

High School Graduation Amendments

2026 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

Chief Sponsor: Jen Plumb

House Sponsor:

LONG TITLE**General Description:**

This bill ensures students meeting graduation requirements can participate in graduation ceremonies.

Highlighted Provisions:

This bill:

- requires an LEA to allow any student receiving a diploma to participate in graduation ceremonies, including students in online programs, except when significant safety concerns exist;

- requires State Board of Education oversight of local graduation policies; and

- makes conforming changes.

Money Appropriated in this Bill:

None

Other Special Clauses:

This bill provides a special effective date.

Utah Code Sections Affected:

AMENDS:

53E-3-501 (Effective 07/01/26) (Partially Repealed 07/01/28), as last amended by Laws of Utah 2025, First Special Session, Chapter 9

53E-4-204 (Effective 07/01/26), as last amended by Laws of Utah 2025, Chapter 142

ENACTS:

53G-4-416 (Effective 07/01/26), Utah Code Annotated 1953

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the state of Utah:

Section 1. Section **53E-3-501** is amended to read:

53E-3-501 (Effective 07/01/26) (Partially Repealed 07/01/28). State board to establish miscellaneous minimum standards for public schools.

(1) The state board shall establish rules and minimum standards for the public schools that

are consistent with this public education code, including rules and minimum standards governing the following:

- (a)(i) the qualification and certification of educators and ancillary personnel who provide direct student services;
- (ii) required school administrative and supervisory services; and
- (iii) the evaluation of instructional personnel;

- (b)(i) access to programs;
- (ii) attendance;
- (iii) competency levels;
- (iv) in accordance with Subsection (8), graduation requirements; and
- (v) discipline and control;

- (c)(i) school accreditation;
- (ii) the academic year;
- (iii) alternative and pilot programs;
- (iv) curriculum and instruction requirements; and
- (v) school libraries;

(d) services to:

- (i) persons with a disability as defined by and covered under:
 - (A) the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. Sec. 12102;
 - (B) the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. Sec. 705(20)(A); and
 - (C) the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1401(3); and
- (ii) other special groups;

- (e)(i) state reimbursed bus routes;
- (ii) bus safety and operational requirements; and
- (iii) other transportation needs;

- (f)(i) school productivity and cost effectiveness measures;
- (ii) federal programs;
- (iii) school budget formats; and
- (iv) financial, statistical, and student accounting requirements; and
- (g) data collection and reporting by LEAs.

(2) Except as provided in Subsection (3), the state board shall determine if:

- (a) the minimum standards have been met; and
- (b) required reports are properly submitted.

(3) When the state board makes a request of an LEA under Subsection (1)(f) or (g), the

state board shall include:

- (a) the justification for the requested information;
- (b) a statement confirming that the information is not available elsewhere;
- (c) a deadline by which the LEA must provide the information in accordance with state board rule; and
- (d) penalties, including withholding of funds, for non-compliance in accordance with state and federal law.

(4) The state board may apply for, receive, administer, and distribute to eligible applicants funds made available through programs of the federal government.

(5)(a) A technical college listed in Section 53H-3-1202 shall provide competency-based career and technical education courses that fulfill high school graduation requirements, as requested and authorized by the state board.

(b) A school district may grant a high school diploma to a student participating in a course described in Subsection (5)(a) that is provided by a technical college listed in Section 53H-3-1202.

(6)(a) As used in this Subsection (6), "generally accepted accounting principles" means a common framework of accounting rules and standards for financial reporting promulgated by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board.

(b) Subject to Subsections (6)(c) and (d), the state board shall ensure the rules and standards described in Subsections (1)(f) and (g) allow for an LEA to make adjustments to the LEA's general entry ledger, in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles, to accurately reflect the LEA's use of funds for allowable costs and activities:

- (i) during a fiscal year; and
- (ii) at the close of a fiscal year.

(c) If the state board determines under Subsection (2) that an LEA has not met the minimum standards described in Subsection (1)(f) or (g) or has not properly submitted a required report, the state board shall allow the LEA an opportunity to cure the relevant defect through an adjustment described in Subsection (6)(b).

(d) An LEA may not, in an adjustment described in Subsection (6)(b), reflect the use of restricted federal or state funds for a cost or activity that is not an allowable cost or activity for the restricted funds.

(7)(a) As used in this Subsection (7):

(i)(A) "Comparable course" means a course that fulfills the same graduation credit

- 99 requirements as a course for which a student seeks to improve a grade.
- 100 (B) "Comparable course" does not include a course a student completes through
- 101 the packet method.
- 102 (ii) "Grade replacement" means credit a student earns by retaking a teacher-led
- 103 course for a letter grade to improve a previous grade, which:
- 104 (A) may raise the student's grade point average if the new grade is higher; and
- 105 (B) replaces the lower grade on the student's transcript.
- 106 (iii) "Original credit" means credit a student earns through the successful completion
- 107 of a course for the first time.
- 108 (iv) "Packet" means a collection of instructional materials and assessments used to
- 109 receive credit through the packet method.
- 110 (v) "Packet method" means an educational approach where:
- 111 (A) a high school student receives a collection of instructional materials from an
- 112 institution, organization, or LEA;
- 113 (B) the high school student works through the materials independently with
- 114 minimal or no direct instruction from a teacher; and
- 115 (C) assessment is primarily based on completion of assignments within the
- 116 instructional materials.
- 117 (vi) "Replacement credit" means a pass-fail credit a student earns for a course the
- 118 student did not pass or complete, which:
- 119 (A) does not affect the student's grade point average; and
- 120 (B) allows the student to fulfill high school graduation requirements.
- 121 (b) An LEA may award a grade for original credit or replacement credit through the
- 122 packet method if the packet adheres to the standards prescribed in state board rule
- 123 and:
- 124 (i) the LEA approves the packet for use as an instructional material in accordance
- 125 with:
- 126 (A) Subsection 53G-4-402(27) for a district school; or
- 127 (B) Section 53G-5-404 for a charter school; or
- 128 (ii) the state board recommends the packet after going through the state instructional
- 129 materials process described in Title 53E, Chapter 4, Part 4, State Instructional
- 130 Materials.
- 131 (c) An LEA may not use the packet method, or classify a packet as original credit, to
- 132 improve a previous course grade of a high school student as described in Subsection

(7)(d).

(d) A high school student may improve a grade through grade replacement by:

(i) repeating a course one or more times; or

(ii) enrolling in and completing a comparable course that is teacher-led.

(e) The state board shall:

(i) in accordance with Title 63G, Chapter 3, Utah Administrative Rulemaking Act, make rules or policies that:

(A) establish standards for the use of the packet method to award original credit and replacement credit;

(B) include alignment with core standards the state board establishes under Sections 53E-3-501 and 53E-4-202; and

(C) maintain a comprehensive list of state board approved packets in the state board's Recommended Instructional Materials System on the state board's website; and

(ii) report annually to the Education Interim Committee the number of students in each LEA who receive academic credit through the packet method.

(f) An LEA shall:

(i) assign a distinct course name and number for credit earned through the packet method to easily identify the use of the packet method on a student transcript; and

(ii) track and record the number of packets an LEA uses to award original credit or replacement credit each school year.

(8) In establishing rules and minimum standards under Subsection (1)(b)(iv) regarding graduation requirements, the state board shall ensure that the rules and standards require an LEA to comply with Section 53G-4-416 regarding student participation in graduation activities.

Section 2. Section **53E-4-204** is amended to read:

53E-4-204 (Effective 07/01/26). Standards and graduation requirements.

(1) The state board shall establish rigorous core standards for Utah public schools and graduation requirements under Section 53E-3-501 for grades 9 through 12 that:

(a) are consistent with state law and federal regulations;

(b) use competency-based standards and assessments;

(c) include instruction that stresses general financial literacy from basic budgeting to financial investments, including bankruptcy education and a general financial literacy test-out option;

- (d) include graduation requirements in language arts, mathematics, and science that exceed:
- (i) 3.0 units in language arts including up to 0.5 units emphasizing verbal communication completed in a course or a school sponsored activity;
 - (ii) 2.0 units in mathematics; and
 - (iii) ~~[and]~~ 2.0 units in science; ~~[and]~~
- (e) include a graduation requirement in social studies that is equal to or exceeds 3.5 units, including at least 1.0 unit in American constitutional government and citizenship as described in Section 53E-4-205.2; and
- (f) ensure up to 0.5 units described in Subsection (1)(e) may be earned by:
- (i) completing a course or a school sponsored activity emphasizing verbal communication provided that a significant portion of the course or activity is dedicated to civic education, including:
 - (A) policy analysis;
 - (B) governmental systems; and
 - (C) civic engagement; or
 - (ii) participation in the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps described in 10 U.S.C Sec. 2031.

(2) The state board shall establish competency-based standards and assessments for elective courses.

(3) The state board shall study requiring all LEAs to issue a high school diploma to students who receive:

- (a) an associate's degree with at least 60 credit hours from an accredited post-secondary institution; or
- (b) an industry certification with at least 500 hours of instruction from a business, trade association, or other industry group in accordance with Section 53E-3-501.

(4) The state board shall ensure that an LEA complies with the requirements of Section 53G-4-416 regarding student graduation participation requirements.

Section 3. Section **53G-4-416** is enacted to read:

53G-4-416 (Effective 07/01/26). Student graduation participation and diploma requirements.

(1) As used in this section, "graduation activities" means graduation ceremonies, commencement exercises, graduation celebrations, honors ceremonies, or other activities associated with graduation recognition.

(2)(a) An LEA shall allow a student to participate in graduation activities if the LEA awards or will award a diploma to the student, including a student participating in an online program.

(b) Notwithstanding Subsection (2)(a), an LEA may prohibit a student from participating in graduation activities if the LEA determines the student's participation presents significant safety concerns.

Section 4. **Effective Date.**

This bill takes effect on July 1, 2026.