

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

What the Michigan Merit Curriculum Law Says

Sec. 1278b(a) The board of a school district or board of directors of a public school academy shall not award a high school diploma to a pupil unless the pupil has successfully completed at least 4 credits in English language arts that are aligned with subject area content expectations developed by the Michigan Department of Education and approved by the State Board of Education before graduating from high school.

Sec. 1278b(5)(f) The English language arts credit requirements are not subject to modification as part of a personal curriculum.

Background Information

The English Language Arts High School Content Expectations (HSCE) comprise four strands, 14 standards, and 91 expectations. The 91 expectations are recursive in that they are addressed repeatedly throughout units of instruction and in increasing complexity and sophistication over the four years of high school English language arts. The overarching goal for the HSCE is for students to exhibit the “habits of mind” or “dispositions” listed in the *Successful Post-Secondary Engagement* chart on page four of the HSCE document. These dispositions are developed through reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and expressing experiences encompassing a broad range of literary, nonfiction literary, and informational texts.

The Grade 9 through 12 English Language Arts Course/Credit Requirements define how credit will be assigned for the four English language arts credits required for graduation. The credit requirement documents for each grade provide a model unit framework and model units of instruction for meeting the 14 standards and 91 expectations while developing the disposition assigned to each grade level. The model units focus on specific aspects of the literary experience while building, refining, applying, and extending the knowledge, skills, and strategies students will need for success within and beyond high school.

The English language arts standards and expectations define processes, skills, and content knowledge.

Strand 1 (Writing, Speaking, and Expressing) and Strand 2 (Reading, Listening, and Viewing) define processes, skills, and strategies that must be taught and practiced not only in English language arts classes, but reinforced in classes across the core content areas (mathematics, science, social studies).

Strand 3 (Literature and Culture) and Strand 4 (Language) define the content of English language arts, including the close and critical reading of and response to literature (fiction, literary nonfiction, and expository texts), and the power of the English language as a communication tool.

What Research Says

Research shows that to be successful in college and to hold well-paying jobs, high school graduates need four years of English language arts. All expectations should be addressed across the course units of instruction in increasing levels of complexity and sophistication.

Questions & Answers

- 1. Q: If a district currently requires a class such as Speech or Technical Writing, rather than English 9, 10, 11, or 12, as one of its required English graduation requirements, could it be accepted as one of the four English language arts requirements, or would it have to be changed to more of a general English 9, 10, 11, or 12-type class?**

A: If the Speech or Technical Writing courses align to the 91 expectations and offer students the opportunity to build, refine, apply, and extend the knowledge, skills, and strategies included in the unit framework for the grade level while developing the assigned dispositions, a district could award credit for these courses.

2. Q: Are the four dispositions in English Language Arts (ELA) suggested themes to meet the benchmarks or are they mandated? Do all four need to be addressed at each grade level?

A: Since the dispositions represent an overarching goal of the ELA High School Content Expectations, they are required. By the end of high school, students should exhibit the "habits of mind" exemplified in all four dispositions. The Course/Credit requirements for ELA 9, 10, 11, and 12 are designed to develop one disposition in each grade while offering opportunities for discussing questions that would connect and support all four dispositions. The more often each disposition is discussed throughout the grades, the more likely students will be comfortable and competent in discussing issues related to all four dispositions.

3. Q: There are 91 ELA content expectations. How can a district be expected to develop curriculum that addresses all 91 each year?

A: The Michigan Merit Curriculum Course/Credit requirements for English Language Arts 9 through 12 provide a description of the ELA standards and expectations and a Unit Framework (p. 6-14) for incorporating all 91 content expectations in thematic units of instruction. Essential Questions that build to the grade-level disposition are listed for each grade level. The Framework is followed by 4 or 5 model units designed to develop effective communication and literacy skills and foster deep understanding and appreciation of a broad range of literary and informational texts.

The units use complex anchor and linking texts to teach the content expectations and to make connections that lead to the dispositions: Inter-Relationships and Self-Reliance, Critical Response and Stance, Transformational Thinking, and Leadership Qualities. The units are designed to take advantage of what each text offers for meeting the expectations, including opportunities for direct instruction of text characteristics and features, reading and writing strategies, critical thinking, building of historical background knowledge, and ongoing literacy development including vocabulary and grammar.

Districts may choose to use or adapt the units described in the Course/Credit requirement documents or design their own units based on the Unit Framework. Literature selections included in the model units represent recommendations, not requirements. Decisions regarding required literature are left to individual school districts