

Public School Instructional Requirements

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Issue

Describe the public school instructional requirements outlined in state statutes and regulations.

(This report focuses on requirements for schools under the jurisdiction of local or regional boards of education. It does not address any specialized forms of instruction at public schools such as Technical Education and Career Schools or regional agriscience centers.) **This report has been updated by OLR Report [2022-R-0145](#).**

Summary

Connecticut requires its public schools to offer students enrolled in grades kindergarten through 12 a specific “program of instruction,” which encompasses 12 subject areas with two additional subject areas specifically for high school students. With limited exceptions, state law does not specify which subject areas must be offered by grade.

The law does not prescribe a specific curriculum that teachers must follow when delivering instruction in these subject areas. Rather, curriculum is developed at the district level with support from the State Department of Education (SDE). SDE’s [Academic Office](#) provides public school districts with frameworks, standards and grade-level expectations, curriculum templates, and sample lessons and assessments.

Additionally, state law requires the State Board of Education (SBE) to make available to boards of education prepared curriculum materials for certain subject areas to assist schools and encourage them to incorporate these subjects into classroom instruction.

State law does not prescribe specific courses that students must complete in order to be promoted in grades kindergarten through eight. It does, however, establish high school graduation requirements. The law prescribes two different sets of such requirements based upon graduation date. Students in grade 9 (class of 2023) must earn at least 25 credits to graduate, and students in grades 10-12 (classes of 2020 through 2022) must earn at least 20. The higher credit threshold will be phased in and apply to all graduating classes over the next three years. State law apportions these credits among required subject areas.

State regulations do not address public school instructional or graduation requirements.

Program of Instruction

The “program of instruction” established in state law refers to general subject areas that must be taught in public school. Some subject areas are further broken down into specific subtopics ([CGS § 10-16b\(a\)](#)). These subject areas are not names of formal courses, with the exception of one course mentioned in this statute (see “Required Course Offering” below).

Table 1 lists the required subject areas that public schools must include in their respective programs of instruction, along with the enabling legislation that instituted the requirements. (The original public act (PA) that was first codified as [CGS § 10-16b](#) became law in 1978, but state law did contain instructional requirements prior to that year, including reading, spelling, writing, geography, and arithmetic, among others. The table below contains requirements and changes since 1978.)

Table 1: Required Subject Areas in Public Schools’ Program of Instruction

<i>Required Subject Areas</i>	<i>Enabling Legislation</i>
The arts, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dance • music • art • theater 	PA 79-128 PA 08-153 (defines “arts”)
Career education	PA 79-128
Consumer education	PA 79-128

Required Subject Areas	Enabling Legislation
<p>Health and safety, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • human growth and development • nutrition • first aid, including CPR • disease prevention and cancer awareness, including age- and developmentally-appropriate instruction in performing self-examinations for screening breast and testicular cancer • community and consumer health • physical, mental, and emotional health, including youth suicide prevention • substance abuse prevention, including opioid use and related disorders • safety, including the safe use of social media and may include the dangers of gang membership • accident prevention 	<p>PA 78-218</p> <p>PA 79-128</p> <p>PA 89-185 (adds subtopics)</p> <p>PA 93-416 (“safety” includes gang membership)</p> <p>PA 15-94 (“first aid” includes CPR; “safety” includes safe social media use)</p> <p>PA 16-188 (cancer self-exams)</p> <p>PA 18-182 (opioid use)</p>
<p>Language arts, including reading, writing, grammar, speaking, and spelling</p>	<p>PA 78-218</p> <p>PA 79-128 (adds “language arts” to encompass all subjects)</p>
<p>Mathematics</p>	<p>PA 78-218</p> <p>PA 79-128 (renames “arithmetic” as “mathematics”)</p>
<p>Physical education</p>	<p>PA 78-218</p> <p>PA 79-128 (separates “physical” from “health” education)</p>
<p>Science, which may include climate change curriculum</p>	<p>PA 79-128</p> <p>PA 18-181 (adds climate change option)</p>
<p>Social studies, including:</p>	<p>PA 78-218</p>

Required Subject Areas	Enabling Legislation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • citizenship • economics • geography • government • history • Holocaust and genocide education and awareness 	PA 79-128 (renames “history” and “citizenship” as “social studies”) PA 18-24 (Holocaust and genocide)
African-American and black studies	PA 19-12
Puerto Rican and Latino studies	PA 19-12
Computer science, including computer programming instruction	PA 15-94 PA 19-128 (makes “computer science” the broader category encompassing programming instruction)
World language*, including American Sign Language (ASL)	PA 79-128 PA 11-136 (classifies ASL as a world language instead of as an optional offering within language arts)
Vocational education*	PA 79-128

*Required at least at the high school level

Other Specific Subject Matter Requirements

Democracy. State law requires elementary schools to include a program on democracy in their third, fourth, or fifth grade curriculum that allows students to “engage in a participatory manner in learning about all branches of government.” Upon a board of education’s request, SBE must make samples of materials available to teach the course ([CGS § 10-18\(a\)\(2\) & \(b\)](#)).

Effects of Alcohol, Nicotine or Tobacco, and Drugs on Health, Character, Citizenship, and Personality Development. By law, these subjects must be taught every academic year to public school students in all grades ([CGS § 10-19\(a\)](#)).

AIDS. Each local and regional board of education must offer planned, ongoing, and systematic instruction on AIDS, as taught by legally qualified teachers. Boards may determine the content and scheduling of the instruction, and they must adopt a policy for exempting students from the instruction at a parent’s or guardian’s written request ([CGS § 10-19\(b\)](#)).

Required Course Offering

Black and Latino Studies. The state’s program of study law contains one specific course that all high schools must offer beginning in the 2022-23 school year: a one-credit black and Latino studies course. Course completion is not a graduation requirement ([PA 19-12](#), §§ 1 & 4).

Available Curriculum Materials

State law requires SBE to make certain curriculum and related materials available to boards of education to help them develop instructional programs.

SBE must assist and encourage boards to include these topics in their classroom instruction within available appropriations and by utilizing resource materials (CGS §§ [10-16b\(d\)](#) & [10-16c](#)). Some materials coincide with subjects in the required program of instruction for public schools (e.g., Holocaust and genocide education). Other materials are for subject areas outside of the required program (e.g., the Great Famine in Ireland).

Table 2 lists the available curriculum material topics that SBE must make available along with their corresponding public acts.

Table 2: Required Topics for SBE-Provided Curriculum Materials

<i>Curriculum Material Topic</i>	<i>Enabling Legislation</i>
Holocaust and genocide education and awareness*	PA 95-101 PA 11-136
Great Famine in Ireland and surrounding historical events	PA 97-45
African-American and black studies*	PA 97-61 PA 19-12
Puerto Rican and Latino studies*	PA 97-61 PA 19-12

Native American history	PA 97-61
Personal financial management, including financial literacy	PA 97-61 PA 15-138
Topics approved by SBE upon the request of a local or regional board of education	PA 97-61
CPR* and the use of automatic defibrillators	PA 12-198
Labor history and law, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organized labor • collective bargaining process • existing legal protections in the workplace • history and economics of free market capitalism and entrepreneurialism • role of labor and capitalism in the development of the American and world economies 	PA 15-17
Climate change, consistent with the Next Generation Science Standards	PA 18-181
Safe Haven Act instruction	PA 18-182

*Denotes subject area that is part of public schools' required program of instruction

Other Required Curriculum Materials and Guides

Family Life Education. SBE must develop curriculum guides to assist boards of education in developing family life education programs in the public schools. The guides must include information on developing a curriculum that includes family planning; human sexuality; parenting; nutrition; and the emotional, physical, psychological, hygienic, economic, and social aspects of family life. The guides must not include abortion as an alternative to family planning ([CGS § 10-16c](#)).

Boards have the option to offer such programs in their public schools, and students are not required to participate ([CGS §§ 10-16d](#) & [10-16e](#)).

Firearm Safety. SBE must develop guides within available appropriations to help boards of education develop firearm safety programs for grades kindergarten through 12. Boards have the option to offer such programs in their public schools, and students are not required to participate ([CGS §§ 10-18b](#) & [10-18c](#), as amended by [PA 19-5](#)).

High School Graduation Requirements

State law prescribes the minimum amount of academic credits to be earned for high school graduation ([CGS § 10-221a](#)). Table 3 describes these requirements, which are currently split into two distinct sets based on graduation year.

Table 3: High School Graduation Requirements

10th - 12th Grade Classes in the 2019-20 School Year (CGS § 10-221a(b))	9th Grade Classes in the 2019-20 School Year (CGS § 10-221a(c))
English: at least 4 credits	Humanities: at least 9 credits, including civics and the arts
Social studies: at least 3 credits, including at least 0.5 credits in civics and American government	
Arts or vocational education: at least 1 credit	
Math: at least 3 credits	STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math): at least 9 credits
Science: at least 2 credits	
Physical education: at least 1 credit	Physical educational and wellness: at least 1 credit
	Health and safety education: at least 1 credit
	World languages: at least 1 credit
	Mastery-based diploma assessment: 1 credit
Total minimum credits required to graduate: 20	Total minimum credits required to graduate: 25

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