

Salem Public Schools Graduation Requirements and Competency Determination Policy

I. Context

[Massachusetts state law](#) requires students to satisfy the requirements of a competency determination (CD) to graduate high school. Historically the competency determination for all high school graduates across the state of MA was a passing score on MCAS assessments. However, in November 2024, Massachusetts voters passed Question 2, a measure that removed MCAS as a mandatory condition for high school graduation. Under the newly revised law, students are required to still take MCAS exams (in grades 3–8 and 10), but they will no longer need a passing score on the Gr. 10 MCAS to receive a diploma. Instead, the governing body of the district must develop a policy for determining competency that outlines how students will demonstrate mastery of a common core of skills that are aligned to the state academic standards and curriculum frameworks in the areas previously measured by MCAS high school tests. Satisfaction of the competency determination shall be a condition for high school graduation.

II. Defining: Competency Determination and Local Graduation Requirements

In order to earn a Salem Public Schools diploma, a student must fulfill both of the following two conditions.

- 1. Meet local graduation requirements and
- 2. Fulfill the competency determination requirement, as determined by the School Committee.

Local graduation requirements may align to the competency determination but do not take the place of it.

Earning a diploma = satisfying local graduation requirements + meeting the district’s competency determination

III. Local Graduation Requirements for Salem High Schools

Below is an outline of the total number of credits required for graduation at each high school in Salem. Specific requirements can be found in the individual school’s Program of Study (PoS).

Salem High School 26 credits	Salem Prep High School 24 credits	New Liberty Innovation School 26 credits
SHS PoS	Salem Prep PoS	NLIS PoS

IV. Standards for Competency Determination

As described in the new regulations, the competency determination represents two accomplishments:

- 1. Showing mastery of skills in English language arts, mathematics, science and history (*beginning with the graduating class of 2027*) and
- 2. Satisfactory completion of relevant coursework

Showing mastery of skills – To earn a competency determination, Salem Public School students must demonstrate mastery of high school academic standards in the following subject areas through the identified method for determining mastery at each school.

TABLE 1	CD Required Courses		
	Salem High School	Salem Prep High School	New Liberty Innovation School
English Language Arts	English I English II AP Seminar: English For students at ACCESS Levels 1-2:	English I English II	Humanities I Humanities II

	Newcomer ELD Beginner ELD		
Mathematics	Algebra I Geometry Integrated Mathematics I Integrated Mathematics II	Math I (Algebra I) Math II (Geometry)	Integrated Mathematics I Integrated Mathematics II
Science	<i>One of the following:</i> Biology or AP Biology Chemistry or AP Chemistry Physics or AP Physics I or II	Biology	Biology
US History (Starting w/ the graduating class of 2027)	<i>One of the following:</i> American and World Encounters I American and World Encounters II AP US History	US History I	US History I
Method for Determining Mastery	Students will demonstrate mastery in these courses by earning a 2.3 or higher on their final exam or culminating project . If a student prior to the final exam or project has a 2.3 or higher and cannot demonstrate mastery of skills, concepts, and standards on the final exam or project, they will be provided an opportunity to complete a portfolio that will be used to assess mastery of key concepts, skills, and standards as defined by the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.	Students will demonstrate mastery in these courses by earning a 2.3 or higher on their final exam or culminating project .	Students will demonstrate mastery in these courses by earning the equivalent of a C or higher on the NLIS learning continua and an end-of-course final exam .

Satisfactory completion of coursework – To earn a competency determination, Salem students must successfully complete coursework as defined by these grading criteria as specified in the Program of Study for each school.

TABLE 2

CD Grading Criteria		
Salem High School	Salem Prep High School	New Liberty Innovation School
Students will demonstrate successful completion of coursework by earning a grade of 2.3 or higher on the SHS standards-based grading scale.	Students will demonstrate successful completion of coursework by earning a grade of 2.3 or higher on the SPSHS standards-based grading scale.	Students will demonstrate successful completion of coursework by earning the equivalent of a C or higher on the NLIS learning continua.

V. Competency Determination by Class

Graduating Class of 2026 and 2027

Students in the Class of 2026 and 2027 may satisfy the competency determination requirements for each subject using one of the following methods:

- Students who achieved the competency determination via MCAS prior to January 3, 2025 will retain their earned status.
- Students who did not achieve competency determination through MCAS by this date may fulfill this requirement by successfully completing the relevant course work for that subject area with a minimum grade as specified in Table 2.

- Note at the time that these courses were taken, there were no mechanisms in place to verify “mastery” as defined by DESE guidelines.
- Students in the Class of 2027 must also satisfy coursework in US History or the equivalent.

Graduating Class of 2028 and Beyond

Students in the Class of 2028 and onward may only earn the competency determination by satisfying the requirements in Table 1 and Table 2.

VI. Opportunities for Retest for Mastery

Students who earn credit for relevant coursework but do not earn “mastery” for the course will have the opportunity to attain mastery in subsequent years through retests or a portfolio review. Assessments will cover the same standards but be presented in different ways to ensure authentic mastery of the material.

VII. Special Populations

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities, including those educated in out-of-district placements, will receive accommodations and supports as outlined in their IEPs. Special considerations for students with disabilities related to the requirements for a competency determination are outlined below. To be eligible for these special considerations, a student must have a significant disability, as defined by DESE, including:

- Significant delays in academic achievement due to a significant disability;
- Substantial support needs to make measurable progress on grade-level standards;
- Documented cognitive and adaptive functioning two or more standard deviations below the mean on accepted assessments.

Special Considerations for students with Disabilities:

- **General Education with Inclusion Supports:** Students should be enrolled in courses that enable them to demonstrate mastery as determined by the IEP team. Students with disabilities who are enrolled in general education courses in the inclusion setting may have access to supports that include but are not limited to a special educator with services, consultation or accommodations.
- **Alternative Demonstration of Mastery:** Determination as part of an IEP team decision, a student may demonstrate competency through alternative or modified assessments. This can include portfolio assessment, projects, and/or tasks that indicate completion of work aligned with state curriculum frameworks, as indicated by the student's IEP.
- **Considerations for Students in Out-of-District Placements:** All approved Out of District programs offer rigorous coursework based on each student’s circumstances that aligns closely with the Curriculum Frameworks consistent with 603 CMR 28.09(9)(b). Students in OOD placements have various opportunities to participate in or submit work toward the CD requirements. This can include portfolio assessment, projects, asynchronous or synchronous participation in classes, work experiences, and/or tasks that indicate completion of work aligned with state curriculum frameworks, as noted in the student's IEP. Recognizing that individualized pacing is often necessary, OOD schools may provide unique scheduling and educational alternatives. These may include credit recovery programs and coursework extensions into summer or vacation periods, ensuring all students are afforded an equitable opportunity to satisfy CD requirements.

Multilingual Learners

Students at ACCESS levels 1–2 may meet the English language arts coursework requirement through designated English Language Development (ELD) courses that integrate grade-appropriate ELA standards with appropriate scaffolding. These courses will be certified by the district and offered only to eligible students. Students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE) may also be eligible for these courses, even if their ACCESS level is above 2, based on demonstrated need and academic history.

Late-Enrolling Students or Transfer Students

Students who enroll in a Massachusetts public high school after their ninth-grade year may be granted a determination of competency by the Salem Public Schools in one or more of the following ways:

- Transcript review by school administrators
- Additional course requirements as determined by school administrators

- A qualifying MCAS score of at least meeting or exceeding expectations achievement levels on the relevant high school MCAS assessment
- Meeting the standard for a substituted equivalent that the district certifies satisfies the same academic standards of any course listed in DESE's approved course list.

VIII. Additional Considerations

Credit Recovery Options

Students who do not meet the passing grades in the above prescribed courses may enroll in Not Yet Academy, credit recovery courses or be scheduled to take additional coursework by their guidance counselor that meets the same MA Curriculum Framework Standards. These opportunities will provide a student who has yet to meet the CD requirements additional opportunities to meet this standard for graduation.

Appeals Process

Current students and/or parents/guardians may appeal the determination of competency in accordance with the following district procedures:

- A student (18 or older) or parent/guardian submits a request in writing to the Principal.
- The College & Career Counselor/guidance counselor will audit the information presented.
- Findings are presented to the Director of Guidance/Principal in conjunction with relevant personnel for final approval.
 - A passing score of meeting or exceeding expectations on the MCAS assessment may be considered as part of the review.
- If the student should be awarded a competency determination, a notation is made in Aspen and in the student's record.
- The decision will be provided within thirty (30) days of receiving all supporting documents. Written notification will be sent to the email address provided by the requestor.
- The decision may be appealed in writing to the Superintendent or designee within five (5) days. The Superintendent or designee will have final approval.

Transcript Review for Former Students

Salem Public Schools provides a formal transcript review process for any former student who believes they have earned a Competency Determination (CD) in alignment with the district's [current policy](#). This review ensures that individuals who have satisfactorily completed the relevant coursework are recognized as meeting CD requirements as outlined in this existing policy, and therefore have earned a high school diploma. To request a formal transcript review process, former students should contact the high school where they were last enrolled. *Note:* Grade scale conversions are available in the Salem High School Program of Study.