



Illinois Civics Mandate Guidance Document

Intended Audiences: District and school administrators, curriculum coordinators, teacher-leaders, and classroom teachers

Description: This document is to serve as a guide for districts, schools, and teachers in interpreting the amendments to the School Code that effect civics instruction (Public Act 99-434 and Public Act 99-485). Included are the Illinois State Board of Education's interpretation of the law and common misconceptions.

Beginning with students entering the 9th grade in the 2016-2017 school year and each subsequent year, there are changes in the required social science high school courses for students. The changes to these requirements can be found in the Illinois General Assembly Compiled Statutes. This change is highlighted with a red box below.

From the Illinois General Assembly Compiled Statutes:

Sec. 27-22. Required high school courses.

(e) As a prerequisite to receiving a high school diploma, each pupil entering the 9th grade in the 2008-2009 school year or a subsequent school year must, in addition to other course requirements, successfully complete all of the following courses:

- (1) Four years of language arts.
- (2) Two years of writing intensive courses, one of which must be English and the other of which may be English or any other subject. When applicable, writing-intensive courses may be counted towards the fulfillment of other graduation requirements.
- (3) Three years of mathematics, one of which must be Algebra I, one of which must include geometry content, and one of which may be an Advanced Placement computer science course if the pupil successfully completes Algebra II or an integrated mathematics course with Algebra II content.
- (4) Two years of science.

(5) Two years of social studies, of which at least one year must be history of the United States or a combination of history of the United States and American government and, beginning with pupils entering the 9th grade in the 2016-2017 school year and each school year thereafter, at least one semester must be civics, which shall help young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives. Civics course content shall focus on government institutions, the discussion of current and controversial issues, service learning, and simulations of the democratic process. School districts may utilize private funding available for the purposes of offering civics education.

(Source: P.A. 98-885, eff. 8-15-14; 99-434, eff. 7-1-16 (see P.A. 99-485 for the effective date of changes made by P.A. 99-434); 99-485, eff. 11-20-15; 99-674, eff. 7-29-16.)

There are several pieces of vital information in the text above:

- Begins with students starting the 9th grade in 2016-2017
- Two years required social science courses
- 1 year must be U.S. history (or combination of US history and American government)
- 1 semester of civics

Additionally, clarification is also provided about the content of the civics coursework:

- The intent is which shall help young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives.
- Civics course content shall focus on:
 - government institutions,
 - the discussion of current and controversial issues,
 - service learning, and
 - simulations of the democratic process.
- School districts may utilize private funding available for the purposes of offering civics education.

This language has led to many questions about options for *how* the civics requirement can be addressed within the high school structure while still maintaining compliance. Clarification exists in the Graduation Guidance Document from the Illinois State Board of Education.

From ISBE's Graduation Guidance Document:

The first several mentions of social sciences in the Graduation Guidance Document reiterate the requirements from the legislation passed by the Illinois General Assembly.

Graduation Requirements: 105 ILCS 5/27-22, 27-22.05, 27-22.10

The following information will help your school district offer the coursework necessary to meet the state graduation requirements. This document amends the September 2015 guidance to provide general updates resulting from recently enacted legislation and updates to agency rules. Below is a summary of issues, presented in a question-and-answer format, that pertain to graduation requirements that may be of interest to school districts.

1. What are the state-imposed graduation requirements?

As you can see from the chart in Appendix A, the law has phased in the new graduation requirements over four years so that any student entering high school as a ninth-grader starting in the 2008-09 school year *and beyond* will have taken the following minimum number of courses during high school:

- 4 years of language arts;
 - 2 years of writing-intensive courses, one year of which must be offered as an English language arts course and may be counted toward meeting one year of the four-year English language arts requirement. The writing courses may be counted toward the fulfillment of other state graduation requirements, when applicable, if writing-intensive content is provided in a subject area other than English language arts;
 - 3 years of mathematics, one of which must be Algebra 1 and one of which must include geometry content;
 - 2 years of science;
 - 2 years of social studies, of which at least one year must be the history of the United States or a combination of the history of the United States and American government; and
- By graduation, students must complete any of the following:
- art;
 - music;
 - foreign language, which shall include American Sign Language; and
 - vocational education.

Additionally, starting with students entering grade 9 in the 2016-17 school year and thereafter, at least one semester of civics coursework will be required.

Revised Graduation Requirements

The chart below outlines the minimum state-required courses for students graduating in the year shown¹. Section 27-22.10 of the School Code allows coursework to count towards meeting the state-imposed graduation requirements listed below in cases where a student in seventh or eighth grade takes the required courses at the high school or his or her middle school, as prescribed under the law, and the local board of education adopts a policy pursuant to Section 27-22.10 (see Question 2).

Graduation Date	Mathematics	Writing ²	Language Arts	Science	Social Science	Electives
2016 and beyond (i.e., students entering as ninth-graders starting in school year 2012-13)	Of 3 years, 1 year must be Algebra I and 1 year must be a course that includes geometry content.	2 years; 1 year must be an English course and 1 year may be provided as a part of any course offered.	4 years; no content specified.	2 years; no content specified.	2 years; must include 1 year of U.S. history or combination of U.S. history and American government and 1 semester civics	1 year; includes art, music, foreign language, or vocational education.
Total ³	3 years	2 years	4 years	2 years	2 years	1 year

One of the most commonly asked questions about the civics requirement is also addressed within the Graduation Guidance Document. Many districts and schools have questions about whether civics is now mandated to be a stand-alone course or if it can be incorporated within existing course structures. The Graduation Guidance Document states:

7. Do schools have to offer a separate civics course or may they incorporate civics into existing social studies courses?

Under Section 27-22 of the School Code, civics education must "help young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives"; address government institutions; discuss current and controversial issues; and include service learning and simulations of the democratic process. Civics instruction should also align to the Illinois Learning Standards for Social Science, which are currently being expanded to enumerate the knowledge and skills that students should acquire in civics during the high school experience. The course of study must be a minimum of one semester. School districts are free to determine how to incorporate civics education into their current curricula in a way that best meets the needs of their students.

Several key issues are adjusted in the paragraph above. To clarify, below is a list of key ideas discussed in the Graduation Guidance Document. *Text from the Graduation Guidance Document is in standard font, clarification and explanation follows in bold font.*

- Civics Education must:
 - "help young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives";
 - address government institutions; **(This should include ideas of discussing foundations of our American government, branches of government, and other institutions)**
 - discuss current and controversial issues; **(Current and controversial issue discussions should link issues to core curricular goals as well as address meaningful and timely questions about public problems that deserve both students and the public's attention.)**
 - and include service learning and simulations of the democratic process **(Service learning is NOT in reference to having students just gather community service hours. Service learning**

addresses the idea of taking informed action upon learning and service learning should connect to the content within the classroom. This could take the form of a traditional service project connected to content or could be to advocate or take action about key components of learning.)

- and include simulations of the democratic process **(The goal of simulations is to engage students in practices of citizenship through role-playing, scenario consideration, or problem-based case solutions.)**
- Civics instruction should also align to the Illinois Learning Standards for Social Science which...enumerate the knowledge and skills that students should acquire in civics during the high school experience. **(The Illinois Learning Standards for Social Science should guide learning in *all* social sciences. All social science courses should strive to incorporate the Inquiry Skills simultaneously with the Disciplinary Concepts. Cross-curricular integration is highly encouraged in all courses. For example, civics coursework should include the civics standards as well as any other applicable standards from the other areas of the disciplinary concepts.)**
- Course of study must be a minimum of one semester
- School districts are free to determine how to incorporate civics education into their current curricula in a way that best meets the needs of their students. **(School districts have the discretion to determine how to implement Civics. They can have a standalone course, but they *may* also infuse a semester's worth of civics course content into another course. In other words, it is NOT a requirement for the civics coursework to be a stand-alone course. Though the coursework is required to be at least a semester, required coursework may be incorporated into existing course structures.)**