



## EARNING CREDIT

### What the Michigan Merit Curriculum Law Says

*380.1278(a)(4)(a) A student is considered to have completed a credit if the student successfully completes the subject area content expectations or guidelines developed by the Michigan Department of Education that apply to the credit. A school district or public school academy shall base its determination of whether a student has successfully completed the subject area content expectations or guidelines developed by the department that apply to a credit at least in part on the student's performance on the assessments developed or selected by the Department or on 1 or more assessments developed or selected by the school district or public school academy that measure a student's understanding of the subject area content expectations or guidelines that apply to the credit.*

*380.1278a(4)(c) A school district or public school academy also must grant a credit if the student earns a qualifying score, as determined by the Department, on the assessments developed or selected for the subject area by the Department or the student earns a qualifying score, as determined by the school district or public school academy, on 1 or more assessments developed or selected by the school district or public school academy that measure a student's understanding of the subject area content expectations or guidelines that apply to the credit.*

*380.1278b(2) If a student successfully completes 1 or more of the high school credits required in the Michigan Merit Curriculum before entering high school, the student shall be given high school credit for that credit.*

## Background Information

The Michigan Merit Curriculum lays out a new foundation for "credit" by requiring that credit be awarded not by the commonly used Carnegie unit, which is based on seat time, but based on a student's demonstration that he or she has successfully met the content expectations for the credit area.

The Michigan Merit Curriculum content expectations can be met in various learning settings such as career and technical education; work-based learning programs; integrated sequences such as humanities (e.g., combining English, social studies, and art); integrated math and science classes; project-based learning; college credit opportunities like dual enrollment; advancement placement and International Baccalaureate programs; and online learning. Regardless in what setting, students must demonstrate they have met the subject area content expectations for that credit area.

## Questions & Answers

1. Q: What is a credit?

A: A credit is a completed unit of study as measured by proficiency in a predetermined set of content expectations (e.g., Algebra 1, Biology, English Language Arts 12, etc.). Students *earn* credit -- students *take* a course.

2. Q: How can a student earn credit? (Updated 8/07)

A: Students may earn credit if they successfully demonstrate mastery of subject area content expectations or guidelines for the credit. The assignment of credit must be based, at least in part, on student performance on subject area assessments which measure the extent to which they meet the credit expectations and guidelines.

Beyond earning credit through a traditional course setting, a student may earn a credit in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to:

- A related course(s) in which content standards are embedded (e.g., math standards embedded in a career-technical program, industrial technology course, or vocational course, a humanities program, etc.) (Updated 8.07)
- Non-traditional course work
- Independent teacher-guided study
- Testing out

In addition, the district may allow students to satisfy credit requirements through:

- Dual Enrollment
- Advanced Placement Courses
- International Baccalaureate or other “early college” experiences or programs
- An on-line class

3. Q: Do students have to earn credits in the Michigan Merit Curriculum in a particular sequence?

A: No. The law provides local districts and students with the flexibility to establish the sequence and pace of instruction.

4. Q: Is a student allowed to receive high school credit for coursework prior to high school?

A: Yes. The law states if a student successfully completes one or more high school credits before entering high school, the student must be given graduation credit for that credit if the district: 1) determines a student has met Michigan Department of Education high school course/credit content expectations; and, 2) uses an assessment to certify that the student is proficient in the course/credit content expectations, and the expected level of proficiency is the same as for high school. While a student must receive graduation credit for credit earned prior to high school, a district continues to have the ability to establish graduation requirements beyond the Michigan Merit Curriculum.

In other words, if middle school students meet the same expectations and proficiency level as high school students, they must receive credit. This is true even if textbooks and other resources are different. The key is mastering the course content expectations, being measured by the same assessment(s) as in high school, and performing at the same level of proficiency (passing standards) as in high school. (Updated 8.07)

5. Q: Must a school provide students with the opportunity to take all required Michigan Merit credits/classes? For example, if a district is able to offer only Chemistry and is not able to offer Physics, may the district require all students to take Chemistry without the option of choosing Physics? What if a school is not able to hire enough teachers trained in these areas?

A: Under the law, a district should make every effort to offer the curriculum necessary for the student to meet the Michigan Merit Curriculum credit requirements. However, the law provides districts with a great deal of flexibility to meet credit requirements, including, but limited to: alternative instructional delivery methods such as teaching certain subjects in certain years, district partnerships, online courses, dual enrollment, community college partnerships, etc.

If a district is still unable to meet all curricular or other requirements outlined in the law, a district may apply to the Michigan Department of Education for permission to phase in one or more requirements. To apply, the school district must submit a proposed phase-in plan to the Department which outlines its

strategy to make satisfactory progress toward full implementation of the requirements. If the plan is not approved, the Department must work with the school district to develop a satisfactory plan.

If a school district demonstrates to the Department it is unable to hire enough highly qualified teachers, the Department will work with the school district to develop a plan to hire enough highly qualified teachers to meet the requirements. However, for a high school to be accredited, it is required to ensure all curriculum credit requirements are made available to the affected students. For a definition of "Highly Qualified," see page 8.

6. Q: Will districts be allowed to give ½ credits?

A: Yes. The sequence, pace, and "packaging" of credits is the prerogative of the district. Districts may award credit units even smaller than ½, if appropriate.

7. Q: How can students receive credit without passing a class?

A: A student may demonstrate proficiency in the credit area by testing out (passing a test or battery of assessments approved by a district), which measures a student's understanding of the content expectations for that credit.

8. Q: Does the content and assessment for a credit offered in both middle and high school need to be the same?

A: Yes. While the textbook and other resources may vary, students are required to learn the same content, be assessed by the same assessment(s), and be held to the same level of proficiency whether they earn the high school graduation credit in middle or high school. (Updated 8.07)

## EARNING CREDIT 8/07 ADDITIONS

9. Q: Can a district simply say no to kids earning high school graduation credit for classes passed prior to high school? If a student successfully completes Algebra I in the 8th grade, can I just check off the Algebra I box on his list of requirements, but not give him or her an actual credit?

A: No. The new law REQUIRES high school graduation credit must be awarded for classes taken before high school which meet the following conditions:

- The class must cover the same content as the high school class, in other words, high school level material. School districts have one year following state approval of each Michigan Merit Curriculum Course/Credit Expectations to align courses and assessments. Therefore, during the 2006-2007 school year, districts may use their current high school curriculum to assign credit. By the 2007-2008 school year, all expectations and assessments should be aligned with the exception of social studies expectations which must be aligned one year following final approval by the State Board of Education
- Proficiency must be assessed using the same assessment(s) (e.g. end-of-course exam or combination of assessments) used at the high school.
- The level of proficiency expected in order to "pass" (e.g. 80%) must be the same as at the high school.

10. Q: Our school district has traditionally awarded high school credit to students who successfully completed Algebra I in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Although we have been working this year to align Algebra I and other classes with the new high school content expectations, we have not completed that task. May we award high school credit to this year's 8<sup>th</sup> graders successfully completing Algebra I, even though our high school and middle school Algebra I programs are not yet fully aligned with the content expectations.

A: Yes, you may do so for this year only, 2006-07. The law requires that a high school have in place all the opportunities necessary for a 9<sup>th</sup> grader entering in the fall of 2007 to earn the graduation requirements. This essentially has given schools the current 2006-2007 school year to align with the content expectations the programs/courses/classes that are available to freshmen next fall. You may therefore award high school credit for 8<sup>th</sup> grade Algebra this year based on the benchmarks and standards that your district has in place currently for Algebra I.

This would NOT apply to a district that, up to now, has not been awarding high school credit for Algebra I in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and now wishes to take advantage of doing so this year under the old benchmarks. In order for this permission to apply, the district must have had a history of awarding such credit.

11. Q: Can a district require the student to take four math classes sometime during his four years at high school?

A: Yes. The new law sets the floor, not the ceiling. The law explicitly allows local districts to set graduation requirements above and beyond those in the law. Therefore, a district could mandate that, as a local graduation requirement a student is required to take four years of math in high school, even if they have satisfied some math graduation requirements in middle school. Moreover, a local graduation requirement could require that a student be in attendance for 8 semesters, and define "attendance in a semester" as being enrolled in a minimum number of credits. However, additional requirements could impact the number of student electives and early college credit opportunities through Advanced Placement classes, dual enrollment, etc.

12. Q: If a student is in the Class of 2010 (ninth grade in 2006/07) and, due to failures, does not earn enough credits to progress with his/her class and, technically, is now in the Class of 2011, do the new graduation requirements apply to this student?

A: No, they don't. The actual graduation legislation does not mention "graduation class of 2011." The law states the new requirements apply to the students who are in 8th grade in 2006. Therefore, a student in 9th grader during the 2006-2007 school year, who graduates with class of 2011 instead of the class of 2010, is not subject to the new graduation requirements. Such a student would graduate under the requirements in effect for that student when he/she entered the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

13. Q: If a student fails a class as a result of not meeting district attendance policy, for example, but passes the end of course exam, does the student get credit?

A: Yes. Once a student registers for and attends a class, he or she agrees to the district's requirements for earning a grade in the class, including attendance, homework, etc. However, the district must grant credit if a student passes an exam or series of exams used for testing out, which the district has determined measures a student's proficiency in meeting the Michigan Merit course/credit content expectations.

Districts are responsible for determining the assessments, which can be used for testing out purposes. The assessments could include the Michigan Department of Education's Secondary Credit Assessment or other assessments aligned with the Michigan Merit course/credit content expectations. Assessments may also include one or more elements in addition to paper-and-pencil exams for testing out purposes, including but not limited to paper, project, presentation, performance, demonstration or participation elements. (Updated 11.07)

14. Q: Currently our district is thinking of assessments, which are EXACTLY the same for all teachers of a particular subject and contain the HSCEs. So this means that exams are the same and unit tests are the same. Is this correct or can you give me some more information?

A: This is certainly acceptable and a good way to unify standards in a district. To earn the required credit, students must meet the expectations. The law states that the assignment of credit must be based, at least in part, on assessments designed to determine if students have met the expectations. Common assessments designed to match the instructional model (units, topics, skills, knowledge) and to assess the expectations will allow you to determine if students have met the expectations while offering some assurance that you are using the same standard for assignment of credit for all sections of a course or series of courses.

A district may determine a need for offering opportunities to meet the expectations that differ in instructional model from other courses/sections designed to meet the same expectations. The assessments for those courses/sections will probably differ from those described above as your "common" assessments in that they will align with your instructional model while still assessing whether students have met the same expectations. An example might be that in most Algebra I sections, students are expected to answer problems on a paper and pencil assessment in which the students independently read and complete all portions of the assessment. In another section, students may perform the same problems posed in an applied setting in which the teacher gives them a number of scenarios and information and asks them to independently solve problems to show that they have met the expectations. This is one issue special educators are working hard to develop.

15. Q: What accommodations are allowable to assist English Language Learners (ELL) students in obtaining credit?

A: For all students -- ELL, special education, and others -- earning credit means meeting the expectations. The expectations can be met in a variety of ways and the assessments used to determine whether students have met the expectations should match the instructional model while still assessing whether the students have actually met the expectations. The texts to be read and the discussions that take place may be designed to accommodate the language skills of the student.

16. Q: How does an ELL student, especially one with very low English skills, meet the requirements of our English 9, 10, 11, and 12 or can they have their own class and assessments, which could have the High School Content Expectations built into them?

A: While these are district decisions, a district may consider students to have met the requirements who can communicate orally, attend regular classes in which they have the same discussions as others and are exposed to the same instruction coupled with a support class in which they receive help with meeting the requirements for reading, writing, and preparation for discussions.

17. Q: Are there any circumstances in which a student could receive more than 1 credit for one class meeting two or more Course/Credit Content Expectations? For example, if a student signs up for a graphic communications course which meets the state's Visual, Performing and Applied Arts (VPAA) credit requirement and is approved by the district as containing sufficient math for the state's 4<sup>th</sup> math credit, could he or she receive 1 credit each for both for a total of 2 credits?

A: No. While a district has the discretion to grant 2 or more credits for non-state required courses, a district may not grant a student more than 1 credit per course for a course/credit area required under the Michigan Merit Curriculum, with the exception on Algebra II, which the law explicitly allows to be delivered over two years.

18. Q: Is a district allowed to pass a residency rule, requiring students to be fully enrolled for six or eight semesters to graduate after satisfying the requirements of the MMC?

A: Yes. A district may establish residency rules. If a district does so, however, the district should consider how to provide early-college, college-level work, to students who would otherwise be ready to go on. One of the primary reasons the new graduation requirements refer to credits not courses or classes is to provide Michigan high school students a more challenging and relevant curriculum and to increase college-level opportunities. While this is a local district decision, a school residency rule should be flexible to allow and encourage these opportunities.

19. Q: How can a district determine when to grant a student transferring in from a different state or country credit for Michigan Merit Curriculum requirements?

A: Districts have the flexibility to establish Michigan Merit Curriculum credit policies and procedures. The law does require students to be proficient in the course/credit content expectations and that this proficiency be measured, at least in part, by an assessment that evaluates a student's understanding of the expectations. The law however, does not require an assessment be given prior to placement. Therefore in some circumstances, students could simply test out of a credit. While in others, if a student's transcript shows they have completed Algebra I, for example, a district could elect to place a student in Algebra II and use one or more assessments given in Algebra II to verify the student's proficiency and grant credit for Algebra I.

20. Q: How should districts award students transitioning from home schools credit for Michigan Merit Curriculum requirements in areas like Algebra I, Biology, etc?

A: Districts have the flexibility to establish Michigan Merit Curriculum credit policies and procedures. To ensure a student is scheduled in the appropriate sequence of courses that will allow him/her to meet the MI graduation requirements, districts may determine that some assessment(s) will be necessary, such as an assessment used for testing out purposes (for example, an end-of-course exam). Whatever the district decision, the policy should have uniform application.

21. Q: Is a student who is unable to complete the Michigan high school graduation requirements in a regular four-year sequence, eligible to attend high school for a fifth year?

A: Yes. However, these requirements were developed to provide schools and students with ample time to support student success during a four-year sequence. From a funding standpoint, a student who has not yet graduated may continue in high school and be eligible for state aid up to the point were they are 19 years old by Sept. 1. If they are 20 by Sept. 1, they are ineligible for state aid.

22. Q: If students master only part of a required subject's High School Content Expectations, how will districts document that that students have completed the remaining HSCE in other courses such as CTE?

A: Given most districts have a unique data collection system, this new law continues to provide districts with the flexibility to integrate and manage data about which expectations students have mastered in which settings.

23. Q: Are you considering ways to share resources and lesson plans with schools and ISDs?

A: Yes. The Michigan Department of Education, in partnership with ISDs, local districts, Institutions of Higher Education and professional organizations will continue to collaborate on providing professional development, resources and promising practices. For example, the Department's School Improvement conferences to be held in November and April will include a "Panorama of Promising Practices." In addition, there will be sharing of information on the Michigan Educator Resources site on the Michigan Electronic Library (MEL) and MVU Learnport.