Code 281-12.5(16)).

5. Does a class offered outside the scheduled bell time meet offer-and-teach?

No. (Iowa Administrative Code 281-12.5(16)).

6. When sharing courses with another district, must students from both districts be enrolled to meet offer-and-teach?

Yes. Each participating high school must have students enrolled in the shared program for the course to count toward offer-and-teach. Each district that sends students to a shared class intending for said program to fulfill the offer-and-teach requirement must provide transportation for students enrolled in the shared program. If a sending school district contracts with a receiving school district to provide a program as part of the sending district's offer-and-teach requirement, the sending district is required to provide transportation (Iowa Administrative Code 281-12.5(16);

For a district with multiple high schools and/or a district with an alternative school: As long as students have access to courses in other buildings not all of the district's high schools need to meet offer-and-teach. However, students must be aware of the offerings and be provided access (e.g., transportation) to other building courses.

7. Can courses offered through concurrent enrollment be used to meet a district's minimum program requirements?

Yes. A school district or school can use contracted community college courses to meet any high school offer-and-teach requirements. However, the sharing agreement is only applicable if all of the following conditions are met:

- The unit is offered during the regular school day.
- The unit is made accessible by the school district to all eligible pupils (Iowa Code 279.50A (1)).
- The unit meets additional requirements outlined in Iowa Code 257.11, subsection 3, paragraph "b", subparagraphs (2) through (7). See Senior Year Plus Guide for more information.

Any concurrent enrollment course utilized to meet minimum program requirements is not eligible for supplementary weighted funding under section 257.11, subsection 3. Regardless of whether the district

receives supplementary weighted funding, the district shall not charge tuition to its students who participate in a concurrent enrollment course. See Senior Year Plus Guide for more information.

8. May a teacher instruct two or more courses simultaneously?

Yes, two or more sequential units of one subject area may be taught in the same classroom at the time in grades nine through 12. These courses will meet minimum offer-and-teach requirements. (Iowa Code 256.11(5A)).

A district may also utilize a community college-employed instructor or a district-employed teacher to teach two or more courses in one subject area simultaneously, if the instructor is providing instruction under the concurrent enrollment program (Iowa Code 261E.8). Secondary licensure is not a requirement for providing instruction under the concurrent enrollment program. See Instructor Credentialing.

Please note, community colleges have specific requirements which must be met in order to deliver postsecondary courses (Iowa Code 260C, Higher Learning Commission (HLC), National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP)). Therefore, schools who intend to deliver coursework where a combination of sequential unit offerings may impact the delivery of a postsecondary concurrent enrollment course will need to ensure discussions have occurred with their contracting community college prior to instruction occurring to have the arrangement approved.

9. Can Algebra IA and Algebra IB be counted for offer-and-teach?

If Algebra I is offered, then no. If Algebra IA, Algebra IB, and Algebra I are teaching the same standards, they are considered the same course and only count as one unit toward the offer-and-teach requirements. The same would be true for other courses teaching the same standards and benchmarks (Iowa Administrative Code 281-12.5(5)“c”).

10. Does enrolling students in PE only one semester or trimester per year meet offer-and-teach?

Yes, but only with an approved Flexible Student and School Program Waiver. Iowa Administrative Code 281-12.9(1)). For additional technical assistance on PE, see the Physical Education Instruction and Health Education Instruction webpages.

11. Must physics and chemistry be offered each year?

No. They can be offered in alternate years. However, five units of science must be offered annually. If physics is offered every other year, the total number of science units required for offer-and-teach must still be five units (Iowa Administrative Code 281-12.5(5)“d”).

12. Can health be offered on alternate days with PE and meet offer-and-teach?

Yes. If the total health instructional time is equal to 120 hours or more during the year, it would count as one unit of health. If the total instructional time is equal to 60 hours during the year, then it would count as one-half unit (Iowa Administrative Code 281-12.5(5)“e”).

13. Does the Department of Education have a resource that shows what endorsement a teacher needs to teach a specific course or content area?

Yes. The BEDS Crosswalk lists the course code, course title and licensure endorsement needed.

14. Do independent study courses meet offer-and-teach guidelines?

No. Independent study courses do not meet the requirement of direct instruction (Iowa Administrative Code 281-12.5(5)).

15. Can a supervised study hall or lab that provides support to students in math or language arts qualify for offer-and-teach?

No. The supervised study hall or lab is a support for completing homework and does not provide direct instruction with distinct standards and benchmarks as is required for offer-and-teach instruction (Iowa Administrative Code 281-12.5(5)).

16. Does an AP course count for offer-and-teach, even when the content may be the same as a non-advanced course?

Yes. For example, AP US History and US History both count as a unit for offer-and-teach.

17. May online AP courses be used to meet offer-and-teach?

Yes, provided that those courses are available to all eligible students.

18. Do online courses being used for offer-and-teach need a waiver?

Yes. Districts and accredited nonpublic schools may use two online courses per content area to meet offer-and-teach without a waiver. In addition, districts/schools may use online courses to meet offer-and-teach if either of the following apply:

- The district/school makes every reasonable and good faith effort to employ a licensed teacher to teach the course but is unable to or
- Fewer than 10 students typically register for the course.

For additional information, see the Online Learning webpage. The school district or school is responsible for providing an appropriately licensed Iowa teacher and aligning online courses with applicable academic standards (state and federal; Iowa Code 256.9(55) Iowa Code 256.11(17)).

19. Have any online private providers been approved?

Yes. Refer to the Online Learning webpage for a list of current providers.

20. What are the student graduation requirements?

All students in schools and school districts must satisfactorily complete at least the following requirements to graduate:

- Four units of English-language arts;
- Three units of mathematics;
- Three units of science;
- Three units of social studies, which may include the existing graduation requirements of one-half unit of United States government and one unit of United States history;
- One full unit of physical education; and
- Complete a CPR certification course by the end of grade 12. (Iowa Administrative Code 281-12.5(5); Iowa Code 256.11(5)"k").

In implementing the high school program standards, use the curriculum standards specified in Iowa Administrative Code 281-12.5(5)“a”-“l.”

School districts and schools are required to establish graduation requirements. The requirements shall include the items listed above and may include additional locally determined criteria. (Iowa Code 280.14)

21. How do Iowa's academic standards impact high school graduation and program requirements?

While Iowa's academic standards are required for all students, districts are not required to teach the standards within defined courses.

Iowa Assessments will reflect a cross section of the academic standards. It is paramount that districts ensure students have access to these standards.

For example: Iowa's academic standards in mathematics include Algebra II standards. This does not mean a district should require all students to take Algebra II. However, the Algebra II standards should be addressed in appropriate courses to meet individual student needs. This would also be the case in other content areas where standards are present in high school, but no specific course requirement exists.

Specific courses are required for postsecondary entrance and specific career expectations.

*Students are required to complete the following units prior to graduation:

- One-half unit of United States Government
- One unit of American History
- Student participation in physical education for one-eighth unit in each semester of enrollment in high school. (An individual student may be excused or exempted from this requirement if statutory grounds are met)

Additional Questions and Resources

Contacts

Contact one of the Iowa Department of Education school improvement consultants with questions.

Supplemental Resources

Iowa Code and Administrative Code

- High School Educational Standards (Iowa Code 256.11(5))
- General Accreditation Standards (Iowa Administrative Code 281-12)
- Definitions (Iowa Administrative Code 281-12.2)