

POLICY
RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

HIGH SCHOOL PROFICIENCY BASED GRADUATION

Purpose

High School graduation is significant. It is a milestone that marks validation by the Rhode Island School for the Deaf that a student has achieved proficiency and completed necessary obligations and course work to earn a high school diploma. Proficiency in academic areas is based upon Standards set by the Rhode Island Board of Education, including the Common Core Standards in Mathematics and ELA. A Rhode Island graduate is defined by the Board of Education as *“well prepared for postsecondary education, work, and life. He or she can think critically and collaboratively and can act as a creative, self-motivated, culturally competent learner and citizen.”*

Rhode Island School for the Deaf (RISD) believes that this high standard applies to all deaf/hard of hearing students as well.

Philosophy

All students at Rhode Island School for the Deaf have access to curriculum and instruction designed to support their journey to proficiency in all disciplines. RIDE defines Proficiency Based Learning as *a key component to providing flexible and multiple pathways for Rhode Island students.*

Proficiency-based learning is a more individualized process of mastery, designed to identify and address gaps in learning to provide equitable learning opportunities for every student. For deaf and hard of hearing students, learning and knowledge gaps often develop due to inconsistent or very limited access to information and/or to the general curriculum due to hearing differences and delays in language development.

Rhode Island Proficiency Framework

In a proficiency-based system, students earn their diploma by demonstrating mastery of skill and content, not on testing alone. Rhode Island requires proficiency-based graduation requirements (PBGRs) where by proficiency is defined as a level of knowledge and skills that are expected to be learned, signaling that a student is well prepared to progress to the next lesson, grade level, or to receive a diploma. This allows students to “show what they know” in an additional format to testing.

The specific course, experience, and demonstration of mastery requirements are determined by RISD, but these requirements must represent the state-adopted high school content standards adopted by the Rhode Island Board of Education.

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PBGRs are required under the RI Secondary School Regulations. *The Secondary School Regulations, approved by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education in 2016, require schools to have PBGRs to determine student proficiency and readiness for graduation.*

Diplomas shall be issued based on demonstrated proficiency in the core content areas of mathematics, English language arts, science, social studies, and computer science, civics, and financial literacy.

RISD also requires coursework in the Arts and coursework in American Sign Language.

RISD will support the thoughtful development of approved flex credits so teachers have the opportunity to design rigorous and meaningful interdisciplinary learning experiences to support the passions of our students. Our high school will award academic credit for pre-approved work-based learning.

Proficiency is a mutual, shared accountability. The school is accountable to provide an appropriate educational program designed to move students steadily towards proficiency AND the student is responsible for active participation and accountable for completion of their program in order to achieve a diploma.

Policy on Graduation

RISD believes that all students who successfully complete the approved graduation requirements, including PBGR, and complete required coursework should be awarded a high school diploma. That may look different for each student and may be personalized, maintaining rigor in all actions, to account for those differences.

Deaf and hard of hearing students across the nation face challenges demonstrating what they know through standardized tests that are normed on hearing students. This is no different for RI students. For this reason, RI School for the Deaf has adopted a strong PBGR model in addition to required coursework for all high school students.

RISD students shall have multiple opportunities and individualized support to demonstrate proficiency. Proficiency shall be demonstrated through various means: state assessments, proficiency-based course assignments, a PBGR electronic portfolio with work submissions that have been reviewed by teachers, and a Senior Project/Graduation Capstone to be completed either Junior or Senior year.

All requirements must be satisfied prior to graduation. The high school shall communicate to students and families at least once annually the progress evidence toward meeting these benchmarks and expectations for college and career readiness.

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Coursework Expectations:

All RISD high school graduates shall complete courses in:

- **English Language Arts:** 4 credits.
 - **Mathematics:** 4 credits (including Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2)
 - **Science:** 4 credits (including Life Science, Physical Science, Earth Science, and an additional or advanced Science)
 - **Social Studies:** 3 credits (including U.S. History and Government)
 - **Civics:** .5 credits
 - **American Sign Language:** 2 credits
 - **Arts:** 1 credit
 - **PE/Health:** 1 credit
 - **Computer Science:** 1 credit
 - **Community Service** (outside of school functions) **or Work-Based Learning:** .5 credit
 - **Senior Project/Capstone:** 1 credit
- Total: 22 credits**

Coursework completion shall be recorded on the student's transcript by a passing grade in each course.

Electronic Portfolios

In 2013, RISD contracted with a local company, *Richer Picture*, to design a PBGR portfolio that aligns to our students' visual learning needs. The PBGR requirements includes tasks that are defined by subject area, tasks that are designed with cross-discipline collaboration, and opportunities for reflection on themselves as a deaf/hard of hearing citizen along with activities that support the development of their identity. Community service hours are also tracked within the portfolio.

Senior Project/Capstone

Every student participates in a Capstone project before graduation. This is a year-long course resulting in a 5-8 page research paper on an important and approved question of personal interest to the student, a mentorship of 12-15 hours with someone in the community related to their research question, and a final slide presentation to a panel of three deaf/hard of hearing community members not affiliated with the school, who score according to a rubric. The final grade is a combination of their benchmark tasks along the way, the student's final grade on the research paper and the grade from their presentation.

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Students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and Alternate Assessment

Every student attending this school learns under the guidance and protection of an IEP. Some students learn and achieve modified proficiency standards that require significant interventions under federal and state regulations AND who are eligible for alternate assessment as defined by the Rhode Island Department of Education. These students will receive a standard diploma that does not differ from those students who pursued a more traditional route to graduation if they complete the criteria for Alternate Assessment Graduation.

Criteria for Alternate Assessment Graduation are as follows:

- Completion of a minimum of 20 credits inclusive of core subjects, transition and career/life experiences. Coursework may include internships, activities of daily living instruction, career exploration, science & real life technology, arts, mathematics, and on-the-job literacy.
- Completion of a Making Action Plan meeting (MAPS)
- Community experiences related to Independent Living and Working (60 hours)
- Participation in RI Alternate Assessment
- A modified Capstone Project

Council Designations

RISD students may earn RI Council of Education designations on their Diploma, based on their achievement of specific criteria. These designations indicate that the graduate achieved beyond the minimum requirements of proficiency-based graduation.

- **Commissioner's Seal** – certifies that the student demonstrated proficiency in English Language Arts and Math, as confirmed by external evidence, such as RI state testing (school day SAT).
- **Pathway Endorsement** – certified that the student accomplished deep learning in a chosen area of interest combining academic study, applied learning, and formal exploration of related careers.
- **Seal of Biliteracy** – certifies that the student has attained proficiency in English and one or more world languages, usually ASL, as confirmed by external evidence, (such the achieving Proficiency on the SAT and achieving Proficiency (a score of 3 or above) the ASLPI)

Accelerated Academic Credit Courses

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Concurrent Enrollment or Dual Enrollment Classes are encouraged and supported for students with a 3.0 GPA or above in their Junior or Senior years. For more detailed information, see separate RISD policy on *Accelerated Credit Classes*.

Students Who Transfer to RISD in High School

RISD frequently enrolls deaf/ hard of hearing high school students who arrive later in their high school years with very little formal language structure and limited or no coursework that meet the graduation requirements.

These Transfer Students shall be considered for graduation on a case-by-case basis and shall have an individual program of studies, designed by RISD staff and detailed in their IEP, to prepare the student for the best possible scenario for post-secondary success. This plan should align as closely as possible to the school's graduation requirements, although it may be highly modified. Completion of a PBGR portfolio and a Senior Project will be expected.

Individual cases that do not fit these scenarios will be considered individually, based on the recommendation of the sending district and the HS Principal, subject to the review and approval of the Director.

First Reading: July 12, 2023

Second Reading: Aug 16, 2023

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