



## Introduction

On April 20, 2006, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm signed into law one of the most comprehensive sets of high school graduation requirements in the nation called the *Michigan Merit Curriculum*. This law is a result of an extraordinary partnership between Governor Granholm, the State Board of Education, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Legislature, and numerous education associations who worked together to better prepare students for greater success and to secure the economic future of our state.

As a result, a high school diploma in Michigan will soon say a lot more about the graduate whose name it bears. It will tell employers that our students have mastered the reading, writing, and math skills required for success in the workplace. It will tell college and university admissions officers and career and technical schools the student is ready for the rigors of post-secondary education. It will tell the world -- Michigan is committed to having the best-educated workforce.

The Michigan Merit Curriculum defines a common set of required credits for graduation and provides educators with a common understanding of what student's should know and be able to do for credit. It also provides students the learning opportunity, knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college or the workplace.

## MICHIGAN MERIT CURRICULUM

The Michigan Merit Curriculum requires students entering 8th grade in 2006, to obtain a minimum of 16 credits for graduation, which could be met using alternative instructional delivery methods such as alternative course work, humanities course sequences, career and technology courses, industrial technology or vocational education courses, or through a combination of these programs.

The new law also requires students to have an online course or learning experience. For a student to meet this requirement, the student must meet either of the following, as determined by the school district or public school academy: 1) Has successfully completed at least 1 course or learning experience that is presented online, as defined by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE); and 2) The student'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.

In addition, students entering the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in 2006 will need to complete two credits of a language other than English in grades 9-12; OR an equivalent learning experience in grades K-12 prior to graduation. High School Content Expectations and Course/Credit Content Expectations and Guidelines are available on the Michigan Department of Education's high school web page at [www.mi.gov/highschool](http://www.mi.gov/highschool).

<b>Michigan Merit Curriculum High School Graduation Requirements</b>	
<b>MATHEMATICS - 4 Credits</b>	
Algebra I Algebra II	Geometry One math course in final year of high school
<b>ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS - 4 Credits</b>	
English Language Arts 9 English Language Arts 10	English Language Arts 11 English Language Arts 12
<b>SCIENCE - 3 Credits</b>	
Biology Physics or Chemistry	One additional science credit
<b>SOCIAL STUDIES - 3 Credits</b>	
.5 credit in Civics U.S. History and Geography	.5 credit in Economics World History and Geography
<b>PHYSICAL EDUCATION &amp; HEALTH - 1 Credit</b>	
<b>VISUAL, PERFORMING AND APPLIED ARTS - 1 Credit</b>	
<b>ONLINE LEARNING EXPERIENCE</b> Course, Learning or Integrated Learning Experience	
<b>WORLD LANGUAGE - 2 Credits</b> In grades 9-12; OR an equivalent learning experience in grades K-12	

# MICHIGAN MERIT CURRICULUM

## Questions & Answers

**1. Q: What's the difference between the state's current graduation requirements and the new Michigan Merit Curriculum high school graduation requirements?**

**A:** Prior to the passage of the Michigan Merit Curriculum, the state of Michigan required only one semester of Civics for high school graduation. The new law, which goes into effect beginning with students entering the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in 2006, is designed for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century student. The curriculum is required of each and every student. It supports the need for personalization, acceleration, and innovation in an atmosphere of high expectations and high support for students.

The Michigan Merit Curriculum is crafted around the philosophical belief that all students will need extended learning opportunities for extended learning beyond high school. As the learning skills for college and the workplace have merged, this curriculum will prepare students with the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in our global economy and workplace.

**2. Q: Don't most school districts already have similar graduation requirements?**

**A:** While most districts have adopted graduation requirements, the number and type of credits vary widely throughout the state. The Michigan Merit Curriculum will provide all students a common set of credit requirements for graduation and will provide educators with a common understanding of what students should know and be able to do for credit.

**3. Q: How does the Michigan Merit Curriculum compare with other states' graduation requirements?**

**A:** Michigan's new high school graduation requirements are regarded as among the best in the nation. In addition to requiring students to earn a full complement of math, science, English and other credits to receive their diplomas, Michigan is the first state to require students to have an online learning experience to prepare them for postsecondary education and the workplace. In addition, in order to work in our global economy, students entering 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in 2006 and beyond will also need to complete two credits of languages other than English or equivalent K-12 experience prior to graduation.

**4. Q: Does the Michigan Merit Curriculum allow decisions to be made by local school districts?**

**A:** Yes. Local school districts will continue to issue diplomas, align curriculum, determine what constitutes a credit, establish a credit award system, identify assessments, set school calendars, select and purchase textbooks, etc. Local school boards and districts will continue to have flexibility to determine "how" to implement these new graduation requirements and when students have earned the credits. The Michigan Department of Education will continue to develop content expectations and guidelines to determine "what" students should know and be able to do to receive Michigan Merit Curriculum high school graduation credit.

Local boards of education also will continue to establish additional graduation requirements beyond those in the Michigan Merit Curriculum and the total number of credits required for graduation. However, a district cannot establish lesser requirements.

**5. Q: Different school districts have varying ways in which they schedule their high school class day. Will these new requirements force districts to change their high school class day schedules?**

**A:** No. The requirements allow districts the flexibility to maintain their current scheduling system or to develop other systems to meet the individual needs and desires of each district.

**6. Q: Will the Michigan Merit Curriculum reduce the number of electives students may take?**

**A:** The Michigan Merit Curriculum continues to allow districts to determine the number of electives offered to their students. It also provides students the flexibility to select additional electives and/or earn graduation credit through online courses, by testing out, attending summer school, and other local options.

**7. Q: Why can't we take longer to implement new graduation requirements – it feels like we are rushing toward this change?**

**A:** Michigan's economic future is on the line. Today, far too many students are graduating from high school without the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in college or the workplace. The implementation of this new curriculum will not only help students, but will benefit the state as a whole. If we implement this change with next year's 9<sup>th</sup> graders, we will still be four years away from preparing 100% of Michigan students for work and postsecondary education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

**8. Q: Will this push some struggling students to drop out rather than attempt to meet the demands of a harder curriculum?**

**A:** Research tells us that students do not drop out because they have a more rigorous curriculum and/or are asked to work harder. Rather, studies show students of all abilities are more likely to pass high-level courses than low-level courses, graduate from school, get better grades, succeed in college without requiring remedial education classes, be better prepared for the workforce, and earn higher wages. For more information, go to <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/hsinit/papers/highex.doc>

**9. Q: Don't you think that making the high school credit requirements so rigorous is an invitation to return to "tracking" kids?**

**A:** On the contrary. The Michigan Merit Curriculum is intended to provide all students with the same rigorous curriculum and credit content.

## NON-PUBLIC AND HOME SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS

### Questions & Answers

**1. Q: Do the new graduation requirements apply to home schools, private schools, and parochial schools?**

**A:** No, the legislature did not specifically require this as a condition to earn a high school diploma in a non-public Michigan school. However, currently the requirement for one semester credit in Civics/Government does apply to all public and non-public schools in Michigan.

Currently, many private and parochial schools choose to follow the Michigan Merit Curriculum in order for their students to qualify for the Michigan Merit Award and succeed in being ready for college and workplace demands.