# Reading: Introduction to Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards

The main goal of academic standards is to ensure a high-quality equitable education for all learners. Standards establish high expectations for learning at given grades, provide clear progressions of learning across grades, and guide schools and districts to design, develop, and deliver learning experiences that enable students to successfully complete the standards and benchmarks.

In response to federal regulations requiring academic standards ([Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994, Public Law No. 103-382](https://www.congress.gov/103/bills/hr6/BILLS-103hr6enr.pdf)), Minnesota statutes require the development of state standards ([Minn. Stat. § 120B.021](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=120B.021)) for the following content areas:

* language arts
* mathematics
* science
* social studies
* physical education
* the arts

School districts and charter schools must revise and align local academic standards and high school graduation requirements in health, world languages, and career and technical education to require students to complete the revised standards beginning in a school year determined by the school district or charter school. School districts and charter schools must formally establish a periodic review cycle for the academic standards and related benchmarks in health, world languages, and career and technical education.

## What is the purpose of academic standards?

The standards are intended to raise academic expectations for students, teachers, and schools but must refrain from directing any specific curriculum, instructional method or assessment ([Minn. Stat. § 120B.02](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=120B.02)). Standards focus on outcomes for student learning rather than inputs such as instructional time requirements, required curriculum topics, reporting requirements, etc.

## What are standards and benchmarks?

An academic standard is a summary description of student learning in a content area ([Minn. Stat. § 120B.018](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=120B.018)). Standards define the learning expectations for credit requirements. Students must fulfill credit requirements “sufficient to satisfy all of the standards” in that subject ([Minn. Stat. § 120B.024](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=120B.024)).

The benchmarks for a given standard identify specific knowledge or skills that a student must master to complete that academic standard ([Minn. Stat. § 120B.018](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=120B.018)). Schools must offer and students must achieve all benchmarks for an academic standard to satisfactorily complete that state standard ([Minn. Stat. § 120B.023](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=120B.023)).

## How are the standards developed?

The standards review and revision process ([Minn. Stat. § 120B.021](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=120B.021)) requires participation from various stakeholders including parents, educators, administrators, school board members, higher education faculty, and business representatives. This statute also provides the timeline for standards revision. The standards for a given content area were or will be reviewed during the school year noted below and every 10 years thereafter:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Content Area** | **Revision Year** |
| Arts | 2017-18 |
| Science | 2018-19 |
| Language Arts | 2019-20 |
| Social Studies | 2020-21 |
| Mathematics | 2021-22 |
| Physical Education | 2026-27 |

Refer to the [Frequently Asked Questions about Minnesota’s K-12 Academic Standards](https://education.mn.gov/mdeprod/idcplg?IdcService=GET_FILE&dDocName=058273&RevisionSelectionMethod=latestReleased&Rendition=primary) document for more details about the standards review process.

## What is the relationship between standards and credit requirements?

A credit is defined as an academic year of study as determined by the district ([Minn. Stat. § 120B.018](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=120B.018)). As noted in the graduation requirements below, the credits refer to the academic standards for each content rea.

Students beginning 9th grade in the 2011-2012 school year and later must successfully complete the following high school level credits for graduation ([Minn. Stat. § 120B.024](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=120B.024)):

1. four credits of language arts sufficient to satisfy all of the academic standards in English language arts;
2. three credits of mathematics, including an algebra II credit or its equivalent, sufficient to satisfy all of the academic standards in mathematics;
3. an algebra I credit by the end of 8th grade sufficient to satisfy all of the 8th grade standards in mathematics (In other words, Algebra I is an 8th grade requirement and therefore it does not qualify as one of the required high school credits in mathematics.)
4. three credits of science, including at least one credit of biology, one credit of chemistry or physics, and one elective credit of science. The combination of credits under this clause must be sufficient to satisfy (i) all of the academic standards in either chemistry or physics and (ii) all other academic standards in science;
5. three and one-half credits of social studies, encompassing at least United States history, geography, government and citizenship, world history, and economics sufficient to satisfy all of the academic standards in social studies (School districts are encouraged to offer a course for credit in government and citizenship to 11th or 12th grade students who begin 9th grade in the 2020-2021 school year and later, that satisfies the government and citizenship requirement.);
6. one credit of the arts sufficient to satisfy all of the state or local academic standards in the arts; and
7. a minimum of seven elective credits.

## Where can the standards be accessed?

Academic standards documents and additional information can be accessed on the [Academic Standards page](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/stds/).

The standards documents for each content area can also be accessed through the [Minnesota Standards Portal](https://standards.education.mn.gov/sds/mnsds/index.htm).