



“Survival Competencies”: New Oregon Graduation Requirements

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New standards for high school graduation in Oregon are based on attendance, course requirements, and demonstrated performance. Local districts now have freedom, for example, to waive attendance requirements and to develop 11-, 12-, or even 13-year school programs based on the individual needs of the student.

TYPICAL eighth graders Betty Brown and Willie White now studying in Oregon's classrooms will enter a new program next fall of competency-based school graduation requirements. The school diploma will mean something, and the new requirements will replace requirements aimed generally at preparation for college.

By the time Betty and Willie graduate in the class of '78, they may have spent time working in the community and receiving credit for it. They may have completed high school early and be pursuing a career or attending a community college when traditional June graduation rolls around.

It is likely that the typical senior year or 12th grade will be dramatically different by 1978. As many as one-third of the 12th year students will be enrolled in nearby community colleges full or part-time. Another third will be working in community service

activities full or part-time. And the final one-third will likely remain in the typical school-based program.

A Hierarchy of Needs

The new Oregon minimum graduation standards focus on the concept of providing students an opportunity to learn and demonstrate specific “survival” competencies. Abraham Maslow has described a hierarchy of human needs; the first and most fundamental is for survival. The second need is for security; the third is for love and belonging; the fourth is for self-esteem; and the fifth is for self-actualization. It is not possible to completely satisfy any one of these needs until those which precede it are largely satisfied, Maslow states.

If the first level of need is survival, does it make sense to force a student to sit through the self-actualizing experience of Shakespeare and ignore the survival needs? This is not to intimate that literature is unimportant but only that if schools are to meet students at the point of their greatest need, the individual's real-life priorities must be recognized. Therefore, helping students develop survival

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competencies is one of the primary tasks of schooling in Oregon.

Far too many current educational rules and regulations have been based on the needs of the society of 40 and 50 years ago. The society of 1973, with its credit cards, installment purchasing, high-speed automobiles, television, and other modern developments, requires different individual competencies from the society of the twenties and thirties.

What competencies are required to survive in the various life roles during the last quarter of this century? What kinds of competencies are required to cope successfully with life as a citizen, wage earner, consumer, and life-long learner?

In the past the high school diploma has been based on two legs—attendance (seat time) and course requirements (exposure). These two features will still exist to some degree under the new requirements, but a third leg of demonstrated performance has been added.

The new requirements focus on real life roles and the competencies needed to cope with those roles. Our reference point is the ability to perform real life tasks—reading a newspaper, writing a letter for employment, reading maps and timetables, locating a library book, making change, computing interest rates, learning to swim, completing a simple income tax form, balancing a bank checkbook, knowing the basis of property taxes, and demonstrating first-aid procedures, as examples.

The new standards provide many freedoms at the local level. They allow local districts to break the traditional mold that assumes every student is a 12-year learner. They provide an opportunity to waive attendance requirements and develop 11-, 12-, or even 13-year school programs based on the individual needs of the student.

The local school board, working with administrators, staff, and the community, will decide whether or not to allow credit for community service, independent study, and work experience. The local district is urged to award a certificate of competency to the nongraduate, so that the student may have a clear understanding of his or her competency

levels and what will be required by way of demonstrated performance.

Each student is required to earn a minimum of 21 units of credit in grades 9-12. Credits are earned in ten required areas of study—communication skills, mathematics, social science, laboratory science, health education, physical education, electives, and three new areas—citizenship education, personal finance, and career education. In order to offer a required area of study, a district must provide 130 clock hours of instruction in one or more courses for that area. The student may challenge any of these requirements and receive credit by examination.

A planned course consists of a course title, goals to be achieved, general course content, expected learning activities, procedures for evaluation, and anticipated learner outcomes in terms of skills, knowledge, and values. It is suggested that planned course statements be composed of two parts: general course requirements and survival course requirements.

Local school boards may establish the local performance indicators they are willing to accept as evidence that the student has indeed developed the survival-level competencies. Not all competencies need be developed within the schooling process; however, the schools are required to assess the competencies.

Setting Survival-Level Competencies

The State Board of Education has established three major areas of public school responsibility in terms of developing minimum survival-level competencies. The areas are Personal Development, Social Responsibility, and Career Development.

To survive and grow as an individual (Personal Development), it is necessary to develop: (a) basic skills—reading, writing, computing, listening, speaking, and analyzing; (b) understanding of scientific and technological processes; (c) understanding of the principles involved to maintain a healthy mind and body; (d) the skills to remain a lifelong learner.

Good citizenship (Social Responsibility)

requires the ability to cope responsibly: (a) with local and state government as well as national government; (b) in personal interactions with the environment; (c) on the streets and highways; (d) as a consumer of goods and services.

To survive and advance in any career area (Career Development), students are asked to develop: (a) entry-level skills for their chosen career fields; (b) good work habits and attitudes; (c) ability to maintain good interpersonal relationships; (d) the ability to make appropriate career decisions.

The new requirements, which replace the largely college preparatory standards of 1932, were developed between 1969 and September 1972 in a series of steps:

1. The State Department of Education, in cooperation with a marketing and research firm, conducted an assessment of Oregon's educational needs by sampling opinion from the public, educators, students, and dropouts.

2. The State Board of Education and Superintendent of Public Instruction held a series of meetings, and a report was issued under the title "Oregonians Speak Out." The Board received strong statements of public concern that the high school diploma had lost its credibility and that *all* students were not receiving training and instruction necessary for survival in a complex society.

3. The Oregon Association of Secondary School Administrators requested that the Superintendent of Public Instruction explore the possibility of revising high school graduation requirements into quality or performance standards.

4. A first draft of proposed requirements was developed, distributed, and discussed in the fall of 1971. Elementary and secondary administrators, classroom teachers, board members, students, business and labor leaders all contributed to a much-changed second draft of the proposed standards.

5. The second draft was used as a basis for public hearings at five meetings of the State Board of Education. After statewide

testimony, the Board revised the second draft and adopted the new minimum standards at the September 1972 meeting.

6. Six pilot school districts developed guidelines and model competency statements in the areas of personal development, social responsibility, and career development. Approximately 300 Oregon educators and community members participated in these pilot projects.

7. A state-level workshop involving local project and State Department personnel was held in May of 1973 to synthesize the six project reports and develop guidelines for local districts. By July 1, 1974, districts are asked to file their implementation plans for State Board approval.

"Survival" is a relative term which can be defined by example with several hundred portions of the guide document.* "Survival" is a point of view which each district must clarify to its own satisfaction in order to identify the basic skills and abilities that *all* students should acquire as a result of local public schooling.

Compliance with the new standards should not be construed to encompass the total school experience. The development of survival competencies is only one part of schooling. Local schools are encouraged to offer broad experience in the fine arts, humanities, foreign languages, and the usual college preparatory program.

Community members will have a better understanding of current as well as proposed school programs, because they will be informed and involved in planning and approving the changes.

During the next four years, options will become available to those typical eighth grade students—Betty Brown and Willie White—that will help them develop the skills and confidence so that they can cope with life, real life, during the remaining decades of the 20th century. □

* *Editor's Note:* The result of these efforts, a publication titled *Oregon Graduation Requirements*, is available upon request for \$5.00 from the Oregon State Department of Education, 942 Lancaster Drive, N.E., Salem, Oregon 97310.

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