

COURSE/CREDIT CONTENT EXPECTATIONS

Since the passage of the new state high school graduation requirements commonly referred to as the Michigan Merit Curriculum, the Michigan Department of Education has worked with hundreds of educators and representatives from professional organizations and higher education to develop documents and materials that outline what students should know and be able to do in required courses/credits during their high school experience.

Two main sets of documents called *High School Content Expectations (HSCE)* and specific *Course/Credit Content Expectations* and Guidelines provide educators with the tools needed to align their curriculum and instruction and provide parents with meaningful information to gauge student progress. These expectations also serve as the basis to determine student proficiency, grant high school credit, and develop various questions for the Michigan Merit Exam.

The Michigan Merit requirements are based on what research shows will provide students with the educational foundation to be successful as they move beyond high school into college and the workplace.

ONLINE COURSE OR LEARNING EXPERIENCE

What the Michigan Merit Curriculum Law Says

380.1278a(1)(b) A school district or public school academy shall provide the basic level of technology and internet access required by the state board to complete the online course or learning experience. For a pupil to meet this requirement, the pupil shall meet either of the following, as determined by the school district or public school academy:

Has successfully completed at least 1 course or learning experience that is presented online, as defined by the Michigan Department of Education.

The pupil's school district or public school academy has integrated an online experience throughout the high school curriculum by ensuring that each teacher of each course that provides the required credits of the Michigan merit curriculum has integrated an online experience into the course.

What Research Says

Thirty-eight million fulltime workers in the nation have Internet access at their jobs and two-thirds of them (67%) go online at least once per day. Seventy-two percent of full-time workers with Internet access at work say it has improved their ability to do their jobs.

Questions & Answers

1. Q: Why has an online learning experience been added to the Michigan Merit Curriculum?

A: Today, technology plays an integral role in school, at home and in the workplace. Completing a meaningful online learning experience in Grades 9-12 will allow students to become familiar with the key means of increasing their own learning skills and knowledge. It also will prepare them for the demands they will encounter in higher education, the workplace, and personal lifelong learning.

Already, many universities and colleges require students to have a laptop with them when they arrive on campus. Businesses conduct training sessions online, and cities now are providing wireless Internet access in businesses to attract customers to their establishments. To give our students an experience of learning in a virtual world, the online learning experience is included in the Michigan Merit Curriculum requirements.

2. Q: What counts for the online learning requirement?

A: The Michigan Department of Education has developed Online Learning Guidelines that were approved by the State Board in October 2006. You can access these guidelines at www.michigan.gov/highschool.

3. Q: Will the online learning experience cost money? Who is going to pay for this?

A: The Michigan Merit Curriculum requires an online learning experience, which can be met in a variety of ways at no cost and does not necessarily have to be met through an online course. A free online course called *Career Forward* has been developed by the Michigan Department of Education and the Michigan Virtual University (MVU) with funding from the Microsoft Corporation. For more information visit the [Career Forward](http://www.mivu.org) website at www.mivu.org.

4. Q: Can the online learning requirement be met prior to 9th grade?

A: Yes, the requirement may be satisfied by an online experience at the middle school level, but students are encouraged to continue with online learning throughout high school.

5. Q: Does the online learning experience need to go on a transcript? (Updated 8/07)

A: While districts will need to assure students complete this requirement, the law does not mandate that a student be given credit for this experience or this experience be recorded on a transcript.

6. Q: If a student is taking a high school class via distance learning, does this fulfill the requirement of an online course or learning experience?

A: Yes, if the class meets the guidelines. Distance learning does not automatically qualify. The distance learning experience must meet the guidelines.

7. Q: Does an online course or online learning experience need to be teacher led or can it be self-paced? Revised (6/07)

A: No. Although research shows that students are most successful in a teacher-led environment, and districts are encouraged to offer teacher-led opportunities, it is a local district decision.

Online Additions 6/07

8. Q: Can students currently enrolled in a CTE or alternative school program earn credit for a required course online or through a computer based course software program?

A: Yes. The emphasis of the Michigan Merit Curriculum is now on proficiency rather than seat time. Any of the state graduation required expectations can be taught in any format as long as it is under the oversight of a highly qualified teacher (see page 40 #7 of the FAQ document) in that subject and is aligned to the state's High School Content Expectations.

9. Q: Can the online experience requirement be met in one class or must an online learning experience be incorporated into each course/credit required by the Michigan Merit Curriculum?

A: The online requirement need only be incorporated into 1 credit such as Chemistry (for example). If the instructor has incorporated online learning into such a class, to the extent that it meets the Online Learning Guidelines, a district may determine that students in that class have satisfied the requirement. Online guidelines may be found at <http://www.mi.gov/highschool>

10. Q: What types of technology-based programs are allowable in a classroom if the teacher is certified but not “highly qualified” in the area(s) he/she is teaching or facilitating.

A: The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which outlines the requirements for highly qualified teachers, differentiates the following:

1. If the teacher of the online class or course is employed and salaried by a public school district that is receiving Title I funds, and if the online class or course is being delivered to students in that district, or another public school district, for credit, the teacher must be highly qualified.
2. If the teacher of the online class or course is not employed and salaried by a public school district (or if so, is not acting in that capacity) and is being compensated for the development or delivery of the class or course by other than a public local or intermediate school district, the teacher does not have to be highly qualified.

It is, therefore, possible for a student in a public school classroom, technology lab, resource center, media center, etc. to be taking an online course or a multiple number of such courses for high school credit. The online teacher does not need to be “highly qualified” in the subject area(s) in which students are being instructed, unless, as noted above, the instruction is being delivered online by a teacher employed by the student’s public school district or another public school district.

For state aid purposes, there are some conditions under which online learning could occur and still be eligible for state aid. Rather than try to recite them all here, please refer to the department’s *Pupil Accounting Manual*. A copy of this can be accessed online at the department’s website: www.michigan.gov/mde. In the column of options on the left, click on “Offices” then “State Aid and School Finance” and the document appears on the main page.

11. Q: Does a highly qualified requirement apply to stand-alone (“plug and play”) course software, e.g. Plato, vs. online courses?

A: The issue of the “highly qualified” teacher requirement does not apply to the use of stand-alone instructional programs since there is generally no teacher actively involved in instruction in a stand-alone program.

The use of stand-alone programs also does not pose a problem with state aid. Whether the student is taking an online class as part of his/her school day schedule for high school credit, or whether outside of school on his/her own time and place, again for high school credit, eligibility for state aid would require that a certified teacher either be the instructor-of-record of the course or function as a mentor or facilitator assigned to the student.

Furthermore, state aid would not hinge upon whether the student is engaging stand-alone software or is online but on whether the student is taking the online course for credit and whether a certified teacher is engaged with the student as teacher, mentor, facilitator, etc. The *Pupil Accounting Manual* referenced above outlines additional requirements for state aid eligibility if the student is taking online classes outside the school day.

12. Q: Do you know of any online options for social studies that a student could take in addition to his or her regular classes that would be accepted for her graduation requirement?

A: The Michigan Virtual High School offers online courses that would help fulfill the social sciences requirement. For additional information, contact the MVHS help desk, (888) 889-2840, or visit their online course catalog at <http://www.mivhs.org/content.cfm?ID=32>. Other online providers may also have courses that would fulfill the requirement, though care must be taken to ensure they align to the Michigan Merit Curriculum Content Expectations.

13. Q: Can a student taking a class, which the district has determined also meets the online learning requirements, test out of both the class and the online requirement?

A: No. While a student may test out of a subject or class required by the MI high school graduation requirements, the law does not mention testing out of the online requirement. The online requirement is unlike the other graduation requirements in that it is more about process than content. It is not about "computer skills," which most young people are presumed already to have. It is instead about the process of using those skills to pursue learning in an online environment, which is a process that unfolds as students engage in online learning activities. It is unlikely that any kind of testing-out assessment (like an end-of-course exam) could truly "test" the process that occurs when a student engages with content, other students, and a teacher online.