

Graduation Requirements Review

Consultation Paper

High School Principals

Fall, 2003

Background

In 1995 Newfoundland and Labrador became a partner in the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (APEF). Under the APEF, a regional initiative was established to cooperatively develop and implement a common curriculum for the K-12 school system in the Atlantic provinces. As well, the province was involved in a pan-Canadian science initiative through a consortium of Canadian provinces. Consequently there have been significant changes in curriculum, especially in the areas of English Language Arts, Mathematics and Science.

The current graduation requirements for anglophone high school students in this province, which have been in place since September 1998, do not reflect the significant changes that have occurred in curriculum or other changes that have occurred in Canadian society. During the 2001-2002 school year, the Department of Education established a broad based committee to review the current graduation requirements and propose new graduation requirements.

The intent of the three year high school program is to provide a balanced and rigorous curriculum that fosters the full development of each and every student. The following guiding principles formed the basis for the recommendations for change:

1. The Essential Graduation Learnings provide a foundation to guide and support the development of all school curricula and consequently the graduation requirements.
1. Graduation requirements encourage the fullest development of students as set out in the Essential Graduation Learnings.
1. Students are challenged academically and guided toward a program that is both academic and rigorous. When expectations, standards and performance objectives are raised there will still exist a significant range of performance levels.
1. Graduation requirements permit for different levels of graduation (e.g., honours, academic, general) that should be achievable by students.
1. Students meet graduation requirements through course offerings available in every high school in the province.

Current Senior High Graduation Requirements

The graduation requirements, shown in Table 1 were implemented in September, 1998. These requirements were developed under the assumption that new courses in English, Mathematics, and Science would be implemented from 1998 – 2001. Since the implementation schedule for these courses was delayed, students entering the high school system since 1998 have been using both old and new courses to meet these graduation requirements.

Table 1
Current Graduation Requirements

Requirement Groups		Number of credits required
Language Arts	Core Language Arts	6 credits
	Optional Language Arts	2 credits
Mathematics/ Science/ Technology	Mathematics	4 credits
	Science	4 credits
	Mathematics and/or Science and/or Technology	4 credits
Social Studies	World Studies	2 credits
	Canadian Studies	2 credits
Enterprise/Economic Education		2 credits
Personal Development (Music, Family Studies, Career Education, French, Theatre Arts, Cooperative Education, Religious Education, Art/Media, Physical Education)		4 credits
Any Subject Areas		6 credits
Total		36 credits

- at least **20 of the total credits** must be obtained **beyond Level I**, and
- at least **9 of the total credits** must be **beyond Level II**. **At least five (5) of these credits must be attained in the Newfoundland Senior High School Program.**

Note: All alternate courses (i.e., courses with a third digit of 7) count as local courses for graduation purposes and fulfill the ANY SUBJECT category. A student cannot use more than 4 local course credits to contribute to the 36 credits to graduate.

Proposed Graduation Requirements

Table 2 outlines the new proposed graduation requirements.

**Table 2
Graduation Requirements**

Requirement Groups		Number of credits required
Language Arts	English Language Arts	6 credits
	Language Arts (English or French)	2 credits
Mathematics		4 credits
Science		4 credits
Social Studies	World Studies	2 credits
	Canadian Studies	2 credits
Citizenship		2 credits
Fine Arts		2 credits
Any Subject Areas		12 credits
Total		36 credits
Student Development Requirements		Number of hours
Active Living *		180 hours (average 60 hours each year)
Community Service		90 hours (average 30 hours each year)

*This requirement can be fulfilled through three physical education credits.

- at least **20 of the total credits** must be obtained **beyond Level I**, and
- at least **9 of the total credits** must be **beyond Level II** . **At least five (5) of these credits must be attained in the Newfoundland Senior High School Program.**

Note: 1. A student cannot use more than 4 local course credits to contribute to the 36 credits to graduate.

2. **A student requiring alternate courses may use a maximum of 4 alternate course credits to contribute to the 36 credits to graduate. All alternate courses (i.e., courses with a third digit of 7) will fulfill the Any Subject category.**

Areas for Discussion

Physical Education/Active Living

Statistics Canada and the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute data show Newfoundland and Labrador has a much higher than average incidence of inactivity than Canada as a whole. A 2002 National Roundtable on Active School Communities highlighted the need for school-aged adolescents to become more physically active. The provincial advisory committee on physical activity has developed a strategy, *Regaining Our Health* with a focus on children and youth. There is a consensus that schools, in partnership with communities and community organizations, need to promote a more active lifestyle among students. Other provinces including British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario recently announced new graduation requirements making physical education mandatory in senior high school. Students can meet this requirement by taking physical education courses, or through alternative activities such as participation in extra-curricular school sports activities.

Currently, physical education is one option that students may select to partially fulfill the personal development category. Adding a physical education graduation requirement would encourage students to adopt healthy lifestyles. This would reinforce the importance of physical fitness to overall wellness and help to improve the overall health of youth in the province.

What would provide the desired results?

- mandatory physical education courses in high school
- alternative activities outside classroom time
- combination of physical education credits and active living activities

Recommendation:

Students be required to complete at least three credits in Physical Education, or engage in 180 hours with a minimum of 60 hours each year of Active Living activities outside the instructional day.

Citizenship

The Canadian Students' Association report that large numbers of post secondary students have no career goals and lack career-oriented direction upon entry into post-secondary institutions. Many high school graduates experience difficulty making the transition to post-secondary education. Students need more guidance in planning a three year high school program that will satisfy graduation requirements and prepare them for entrance to post-secondary institutions. Research and real life experiences of students, teachers, parents and employers repeatedly document the need for on-going career planning by students.

In December 2001, the Prime Minister announced the Canada Volunteerism Initiative funded by the Government of Canada, to promote the participation in and contribution of Canadians, including youth, to society. The goals of the initiative include encouraging Canadians to participate in voluntary organizations and enhancing the experience of volunteers. It is considered an important method for youth to have additional experiences outside the classroom, to gain valuable experience in the labour market, and to gain new skills. Many secondary school boards across Canada are making volunteering a component of their curriculum, and some provinces have it as part of graduation requirements.

In this province, some schools have made efforts to provide students with a comprehensive career education program that focuses on helping students formulate their career aspirations at each high school grade level. Students, through a combination of occupationally related academic courses, career development activities, the infusion of career development concepts across the curriculum, and the completion of a co-operative education program, are able to develop realistic career plans for the future.

Recommendations:

- Students be required to complete two credits in Career Development, preferably in Grade 10.
- Through an advisor system, students be required to develop an annual educational plan.
- Students be required to do 90 hours of community service over three years in order to graduate and that this be validated.
- Students be required to maintain a record of their Community Service and Active Living activities.

Course Options

Fine Arts

The inclusion of fine arts in the provincial curriculum is seen by many to be, essential to the realization of a well rounded education, important in the development and sustenance of the culture of Newfoundland and Labrador and contributes to the broader social and economic goals of the province (Ministerial Panel on Educational Delivery in the Classroom, p. 19). A broad fine arts curriculum should be available to all students in the province.

Recommendation:

Students be required to complete at least two credits in Fine Arts.

Technology Education

Technology Education is often grouped with mathematics and science for graduation requirements. Students are fulfilling this graduation requirement by completing math and science courses only. It should be noted that only one other province in Canada, Nova Scotia, has a technology education graduation requirement.

Recommendation:

The Math/Science/Technology graduation requirement be changed to reflect a minimum number of courses in Mathematics and in Science.

Enterprise/Economic Education

The placement of Enterprise/Economic Education as a separate graduation requirement requires students to complete six credits in Social Studies.

Recommendation:

The two-credit Economic Education graduation requirement become part of the course listings for Social Studies.

Courses for general students

Reports from high school principals indicate that many students who struggle in academic areas do not have a sufficient breadth of course offerings. Courses such as the industrial arts courses are no longer available in many high schools.

Recommendation:

The Department review the current provincial course offerings to ensure that there are a sufficient number of courses available for general students to meet graduation requirements.

Pathways to Graduation

Pathways to Programming and Graduation: A Teacher's Guide (2003) describes a variety of pathways to graduation that are available for students. Concerns with both Pathway 3 (modifying outcomes of prescribed courses) and Pathway 4 (alternate courses) have been expressed.

In Pathway 3, specific curriculum outcomes are deleted, added, and/or changed. However, the general curriculum outcomes of the prescribed course are maintained and consequently, the course integrity is maintained. In Pathway 4, alternate courses are developed to respond to the needs of an individual learner. An alternate course is appropriate when adaptations/accommodations and/or course modifications have not been sufficient in meeting the needs of the student, or where there is no corresponding provincial course which would meet the individual needs of the student. Alternate courses should reflect Essential Graduation Learnings.

*** Alternate Courses being submitted for credit approval must reflect the performance expected at the High School level. Credit approvals will be in the Any Subject Area - Requirement Group and will not qualify for credits in any other Requirement Group.**

Presently, school districts approve alternate courses. Schools contact the Department to obtain a course number. This approach allows for a wide range of standards in both course numbers and course content. In all other courses, the Department is responsible for approving the outcomes of a course, as well as determining the subject area, the level at which the course will be taught (Level I, II or III), and its credit value.

Recommendation:

All alternate courses submitted for credit be approved by the Department, using a process similar to the current local course approvals.

Under the current graduation requirements students are limited to a maximum of four credits in alternate and local courses combined. This is causing undue hardship for students where courses in experiential learning (e.g., co-operative education) are an integral and valuable component of a student's Individual Support Services Plan. Similarly, many of these students are limited in the number of local courses for which they can register. In both instances, the Department has approved the curriculum, provincial or local. The committee believes that the maximum number of alternate course credits that may be used for graduation purposes should remain at four. However, a student who has registered for alternate courses should also be able to receive up to four local course credits.

Recommendation:

Students, that are permitted to receive up to four alternate course credits, also be permitted to receive up to four local course credits.

Comments/Feedback
Physical Education/Active Living

Citizenship

Course Options

Pathways to Graduation

Other