

## GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

### I. PURPOSE

To identify requirements for graduation for Shelby County Schools.

### II. SCOPE

This policy applies to all students seeking graduation from Shelby County Schools.

### III. POLICY STATEMENT

The State Board of Education has established minimum standards for graduation from any Tennessee public high school. Any student who meets those requirements shall be awarded the appropriate diploma as specified in the Tennessee State Board of Education Rules, Regulations and Minimum Standards for the Operation of the Public School System. Additionally, a student's diploma and transcript shall indicate whether the student is graduating with any special recognition proscribed in accordance with the regulations to this policy or the policies/regulations of the Tennessee State Board of Education or the Tennessee State Department of Education (e.g., graduating with State Honors, State Distinction, District Honors, or District Designation of Exemplary Recognition).

The Board delegates to the Superintendent the authority to delineate areas that may be substituted for the physical education requirement; to identify areas of elective focus beyond those listed in the State's High School Policy; to determine standards for students to earn credit by examination toward high school graduation; and to determine how students who voluntarily complete at least ten (10) hours of community service each semester the student is in attendance at a public high school shall be recognized at their graduation ceremonies.

#### **IV. RESPONSIBILITY**

- A. The Chief Academic Office is responsible for administering this policy, including identifying and providing guidelines for students to earn credit by examination toward high school graduation.
- B. The Superintendent (or designee) is responsible ensuring that this policy is followed.

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Legal References:

1. TCA 49-6-6001; TRR/MS 0520-1-3-.06
2. TRR/MS 0520-1-3-.06(3)
3. TRR/MS 0520-1-3-.06(1)(d)
4. TRR/MS 0520-1-3-.03(6)
5. TRR/MS 0520-1-3-.06(1)(b)(2);TRR/MS 0520-1-3-6(2)
6. Title 49, Chapter 12, Part 3 - Part Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children
7. TCA 49-6-8301-8306
8. TCA 49-6-1209
9. TCA 49-6-408

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## **GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS**

### **REGULAR HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA**

To earn a regular high school diploma, students must meet the minimum standards established by the State Board of Education, specifically, complete the ACT or SAT prior to graduation, if the students was enrolled in a Tennessee public high school during their 11<sup>th</sup> grade year\*, have a satisfactory record of attendance and discipline, and earn the following 22 units of credit:

- English Language Arts      4 credits
- Mathematics                      4 credits
- Science                              3 credits
- Social Studies                    3 credits
- Wellness                            1 credit
- Physical Education            0.5 credit
- Personal Finance              0.5 credit
- Elective Focus                    3 credits
- Foreign Language\*\*          2 credits
- Fine Arts\*\*                        1 credit
- Total                                22 credits

\* *Effective for all students beginning with those students graduating during the 2017-2018 school year.*

\*\* Also see Foreign Language and Fine Arts description in the Description of Requirements section below.

***Students of Non-senior Status*** - Students of non-senior status who meet the minimum standards established by the State Board of Education and earn the required 22 units of credit may receive a high school diploma. This does not necessarily qualify a student for the Early High School Graduation Program under the Move on When Ready Act. Students who wish to participate in that program must fulfill all of the specified requirements of the act.

*Students with Disabilities* - Students with disabilities will be included in regular classes to the maximum extent possible and with appropriate support and accommodations. To earn a regular high school diploma, students with disabilities must earn the prescribed 22 credit minimum.

### ***Description of Requirements***

*Note: All high school courses, including honors courses, taken prior to high school enrollment will count as elective credit, unless state or federal guidance provides otherwise (e.g., Early High School Graduation Program under the Move on When Ready Act., etc.).*

#### English – Four (4) Credits

Students are required to complete four (4) credits of English, including English I, English II, English III, and English IV.

#### Mathematics – Four (4) Credits

Students are required to complete four (4) credits of mathematics including Algebra I and II, Geometry or the equivalent Integrated Math I, II, and III, and another mathematics course beyond Algebra I or Integrated Math I. Students must be enrolled in a mathematics course each school year. Students who complete any of the required mathematics credits prior to ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) grade may receive graduation credit for that coursework; however, those students are still required to enroll in a mathematics course during each high school year. The Bridge Math course is recommended for students who have not scored 19 or higher on the ACT mathematics subtest or a 460 on the SAT mathematics subtest by the beginning of the senior year. Other factors like career interest, study habits, etc. can be used to determine twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) grade placement.

Students with a qualifying disability who have deficits in mathematics, as documented in the IEP, shall be required to achieve at least Algebra I and Geometry (or the equivalent Integrated Math I and Integrated Math II). The required number of credits in mathematics will be achieved through strategies such as, but not limited to, increased time, appropriate methodologies, and accommodations as determined by the IEP team.

#### Science – Three (3) Credits

Students must complete three (3) credits of Science. Students must complete Biology I, Chemistry or Physics, and a third lab science. Students with qualifying disabilities as documented in the IEP shall be required to achieve at least Biology I and two other lab science credits. The required number of credits in science will be achieved through

strategies such as, but not limited to, increased time, appropriate methodologies, and accommodations as determined by the IEP team.

### Social Studies – Three (3) Credits

Students must complete three (3) credits of Social Studies. The content of the social studies courses will be consistent with Tennessee Academic Standards and with admissions requirements of Tennessee public institutions of higher education. Required courses include United States History and Geography, World History and Geography, Economics, and United States Government and Civics.

### Personal Finance – One-Half (.5) Credit

Students must complete one-half (½) credit in Personal Finance. Three years of JROTC may be substituted for one-half (½) credit of Personal Finance if the JROTC instructor attends the Personal Finance training.

### Wellness – One (1) Credit

Students must complete one (1) credit in wellness. The wellness courses will integrate concepts from health, physical fitness, and wellness and may be taught by a team of teachers from one or more teaching areas, including health, physical education, family and nutrition sciences, and health sciences education.

- A. Participation in marching band and interscholastic athletics may not be substituted for this aspect of the graduation requirements. Credit earned in two years of JROTC may be substituted provided the district has complied with requirements of the State Board of Education.
- B. Credit for basic training may be substituted, upon the choice of the student, for the required credit in lifetime wellness and credit in one (1) elective course or for credit in two (2) elective courses.

### Physical Education – One-Half (.5) Credit

Students must complete one half (½) credit in Physical Education. This requirement may be met by substituting a documented and equivalent time of physical activity in marching band, JROTC, cheerleading, interscholastic athletics, school sponsored intramural athletics, and other areas identified by the Superintendent in accordance with policy 5004 Graduation Requirements.

### Electives – Three (3) Credits

Students must complete three (3) credits in an elective focus. The elective focus may be Career and Technical Education (CTE), science and mathematics, humanities, fine arts, Advanced Placement (AP)/International Baccalaureate (IB), or other areas identified by the Superintendent in accordance with policy 5004 Graduation

Requirements. Students completing a CTE elective focus must complete three units in the same CTE career cluster or state-approved program of study.

Schools should make every effort to ensure that all students complete a state or locally approved elective focus, however, schools may waive the elective focus requirement for those students who transfer during the junior or senior year to a Tennessee high school from a school in another state or from a non-public school, if the completion of the elective focus would prevent or delay graduation.

In accordance with the Tennessee State Board of Education High School Policy (#2.103), the Superintendent allows students who begin an elective focus in a Tennessee high school and transfer during the junior or senior year to another Tennessee high school to have the elective focus requirement waived if:

- the receiving school does not offer the same elective focus area and is unable to offer related coursework to complete a state or locally approved focus area, or
- the completion of the elective focus would prevent or delay graduation.

#### Foreign Language – Two (2) Credits and Fine Arts – One (1) Credit

Students must complete two (2) credits of the same foreign language and one (1) credit in fine arts. The credit requirements for foreign language and fine arts may be waived by the district for students, under certain circumstances, to expand and enhance their elective focus.

#### Computer Education – One (1) Full Year

Computer education is not specifically listed in the graduation requirements. However, T.C.A. 49-6-1010 requires every candidate for graduation to have received a full year of computer education at some time during the candidate's educational career. Computer science and courses such as digital art and design, architectural and engineering design, programming and logic, web design, and website development will also satisfy this requirement and serve as a complement to a student's elective focus. Students who transfer from another state during their senior year are exempt from this requirement.

#### United States Civics Test

A United States civics test is not specifically listed in the graduation requirements. However, except as provided below, T.C.A. 49-6-408 requires, beginning January 1, 2017, that a student during his or her high school career shall be given a United States civics test in accordance with Tennessee state law. A student may be provided the opportunity to take the test as many times as necessary for the student to pass the test and shall pass the test if he or she correctly answers at least seventy percent (70%) of the questions. A passing grade is not a condition of receiving a regular diploma.

A student who has an individualized education program (IEP) under which the civics test is determined to be an inappropriate requirement for the student shall not be required to take and pass the civics test.

#### Capstone Experience (Encouraged)

The completion of a capstone experience is encouraged, but not required for graduation. A capstone experience may be completed during the junior or senior year. Options for the capstone experience may include, but are not limited to the following: junior/senior project, virtual enterprise, internship, externship, work-based learning, service learning (minimum of 40 hrs.), or community service (minimum of 40 hrs.).

#### Voluntary Community Service (Encouraged)

A student who voluntarily participates according to State Board of Education rules in at least ten (10) hours of community service each semester that the student is in attendance shall be recognized by the high school at graduation by awarding a certificate of service, placing an appropriate designation on the student's diploma or other credential, providing a ribbon or cord to be worn with the graduation regalia, or recognizing the community service in another suitable manner.

### **GRADUATION WITH STATE HONORS**

Students who score at or above **all** of the subject area readiness benchmarks on the ACT or equivalent score on the SAT will graduate with “state honors” (Superscoring is permitted.). ACT readiness benchmarks are identified by ACT and will be provided annually by the District department responsible for the administration of the ACT.

### **GRADUATION WITH STATE DISTINCTION**

Students will be recognized as graduating with “state distinction” by attaining a B or better average and completing at least one of the following:

- Earn a nationally and/or state recognized industry certification;
- Participate in at least one of the Governor’s Schools;
- Participate in one of the state’s All-State musical organizations;
- Be selected as a National Merit Finalist of Semi-Finalist;
- Attain a score of 31 or higher composite score on the ACT or SAT equivalent (e.g., 1360);
- Attain a score of 3 or higher on at least two advanced placement exams;
- Successfully complete the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme; or

- Earn 12 or more semester hours of transcribed postsecondary credit.

## **GRADUATION WITH SHELBY COUNTY SCHOOLS HONORS**

The District may design student recognition programs that allow students to graduate with honors if they have met the graduation requirements and have obtained an overall grade point average of at least a 3.0 or higher on a 4.0 scale. The District may set a higher GPA at its discretion. The District may specify additional requirements, such as requiring students to demonstrate performance of distinction in one (1) or more areas.

## **SHELBY COUNTY SCHOOLS DESIGNATION OF EXEMPLARY RECOGNITION**

In order to best prepare students for college and an ever more competitive global job market, Shelby County Schools supports, encourages and motivates students to challenge themselves by taking the most rigorous course of study.

Students eligible for the *Designation of Exemplary Recognition* must have earned twelve (12) Honors or Advanced Placement credits (any combination) in Grades 9-12 or a combination of such credits totaling twelve (12), with each Advanced Placement credit equal to 1.5 honors credits. A minimum of two (2) Honors or Advanced Placement courses is required during the senior year.

A qualified graduate will receive a Diploma that indicates the exemplar status and *Designation of Exemplary Recognition* will be printed on the graduate's final high school transcript.

## **TENNESSEE TRI-STAR SCHOLAR RECOGNITION**

A student who earns a composite score of nineteen (19) or higher on the ACT, or an equivalent score on the SAT, and earns a capstone industry certification as promoted by the department of education, shall be recognized as a Tennessee Tri-Star Scholar upon graduation from high school. The public high school from which a student who meets the specifications shall recognize the student's achievement at the graduation ceremony by placing an appropriate designation on the student's diploma, or other credential, or by providing a ribbon or cord to be worn with graduation regalia. The student shall be noted as a Tennessee Tri-Star Scholar in the school's graduation program.



## EARLY GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

A public school student may complete an early high school graduation program and be eligible for unconditional entry into a public two-year institution of higher education or conditional entry into a public four-year institution of higher education, if the student fulfills each of the following requirements:

i. Earns eighteen (18) credits to include:

1. English I, II, III, and IV
2. Algebra I and II\*
3. Geometry\*
4. United States history
5. Two (2) courses in the same foreign language
6. One (1) course selected from the following:
  - (I) Economics
  - (II) Government
  - (III) World Civilization
  - (IV) World Geography
7. One (1) course selected from the following:
  - (I) History and appreciation of visual and performing arts
  - (II) A standards-based arts course, which may include studio art, band, chorus, dance, or other performing arts
8. and Physical Education (Wellness)
9. Biology;
10. Chemistry;

\*Integrated Math I, II, and III may fulfill the Algebra I, Algebra II, and Geometry requirements in districts that offer the Integrated Math sequence.

(ii) Have a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.2 on the Uniform Grading System four (4) - point scale;

(iii) Scores at the On-Track or mastered level on each end of Course assessment taken (excluding end-of-course assessments taken during the student's final semester prior to early graduation);

(iv) Meets benchmark scores of twenty-one (21) or higher composite score on the ACT or an equivalent score on the SAT;

(v) Achieves a passing score on a nationally recognized foreign language proficiency assessment; and

(vi) Completes at least two (2) early postsecondary courses.

These early postsecondary courses may be included within the 18 credits listed in (i) above and/or in addition to the 18 credits listed in (i) above.

A student pursuing early graduation through the Move on When Ready program may take two (2) high school English courses in an academic year.

A student pursuing early graduation through the Move on When Ready program shall indicate to the high school principal the student's intent prior to the beginning of grade nine (9) or as soon thereafter as the intent is known and must complete with parent signature an intent form available from the Department of Education and submit it to his or her high school principal and the Department of Education.

A student pursuing early graduation through the Move on When Ready program in accordance with these requirements is exempt from additional graduation requirements.

The state board of education or a local board of education shall not impose graduation requirements that would prohibit a student who is pursuing an early graduation program as outlined above from completing high school in less than four (4) years.

A student who completes the Move on When Ready program shall be awarded a high school diploma.

A student who completes the early graduation program in accordance with these requirements qualifies for unconditional admittance to all public two-year institutions of higher education. A public four-year institution may accept a student who completes the early graduation program.

### **GRADUATION PROVISIONS FOR CERTAIN STUDENTS IN OR EXITING CUSTODY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

The District shall not require any enrolling or transferring student, who is in grade eleven (11) or higher and in the custody of the department of children's services or exiting its custody, to meet more than the minimum requirements for graduation set forth by the state board of education. The District shall issue a full diploma to any such student who meets the minimum requirements.

## **ADJUSTMENT OF GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS – PROVISIONS FOR STUDENTS OF MILITARY PARENTS**

SCS shall waive specific courses required for graduation for students of military parents who enroll/transfer into the district if the student has satisfactorily completed similar course work in another district; or SCS shall provide reasonable justification for the denial. If a waiver is not granted to a student who would qualify to graduate from the sending school, SCS shall provide an alternative means of acquiring the required course work.

SCS shall accept the exit or end-of-course exams required for graduation from the sending state, norm-referenced achievement tests, or alternative testing in lieu of testing requirements mandated for graduation by the state of Tennessee or SCS. If alternatives cannot be accommodated by SCS for a student transferring in his/her senior year, SCS and the sending district shall ensure the receipt of a diploma from the sending district, if the student meets graduation requirements in the sending district.

Additionally, for a student of military parents transferring to SCS at the beginning or during his/her senior year, who is ineligible to graduate after all alternatives have been considered, SCS and the sending district shall ensure the receipt of a diploma from the sending district, if the student meets graduation requirements in the sending district. If the sending district is not a member of the Interstate Commission, SCS shall use best efforts to facilitate the on-time graduation of the student through adjustment of graduation requirements based on course waivers and acceptance of the sending state's examinations/tests or alternative testing.

### **OCCUPATIONAL DIPLOMA**

An occupational diploma may be awarded to students with disabilities at the end of their fourth year of high school who have:

- (i) Not met the requirements for a regular high school diploma;
- (ii) Received special education services or supports and made satisfactory progress on an IEP;
- (iii) Satisfactory records of attendance and conduct; and
- (iv) Completed the occupational diploma Skills, Knowledge, and Experience Mastery Assessment (SKEMA) created by the Tennessee Department of Education; and
- (v) Completed two (2) years of paid or non-paid work experience.

The determination that an occupational diploma is the goal for a student with a disability will be made at the conclusion of the student's tenth (10th) grade year or

two (2) academic years prior to the expected graduation date. Students who obtain the occupational diploma may continue to work towards a regular high school diploma through the end of the school year in which they turn twenty-two (22) years old.

### **SPECIAL EDUCATION DIPLOMA**

A special education diploma may be awarded at the end of their fourth year of high regular school to students with disabilities who have (1) not met the requirements for a high school diploma, (2) received special education services or supports and made satisfactory progress on an individualized education program (IEP), and (3) have satisfactory records of attendance and conduct. Students who obtain the special education diploma may continue to work toward a regular high school diploma through the end of the school year in which they turn twenty-two years old.

### **ALTERNATE ACADEMIC DIPLOMA**

An alternate academic diploma may be awarded to students with significant cognitive disabilities at the end of their fourth (4th) year of high school who have: (1) participated in the high school alternate assessments, (2) earned the prescribed twenty-two (22) credit minimum, (3) received special education services or supports and made satisfactory progress on an IEP, (4) have satisfactory records of attendance and conduct, and (5) have completed a transition assessment(s) that measures, at a minimum, preparedness for postsecondary education and training; employment; independent living; and community involvement. The required credits may be earned either through the state-approved standards or through alternate academic diploma modified course requirements approved by the State Board. A student who earns an alternate academic diploma shall continue to be eligible for special education services under IDEA until he or she receives a regular high school diploma or through the school year in which the student turns twenty-two (22).

### **EQUIVALENCY HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA**

The equivalency diploma will be available in accordance with the rules/guidance of the Tennessee Department of Education and the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

### **PUPIL COURSE WORK LOAD**

All full time students in grades 9-12 shall be enrolled each semester in subjects that produce a minimum of five units of credit for graduation per year. Students with hardships and gifted students may appeal this requirement to the local school

superintendent and then to the local board of education.

## **FOCUSED AND PURPOSEFUL PLAN OF STUDY**

Students are expected to meet the graduation standards in place the year they enter 9<sup>th</sup> grade, unless otherwise specified in law, State rules/policy/guidance, or District policy.

Prior to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade or age fourteen (14), all students will jointly prepare with their parent or guardian(s) and school counselor or faculty advisor an initial plan of focused and purposeful high school study that complies with the standards outlined in the Tennessee State Board of Education High School Policy (#2.103). The plan will cover either four (4) years, grades nine through twelve (9-12) or five (5) years, grades eight through twelve (8-12); connect the student's academic and career goals to school-and be reviewed/updated annually by the student and school counselor or faculty advisor based on the student's academic progress and changes in the student's interests and career goals (including results of various types of assessments).

One career interest inventory shall be completed in seventh (7<sup>th</sup>) grade to inform future course planning decisions and another by the end of tenth (10<sup>th</sup>) grade to focus the plan to ensure the completion of the program of study and a smooth transition to postsecondary study and work. The plan should contain information about career options and long-term goals supported by the plan through the courses to be taken in the eleventh (11<sup>th</sup>) and twelfth (12<sup>th</sup>) grades as well as courses to be taken at the postsecondary level.

For students with an IEP, the four (4) year or five (5) year plan of study should also connect the student's goals for high school including, the courses and/or training and/or skills necessary to meet his or her potential after high school. The required plan will include identifying possible transition service needs of the student under the applicable components of the student's IEP.

Professional school counselors are responsible for:

- the annual review of the plan with students and parents/guardians for the purpose of ensuring that students maintain progress toward the fulfillment of graduation requirements;
- reviewing the cumulative records of students at the end of each semester for accrual of credits; and
- advising students to enroll in appropriate courses to make certain that they are on the right path.

To assist in monitoring students' progress toward graduation, a districtwide document which contains a written description of curricular and graduation requirements (e.g., A Student Guide to Secondary Curriculum) shall be developed or revised, updated annually by June 30, and made accessible to schools, parents and students.

The Chief Academic Office is responsible for coordinating the logistics required for printing and distribution of diplomas.

### **TESTING FOR CREDIT**

Shelby County Schools may offer credit by examination to students enrolled in grades 9-12 who have taken the equivalent of high school level courses. Students may earn credit toward graduation upon passing a comprehensive written examination in accordance with the standards determined by the local board of education as delegated to the Superintendent pursuant to policy 5004 Graduation Requirements. The Department of Academics shall identify standards and provide guidelines for students to earn credit by examination.

High school credit may not be given by examination in American History.<sup>5</sup>