

Rhode Island High School Graduation Requirements: 2003-2011

History

2003: Rhode Island initiated a sweeping high school reform initiative. Among other things, this initiative resulted in high school regulations that added a new graduation requirement: in addition to completing their coursework, graduates had to successfully complete a large-scale, performance-based assessment such as senior project or portfolio. The performance-based assessment was added to ensure that instruction was relevant to students, promoted real-world learning, and improved student engagement in their own education.

Graduation requirements, 2006

- Successful completion of at least 20 courses (Carnegie units)
- Successful completion of 2 performance-based diploma assessments
- Participation in state assessments (10% of graduation decision)

The new regulations include substantial RIDE monitoring and oversight in the form of the Commissioner's Review process. The Commissioner's Review process is a RIDE-managed audit of district-level implementation of the secondary regulations that included both desk and on-site monitoring.

2008: The Board of Regents revised the regulations, adding two graduation requirements intended to go into effect for the class of 2012. First, the 2008 revisions added the requirement that students reach "partial proficiency" on the state assessment in reading and math. Second, the 2008 regulations strengthened the importance of the outcome of the Commissioner's review process; beginning in 2012, the Rhode Island Department of Education would be required to suspend diploma-granting authority for school districts that failed to reach full Diploma System approval from RIDE. For more detailed information about the history of the secondary regulations and state and local implementation efforts, please see attachment 1.

Graduation requirements, Class of 2012

- Successful completion of at least 20 courses
- Successful completion of 2 performance-based diploma assessments
- "Partial proficiency" in reading and math on state assessments or alternative
- Enrollment in a school district that is "Diploma System Approved."

Outcomes Since 2002

This initiative has produced some important changes in secondary teaching and learning in Rhode Island; principals, teachers, students, and parents have reported more authentic and meaningful high school experiences. Along with these reported changes in attitude and perception, the data show modest improvements in student learning and achievement between 2005 and 2010.

- The graduation rate improved by a few percent, reaching a peak of 76%.
- 11th grade performance on the state reading assessment has steadily improved while math performance has been largely stagnant, with some growth in 2010.
- There has been little progress in closing the 11th grade achievement gap between white students and students with IEPs, students of color, students living in poverty, and English language learners.
- In 2010, over 60% of recent high school graduates enrolled at CCRI must be placed in remedial courses; most of these students will not earn a degree.

- The rate of remediation necessary for Rhode Island public school graduates has increased since 2002.
- Based upon current college completion trends, less than one quarter of the class of 2014 – our current freshman -- will earn an associates or bachelors degree within five years of graduation.

Policy Issue: Graduation Class of 2012

In August 2010, the Board of Regents established a subcommittee to review and revise the secondary regulations. The Regents were attempting to address a major policy issue. Under the 2008 regulations, student graduation required partial proficiency on the state assessment in reading and math (or an alternative) and enrollment in a “Diploma System Approved” school district. In its most literal interpretation and based on 2009 data, the graduation status of over 75% of the graduating class of 2012 could be in jeopardy.

<i>School Districts “on track” for Diploma System Approval (13)</i>	2009 Math NECAP Performance	
	<i>Substantially Below Proficient</i>	<i>Partially Proficient or Above</i>
	2,799 (51%)	2,649 (49%)

<i>School District with substantial implementation gaps (26)</i>	2009 Math NECAP Performance	
	<i>Substantially Below Proficient</i>	<i>Partially Proficient or Above</i>
	2,446 (43%)	3,228 (57%)

Policy Recommendation

In an effort to address this policy issue, the Regents began discussing revisions to the graduation requirements and role of the Commissioner’s review process for Rhode Island public high schools. The Regents carried four guiding principles forward from the 2003 and 2008 work: the creation of a multiple measure graduation system that results in graduation decisions that are:

1. ***credible*** to all stakeholders (including students, parents, higher education, businesses),
2. ***rigorous*** – preparing students for postsecondary success,
3. ***accurate*** – valid and reliable, and
4. ***comparable*** across the state.

After six months of deliberation, the Rhode Island Board of Regents issued a draft of revised high schools regulations that include four major policy changes:

- (1) Clarification and strengthening of the role of the state assessment through the creation of a conjunctive multiple measure system that equally considers three sources of evidence:
 - a. Successfully completing at least 20 courses that reflect the academic core;
 - b. Successfully completing a performance-based assessment (senior project, portfolio, etc); and
 - c. Reaching partial proficiency in math and reading on the state assessment.

- (2) Changing the role of the Commissioner’s Review process by introducing progressive intervention – rather than the stripping of diploma-granting authority – for districts that have failed to fully implement the secondary regulations;
- (3) Changing the implementation date from the Class of 2012 to the Class of 2014; and
- (4) Introducing the opportunity for students that achieve beyond basic levels to earn a “Regents’ commendation.”

In addition, the revised regulations include three minor policy changes:

- (1) Expansion of system of support for and detail on the use of the state assessment as a graduation requirements;
- (2) Greater specificity on the impact of the assessment on traditionally underserved populations (English language learners and students with disabilities); and
- (3) Maintenance of the common planning time requirements but reduction of the regulatory specificity governing its frequency, structure, and use.

**Proposed graduation requirements,
Class of 2014**

- Successful completion of at least 20 courses
- Successful completion of 2 performance-based diploma assessments
- Achievement of partial proficiency on reading and math state assessment

The proposed new regulations focus on the four following policy goals. They seek to:

1. Set a high standard for graduation. The proposed changes maintain high academic standards and measure student performance through coursework and the state assessment. At the same time, they continue to require that we teach students the essential 21st-century skills – teamwork, innovation, problem-solving, and communication – and that we assess these skills through senior projects and portfolios.

2. Value and recognize all aspects of student achievement equally. Rhode Island is not and will not become a state that recognizes and values only the state assessment. Students will have to meet state and local requirements on all three of the graduation requirements: state assessments, coursework, and performance-based assessments. No single element is more or less important than the others.

3. Require intensive intervention for students and reward them for growth. Rather than establishing a single cut score on the state assessment, these proposed graduation requirements focus on promoting growth for students who are at risk for academic failure. The regulations will require schools and districts to provide additional support and interventions for struggling students; those students will then be able to earn a diploma by demonstrating that they have substantially improved their academic skills.

4. Honor students who achieve at high levels. Through the proposed Regents’ commendation, Rhode Island would join 30 other states in using the high school diploma to recognize students who achieve at high levels. All students will be eligible to earn this distinction through a diploma system that is designed to reward excellence and to inspire all students to do their best work.

Attachment 1: History Regulations and State and Local Implementation Efforts

**Stage 1: Learning about Diploma System
2004 - 2006**

Develop basic understanding of Diploma System
Attend technical assistance sessions
Choose Diploma Assessments
Develop and adopt local policies
Design Diploma System
Conduct first Alignment study for access and opportunity
Begin to design structures and processes for local diploma system

**Stage 2: Initial Implementation of Systems
2006 - 2008**

Implement supports as result of alignment study
Initial implementation of Diploma System infrastructure
Change local policies to reflect 2008 regulations

**Stage 3: Moving toward full Implementation
2008 - 2010**

Focus shifted to implementation of structures and processes
Standard setting for proficiency
Continuous improvement and self-monitoring

**Stage 4: Full Implementation of Diploma Systems
2010 - 2012**

Full implementation of diploma system
Alignment work expanded to include other areas (6 core)
Transition all alignment work to Common Core standards
Quality of local assessments and NECAP proficiency decisions
Multiple Pathways implementation

**Stage 5: Sustaining, Improving and Changes/Challenges
2012 and beyond**

Focus on performance outcomes (dropout, graduation and remediation rates)
Validation of standards
Continuous improvement and adjustments (Common Core, PARCC, Multiple Pathways)

January 2003 Regents Regulations

Regents adopt Regulations

2004-2005 Guidance and Technical Assistance

Development of guidance materials
Extensive technical assistance opportunities
Establishment of GATES networks for diploma assessments

Fall 2005 – Spring 2006 Peer Review

First time districts required to describe their systems
Non-evaluative feedback provided on system design

Fall 2006 – Commissioner’s Review

Access and Opportunity focus
Districts reviewed and given Mid/Mod/Max designation

2007 – 2008 NECAP and Secondary Regulations adopted

Oct 2001 first HS NECAP tests administered
Student requirements specified
NECAP partial proficiency level described
Middle level implementation added to regulations

Fall 2008 Commissioner’s Review

Preliminary approval status based on level of implementation of prioritized areas

2009 – 2010 Commissioner’s Review

Ongoing technical assistance and development of 2010 Commissioner’s Review protocols – evidence and visit
Monitoring process – level of implementation to be on track for 2012 review
Middle level inclusion

2010 – 2011 Common Core and Multiple Pathways

Adoption of standards and communication of changes to systems
Guidance and TA

2012 Commissioner’s Review Process

Technical Assistance
Revision of review process to consolidate agency visit structure
Awarding diplomas depends on validation and approval process

2012-2014 Adoption and implementation of PARCC

Revision of local policies
Revision of standard setting processes
Ongoing technical assistance and monitoring (local and state)