

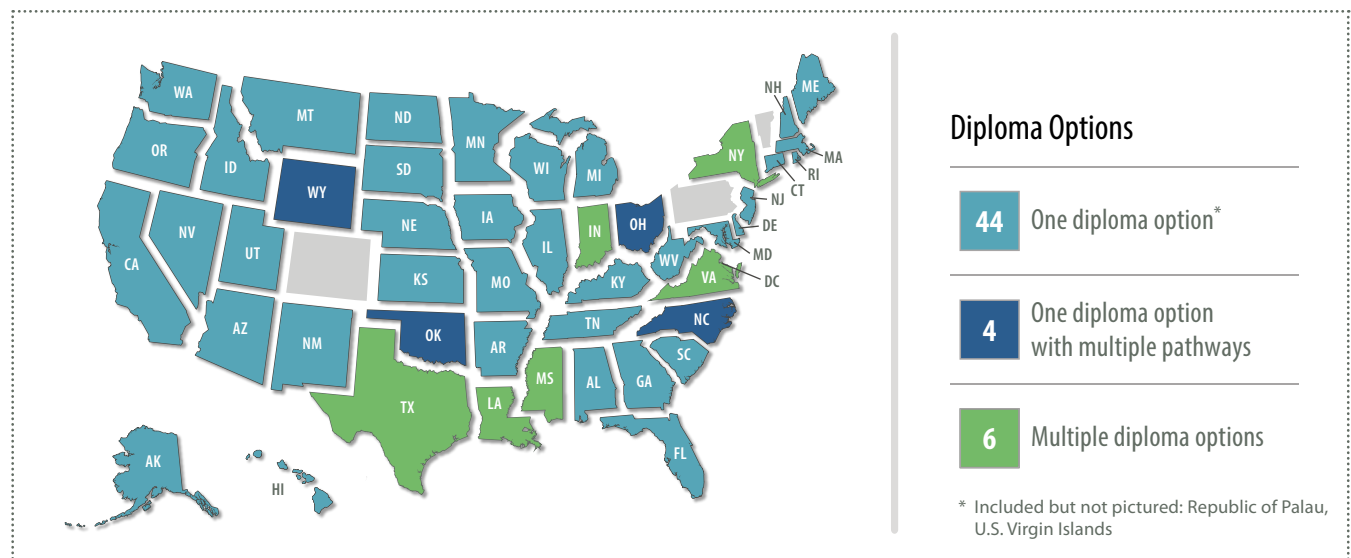
Course Requirements for High School Graduation

What are states requiring that students study as a condition for high school graduation?

With today's greater focus on preparing students for college and careers, the Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation (CSAI) recently conducted a review of the coursework that states are requiring students to complete in order to receive a high school diploma, and of what diploma options are available for students in each state. This CSAI Update summarizes the results of that state scan.¹

Diploma Options

As of the 2015–16 school year, 44 states offer only one diploma option. Four of those 44 states (North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Wyoming) provide multiple pathways to a diploma, which allow students to enroll in courses that are geared toward their interests and their future goals or aspirations. Of the 53 states covered in this update, only six (Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, New York, Texas, and Virginia) offer multiple diploma options.²



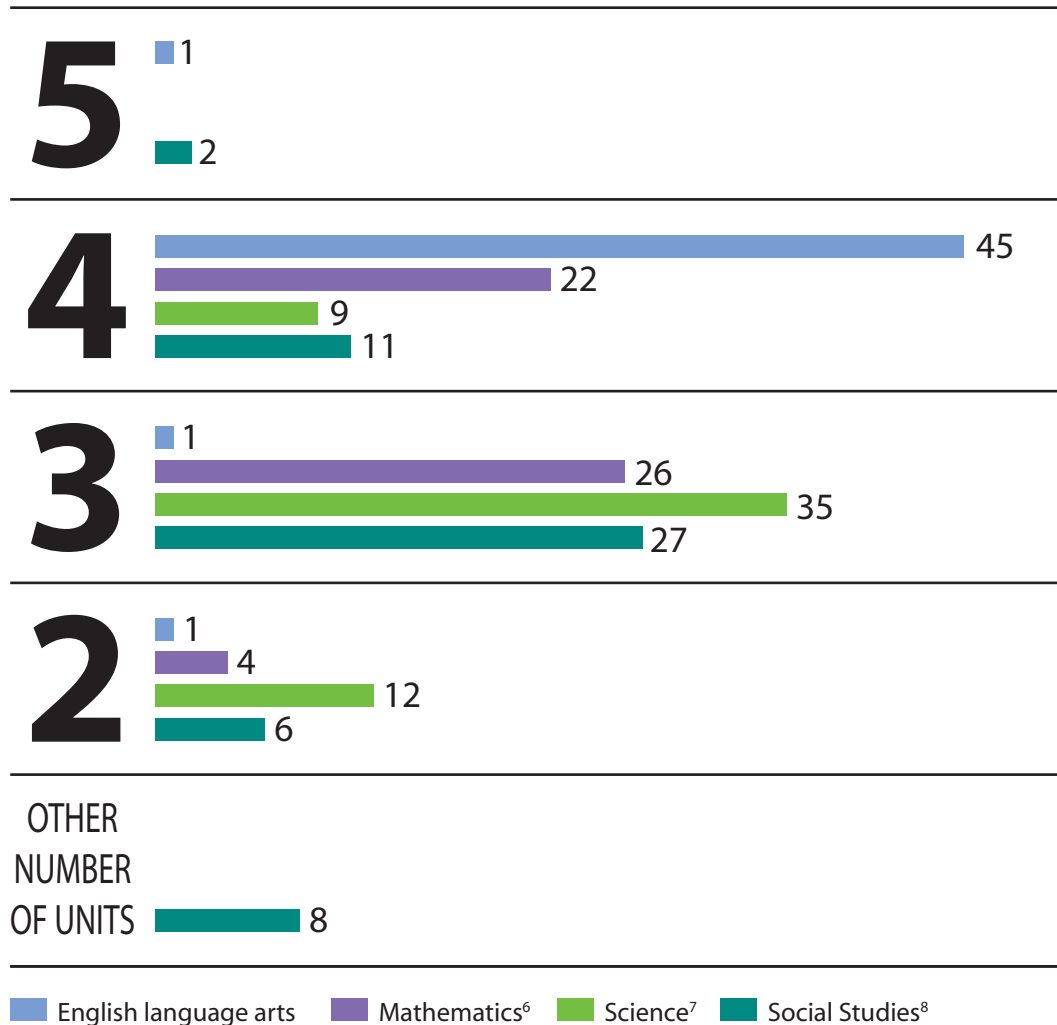
¹ For the purposes of this update, the term "states" refers to the 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, and eight U.S. territories. Information was not available for six states (American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and Republic of the Marshall Islands); thus, this brief only discusses findings for 53 states (n = 53).

² As described in the Core Course Requirements section, Colorado, Pennsylvania, and Vermont are not included in the counts in this section because they do not have a set of graduation requirements at the state level; local school boards develop and implement their own graduation requirements.

Core Course Requirements

Of the 53 states discussed in this brief, all but three (Colorado, Pennsylvania, and Vermont) specify course requirements that students have to meet in order to graduate. Fifty of these states require that students enroll in and satisfactorily complete a certain number of units in various content areas.³

Required Number of Units⁴ / Number of States⁵



³ States with unconventional credit systems—Idaho (46 credits), Indiana (40–47 credits), and Nebraska (200 credit hours)—are not discussed or included in the counts in this section. It is unclear, from the information available, whether one credit is equivalent to one year's worth of coursework in Idaho and Indiana, as it is in other states. For Nebraska, it is unclear what "credit hours" means and how these credit hours translate to units.

⁴ One unit is equivalent to a school year's worth of work.

⁵ A state can require different numbers of units for the same content area, depending on the number of diploma options that the state offers.

⁶ Mathematics includes algebra 1 and 2, geometry, and other higher-level mathematics courses, including, but not limited to, trigonometry, precalculus, calculus, and statistics.

⁷ Science includes the study of life and physical sciences (e.g., biology, chemistry, and physics).

⁸ Social studies includes the study of U.S. history, world history, geography, economics, government/civics, and personal finance.

Other Course Requirements

Some states require students to enroll in and complete courses in other content areas, shown in the following table, in order to graduate.

CONTENT AREA	NUMBER OF STATES THAT REQUIRE COMPLETION OF UNITS IN CONTENT AREA
Fine, performing, or practical arts	43
Physical/health education	42
Career focus or career and technical education	35
Foreign languages	32
Technology or computer science	11

Extracurricular Requirements

In addition to course requirements, a number of states are implementing extracurricular requirements.

- ◆ The District of Columbia requires students to complete 100 hours of **community service**.
- ◆ Connecticut, Hawaii, Idaho, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota require students to complete a **senior/culminating project**.
- ◆ Kentucky requires students to gain **proficiency in technology**.
- ◆ Missouri requires students to receive **training cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid** beginning in fall 2017.
- ◆ Oregon requires students to partake in **extended learning opportunities**.
- ◆ Oklahoma requires students to gain **proficiency in financial literacy** and receive **instruction in CPR**.
- ◆ Texas requires students to gain **proficiency in speech skills**.

Nine states (Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Mississippi, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington, and West Virginia) require districts/schools to implement **student learning plans**, which are intended to help students transition successfully from high school to college and careers.

For detailed information about high school course requirements for each diploma option and pathway in each state, please visit the [CSAI website](#) and read the full report.



CSAI Update is produced by the The Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation (CSAI). CSAI, a collaboration between WestEd and CRESST, provides state education agencies (SEAs) and Regional Comprehensive Centers (RCCs) with research support, technical assistance, tools, and other resources to help inform decisions about standards, assessment, and accountability. Visit www.csai-online.org for more information.



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