

Frequently asked questions

What is House Bill 5?

It is a bill passed by the Texas Legislature in 2013 that made major changes to the state's graduation requirements. Chiefly it: reduces the number of end-of-course exams in high school; and creates a new graduation plan called the Foundation High School Program, which offers students an opportunity to take classes tied to their career plans.

When will the changes take effect?

Today's eighth grade students will be entering ninth grade this fall. They are the first group required to follow the new graduation rules. Students starting grades 10, 11 and 12 can either continue with the previous "4x4" graduation plan or use the new system.

What is the first step for parents and students?

Parents should attend informational meetings that are being held at school districts across North Texas. The meetings outline the changes and also offer information about upcoming enrollment for eighth-grade students who will be in high school next fall.

Parents should also contact counselors, who can tell them how their district will keep them in the loop. Several school districts have Power Point presentations and videos online that explain House Bill 5.

Generally, how have the graduation requirements changed in terms of coursework?

The biggest change is that students will have to earn at least one endorsement in five study areas.

What is an endorsement?

An endorsement is a specialty area that a high school student chooses in addition to the basic requirements. To earn one, a student must complete: curriculum requirements for the endorsement, four credits in mathematics, four credits in science and two additional elective credits. Counselors said the endorsements allow students to focus their studies on areas in which they plan to build careers. For example, some who wants to be a nurse would take science classes in high school that will help build a foundation for college.

What are the five endorsements available?

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math)

Business and Industry

Public Services

Arts and Humanities

Multidisciplinary Studies

Are there any other major changes?

Algebra II is no longer required for all students. Students who don't take Algebra II have to take an alternative course. The state is developing an alternative called Algebraic Reasoning and Statistics that is expected to be ready for districts to offer in the 2015-2016 academic year.

Foundation Graduation Plan plus Endorsements

Here are the total courses required for graduation:

- **4 English credits:** English I, II, III plus one advanced English.
- **3 Math credits:** Algebra I, Geometry plus two advanced math courses. Note: some endorsements may require more math courses.
- **3 Science credits:** Biology plus two advanced science courses. Note: Some endorsements may have more science requirements.
- **3 Social Studies:** World Geography or World History,
 - U.S. History, Government and Economics
 - 2 Language credits: (LOTE) or Computer Science
 - 1 Physical Education credit
 - 1 Fine Arts credit
 - 5 elective credits
 - 4 Courses in endorsement area

26 TOTAL CREDITS

What is distinguished achievement?

Students planning to attend college must earn a distinguished achievement designation upon graduation. The designation must also be earned in order to be eligible for top 10 percent automatic admission to a public Texas university.

In order to earn it, a student must successfully complete four math credits, including Algebra II; four science credits; and endorsement requirements.

What is a performance acknowledgment?

Students can also earn a performance acknowledgment upon graduation for outstanding performance in a dual credit course, bilingualism and biliteracy, on an AP or IB exam or on the PSAT, ACT-Plan, SAT or ACT.

They can also earn one for earning a nationally or internationally recognized business or industry certification or license.

How do I make sure my child signs up for the right courses?

Counselors said the key to success is for parents to work with their children. Parents and students have to specify the endorsement chosen in writing.

What happens if my child decides to change endorsements in the 11th grade?

Counselors said that ideally students won't change this close to graduation. But if a student has changed plans several times, the multidisciplinary studies endorsement can be used for graduation.

Are this year's eighth-grade students choosing their endorsement tracks for high school?

Yes, beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, a school district must ensure that each student, on entering ninth grade, indicates in writing an endorsement that the student intends to earn. A district must permit a student to choose, at any time, to earn an endorsement other than the endorsement that the student previously indicated.

Can school districts allow students to graduate through the Foundation Program with only 22 credits and no endorsements?

According to the TEA, a student may graduate under the program without earning an endorsement if, after the student's sophomore year:

- 1) The student and the student's parent is advised by a school counselor of the specific benefits of graduating from high school with one or more endorsements; and
- 2) The student's parent files written permission with a school counselor on a form allowing the student to graduate under the Foundation High School Program without earning an endorsement

Can districts require students to take courses that are in the distinguished graduation track?

Yes. The districts can always require more than the state plan. Every student will graduate under the foundation plan and then districts and students may choose to require more, according to the TEA.

Read more here: <http://www.star-telegram.com/2014/04/26/5769211/texas-eighth-graders-beginning.html?rh=1#storylink=cpy>