

MIDDLE-LEVEL AND HIGH-SCHOOL 2008 REGULATIONS GUIDANCE

Introduction – Intent of the Regents Regulations

In January 2003, the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education (“Board” or “Regents”) adopted regulations addressing:

- K-12 literacy,
- restructuring of the learning environment at the middle- and high-school levels, and
- proficiency-based graduation requirements (PBGRs) at high schools.

The Regents intended that these Regulations would substantively redesign the education offerings in Rhode Island public schools. During the five-plus years since the adoption of these landmark regulations, through an unprecedented level of cooperation among educators, local educational agencies have restructured secondary schools and designed high-school diploma systems to meet the two key goals of those regulations:

1. Each Rhode Island secondary school shall offer all of its students meaningful opportunities to achieve proficiency in six (6) core academic areas.
2. Sufficient student supports and personalization of instruction shall be offered to ensure that said opportunities to achieve proficiency are meaningful and attainable.

On September 3, 2008, the Regents amended the January 2003 regulations. The amended regulations codify and solidify the policies and procedures that have been developed during the last five years. The amended regulations reflect key design elements and principles that have been identified since 2003. The amended regulations support the continuation of ongoing, successful efforts by local educational agencies to meet the goals of the 2003 Regulations. The amended regulations do not prescribe a single, correct approach to meeting the goals of the Secondary School Regulations. Rather, they reflect the principle that districts must have flexibility in order to design programs that will meet the needs of their communities.

Purpose of this Document

The primary purpose of this Guidance document is to provide clarification to educators, students, and parents/guardians regarding the requirements specified in the Secondary School Regulations. In particular this Guidance focuses on providing additional detail on requirements specified in the regulations.

This Guidance is one piece of a larger, ongoing effort by RIDE to provide local educational agencies with support and technical assistance toward meeting the goals of the Regents regulations. This initial Guidance is not an all-purpose document. It does not include detailed information on:

- Recommended methods and approaches to implement the requirements, or

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- Descriptions of supports and technical assistance that RIDE plans to offer for implementation of the regulations.

RIDE will provide that information in separate documents or alternative formats, as needed.

Proficiency and Personalization

Two key concepts permeate the Regents regulations: proficiency and personalization. These concepts reflect the beliefs that:

- All students must attain an acceptable level of proficiency in each of the six core academic areas (integrated with applied learning skills) in order to be successful after high school.
- Instructional plans must be built on an awareness and understanding of the needs of individual students in order to provide sufficient opportunities for each student to attain proficiency.

Virtually all of the requirements set forth in the Regents regulations are directly related to defining, measuring, or providing the necessary supports for proficiency and personalization.

The central component of the regulations supporting proficiency and personalization is the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) described in Section 3.6. Beginning in grade 6, each student's ILP will provide the framework for the student and local educators to identify the student's postsecondary goals, chart pathways toward meeting those goals, and monitor the student's progress toward those goals. The ILP will encompass all available information about the student, including information collected for other plans required for specific needs. The ILP will be a dynamic tool rather than a static document. It will contain usable information, and it will make this information available to appropriate personnel and the student in a timely manner so that this information can be acted upon to support the student.

The use of the term *pathway* throughout the regulations and this Guidance reflects three key principles of personalization:

1. A student may follow multiple sequences of courses or programs of study to achieve the level of proficiency in the core academic areas required for graduation.
2. Students have different postsecondary goals that require varying levels of proficiency. An individual student's program of study must include sufficient opportunities for the student to meet those goals.
3. Different sequences of courses or programs of study lead to different levels of proficiency within an academic area. Students, parents, and educators must have enough information to evaluate whether a particular program of study will enable students to meet their goals.

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Additionally, the term *pathway* was chosen to connote both direction and flexibility. Defining a direction to follow to meet particular goals is essential. A particular pathway, however, must be flexible enough to meet the needs of individual students, and there must be enough flexibility in the student's ILP to support moves between pathways as a student's needs and goals change over time. A local educational agency must not adopt a policy that reflects the interpretation of the term *pathway* as a rigidly defined *track* from which it is difficult to move.

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Section 2.0 ENSURING GRADE LEVEL LITERACY AND NUMERACY FOR ALL RHODE ISLAND STUDENTS

Each local educational agency shall ensure that all its students are proficient in literacy and numeracy. They will do so by providing access to aligned coursework, monitoring student progress, and providing supports to ensure that all students become proficient. The Commissioner shall ensure that each local educational agency has mechanisms in place to develop students' proficiency in literacy and mathematics.

Since the Regents approved the initial regulations in 2003, districts have developed and implemented detailed policies and procedures to ensure grade-level literacy, such as the development of Personal Literacy Plans. In setting up their scaffolded literacy programs, middle-level and high schools must refer to the Rhode Island Literacy Policy and subsequent guidance documents. These amended regulations clarify some of the components of scaffolded literacy programs.

Section 2.1 Assessing reading proficiency levels of students at all levels

Use of designated state assessment

Districts are responsible for initiating reading interventions for each student who is not reading at grade level as determined by the assessments required under section 2.1 of the regulations. Districts may use the state reading assessment as a screening instrument to determine if further diagnostic assessment is needed. Students at the achievement levels of *Partially Proficient* and *Substantially Below Proficient* are considered to be reading below grade level. They need to be diagnostically assessed so that the district can acquire greater information about the students, validate the screening results, and analyze the results to determine the specific literacy supports needed to improve reading. Students who do not have NECAP scores must be assessed using another screening instrument. For RIDE suggested screening instruments, consult the Personal Literacy Plan Guidelines (June 2005).

Districts will report to RIDE, in a manner and schedule determined by the Commissioner, the number of students receiving literacy support and the number of students discontinued from support.

Section 2.2 Improving literacy for students reading below grade level

Middle-level and high-school literacy instruction must include a scaffolded approach that includes schoolwide, targeted, and intensive supports. All students must receive schoolwide discipline-specific literacy instruction taught by each content-area teacher. This instruction should assist students in acquiring information and in navigating increasingly complex content concepts, text structures, and vocabulary in every subject.

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Students reading one year or more below grade level must receive targeted intervention that includes the development, implementation, and progress monitoring of a Personal Literacy Plan (PLP). Students who have substantial reading difficulties (reading more than two years below grade level) must receive intensive literacy instruction from a reading specialist. These students must also have a PLP to monitor their progress (see PLP Guidelines for further explanation).

Section 2.3 Improving numeracy for all students.

Districts are responsible for planning and implementing mechanisms that identify and provide supports to students who are not making progress in mathematics. Districts will provide all students with access to coursework aligned to mathematics state standards (GLEs at the middle level and minimally grades 9-10 GSEs at the high-school level). Districts will also ensure that schools at all levels work in partnership to transition students into new schools within and across local educational agencies. Districts will report, in a manner, format, and schedule to be determined by the Commissioner, the effectiveness of their specific mathematics strategies and programs to support student proficiency in mathematics.

Section 2.4 State panel for instruction

The Commissioner will maintain and periodically revise the Rhode Island PreK-12 Literacy Policy, subject to the approval of the Board of Regents. The State Panel for Instruction shall provide advice to the Board of Regents regarding this Policy, including the creation, dissemination, and regular updating of pertinent resource materials for Rhode Island public schools in the area of literacy and numeracy. For purposes of implementing these regulations, the composition of the State Panel for Instruction shall reflect the involvement and collaboration of pre-K, elementary, middle level, high school, and higher education in order to benefit both pre-service and practicing teachers.

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Section 3.0 RHODE ISLAND DIPLOMA SYSTEM

The Rhode Island Diploma System is designed to support students in becoming proficient life-long learners in order to successfully pursue postsecondary academic and career goals. Students will substantiate their proficiency by producing evidence of meeting the content standards and applied learning skills in the six core academic areas, in accordance with local diploma requirements and each student's individual learning plan (ILP). Local educational agencies (LEAs) shall provide students with multiple opportunities and appropriate supports to ensure students' progress toward meeting their postsecondary academic and career goals.

Local policy decisions relating to implementation of the Rhode Island Diploma System will focus, appropriately, on issues related to high schools. Educators, parents, and students at the middle level, however, must also understand the requirements of the diploma system. To develop an appropriate ILP for a middle-level student, educators must understand not only the student's current and past performance, but also the requirements that the student will be expected to meet as he or she progresses through middle level and into high school.

Section 3.1 Coursework graduation requirements

Local graduation requirements

Local educational agencies are responsible for establishing graduation policies and requirements and making graduation decisions for individual students within the parameters set forth in the Regents regulations and all specific statutory curricular requirements otherwise set forth in the General Laws. The Regents regulations do not shift responsibility for certifying individual students' eligibility for receiving a high-school diploma from the local educational agency to the state. As described in Section 3.4, the role of the state is to review and approve diploma systems -- not to certify individual student results. Consistent with past practice and policy, nothing in the Regents regulations overrides current policies and procedures enabling individual students to appeal local graduation decisions to the Commissioner.

Coursework graduation requirements for all students

The attainment of proficiency as defined in the Regents regulations is a critical graduation requirement for all students. Districts must align their coursework with the state and locally adopted content standards in order to support this requirement. The coursework graduation requirements, however, encompass more than the proficiency requirement. The coursework requirements ensure that all students receive appropriate and sufficient opportunities to meet the goals of their ILP throughout their high-school career.

Many students will meet the proficiency requirements in English language arts and mathematics by the end of the tenth grade. Students must continue with their coursework

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in those academic areas throughout their high-school career, regardless of the student's postsecondary plans. Coursework offered in the core academic areas and other areas (e.g., world languages, business, CTE courses) should be consistent with the goals of the student's ILP.

The coursework requirements do not require or suggest that all students will complete the same sequence of courses. Students who have met the minimum proficiency requirement for graduation before completing the required number of courses will continue to study the content area in greater depth or breadth through courses based on the grade 11-12 grade-span expectations or other content standards. Students who have not yet met the proficiency requirement will enroll in courses that provide sufficient opportunities for them to meet those requirements by the end of the twelfth grade. Students planning advanced study in an area may complete the coursework requirement through advanced-placement courses, dual enrollment, or similar options. Students enrolled in state-approved career and technical programs may complete the coursework requirement through courses in those programs aligned with the appropriate grade span expectations or content standards.

Section 3.2 Performance-based diploma assessments

Multiple sources of evidence

The Rhode Island Diploma System requires that student proficiency in each of the core academic areas must be demonstrated through multiple sources of evidence gathered over time. This requirement is based on the fundamental principle that the level of student proficiency in an academic area reflects the level of proficiency at which the student can function on a routine basis -- not simply evidence that the student was able to demonstrate the minimum level of proficiency one time, on one day, or in a single situation. It would be difficult to make such an assessment of the level of student proficiency based on a single piece of evidence.

Performance-based assessments

The regulations require that local educational agencies include at least two of the following performance-based assessments in their local assessment system: graduation portfolios, exhibitions, comprehensive course assessments, or some combination thereof, such as a Certificate of Initial Mastery ©. This requirement emphasizes the importance of applied learning through performance-based evidence of student proficiency and the need for multiple sources of evidence.

The regulations do not suggest that two single administrations of a performance-based assessment are sufficient to determine student proficiency in each of six core academic areas. Rather, the regulations identify the types of performance-based assessments that a local assessment system must include. As part of the effort to gather sufficient evidence to determine student proficiency within each core area, a local assessment system may include several comprehensive course assessments within and across the core academic

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areas. A local assessment system that includes a graduation portfolio must ensure that the portfolio contains evidence to evaluate student proficiency in each of the core areas to which it is being applied.

The performance-based assessments listed differ in size and scope. A comprehensive course assessment in mathematics, for example, is likely to provide evidence of student proficiency on selected grade-span expectations within mathematics and perhaps a limited number of grade-span expectations within English language arts. A well-designed graduation portfolio, however, is likely to be much broader in scope. It will contain multiple sources of evidence in multiple core academic areas. For example, the graduation-portfolio entries used to evaluate the level of student proficiency in mathematics might include components such as successful completion of coursework, in-school and out-of-school projects, and results from other performance-based assessments, such as comprehensive course assessments.

Applied learning skills

The applied learning skills of communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, research, and reflection/evaluation are a central component of the Rhode Island Common Core of Learning. Proficiency in these skills is critical to success in the 21st century. The applied learning skills have been embedded in the grade-level and grade-span expectations, either explicitly, as with reading and writing (i.e., English language arts), or more implicitly in mathematics or science. Content standards that local educational agencies adopt in the remaining core academic areas (and other academic areas) must also embed these applied learning skills. Evidence of student proficiency in each of these areas must include demonstrations of appropriate applied learning skills.

In addition, each student's ILP must contain evidence of how the applied learning skills will be developed and exhibited over the course of the student's middle-level and high-school experience. A student's ILP must include the opportunities and supports necessary for the student to develop and demonstrate those applied learning skills in an area of specialized interest of the student's choosing related to her or his academic, community, or career goals.

Exhibitions

Many local educational agencies have instituted a "senior project" or exhibition graduation requirement as part of their effort to implement the 2003 Regents Regulations. Nothing in these regulations discourages or prohibits the use of senior projects as a local graduation requirement, as an opportunity for a student to demonstrate applied learning skills, and/or as a source of evidence of student proficiency within a content area(s).

For most students, however, the senior year is not an appropriate time for collecting evidence that the student has attained the minimum level of proficiency in one (or more) of the six core academic areas. Most students should have attained and exceeded the minimum level of proficiency required for graduation, based on the grade 9-10 grade-span expectations, well before their senior year. For these students, the senior year

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provides on-going opportunities to meet the goals of their ILP in preparation for their postsecondary experiences.

All exhibitions will minimally meet 9-10 grade-span expectations and many will exceed that level. The significance of the exhibition, however, is the opportunity for students to demonstrate a learning stretch while using a combination of the applied learning skills, including research, over an extended period of time in their area of specialized interest.

Section 3.3 Use of proficiency measures for high-school graduation

Proficiency in each of six core-academic areas

To be eligible for graduation, students must meet or exceed the minimum level of proficiency required for graduation in **each** of the six core academic areas: English language arts, mathematics, science, the arts, social studies, and technology. Superior performance in one of the six core areas cannot offset subpar performance in another core area.

In English language arts, mathematics, and science, the state has developed grade-level expectations (middle level) and grade-span expectations (high school) that describe the required content knowledge and skills in those areas. The Regents have adopted these grade-level and grade-span expectations (GLEs and GSEs). All local educational agencies throughout the state must include these state expectations in their curriculum and instruction.

In English language arts and mathematics, there are two sets of GSEs: grade 9-10 and grade 11-12. In these content areas, the minimum level of proficiency required for graduation is based on the grade 9-10 GSEs. The grade 9-10 GSEs describe content knowledge and skills expected of all students earning a diploma from a Rhode Island high school. The grade 11-12 GSEs describe additional content knowledge and skills required of students pursuing further study in that academic area.

In the arts, social studies, and technology, local educational agencies will adopt grade-span expectations (or content standards). The grade-span expectations in these core areas, like those that the state developed in English language arts, mathematics, and science, must be based on nationally recognized content standards, incorporate the state-defined applied learning skills, and reflect the knowledge and skills expected of all students earning a high-school diploma. The social studies content standards that local educational agencies adopt must include the standards contained in *Civics and Government and Historical Perspectives/RI History*. Districts must provide appropriate and sufficient opportunities for students to achieve proficiency in these areas.

Level of proficiency

Student proficiency in an academic area can be described along a continuum. In each of the six core academic areas, the minimum level of proficiency required for graduation is the level of proficiency expected of all students earning a high-school diploma, regardless of their postsecondary plans. Students planning to pursue advanced academic study or

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specialize in a particular area will take courses in high school that lead to a higher level of proficiency than the minimum level of proficiency required for graduation.

The Regents initially have established *Partially Proficient* as the minimum level of proficiency on the state assessments required for graduation, beginning with the class of 2012. Performance at the *Proficient* level is the goal of the regulations. The initial requirement for *Partially Proficient* on the state assessment reflects several factors including:

1. The current state of implementation of high-school diploma systems and the redesign of secondary-school programs to meet the needs of all students,
2. The length of time that the grade-span expectations, achievement standards, and assessments have been in place and known to educators, students, and parents, and
3. The nature of the state assessment as a single, on-demand measure of student performance.

The Regents will re-evaluate the minimum level of proficiency required for graduation on the state assessments as these factors change over time. Local educational agencies should consider similar factors when establishing the minimum level of proficiency in the core academic areas required for student graduation.

Use of multiple measures to establish a proficiency profile

Local educational agencies must use multiple measures to create a proficiency profile of student performance in each of the six core academic areas. The two major local components in the proficiency profile are evidence of successful completion of coursework and performance-based diploma assessments. These components both must align with the GSEs and other content standards. Of course, districts may collect a wide variety of measures of student proficiency (both from in-school and out-of-school sources) within each of these two components. The intent is to create a compelling body of evidence from which to determine a student's level of proficiency. The student's ILP will include and document the measures used to describe student proficiency.

In the areas of English language arts (reading and writing) and mathematics, the state assessment is a third major component of the profile used to evaluate student proficiency. Districts will evaluate the results of the state assessments in those areas in conjunction with the other components of the proficiency profile to determine whether the student has attained the level of proficiency required for graduation.

Use of state assessments

State assessments are administered in English language arts (reading, writing), mathematics, and science. At this time, the Regents have designated that beginning with the class of 2012 the state assessments in English language arts and mathematics must be one of three components used in evaluating a student's level of proficiency in those

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content areas¹. Together, the three components of successful course completion, performance on performance-based assessments, and the state assessments constitute multiple sources of evidence of the level of student proficiency. Although each of the components has different strengths and purposes, all contain measures that are aligned with the state's grade-span expectations and all contribute to accurately determining the student's level of proficiency. A primary role of the state assessments in evaluating student proficiency is to provide an external, standardized reference point for aligning achievement standards across classrooms, schools, and districts throughout the state.

The Regulations clearly indicate that the state assessments shall not be the sole grounds to prohibit graduation from high school. It is equally important to note that state assessments shall not be the sole grounds for determining that a student has met the proficiency requirement in a particular content area. The state assessments, alone, do not provide sufficient evidence to determine student proficiency in a content area. As stated above, the three components of the proficiency profile must be used in evaluating a student's level of proficiency in a content area.

The Regents have designated *Partially Proficient* as the minimum achievement level on the statewide assessments for the purposes of this section. When student performance does not meet or exceed this level on the state assessments, the local educational agency must take appropriate steps to evaluate the student's level of proficiency in that core academic area.

Student Performance below Partially Proficient on state assessment(s)

Case 1: Performance on the state assessment is consistent with local evidence of student proficiency.

If student performance on state assessment(s) **is consistent** with other measures of student performance in the proficiency profile (performance in courses and on performance-based assessments), the local educational agency (LEA) must:

- Determine whether the student's Individual Learning Plan (ILP) provides sufficient opportunities, supports, and interventions for the student to attain the required level of proficiency for graduation by the end of the twelfth grade.²
- Determine what additional assessment evidence the LEA will collect and when it will do so in order to evaluate the student's level of proficiency.

¹ At this time, the Regents have not yet designated that the state assessment in science must be included in evaluating student proficiency in science. This decision is based on the newness of the assessment and the high school grade span expectations in science. Following further evaluation of the assessment and the implementation of the grade span expectations, the Regents will designate the graduating class for which it will require that schools begin using the results of the state assessment in science to evaluate student proficiency for graduation.

² Students with disabilities have the right under federal law to continue working toward successful completion of the proficiency-based graduation requirements until the age of 21. The phrase "end of twelfth grade" in this document refers to the scheduled completion of high school whenever that may be.

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- Communicate to the student and the student's parent(s)/guardian(s) that the student has not yet met the level of proficiency required for graduation and describe steps for reaching that level of proficiency by the end of the twelfth grade. The LEA should include these steps in the student's ILP.

Case 2: Performance on the state assessment is not consistent with local evidence of proficiency.

If student performance on the state assessment is **not consistent** with other measures of student performance, including performance in courses and on performance-based assessments, the LEA must complete the following sequence of steps:

- a) Determine whether the inconsistency is atypical (applies to an individual student) or is typical in the school (applies to large groups of students).
 - 1) If the inconsistency is **typical**, the school or program must undertake further evaluation and action. There may be a misalignment of content or achievement standards between the school and state.
 - 2) If the inconsistency is **atypical**, continue with further evaluation of student performance.
- b) Determine the magnitude or degree of the inconsistency. If student performance on the state assessment is slightly below the *Partially Proficient* threshold and performance on other measures is slightly above that threshold, there is only a **small degree of inconsistency**. The performance of this student is borderline *Partially Proficient*. The LEA must evaluate additional evidence to determine whether the student meets the proficiency requirement. The LEA must take additional actions to ensure that the student's ILP includes sufficient opportunities and supports for the student to attain proficiency by the end of the twelfth grade.
- c) If there is a **large degree of inconsistency** in the student's proficiency profile between performance on the state assessment and the local evidence in the proficiency profile, the LEA must determine which results make up the more accurate reflection of student performance:
 - 1) State Assessment(s): Is there a nonacademic reason to conclude that the student's low performance on the state assessment(s) is aberrant (e.g., recent illness, emotional event)? Is there a reason to conclude that the student's low performance on the state assessment(s) is not accurate (e.g., the student was not provided proper accommodation(s); there was a disturbance during test administration)?
 - 2) Local Evidence: Is there sufficient evidence in the student's proficiency profile to evaluate performance? Is the level of proficiency demonstrated by the student's performance consistent with other student performance rated as *Partially Proficient* or better? Does the student perform consistently, or does the student's performance vary irregularly across pieces of evidence?
- d) If it is determined clearly through other appropriate evidence of student proficiency that the results of state assessment(s) are aberrant or not accurate, then no additional evidence of student proficiency is needed.

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- e) If it is determined that the results of the local portions of the proficiency profile are not accurate, then the school must re-evaluate the existing evidence of student performance, determine what additional evidence must be collected, and determine that the student's ILP provides sufficient opportunities, supports, and services for the student to attain the required level of proficiency. The school must also collect and evaluate additional external assessment evidence. This additional external evidence may include retaking state assessment(s) in the twelfth grade or other external assessments (e.g., SAT, ACT, Accuplacer). The Commissioner will establish criteria for the use of other external assessments as additional evidence, including a determination of required performance on those assessments.
- f) In those cases where it is determined that both the state assessment(s) and proficiency profile results are accurate, then the LEA must collect and evaluate additional assessment evidence, including external standardized assessments, before determining that the student has met the proficiency requirement for graduation.
- g) In all cases, the LEA must communicate to the student's parent(s)/guardian(s) the determination of the student's level of proficiency and the rationale for that determination. If applicable, the LEA must communicate to the student and the student's parent(s)/guardian(s) that the student has not yet met the level of proficiency required for graduation. The LEA must describe steps for reaching that level of proficiency by the end of the twelfth grade. These steps should be included in the student's ILP.

Case 2 presented above outlines steps to follow when student performance on state assessment(s) is below the minimum required achievement level of *Partially Proficient* and those results are inconsistent with the local evidence in the student's proficiency profile. Inconsistent results, however, may also occur in the other direction. That is, there may be cases where student performance on the state assessment meets or exceeds the *Partially Proficient* level and performance on the local evidence in the proficiency profile is substantially below proficient. Those cases should also trigger further evaluation of the student's performance and ILP.

Section 3.4 Regents-approved diploma system

Commissioner's Review

Since the adoption of the Regents 2003 Regulations, the Commissioner has developed and RIDE has implemented criteria and a system of review to ensure that local educational agencies design high-school diploma systems that comply with the regulations. As local educational agencies have been designing and developing their systems, the review criteria have appropriately focused on design and procedural issues. As most local educational agencies shift from the design phase to the implementation phase of their high-school diploma systems, the focus of the review criteria will shift

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correspondingly. As the LEAs implement their high-school diploma systems and make graduation decisions, they will be expected to provide ongoing evidence of the quality of their diploma systems and their local assessment systems as well as of the reliability and validity of decisions made within the system.

To date, the Commissioner's review of diploma systems has focused on overall design and the evaluation of student proficiency in the core academic areas of English language arts and mathematics. As the scope of the review expands to include other core academic areas, local educational agencies must provide evidence that they have met the review criteria in those areas as well. Preliminary approvals that the Commissioner has granted to date provide clear evidence that the approved local educational agencies understand the criteria and have systems in place to meet those criteria. Preliminary approval based on the 2003 regulations criteria does not guarantee full approval of local educational agencies' diploma systems in 2010.

Regents-approved diplomas

Beginning with the Class of 2012, all diplomas granted by the State of Rhode Island's public schools must be Regents-approved diplomas. Such diplomas will certify that the student receiving the diploma has presented evidence of successful completion of the proficiency-based graduation requirements as adopted by the local educational agency in adherence to the requirements set forth in sections 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 of these regulations. The Regents expect and intend that the dual emphasis on proficiency and personalization throughout these regulations will ensure that the local educational agencies provide the supports and opportunities needed to help students meet the proficiency-based graduation requirements. Some students, however, may not meet those requirements through a traditional academic program. Each student's ILP, reflecting an awareness of the individual student's strengths, weaknesses, and goals, should contain appropriate pathways and supports to help the student meet the proficiency-based graduation requirements.

Furthermore, some students may not meet the proficiency-based graduation requirements during four or more years in high school. The Regents regulations require that the ILP for such a student contain a transition plan that outlines an appropriate pathway for the student to meet postsecondary goals, meet some proficiency-based graduation requirements during high school, if appropriate, and continue to attempt to meet proficiency-based graduation requirements after high school, if appropriate.

These regulations do not prohibit any student from participating in a local graduation exercise or related ceremonies at the completion of the twelfth grade or at an age-appropriate time. Local educational agencies may include students who have met other local requirements for participation (particularly students with disabilities and English-language learners who have completed fewer than three years in Rhode Island schools) in graduation exercises and ceremonies. Local educational agencies will provide students not receiving a Regents-approved diploma with appropriate recognition of the proficiencies and/or certifications that they have attained during their high-school career.

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Appeal of graduation decisions

Local educational agency policies must provide students and families with the opportunity to appeal local graduation decisions at the school/district level. It is more important, however, that local educational agencies develop policies that minimize the need for students and families to appeal local graduation decisions. High-school diploma systems must recognize avenues for alternate methods of measuring the student's overall proficiency in the requisite six core-academic areas required for graduation. Although such avenues and alternate methods may apply to all students, it is likely that they will be particularly relevant for students in special circumstances (e.g., students entering a school in the eleventh or twelfth grade, students unable to participate in specific activities for medical reasons). The goal of local graduation policies must be to determine the level of student proficiency based on available evidence.

When it is clear that a student is not on a path to meet the proficiency-based graduation requirements or at risk of not meeting those requirements, the local educational agency must communicate that information in a timely and appropriate manner to the student and to his or her parents/guardians. In such cases, the student's ILP should reflect decisions that the student, parent/guardian (if appropriate), and educators have made in response to that information. The student's ILP should take account of pathways available to students after the twelfth grade (including additional time in high school, if appropriate) to meet proficiency-based graduation requirements and pursue postsecondary goals.

Section 3.5. Local educational agency notification to community members of the requirements for graduation

Timely and effective communication

Active participation by the student, family, and educators in the student's education, including the design and ongoing management of the student's ILP, requires timely and effective communication of all policies related to graduation requirements. By sixth grade, all parties involved in the student's education should be aware of the proficiency-based graduation requirements. The student's ILP should indicate the appropriate pathways for the individual student to meet those requirements and his/her postsecondary goals.

Section 3.6 Supports and accommodations to students.

Individual Learning Plan

The Regents regulations require that the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) serve as more than a repository of information about a student. The ILP will be actively used by educators, students, and families to guide and monitor student progress along individual pathways toward proficiency for graduation and postsecondary plans. The development and maintenance of the ILP will be a collaborative effort that includes the student and student's family as well as local educators.

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The ILP is the vehicle for coordinating the implementation of plans such as an Individual Educational Program (IEP), Personal Literacy Plan (PLP), or Section 504 Plan, as well as other supports and services that a student may require.

The ILP shall reflect the individual opportunities and supports needed for a student to succeed in meeting the requirements for graduation and fulfilling their postsecondary plans. By describing comprehensive pathways, the ILP will inform students and families whether a particular program of study is a viable option for the student to meet his or her goals and interests. Because the ILP is monitored on a regular basis, it can be modified in a timely manner when necessary. As student interests and goals develop and change, the ILP must be adjusted.

The development of the student's ILP must begin by the sixth grade. It is essential that students, parents, and educators understand how educational choices made at the middle level relate to program requirements in high school and, ultimately, to long-term postsecondary plans. These regulations do not, however, suggest that the design of the ILP will be identical in middle level and high school. The format, emphasis, and focus of an ILP should evolve as a student progresses from grade six through grade twelve.

MIDDLE-LEVEL AND HIGH-SCHOOL 2008 REGULATIONS GUIDANCE

Section 4.0. MIDDLE-LEVEL AND HIGH-SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING

As stated by the Regents in the Preamble to the Regulations, achieving the goals set forth in these regulations through proficiency and personalization will require substantive redesign of education offerings in Rhode Island's public schools at the middle- and high-school levels. The regulations contained in Section 4.0 address five areas that a) are critical to successful implementation of the regulations contained in sections 2 and 3, and b) may require significant change from the traditional structure and design of middle-school level and high-school education. These five areas set forth in Section 4.0 describe key structural supports for the secondary-education system envisioned in these regulations.

In comparison with other sections of the document, the five subsections of Section 4.0 address larger concepts and are less prescriptive. The regulations allow for flexibility in implementation that reflects differences among local educational agencies. In all cases, however, programs and policies developed to implement these regulations must a) reflect relevant educational research and best practices in middle-level and high-school education, b) be part of and support the overall (K-12) strategic plans of the local educational agency, and c) include procedures for evaluating their effectiveness and making necessary adjustments.

Implementation of these regulations will require collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders within a local educational agency and community as well as collaboration among local educational agencies, RIDE, and other stakeholders across the state. RIDE will continue to monitor and evaluate the implementation of these regulations through the Commissioner's Review process. The review process will focus on evidence of effectiveness as well as procedures for ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement.

Section 4.1. Requirement for personalized learning environments

All middle-level and high schools shall implement strategies for creating more personalized learning environments, including the provision of a structure by which every student is assigned a responsible adult, in addition to a school counselor, who is knowledgeable about that student's academic, career, and social/personal goals. In high schools, this personalization may occur through a variety of structures and programs including advisories, academies, teams, and configurations that support personalized environments. At the middle level, advisories that meet throughout the year are required as part of personalization.

These personalization strategies must ensure a collective responsibility for individual students, resulting in more students achieving the Regents standards for academic proficiency. They shall include approaches such as student advisories, schools within schools, academies, or interdisciplinary grade-level teams organized around a common group of students.

MIDDLE-LEVEL AND HIGH-SCHOOL 2008 REGULATIONS GUIDANCE

Section 4.2. Middle-level advisory

Student advisory structures at the middle level shall be an integral component of the middle-level program in each Rhode Island local educational agency, regardless of what additional personalization structures are employed. For purposes of these regulations, advisories shall be defined as structures for students to meet throughout the academic year with at least one assigned adult, in an environment with sufficient time and opportunity to support student achievement in the academic, career, and personal/social domains.

Section 4.3 Individual Learning Plan (ILP)

Local educational agencies are responsible for developing an ILP process, beginning no later than entry into the sixth grade, which supports students in meeting their academic, career, and personal/social goals. The ILP process shall provide regular and ongoing opportunities for students to revisit their ILP with the guidance of responsible adults, including parents or legal guardians. In order to ensure the use of the ILP in coordinating appropriate supports, access to courses, and additional learning opportunities necessary to support students in meeting their goals, ILP reviews must occur, at a minimum, twice a year, and preferably prior to the start of a semester. Additionally, ILPs should be used to support key transition periods, including middle level to high school and high school to postsecondary placement.

Dynamic ILP process

The intent of the requirements in this section and in Section 3.6 is that local educational agencies develop an ILP process that is dynamic. That is, the design and implementation of a student's ILP must be part of an inclusive and ongoing process. All relevant stakeholders, particularly the student and parents or legal guardians, must be involved in the process. The process must require and support ongoing monitoring, review, and adjustment of the student's ILP – particularly at key transition points within and between educational levels (middle level, high school, postsecondary). Because a student's goals, expectations, and performance change over time, the ILP process must contain:

- The flexibility to adjust to meet the needs of the individual student;
- Sufficient information to enable students and educators to make informed choices among appropriate pathways designed to meet the student's goals; and
- Sufficient information to make students and educators aware of the intended outcomes of particular pathways.

Flexibility, informed participation, and timely action are keys to the ILP. No local educational agency should develop an ILP process that interprets the intent of these regulations as creating a static track or series of tracks that students enter and progress through with little monitoring, support, or legitimate opportunity to accommodate changing goals.

MIDDLE-LEVEL AND HIGH-SCHOOL 2008 REGULATIONS GUIDANCE

Comprehensive ILP process

The requirements set forth in section 3.6 and in this section shall apply equally to students enrolled in state-approved career and technical coursework and other academic programs supported by the student's local educational agency. The responsibilities of the local educational agency in the ILP process do not end when a student is enrolled in a program housed outside of a central, comprehensive high school. The local educational agency must have a policy in place to ensure that the student's ILP continues to be monitored, evaluated, and adjusted.

Section 4.4. Professional development

Local educational agencies must monitor and document that all certified educators in middle-level and high schools participate in at least fifteen (15) hours of ongoing professional development annually. This professional development must focus on literacy, numeracy, graduation by proficiency, and personalization. The professional-development activities must be informed with the school's student-achievement data and guided by best practice in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Section 4.5. Common planning time

Through these regulations, the Regents have signaled the importance of local administrators, teachers, and other education professionals working in partnership to plan and focus instruction so that it meets student needs. The minimum time requirements established by these regulations ensure that all local educational agencies engage in this type of activity. The goals of the regulations cannot be met if local educators work in isolation.

The regulations allow local educational agencies to determine the best manner to bring educators together for common planning. LEAs will make these decisions based on the issues at hand and the instructional needs of the schools. Although some issues may best be addressed by departmental or interdisciplinary groups, the overall strategy for common planning time should include both departmental and interdisciplinary groups.