

160-4-2-.49 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDENTS ENROLLING IN THE NINTH GRADE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE 2023-2024 SCHOOL YEAR AND SUBSEQUENT YEARS.

(1) DEFINITIONS.

(a) **Alternate Diploma** – the document awarded to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who were assessed using the alternate assessment aligned to alternate academic achievement standards. The Alternate Diploma is standards-based and aligned with the state requirements for the regular High School Diploma, but it is not a regular High School Diploma. Therefore, an Alternate Diploma does not terminate Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

(b) **Career, Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) Pathways** – three units in a coherent sequence that includes rigorous content aligned with industry-related standards leading to college and work readiness in a focused area of student interest.

(c) **Core Courses** – the category of courses in the areas of English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, CTAE/World Languages/Fine Arts, and Health and Physical Education that can be used to meet the Unit of Credit Requirements for a High School Diploma. Core Courses are identified as “c” or “r” in the *State-Funded List of K-8 Subjects and 9-12 Courses*.

(d) **Elective Courses** – the category of courses beyond the Core Courses Unit of Credit requirements that can be used to satisfy the Elective Unit of Credit requirements for a High School Diploma. Elective Courses are identified as “e” in the *State-Funded List of K-8 Subjects and 9-12 Courses*.

(e) **Equivalent Substitute** – a secondary course with standards that have been reviewed by the Georgia Department of Education (Department) and have been approved by the Department as equivalent to relevant state-approved standards. Equivalent Substitute consideration is only necessary for Required Courses.

(f) **Georgia Alternate Assessment 2.0 (GAA 2.0)** – an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who require substantial adaptations and supports to access the general curriculum and require additional instruction focused on relevant life skills. Instruction for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities is based on extended content standards, which are aligned to the state content standards at a reduced depth, breadth, and complexity. The purpose of the GAA 2.0 is to ensure all students, including students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, are provided access to the state content standards and given the opportunity to

demonstrate progress toward achievement of the state standards.

(g) **High School Certificate** – the document awarded to students who have earned 23 Units of Credit, but do not complete all of the Unit of Credit requirements for a High School Diploma.

(h) **High School Diploma** – the document awarded to students certifying that they have satisfied the Unit of Credit requirements for a high school graduation, as outlined in section (2) of this rule.

(i) **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** – a written statement for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with the Individual with Disabilities Education Act 2004. [34 C.F.R. § 300.22]

(j) **Required Courses** – the Core Courses, or their approved Equivalent Substitutes, that have been specifically designated for completion to earn Units of Credit for a High School Diploma. Required Courses are identified as “r” in the *State-Funded List of K-8 Subjects and 9-12 Courses*.

(k) **Significant Cognitive Disabilities** – significant intellectual disabilities or intellectual disabilities concurrent with motor, sensory or emotional/behavioral disabilities. Students with the most Significant Cognitive Disabilities require substantial adaptations and support to access the general curriculum, and require additional instruction focused on relevant life skills, and participate in the Georgia Alternate Assessment 2.0 (GAA 2.0).

(l) **Special Education Diploma** – the document awarded to students with disabilities assigned to a special education program who have completed their Individualized Education Program, but who have not completed all of the Unit of Credit requirements for a High School Diploma but who have nevertheless completed their IEP.

(m) **State-approved Standards** – course standards that have been adopted by the State Board of Education or approved by the Georgia Department of Education.

(n) **Unit of Credit** – evidence of successful course completion as demonstrated by a final course grade of 70 or higher on a numerical scale; or competency-based course completion as demonstrated by a pre-defined score on state-adopted or -approved assessment instruments.

(2) REQUIREMENTS.

(a) Local boards of education shall provide secondary school curriculum and instructional and support services that reflect the high school graduation and state assessment requirements and assist all students in developing their unique potential to

function in society.

(b) Local boards of education shall require that:

1. Students who enroll from another state meet the graduation requirements for the graduating class they enter and the state assessment requirements as referenced in State Board of Education Rule 160-3-1-.07 *Testing Programs - Student Assessment*.

2. Students who enroll in the ninth grade for the first time in the 2023-2024 school year or subsequent years shall meet the graduation requirements specified in this rule and the assessment requirements specified in State Board of Education Rule 160-3-1-.07 *Testing Programs - Student Assessment*.

(c) MINIMUM REQUIRED UNITS OF CREDIT.

1. The chart below outlines the details of the minimum required Units of Credit for a High School Diploma.

Subject Area	Total Required Units of Credit	Required Units of Credit Details
English Language Arts	4	• 1 Unit Literature & Composition I (23.06160) or its Equivalent Substitute • 1 Unit Literature & Composition II (26.06170) or its Equivalent Substitute • 1 Unit of a Core Course in English Language Arts, identified as “c” in the <i>State-Funded List of K-8 Subjects and 9-12 Courses</i> • 1 Unit of a Core Course in English Language Arts, identified as “c” in the <i>State-Funded List of K-8 Subjects and 9-12 Courses</i>
Mathematics	4	• 1 Unit Algebra: Concepts & Connections (27.08110) or its Equivalent Substitute • 1 Unit Geometry: Concepts & Connections (27.08210) or its Equivalent Substitute • 1 Unit Advanced Algebra: Concepts & Connections (27.08310) or its Equivalent Substitute • 1 Unit of a Core Course in Mathematics, identified as “c” in the <i>State-Funded List of K-8 Subjects and 9-12 Courses</i>
Science	4	• 1 Unit Biology (26.01200) or its Equivalent Substitute

		• 1 Unit Physical Science (40.01100) or Physics (40.08100) or its Equivalent Substitute • 1 Unit Chemistry (40.05100) or Earth Systems (40.06400) or Environmental Science (26.06110) or an Equivalent Substitute • 1 Unit of a Science course from the approved <i>Fourth Science List</i>
Social Studies	3	• 1 Unit United States History (45.08100) or its Equivalent Substitute • 1 Unit World History (45.08300) or its Equivalent Substitute • ½ Unit American Government/Civics (45.05700) or its Equivalent Substitute • ½ Unit Personal Finance and Economics (45.06100) or its Equivalent Substitute
CTAE and/or World Languages and/or Fine Arts	3	• 3 Units of CTAE and/or World Languages and/or Fine Arts
Health and Physical Education	1	• 1 Unit Health and Physical Education: ○ 1 Unit Health and Personal Fitness Combined (36.05800); OR ○ ½ Unit Health (17.01100) and ½ Unit Personal Fitness (36.05100) or its Equivalent Substitute; OR ○ 3 Units of JROTC
Electives	4	• 4 Units of Elective Courses, identified as “e” in the <i>State-Funded List of K-8 Subjects and 9-12 Courses</i>
Minimum Total	23	

2. Units of Credit shall be awarded only for courses that include concepts and skills based on the State-approved Standards for grades 9-12. Units of Credit shall be awarded in accordance with State Board of Education Rule 160-4-2-.48 *Awarding Units of Credit and Acceptance of Transfer Credit and/or Grades*. Units of credit may be awarded for courses offered in the middle grades that meet the grades 9-12 requirements as outlined by the State-approved Standards. The IEP, if applicable, shall specify whether Core Courses taken as part of an IEP shall receive a Unit of Credit in a Core Course.

3. No Unit of Credit may be awarded for courses in which instruction is based on standards for grades K-8.

4. Students planning to attend a Technical College System of Georgia institution or

enter the workforce immediately after graduation may pursue an Accelerated Career Diploma or a Work-Based Learning Diploma.

(i) Details for the requirements of the Accelerated Career Diploma Program are outlined in State Board of Education Rule 160-4-2-.34 *Dual Enrollment*.

(ii) The Work-Based Learning Diploma requirements include the secondary requirements of the Accelerated Career Diploma, as outlined in State Board of Education Rule 160-4-2-.34 *Dual Enrollment*, sections (2)(b)5(i) – (v), and the completion of two High Demand CTAE or Academic Career Pathways and at least four Work Based Learning Courses in a paid position in at least one of the two selected High Demand CTAE or Academic Career Pathways.

5. Completion of High School Diploma requirements does not necessarily qualify students for the HOPE Scholarship Program.

(d) COURSES OF STUDY.

1. Courses that may earn Units of Credit are listed in the *State-Funded List of K-8 Subjects and 9-12 Courses*.

(i) Required Courses are identified with an “r” and must be successfully completed to earn a Unit of Credit for a High School Diploma. A Required Course can only be substituted with an Equivalent Substitute, which has been reviewed and approved by the Georgia Department of Education.

(ii) Core Courses are identified with a “c”. Core Courses may be selected within the content area to meet the unit requirements for a Core Course for a High School Diploma.

(iii) Elective Courses are identified with an “e”. Elective Courses may be selected beyond the Required Course and Core Course requirements to meet the minimum unit of credit Elective requirements for a High School Diploma.

2. English Language Arts (ELA): Four Units of Credit in English Language Arts shall be required to earn a High School Diploma. This includes two Units of Credit in Required Courses: one Unit of Credit in Literature & Composition I (23.06160) or its Equivalent Substitute and one Unit of Credit in Literature & Composition II (23.06170) or its Equivalent Substitute; and two Units of Credit in Core Courses in ELA.

(i) Students seeking admission to a Technical College System of Georgia institution or planning to go directly into the workforce may fulfill one Unit of Credit in a Core Course in English Language Arts requirement by successfully completing all of the courses of an ELA-related CTAE+ Pathway identified the *State-Funded List of K-8 Subjects and 9-12 Courses*.

3. Mathematics: Four Units of Credit in Mathematics shall be required to earn a High School Diploma. This includes three Units of Credit in Required Courses: one Unit of Credit in Algebra: Concepts & Connections (27.08110) or its Equivalent Substitute and one Unit of Credit in Geometry: Concepts and Connections (27.08210) or its Equivalent Substitute and one Unit of Credit in Advanced Algebra: Concepts and Connections (27.08310) or its Equivalent Substitute; and one Unit of Credit in a Core Course in Mathematics.

(i) Students seeking admission to a Technical College System of Georgia institution or planning to go directly into the workforce may fulfill the Unit of Credit in Geometry requirement by successfully completing and passing all of the courses in the Carpentry Pathway within the Construction Career Cluster for CTAE.

(ii) Students seeking admission to a Technical College System of Georgia institution or planning to go directly into the workforce may fulfill the Unit of Credit in a Core Course in Mathematics requirement by successfully completing all of the courses of a mathematics-related CTAE+ Pathway identified in the *State-Funded List of K-8 Subjects and 9-12 Courses*.

4. Science: Four Units of Credit in Science shall be required to earn a High School Diploma. This includes three Units of Credit in Required Courses: one Unit of Credit in Biology (26.01200) or its Equivalent Substitute and one Unit of Credit of either Physical Science (40.01100) or Physics (40.08100) or its Equivalent Substitute, and one Unit of Credit of either Chemistry (40.05100), Earth Systems (40.06400), Environmental Science (26.06110) or an Equivalent Substitute; and one Unit of Credit in Science from the approved *Fourth Science List*.

(i) The fourth Science Unit of Credit may be used to meet both the fourth Unit of Credit in Science and an Elective Unit of Credit requirement.

(ii) Students seeking admission to a Technical College System of Georgia institution or planning to go directly into the workforce may fulfill the fourth Unit of Credit in Science requirement by successfully completing all of the courses in a science-related CTAE+ Pathway identified in the *State-Funded List of K-8 Subjects and 9-12 Courses*.

5. Social Studies: Three Units of Credit shall be required in social studies to earn a High School Diploma. This includes three Units of Credit in Required Courses: one Unit of Credit in United States History (45.08100) or its Equivalent Substitute and one Unit of Credit in World History (45.08300) or its Equivalent Substitute and one-half Unit of Credit in American Government/Civics (45.05700) or its Equivalent Substitute and one-half Unit of Credit in Personal Finance and Economics (45.06100) or its Equivalent Substitute.

6. CTAE/World Languages/Fine Arts: Three Units of Credit shall be required from the following areas to earn a High School Diploma: CTAE and/or World Languages and/or Fine Arts. Students are encouraged to select courses in a focused area of interest.

(i) **Career, Technical and Agricultural Education (CTAE) Pathways:** Students may earn three Units of Credit in a coherent sequence of CTAE courses through a self-selected pathway.

(ii) **World Languages:** All students are encouraged to earn two full Units of Credit in the same world language. Students planning to enter or transfer to a University System of Georgia institution or other four-year post-secondary institution must successfully complete two full Units of Credit in the same world language. Technical College System of Georgia institutions do not require World Languages for admissions.

(I) Students whose native language is not English may be considered to have met the World Languages expectation by exercising the credit in lieu of enrollment option if they demonstrate proficiency in their native language. A formal examination is not necessary if other evidence of proficiency is available. Credit awarded in lieu of enrollment is conferred by the local board of education. Acceptance of credit in lieu of enrollment for admission purposes is at the discretion of the postsecondary institution.

(iii) **Fine Arts:** Courses that qualify for Fine Arts Units of Credit are identified with the prefixes 50.XX, 51.XX, 52.XX, 53.XX, or 54.XX.

7. Health and Physical Education: One Unit of Credit in Health and Physical Education is required to earn a High School Diploma. This includes either: one Unit of Credit Health and Personal Fitness Combined (36.05800), or one-half Unit of Credit Health (17.01100) and one-half unit Personal Fitness (36.05100) or its Equivalent Substitute, or three Units of Credit of Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC).

(i) Three (3) Units of Credit in JROTC may be used to satisfy the Health and Physical Education Unit of Credit requirement under the following conditions: 1) JROTC courses must incorporate the State-approved Standards for Health (17.01100) and Personal Fitness (36.05100) and 2) the local board of education must approve the use of JROTC courses to satisfy the required Unit of Credit in Health and Physical Education.

(e) STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITIES.

1. Students with significant cognitive disabilities who entered the ninth grade for the first time prior to the 2020-2021 school year may graduate and receive a High School Diploma when the student's IEP team determines that the student has:

(i) completed an integrated curriculum based on the state-approved standards that includes instruction in Mathematics, English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies as well as career preparation, self-determination, independent living and personal care to equal a minimum of 23 units of instruction, and

(ii) participated in the GAA during middle school and high school, and

(iii) reached the 22nd birthday OR has transitioned to an employment/education/training setting in which the supports needed are provided by an entity other than the local school system.

2. Students with significant cognitive disabilities who entered the ninth grade for the first time on or after the 2020-2021 school year may graduate and receive an Alternate Diploma when the student's IEP team determines that the student has:

(i) completed an integrated curriculum based on the state-approved standards that includes instruction in Mathematics, English Language Arts, Science and Social Studies as well as career preparation, self-determination, independent living and personal care to equal a minimum of 23 units of instruction, and

(ii) participated in the GAA 2.0 or a state alternate assessment aligned to alternate academic achievement standards during middle school and high school, and

(iii) has transitioned to an employment/education/training setting in which the supports needed are provided by an entity other than the local school system.

(f) LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

1. Local boards of education shall provide instructional support and delivery services. These services shall include, but are not limited to, the following:

(i) Counseling, advisement, career awareness, career interest and career demand inventories, and information to assist students in evaluating their academic skills, career-oriented aptitudes, and career interests for students in grades 6-12.

(ii) Record keeping and reporting services that document student progress toward graduation and include information for the school, parents and students.

(iii) Diagnostic and continuous evaluation services that measure individual student progress in meeting competency expectations for graduation.

(iv) Instructional programs, curriculum and course guides, and remedial opportunities to assist each student in meeting graduation requirements.

(v) Appropriate curriculum and assessment procedures for students who have been

identified as having disabilities that prevent them from meeting the prescribed competency performance requirements.

Authority: O.C.G.A. §§ 20-2-131; 20-2-140; 20-2-142; 20-2-150(a); 20-2-151(a); (b); 20-2-154(a); 20-2-149.4; 20-2-159.3; 20-2-159.4; 20-2-160; 20-2-161.1; 20-2-161.2; 20-2-281(a), (c); 20-2-327(c).

Adopted: June 9, 2026

Effective: June 29, 2026