

Graduation Requirements: GCPS Students Who Started High School Before 2011–12*



Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) students seeking a regular high school diploma must meet state and local graduation requirements by earning designated credits, and by passing specific courses as well as state and local writing assessments. As the parent of a high school student, you may have questions about graduation requirements. Following are frequently asked questions and answers about testing and other requirements for students who started high school in the 2008–09, 2009–10, and 2010–11 school years.

**Students who started high school before July 2008 or after June 2011 have different graduation requirements. Contact your student’s school counselor to learn more.*

What are the graduation requirements for GCPS students who started high school before the 2011–12 school year?

In order to earn a regular Gwinnett County high school diploma, students who started high school before the 2011–12 school year must:

- Learn the AKS in order to pass classes and earn the required course credits/units (*see chart below*);
- Pass Gwinnett’s High School Gateway Writing Assessment, which is administered in the 10th grade;
- Pass the Georgia High School Writing Test (GHSWT), which is administered in the 11th grade; and
- Demonstrate proficiency in the four core areas— language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies— by either passing one EOCT in each of the core content areas or by passing the corresponding subtest of the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT).

To graduate, Georgia students starting high school July 2008 and after must earn a minimum of 23 credits (also called units) in the following areas of study:

Required Area of Study	Credit/Unit
Language Arts	4
Mathematics	4
Science (<i>The 4th science unit may be used to meet both the science and an elective requirement.</i>)	4
Social Studies	3
Modern/Classical Language and/or Technical Education and/or Fine Arts	3
Health and Physical Education	1
Electives	4

Students can earn .5 units per class each semester. (Students on block schedule can earn a full credit per class each semester.) For admission to a University System of Georgia college or university, students must pass specific courses in the core academic areas— language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies— as well as two units of the same modern or classical language.

Core academic courses, both required and elective, are included in calculation of the HOPE GPA for HOPE Scholarship eligibility. Learn more about HOPE requirements on the GCPS website (www.gwinnett.k12.ga.us).

What is the purpose of the graduation testing program?

Graduation tests provide valuable information for students, educators, and parents about student strengths and areas for improvement. The tests identify students who may need additional instruction in the concepts and skills required for a diploma. These assessments ensure that Georgia’s students qualifying for a regular education diploma have mastered essential core academic content and skills.

Are all students subject to testing requirements?

Students with disabilities and students learning English as a second language may receive accommodations based on their needs and the specifications of their Individualized Education Program (IEP), their Individual Accommodation Plan (IAP), or their Test Participation Plan (TPP) for English Learners. Students with disabilities unable to participate in the state testing program, even with maximum accommodations, are assessed with the Georgia Alternative Assessment (GAA).

What are the graduation tests like?

Georgia High School Writing Test (GHSWT)

All students pursuing a Georgia high school diploma must pass the GHSWT. Students take the test in the fall of their junior year. Students compose a persuasive essay of no more than two pages on an assigned topic. The two-hour test administration includes 100 minutes of writing and time for planning and editing the paper. For the 2013–14 school year, the GHSWT will be administered **September 25**. Students who do not pass on their first attempt have multiple opportunities to receive extra help, take a retest, and qualify for graduation before the spring of the 12th grade. Students must pass the writing assessment to graduate.

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GCPS High School Gateway Assessment

All students must demonstrate knowledge of Gwinnett County Public Schools' Academic Knowledge and Skills (AKS) curriculum. Students can find the AKS by course and by core academic subject on the school system website.

The Gateway Assessment measures students' ability to write effectively about 9th and 10th grade Science and 10th grade Social Studies AKS. Students write two essays—one on a Science topic and one on a Social Studies topic. In writing a response, students use their own knowledge about the topic as well as information from documents provided. Students have 125 minutes to write each of the essays, one per day.

Most students participate in this assessment in their sophomore year. For the 2013–14 school year, the Gateway will be administered **March 31** and **April 2**. Results from this administration will be available before the end of the school year.

Intervention classes are provided to help students who do not pass this assessment. Students who are not successful on the assessment the first time have several opportunities to take a retest before graduation.

All Gwinnett students, including those who enroll in GCPS after 10th grade, must pass both sections of the school system's High School Gateway Assessment to earn a regular diploma.

End of Course Tests

Students are required to participate in state-mandated End of Course Tests (EOCT) to earn credit for eight designated high school courses. Any student enrolled in and/or receiving credit for a course requiring an EOCT must participate in the assessment at the completion of the course in **December** or **May** and is required to pass the course in order to earn credit toward graduation. In Gwinnett, results of this multiple-choice test count for 20% of the student's semester grade in the semester the test is administered. EOCTs are required for two courses in each core subject area and are designed to hold all students in Georgia's public schools to the same learning standards. The state's EOCT program includes the following eight content-area assessments: Freshman Language Arts, Junior American Literature, Integrated Algebra I/Accelerated Integrated Algebra I, Integrated Geometry/Accelerated Integrated Geometry, U.S. History, Economics/Business/Free Enterprise, Biology, and Physical Science. *Note: Most Gwinnett students take seven of the courses listed above that require an EOCT, with some GCPS students enrolled in the eighth course, Physical Science.*

Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT)

In 2011, the state Board of Education voted to phase out the GHSGT as a graduation requirement, in favor of the more rigorous End of Course Tests. During the phase-out period, students who started high school in 2008–09, 2009–10, and 2010–11 have the option of demonstrating proficiency with a passing score on either an EOCT or the corresponding GHSGT in each of the four core subjects. For example, a student who passed EOCTs in Freshman Language Arts, Biology, and U.S. History, but was unsuccessful on either of the EOCTs in mathematics, could still meet graduation requirements by passing the math subtest of the GHSGT. Students take the GHSGT in spring of their junior year, with subtests in English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies. The four multiple-choice subtests are scheduled one per day over four days— **March 17–20, 2014**, for this school year. Students have up to three hours to complete each content area of the test.

How can students prepare for graduation tests?

Regular attendance, daily participation in class, and the completion of assigned homework and projects help ensure that students are exposed to the curriculum areas covered on these tests. In addition, Gwinnett high school students regularly write essays and compositions to prompts, which are good practice for both the state writing assessment and the Gwinnett Gateway writing assessment. Students also take tests in class that mirror the Gateway format. This experience helps students develop proficiency in the important content knowledge and writing skills that colleges and businesses expect of today's graduates. Additional resources online include.

- **USA Test Prep.** This resource includes weekly review, daily tips, practice tips, games, and activities, vocabulary, downloads, and more in each of the core academic areas. Request a user name and password through the school. (<http://www.usatestprep.com/Member-Login>)
- **Online Assessment System.** Practice tests for EOCTs also are available through the Georgia Department of Education (<https://www.georgiaoas.org>)
- **GACollege411.** Get test prep help on the state's free college planning website. (<https://secure.gacollege411.org/>)
- **Ga. Department of Education.** Check out information about required state tests. (<http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/default.aspx>)
- **Gateway.** Find Gateway practice prompts and sample papers on the GCPS website in "Assessment Resources" on the Teaching and Learning page.

If you have additional questions, talk to a teacher, counselor, or administrator at your student's school.