



High School Education Program and Graduation Requirements

Offer-and-Teach and Graduation Requirements

Introduction

The general accreditation standards require each public and state-accredited nonpublic high school (grades 9-12) to “offer and teach” certain subjects and specify a minimum number of units for each course—although each administration selects its local curriculum, textbooks, and other classroom materials. Iowa Administrative Code subrule 281—12.5(5) outlines the offer-and-teach requirements. For interpretation of these requirements, refer to the [Chapter 12 Rule Interpretation Matrix](#).

In addition to the offer-and-teach requirements, each student graduating from a district or state-accredited nonpublic school must meet specific graduation requirements. Iowa Code sections 256.7, subsection 26, and 256.11, subsection 5, establish the minimum graduation requirements for students.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is offer-and-teach?

Offer-and-teach means that the state-accredited nonpublic school or school district must:

- Make students aware of the offering,
- Employ an appropriately licensed teacher¹ to teach the course,
- Have the appropriately licensed teacher instruct the students, and
- At least one student must be enrolled in a course to meet the offer-and-teach requirement (281—IAC 12.5(16)).

Offer-and-teach units may be met in the following ways with an appropriate Iowa-licensed teacher:

- Direct instruction by a teacher on-site;
- Whole-grade sharing pursuant to Iowa Code section 282.10;
- Written agreement to jointly employ or share teachers pursuant to Iowa Code section 280.15 (school districts only); and
- Through community colleges for vocational education (also referred to as career and technical education or CTE) only pursuant to 12.5(5)“i.”

For additional information, refer to the [Chapter 12 Rule Interpretation Matrix](#).

WHAT DOES “APPROPRIATELY LICENSED TEACHER” MEAN?

An appropriately licensed teacher is an individual with a current Iowa teaching license appropriate for the grade level and each content area being taught.

¹ The Iowa Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE) sets licensure requirements.

2. What are the requirements for offer-and-teach?

All public and state-accredited nonpublic high schools must annually offer and teach a minimum education program to maintain state accreditation. In implementing the program, high schools must use the curriculum standards specified in [281—IAC 12.5\(5\)“a”-“l.”](#) The minimum requirements are outlined in Table 1 for school districts and Table 2 for state-accredited nonpublic schools.

3. What are the student graduation requirements?

All students in state-accredited nonpublic schools and school districts must satisfactorily complete at least the [following requirements to graduate](#):

- Four units of English-language arts;
- Three units of mathematics;
- Three units of science;
- Three units of social studies, which may include the existing graduation requirements of one-half unit of United States government and one unit of United States history;
- One full unit of physical education; and
- One-half unit of financial literacy ([281—IAC 12.5\(5\)](#); [Iowa Code § 256.11\(5\)“k”](#)).

Districts and state-accredited nonpublic schools may require additional requirements for graduation.

These requirements are provided in Table 1 (districts) and Table 2 (nonpublic schools).

Table 1. Public School District Offer-and-Teach and Graduation Requirements.

Content	Offer-and-Teach Requirement (School District Requirement)	Graduation Requirement (Student Requirement)
English-language arts	6 units	4 units
Social studies	5 units (must include 1 unit of American history and ½ unit of government)	3 units (must include 1 unit of American history and ½ unit of government)
Mathematics	6 units, as specified in 281—IAC 12.5(5)“c” (4 sequential units and 2 additional units)	3 units
Science	5 units (must include chemistry and physics, which may be offered in alternating years)	3 units
Health	1 unit	Local district decision
Physical education (PE)	1 unit	1 unit (⅛ unit each high school semester, unless there is a district-approved waiver in place; may meet by participating in a junior reserve officers' training corps [ROTC] or legislative page program)
Fine arts	3 units	Local district decision

Content	Offer-and-Teach Requirement (School District Requirement)	Graduation Requirement (Student Requirement)
World language	4 units (years 3 and 4 may be annually waived if requirements outlined in the following World Language Waiver section are met)	Local district decision
Vocational education/ CTE	12 units, as specified in 281—IAC 12.5(5)“i” (3 units each in at least 4 of the 6 service areas)	Local district decision
Computer science	½ unit	Local district decision
Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)	None	Must complete a CPR certification course by the end of grade 12. Click here for additional information
Financial literacy	½ unit (must be taught but may be incorporated into another class, such as social studies, math, business, or family and consumer sciences). Click here for additional information	½ unit

Table 2. State-Accredited Nonpublic School Offer-and-Teach and Graduation Requirements.

Content	Offer-and-Teach Requirement (Nonpublic School Requirement)	Graduation Requirement (Student Requirement)
English-language arts	6 units	4 units
Social studies	5 units (must include 1 unit of American history and ½ unit of government)	3 units (must include 1 unit of American history and ½ unit of government)
Mathematics	6 units, as specified in 281—IAC 12.5(5)“c” (4 sequential units and 2 additional units)	3 units
Science	5 units (must include chemistry and physics, which may be offered in alternating years)	3 units
Health	1 unit	Local nonpublic school decision
PE	1 unit	1 unit (½ unit each high school semester, unless there is a school-approved waiver in place; may meet by participating in an ROTC or legislative page program)
Fine arts	3 units	Local nonpublic school decision

Content	Offer-and-Teach Requirement (Nonpublic School Requirement)	Graduation Requirement (Student Requirement)
World language	4 units (years 3 and 4 may be annually waived if requirements outlined in the following World Language Waiver section are met)	Local nonpublic school decision
Vocational education/CTE	5 units, as specified in 281—IAC 12.5(5)“j” (must include occupational education subjects)	Local nonpublic school decision
Computer science	½ unit	Local nonpublic school decision
CPR	None	Must complete a CPR certification course by the end of grade 12. Click here for additional information
Financial literacy	½ unit (must be taught but may be incorporated into another class, such as social studies, math, business, or family and consumer sciences). Click here for additional information	½ unit

WORLD LANGUAGE WAIVER

The Iowa Department of Education (Department) may waive the third and fourth years of world language on an annual basis if the school board or authorities in charge of the state-accredited nonpublic school request a waiver and provide documentation that a licensed or certificated teacher was employed and assigned a schedule that:

- Would have allowed students to enroll in the world language class,
- The class was properly scheduled,
- Students were aware of the course offering, and
- No students enrolled in the world language class (281—IAC 12.5(5)“h”; Iowa Code § 256.11(5)“f”).

4. What is a unit of instruction?

In grades nine through 12, a unit is a course that meets one of the following criteria:

- It is taught for at least 200 minutes per week for 36 weeks;
- It is taught for the equivalent of 120 hours of instruction;
- It requires the demonstration of proficiency of formal competencies associated with the course according to the State Guidelines for Competency-Based Education (CBE) or its successor organization; or
- It is an equated requirement as a part of a Flexible Student and School Support (FS3) program filed as prescribed in rule 281—12.9(256) (281—IAC 12.5(14)).

HOW IS A FRACTIONAL UNIT CALCULATED?

A fractional unit must be calculated in a manner consistent with how a full unit is calculated (281—IAC 12.5(14)).

DO MULTIPLE-SECTION COURSES TAUGHT SIMULTANEOUSLY IN A SINGLE CLASSROOM BY ONE TEACHER MEET THE UNIT DEFINITION?

No. Multiple-section courses taught simultaneously in a single classroom situation by one teacher do not meet this unit definition for the assignment of a unit of credit (unless the method of instruction is competency-based; see the [CBE Program Standards guidance](#)). However, the third and fourth years of a world language may be taught simultaneously by one teacher in a single classroom situation, each yielding a unit of credit (281—IAC 12.5(14)).

HOW DOES REGULAR AND BLOCK SCHEDULING RELATE TO UNITS OF INSTRUCTION?

With “regular” scheduling, a semester-length course is usually the equivalent of a one-half unit of instruction, and a year-long course is typically the equivalent of one unit of instruction. With “block” scheduling, a block-length course taught for one semester is typically the equivalent of one unit. The same course taught in two different semesters does not count as two separate partial or full units of instruction.

5. Are offer-and-teach requirements met if the district or school only “offers” (and does not teach) a subject because no students are enrolled in the course?

No. It is not sufficient for a district to “offer” a course in the high school program and have no students receiving instruction. To meet the requirements of offer-and-teach, the course must also be “taught” (281—IAC 12.5(16)).

6. When is a subject considered offered? When is a subject considered taught?

A subject is considered offered when:

- The teacher of the subject has met the BOEE’s licensure and endorsement standards for that subject;
- Instructional materials and facilities for that subject have been provided; and
- Based on their aptitudes, interests, and abilities, students have been informed about the possible value of the subject (281—IAC 12.5(16)).

A subject to be considered taught only when students are instructed in accordance with all applicable requirements outlined (e.g., at least one student is enrolled). Further, students enrolled in a course cannot be enrolled for a second time if they have already received full credit for the same course (281—IAC 12.5(16)).

7. Does a class offered outside the scheduled bell time meet offer-and-teach?

It depends. An “early bird” or “zero hours” course must be offered during the school day to count toward offer-and-teach (281—IAC 12.5(16)).

8. When sharing courses with another district, must students from both districts be enrolled to meet offer-and-teach?

Yes. Each participating district high school must have students enrolled in the shared program for units of vocational instruction required under Iowa Code section 256.11(5)“h” to count toward offer-and-teach.

Each district that sends students to a shared vocational program intending for said program to fulfill the offer-and-teach requirements must provide transportation for students enrolled in the shared program. If a sending school district contracts with a receiving school district to provide a vocational program as part of the sending district’s offer-and-teach requirement, the sending district is required to provide transportation (281—IAC 12.5(16); see the [Transportation for Shared Programs legal lesson](#)).

NOTE FOR DISTRICTS WITH MULTIPLE HIGH SCHOOLS AND/OR AN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

As long as students have access to courses in other buildings, not all of the district’s high schools need to meet offer-and-teach. However, students must be aware of the offerings and be provided access (e.g., transportation) to the other building courses.

9. Can courses offered through concurrent enrollment be used to meet a district's minimum program requirements?

Yes. A school district can use contracted community college courses to meet offer-and-teach requirements for one unit of math or one unit of science. However, the sharing agreement for a unit of science or mathematics is only applicable if all of the following conditions are met:

- The school district has made every reasonable and “good-faith effort”* to employ a teacher licensed under chapter 272 for the science or mathematics unit (as applicable) and is unable to employ such a teacher;
- Enrollment for the unit exceeds five pupils;
- The unit is offered during the regular school day; And
- The unit is made accessible by the school district to all eligible pupils (Iowa Code § 257.11(3)“c”).

A school district may also contract with a community college to meet the offer-and-teach requirements for vocational education pursuant to 281—IAC 12.5(5)“i.”

*WHAT DOES A “GOOD-FAITH EFFORT” MEAN?

A good-faith effort “includes advertising for the position in an appropriate publication, interviewing applicants, and giving serious consideration to those licensed or authorized, and otherwise qualified, applicants who apply” (Iowa Code § 279.19A(9)).

10. May a teacher instruct two courses simultaneously? The district only has a Spanish teacher for part of the day. Can they teach Spanish 1/2 and Spanish 3/4 at the same time?

No. Only world language units 3 and 4 may be taught simultaneously unless the school meets the competency-based requirements in 281—IAC 12.5(5)“h.”

11. Can Algebra IA and Algebra IB be counted for offer-and-teach?

If Algebra I is offered, then no. If Algebra IA, Algebra IB, and Algebra I are teaching the same standards, they are considered the same course and only count as one unit toward the offer-and-teach requirements. The same would be true for other courses teaching the same standards and benchmarks (281—IAC 12.5(5)“c”).

12. Does enrolling students in PE only one semester or trimester per year meet offer-and-teach?

Yes, but only with an approved [FS3 program waiver](#) (281—IAC 12.9(1)). For additional guidance on PE, see the [PE and Health Education webpage](#).

13. Must physics and chemistry be offered each year?

No. They can be offered in alternate years. However, five units of science must be offered annually. If physics is offered every other year, the total number of science units required for offer-and-teach must still be five units (281—IAC 12.5(5)“d”).

14. Can health be offered on alternate days with PE and meet offer-and-teach?

Yes. If the total health instructional time is equal to 120 hours or more during the year, it would count as one unit of health. If the total instructional time is equal to 60 hours during the year, then it would count as a one-half unit (281—IAC 12.5(5)“e”).

15. May an economics course taught by a teacher with a CTE Business - All endorsement qualify for social studies offer-and-teach?

No. A business endorsement allows the course to qualify for business offer-and-teach only. The teacher must be endorsed in the content area of the offer-and-teach course (281—IAC 12.5(16)).

16. May an animal science course taught by a teacher with a CTE Agriculture endorsement qualify for a science credit through offer-and-teach?

Only if the teacher also holds a science endorsement. The district or school must select only one area for the course to qualify for offer-and-teach, either science or agriculture (based on appropriate teacher endorsement), not both (281—IAC 12.5(16)).

17. Can a computer science class qualify for math offer-and-teach? If yes, what are the requirements?

Yes, provided the teacher holds an appropriate computer science endorsement and grade-level mathematics license and the course contains math content. The [Computer Science Education Work Group Report](#), which Governor Reynolds endorsed, encourages school districts and state-accredited nonpublic schools to allow computer science courses that meet state computer science standards and include math content to count as math credits for students who have completed other courses covering the required state math standards. In addition, a computer science course may fulfill a math requirement for graduation if the course meets state academic standards in math (e.g., an integrated Algebra II/Computer Science course).

All public and state-accredited high schools must offer at least one high-quality semester-long course in computer science (Iowa Code § 256.11(5)“f”). For additional information regarding these requirements, see the [Computer Science webpage](#).

18. Do independent study courses meet offer-and-teach guidelines?

No. Independent study courses do not meet the requirement of direct instruction (281—IAC 12.5(5)).

19. Can a supervised study hall or lab that provides support to students in math or language arts qualify for offer-and-teach?

No. The supervised study hall or lab supports homework completion and does not provide direct instruction with distinct standards and benchmarks as is required for offer-and-teach (281—IAC 12.5(5)).

20. Does an Advanced Placement (AP) course count for offer-and-teach, even when the content may be the same as a non-advanced course?

Yes. For example, AP United States History and United States History both count as a unit for offer-and-teach.

21. May online AP courses be used to meet offer-and-teach?

Yes, provided that those courses are available to all students.

22. Do online courses being used for offer-and-teach need a waiver?

It depends. Districts and state-accredited nonpublic schools may use two online courses to meet offer-and-teach without a waiver. In addition, districts and nonpublic schools may use online courses to meet offer-and-teach if either of the following apply:

- The district or nonpublic school makes every reasonable and good faith effort (see definition on page 6) to employ a licensed teacher to teach the course but is unable to or
- Fewer than 10 students typically register for the course.

The school district or state-accredited nonpublic school is responsible for providing an appropriately licensed Iowa teacher and aligning online courses with applicable state and federal academic standards (Iowa Code § 256.9(55)).

For additional information, please see the [Online Learning](#) page.

23. Have any private online providers been approved?

Yes. Refer to the [Online Learning](#) page for a list of current providers.

Additional Questions and Resources

Contacts

Please contact one of the Iowa Department of Education [school improvement consultants](#) with questions.

Supplemental Resources

IOWA CODE AND ADMINISTRATIVE RULES

- [High School Educational Standards](#) (Iowa Code § 256.11(5))
- [General Accreditation Standards](#) (281—IAC 12)
- [Definitions](#) (281—IAC 12.2)
- [Chapter 12 Interpretation Matrix](#)

LETTERS TO THE FIELD

- [2022 Legislative Session Summary of Changes Affecting Schools](#)
- [2021 Legislative Session Summary of Changes Affecting Schools](#)

DEPARTMENT GUIDANCE AND WEBPAGES

- [Competency-Based Education](#)
- [Computer Science](#)
- [Fine Arts](#)
- [Financial Literacy](#)
- [Health Education](#)
- [Literacy](#)
- [Mathematics](#)
- [PE and Health Education](#)
- [Science](#)
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