

2025

GRADUATION TOOLKIT

**Information for Planning
High School Years and Beyond**

Toolkit Contents



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GRADUATION PROGRAMS OVERVIEW

Foundation High School Program

The Foundation High School Program is a flexible graduation program that enables students to follow their high school interests and effectively prepare for a postsecondary education and/or career in a high-wage, high-skill, and in-demand field.

Students may customize their high school experience by completing additional components of the Foundation High School Program:

- **Endorsements**

Endorsements demonstrate knowledge a student has acquired in a specific field or career and help students prepare for their future goals.

- **Distinguished Level of Achievement**

The distinguished level of achievement designation requires completion of extra credits in math and science, as well as an earned endorsement in a chosen field. This designation is also required for [automatic admission](#) to any Texas public university for students in the top 10 percent of their class.

- **Performance Acknowledgments**

Performance acknowledgments recognize excellence in specific areas. These honors appear on a student's high school transcript and enhance their prospects for college admission or career opportunities. Students can earn multiple performance acknowledgments.

Texas First Early High School Completion Program

The Texas First Early High School Completion Program, also called the Texas First Program, is a graduation program that recognizes high-achieving students and allows students an opportunity to graduate early and receive a Texas First Scholarship.



FOUNDATION HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM

The Foundation High School Program [identifies the requirements](#) Texas public school students need to satisfy to earn a high school diploma.

A credit is a measure of achievement for completing a high school course. To graduate under the Foundation High School Program, students must earn a minimum of 22 credits in the following areas:

Foundation Course Credits (22 credits)		
English (4 credits) • English I • English II • English III* • An advanced English course	Math (3 credits) • Algebra I • Geometry • An advanced math course	Science (3 credits) • Biology • Integrated Physics and Chemistry (IPC), chemistry, or physics • An advanced science course
Social Studies (3 credits) • World History or World Geography • U.S. History • U.S. Government (one-half credit) • Economics or Economics and Personal Financial Literacy (one-half credit)**	Languages Other Than English (2 credits) • Two credits in the same language or two credits from computer programming languages	Physical education (1 credit) Fine arts (1 credit) Electives (5 credits)

Course Credits with Endorsements (26 credits)

A student may earn an endorsement by successfully completing the following **additional** requirements:

- the curriculum requirements for an endorsement,
- a fourth credit in math,
- a fourth credit in science, and
- two additional electives.

* English III or a comparable Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) English language arts and reading course.

** For students entering ninth grade prior to and during the 2025–2026 school year.

FOUNDATION HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM (CONT.)

Additional Graduation Requirements

End-of-Course (EOC) Exams

To graduate from a Texas public high school, students must complete the required credits needed to satisfy the Foundation High School Program requirements and pass EOC exams for English I, English II, Biology, Algebra I, and U.S. History. A student who fails no more than two of the required EOCs can still receive a diploma if they qualify to graduate as a result of an [individual graduation committee](#) (IGC) review.

Financial Aid

Students must also do one of the following in grade 12 to graduate:

- Complete and submit a [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#);
- Complete and submit a [Texas Application for State Financial Aid \(TASFA\)](#); or
- Submit a signed [Financial Aid Application Opt-Out Form](#).

Speech Requirement

Students are required to demonstrate proficiency in certain communication skills defined by the State Board of Education (SBOE) to graduate. Districts can choose different methods to assess how students meet the speech requirement.

Instruction on Proper Interaction with Peace Officers

Students must receive instruction in proper interaction with peace officers at least once before graduation, as required by [The Community Safety Education Act](#).

Instruction in Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and Automated External Defibrillator (AED)

Students must receive [instruction in CPR](#) at least once in grades 7–12 before graduation. Beginning with students entering grade 7 in the 2024–2025 school year, students must also receive instruction in the use of an AED.

Visit [TEA's State Graduation Requirements web page](#) for more information.



ENDORSEMENT OPTIONS

An endorsement represents a student's demonstrated proficiency in a related set of courses often associated with their interests or career goals. Completing an endorsement provides students with in-depth knowledge to pursue high-wage and in-demand occupations.

Endorsements also help students prepare for further education, training, or careers in a chosen field. To earn an endorsement, students must complete four credits each in math and science, two additional elective credits, and the specific courses required for the endorsement.

Students may earn more than one endorsement. A student can graduate without an endorsement if their parent signs the [opt-out agreement form](#). Speak to a local school counselor to discuss options.

What is a CTE completer?

A CTE completer is a student who completes, passes, and receives credit for three or more high school career and technical education (CTE) courses within a program of study for four or more credits. Additionally, one of the courses must be a Level 3 or Level 4 course.

Students can choose from five endorsement areas:

STEM

All students who wish to earn a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) endorsement must complete Algebra II, chemistry, and physics and one of the following options:

- Become a CTE completer in a TEA-designated program of study related to STEM
- Earn two additional advanced math courses
- Earn two additional advanced science courses



Business & Industry

Select one of the following options:

- Become a CTE completer in a TEA-designated program of study related to business and industry
- Become a CTE completer in certain TEA-designated programs of study if the math and science requirements for the STEM endorsement are not met
- Earn four credits in English electives in public speaking, debate, advanced broadcast journalism, or advanced journalism, including newspaper and yearbook



ENDORSEMENT OPTIONS (CONT.)



Public Service

Select one of the following options:

- Become a CTE completer in a TEA-designated program of study related to public service
- Earn four credits in Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC)

Multidisciplinary Studies

Select one of the following options:

- Successfully complete four advanced courses that prepare a student to enter the workforce successfully or postsecondary education without remediation
- Earn four credits in each foundation subject area, including chemistry and/or physics and English IV or a comparable Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) English course
- Earn four credits in AP, IB, or dual credit courses selected from English, math, science, social studies, economics, LOTE, or fine arts



Arts & Humanities

Select one of the following options:

- Successfully complete two levels each in two languages other than English (LOTE)
- Successfully complete four levels in the same LOTE
- Successfully complete four levels of American Sign Language (ASL)
- Earn four credits in one or two disciplines in fine arts (music, theater, art, dance, or film)
- Earn four credits of English electives not included in the business and industry endorsement
- Earn five social studies credits



CTE PROGRAMS OF STUDY

CTE program of study course sequences help students develop technical and academic skills for a specific career path. They also teach employability skills that apply to any workplace. Programs of study include work-based learning and may lead to a post-secondary credential. Programs of study do not replace endorsements; they support the completion of an endorsement. The programs of study fall under one of the **14 state-approved career clusters**:

Agriculture, Food, and
Natural Resources

Architecture and
Construction

Arts, Audio Visual
Technology, and
Communications

Business, Marketing,
and Finance

Education and Training

Energy

Engineering

Health Science

Hospitality and Tourism

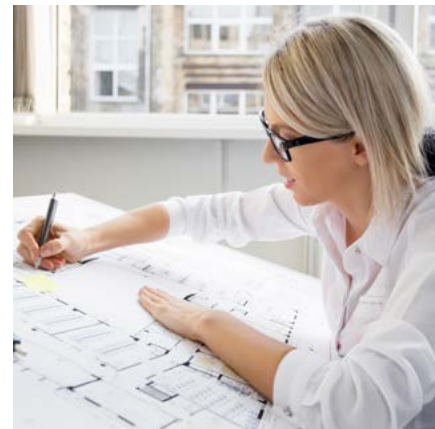
Human Services

Information Technology

Law and Public Service

Manufacturing

Transportation,
Distribution, and Logistics



Visit [TEA's CTE Programs of Study web page](#) for more information.

DISTINGUISHED LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT

Choices Determine Options

Education and training beyond high school are required for most high-skill, high-wage, and in-demand jobs. Student choices affect their future options, whether the goal is an industry credential from a community or technical college or a four-year degree from a university. Students should take the appropriate classes to prepare for their chosen pathway in either postsecondary education or entrance into the workforce.

Distinguished Level of Achievement Requirements

A total of four credits in math, including Algebra II

A total of four credits in science

Successful completion of an endorsement in an area of interest

A student must earn the distinguished level of achievement to be admitted to a Texas public university under the top 10 percent automatic admission law.*

DID YOU KNOW...

The distinguished level of achievement offers many educational and employment opportunities beyond high school:



It **enhances** a student's chances of admission at selective colleges and universities.



It **equips** students with college-level coursework skills at community/technical colleges and universities.



It **establishes** a solid basis for earning an industry credential or college degree.

* The University of Texas at Austin may admit fewer than the top 10 percent of students automatically. Visit the [Automatic College Admission web page](#) for more information.

PERFORMANCE ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Performance acknowledgments recognize outstanding achievement in specific areas. These distinctions will appear on the high school transcript and enhance a student's chances of entering college and/or the workforce successfully. Students can earn more than one performance acknowledgment.

Performance Acknowledgment Areas

Dual credit courses

Bilingualism and bi-literacy

PSAT[®], ACT ASPIRE[®] or PreACT[®], SAT[®], or ACT[®]

**Advanced Placement (AP) or
International Baccalaureate (IB) exams**

**State-, nationally-, or internationally-recognized
business or industry certifications or licenses**



TEXAS FIRST PROGRAM

This graduation program identifies a set of requirements that Texas public school students must satisfy to earn a high school diploma, achieve the distinguished level of achievement, and qualify for the Texas First Scholarship.

Minimum Course Credits

Complete any 22 high school credits. Consider the following when determining which 22 credits to complete:

- the required assessments and demonstration of subject-area mastery for the Texas First Program; and
- college admissions requirements.

Subject-Area Mastery

Demonstrate mastery of each of the following subject areas: English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR), mathematics, science, social studies, and a language other than English (LOTE).

Mastery of each subject area can be demonstrated by meeting one or more of the following criteria:

- 1) earn a STAAR End-of-Course (EOC) assessment score that meets the college readiness standards for Texas Success Initiative application exemption;
- 2) earn course credit in the core curriculum of an institution of higher education with a C or higher; or
- 3) achieve the minimum standards on an assessment set out in [Figure 1, 19 TAC §21.52](#).

Grade Point Average (GPA)

Achieve a minimum final high school GPA of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale.

Assessment Scale Score or Top 10% Graduate

Students must either:

- 1) earn an overall scaled score in at least the 80th percentile on one or more of the following assessments: ACT, SAT, PSAT/NMSQT®, TSIA/TSIA2, or GED®; or
- 2) have a GPA in the top ten percent of the student's current class during the current or the semester **before** the counselor/administrator verifies student eligibility for early graduation under the Texas First Program.

STAAR EOC

Complete the STAAR EOC examinations for English I or II, Algebra I, and Biology by:

- achieving a satisfactory level of performance on the STAAR EOC; or
- achieving a passing score on state-approved substitute assessments for the STAAR EOC.

Additional Requirements

- **Texas Residency:** Must be a resident of Texas.
- **FAFSA or TASFA Completion:** Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the Texas Application for State Financial Aid (TASFA).
- **Official Assessment Results:** Provide schools with official copies of any applicable assessment results.

TEXAS FIRST SCHOLARSHIP

Interested students who complete the Texas First Program should have their counselor verify all eligibility requirements and upon graduation have the counselor/administrator complete the Verification Confirmation Form found in [Texas OnCourse Academy](#).

Additional Information

- TEA [Texas First Early High School Completion web page](#)
- THECB [Texas First Program web page](#)

GRADUATION CHECKLISTS

Grade 8

- **Review** options offered under the Foundation High School Program and the endorsements available to decide on future academic paths.
- **Select** an endorsement and/or a CTE program of study, if applicable, that aligns with personal interests, college major, and career training.
- **Recognize** most college admissions processes value rigorous courses including Algebra II, higher-level science courses, and languages other than English.
- **Complete** a personal graduation plan (PGP) by the end of the 8th grade year using [MapMyGrad](#).



Grades 9 and 10

- **Monitor** high school credit completion.
- **Take** [dual credit](#) or AP courses to earn college credit while still in high school.
- **Consider** [CTE courses and programs of study](#) relating to career interests.
- **Keep** a list of awards, honors, and extracurricular activities for scholarship and college applications.
- **Research** colleges or universities to attend.
- **Check** college and university admission and application requirements and timelines.
- **Consider** taking SAT or ACT preparation classes.
- **Explore** interests and career exploration opportunities and attend site visits during college open house events.
- **Update** a PGP using [MapMyGrad](#).
- **Attend** college and career nights.
- **Talk** with college representatives and future employers about academic programs and [financial aid](#) available.
- **Take** the Texas Success Initiative Assessment 2.0 (TSIA2) and the preliminary PSAT/NMSQT as a sophomore.

Grades 11 and 12

- **Sign up** and take a college readiness exam (ACT, SAT, TSIA2) before grade 12.
- **Take** dual credit or AP courses to earn college credit.
- **Visit** a counselor or college advisor to learn about [available scholarships](#). Apply early and for numerous scholarships. [Explore financial aid](#).
- **Participate** in internships.
- **Submit** either the [FAFSA](#) or the [TASFA](#) early in grade 12.
- **Apply to college** during grades 11 and 12.

COLLEGE AND CAREER RESOURCES

Apply Texas

<https://www.applytexas.org>

Apply to any Texas public university and many Texas community colleges and private universities with a single application.

Ask ADVi

<https://www.askadvi.org>

Uses artificial intelligence (AI) to answer questions about attending public colleges and universities in Texas.

Building a Talent Strong Texas

www.highered.texas.gov

Providing students with a quality education, graduation opportunities, and career readiness.

Job's Y'all

<https://jobsyall.com>

Offers opportunities to explore meaningful, high-wage careers in growing industries. It showcases rewarding jobs in various locations in Texas.

MapMyGrad

<https://texasoncourse.org/tools/mapmygrad>

Students focus on skills and interests to explore careers and endorsements and plan a high school path.

My TX Future

<https://www.mytexasfuture.org>

Connects students with the tools and resources needed to help plan their careers and education.

Texas Career Check

<https://texascareercheck.com>

Use this interactive tool to search and explore occupations. Labor market information is provided regarding annual salary and projected job openings and can be filtered by region.

Texas Internship Challenge

<https://www.txinternshipchallenge.com>

Enables students to gain valuable work-based learning experiences while in high school.

Texas OnCourse

<https://texasoncourse.org>

Offers students access to free and trustworthy resources on college and career planning.

Texas Reality Check

<https://texasrealitycheck.com>

This lifestyle calculator helps students estimate monthly expenses and decide their lifestyle budget. It also shows minimum job salary requirements and suggests occupations that match desired incomes.

Texas Workforce Commission

<https://www.twc.texas.gov>

Provides benefits and services related to employment in the state of Texas.



GLOSSARY

Advanced Academics

Courses, programs, assessments, and services that provide opportunities for students to demonstrate college and career readiness and earn postsecondary credit.

Advanced Placement (AP)

College-level coursework designed by the College Board that provides students the potential to earn college credit with a qualifying score on an AP exam.

Course Credit

A unit of measure awarded for successful completion of a high school course.

CTE Completer

A student who completes, passes, and receives credit for three or more high school CTE courses within a program of study for four or more credits. Additionally, one of the courses must be a Level 3 or Level 4 course.

CTE Concentrator

A student who completes, passes, and receives credit for two or more CTE courses for at least two credits within the same CTE program of study.

CTE Program of Study

A coordinated, non-duplicative sequence of academic and technical content at the secondary and post-secondary level that does the following:

- Incorporates challenging state academic standards
- Addresses academic, technical, and employability skills
- Aligns with the needs of industries in the state, regional, and/or local economy
- Progresses in specificity, beginning with all aspects of the industry and leading to more occupation-specific instruction
- Has multiple entry and exit points that incorporate credentialing
- Culminates in the attainment of a recognized postsecondary credential

Visit the [TEA CTE Programs of Study web page](#) for a complete list of career clusters and programs of study.

Distinguished Level of Achievement

A high level of academic achievement earned by going beyond the Foundation High School Program. It requires completion of a total of 26 course credits, including Algebra II, four credits each in math and science, and an endorsement. A student must earn this designation to be eligible for the top 10 percent automatic admission to a Texas public college or university.

Students who graduate using the Texas First Program pathway also earn the distinguished level of achievement designation.

GLOSSARY (CONT.)

Dual Credit

Dual credit is a process by which a high school student enrolls in a college course and receives simultaneous academic credit for the course from both the college and the high school.

End-of-Course (EOC) Exams

State-mandated tests given during the final weeks of a high school course. There are five EOC exams required to earn a diploma from a Texas public high school. The five exams are given when a student completes English I and II, Biology, Algebra I, and U.S. History.

Endorsements

Areas of specialized study, including STEM, business and industry, public services, arts and humanities, and multidisciplinary studies. A district or charter school that offers only one endorsement must offer multidisciplinary studies.

Foundation High School Program (FHSP)

The 22-credit graduation program for Texas public school students.

Performance Acknowledgments

Students may earn performance acknowledgments on their transcripts for outstanding achievement in areas such as dual credit courses, bilingualism and bi-literacy, and AP, IB, PSAT, SAT, ACT Aspire, PreACT, and ACT exams or by earning a state-, nationally-, or internationally-recognized business or industry certification or license.

State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)

The state-mandated assessments given annually to students in grades 3–8 and at the end of five high school courses.

Texas First Early High School Completion Program

The Texas First High School Completion Program, also known as the Texas First Program, is a graduation program that recognizes high-achieving students and allows students an opportunity to graduate early and apply to receive a Texas First Scholarship.

Work-Based Learning

A continuum of intentional activities and experiences designed to expand the boundaries of the classroom and prepare students for future career opportunities.



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