

LONDONDERRY HIGH SCHOOL COURSE COMPETENCIES

Background: What are the state policies that define and require competency assessment?

Competency Assessment of Student Mastery at the High School level emerged from a State Board of Education Committee in late fall 2005. This charge was based on new requirements in the 2006 School Approval Standards that "the local school board shall adopt and implement written policies and procedures relative to how a credit can be earned" (Ed. 306.04).

Furthermore, the 2006 State Approval Standards charged "the local school board shall require that a high school have in place competency assessments for all courses offered through the high school" (Ed. 306.27d) that also "requires granting of credits shall be based on a student's demonstration of competencies, as approved by certified educators (Ed. 306.27b).

Competencies are defined as "the expected content, concepts, and skills to be mastered in approved courses, independent study, internship, and online/virtual course." Competency Assessment is "the process by which a student demonstrates sufficient evidence of learning in approved courses, independent study, internship and online/virtual course."

To date, only a handful of New Hampshire High schools have fully implemented course competencies, competency assessments and related policies. In Londonderry, policies that address high school course competencies were first brought to the School Board in June 2007 with adoption on July 24, 2007.

District and high school administration have approached competencies and competency assessments conservatively to ensure that all facets of its planning, development, implementation, and ongoing evaluation into our approved courses are successful.

Introduction

All school districts across New Hampshire continue to make strides towards a heightened sense of accountability with their students. Through a comprehensive and strong five-year district strategic plan, Londonderry High School has remained in the forefront of accountability efforts. Competency and competency assessments are the capstone of other curriculum improvement and program efforts for students. In addition to state requirements, competencies/competency assessments are part of new standards set by the NEASC Commission. As part of our District Strategic Plan efforts, the Londonderry High School staff and administrative team has revised benchmarks to state/national standards and implemented new curriculum programs in the major areas of math, reading, English, science, social studies and foreign language; expanded Project Lead the Way; increased Advanced Placement Offerings; implemented Math Labs, LIFT, World Studies, Adult Education/GED and reading support. Too, the high school has developed through a committee of teachers, students, parents, Board members and members of the Londonderry community a revised mission and student expectations aligned to the district mission for the 2010 NEASC Ten-Year Re-Accreditation process.

Through our competency and competency assessment work as well as the implementation of the new student management system (X2) there has been a continuing focus on the improvement of grading and instructional practice. Throughout development of competencies/competency assessments, teachers have incorporated the basic enduring understandings students need to acquire in the courses they teach. This has led to more meaningful authentic assessments that are part of the curriculum, which in turn has provided greater consistency within the course of study.

What are competencies and competency assessments? What does it mean for LHS students?

Competencies are the expectations (aligned to national/state standards, district benchmarks, and course objectives) of the course. The following are various examples of LHS course competencies:

- The student will apply concepts of motion and force to describe and predict the behavior of objects (CP Physics)
- Students will use the writing process to compose a literary based thesis paper that utilizes correct MLA format including citation, as well as the Five Traits of Writing (American Heritage/Honors)
- Students will identify the appropriate verbs in context and conjugate the verbs in present tense (Spanish IV Honors)
- Students will evaluate a work of modern literature for its relationship to the time period from which it was written (Contemporary Literature)
- Student will identify and compare the key components of the values represented by a culture through its literature through a variety of writing assignments (World Literature)

Competency Assessments are the common tools by which students demonstrate at a minimal level the knowledge of the content, concepts, and skills of the course. These common assessments may take the form of quizzes, tests, essays, written responses, portfolios, labs, projects, and demonstrations.

What is different from current practice in assessing student understanding and what changes will students see in their classes?

Competency assessments are not new to current practice at LHS. Teachers in all departments use various assessments such as quizzes, tests, essays, written responses, and other methods tied to national/state standards, district benchmarks, and course objectives to assess student learning. As a result, students will not see a significant difference in how classroom teachers are assessing their understanding of the content, concepts, and skills of the course.

While quizzes, homework, essays, written responses, and various other methods of assessment will continue to be an integral part of Londonderry High School courses, what will change is that there will be no more than two to four *identified* common competency assessments per semester by which students will be assessed on their basic understanding of the content, concepts, and skills in order to be eligible for course credit.

What has the high school staff done to prepare for the implementation of course competencies? Are course competencies being piloted now? If so, what areas?

The high school has assessed students understanding of our benchmarks and course objectives for several years. We have since passage of new School Approval Standards in 2006, been developing multiple common competency assessments including alternative forms, and common scoring methods. Core departments (English, math, science, social studies, and foreign language) are conducting pilots this year of competency assessments in selected courses.

When is it expected that competency assessments will be fully implemented in all courses?

By the start of the 2010-2011 school year, LHS will have in place common course competencies, competency assessments and common grading methods to score competency assessments in all courses identified in the Program of Studies. Course competencies will be available on the District website at "Quick Links", the LHS website, teacher web pages, and parent portal prior to the start of the 2010-2011 school year as well as in all course syllabi for students.

Will competency assessments affect LHS grading practices? Will competency assessments be factored into course grades? Are there common grading practices? Are competencies common for all sections of courses?

Competency assessments will not change existing LHS grading practices. Competency assessments will be scored as Pass (60% and above) or Fail (59% or below) by common grading methods determined by each department. Student performance on initial assessments of each competency will be factored into the quarter course grades. Students are required to pass all identified common competency assessments in order to be eligible for course credit. The quarter grade is the compilation of all assignments including, but not limited to, competency assessments administered during this portion of the course.

What opportunities do students have in fulfilling all course competency assessment requirements?

Should students fail to meet any one of the course competencies, the student will not earn credit for the course, but will have multiple opportunities during the course to retake alternative forms of the assessment allowing them to pass all the competency assessments. The following is a menu of options for make-up times:

- During class time
- Before School
- After School
- Math Lab/Learning Lab/Study Lab
- Other times arranged with the teacher

Should the student fail to meet any of the course competencies, the student will not earn credit for the course. In such a circumstance (as is the case without required competency assessments), the student would need to repeat the course and pass its competencies in the regular high school program or enroll in alternative education or extended learning opportunities to earn course credit.

Is there a window by which students must retake any failed course competency by? What happens at the end of the year? How will this affect graduating seniors?

Students who fail to successfully complete any course competency(ies) will have a 3 week window which ends the last day of final exams to make-up failed competencies. Regarding semester one failures, the aforementioned in-school options are available. In the case of graduating seniors, we expect makeup opportunities to occur throughout the semester ending with the final day of 'senior week'. If any senior is not graduating and has to make up course competencies to complete all LHS graduation requirements, these students will be able to access summer study through summer school and Extended Learning Opportunities, as pre-approved by the Principal or designee. Staff will not administer competency assessments two weeks prior to the end of Quarters 2 and 4. During Quarters 1 and 3, teachers may administer competency assessments because the student remains in the course.

How will competency assessments affect student eligibility for athletics, music, and other co-curricular areas?

The Londonderry High School Student Handbook states "the student must pass five units of work (i.e., five regularly scheduled half credit classes that meet five days a week) during the previous marking period."

LHS Administration recommends the following additions with regard to competency assessment and its impact on eligibility: Credit acquisition has never been factored into eligibility requirements. Eligibility is strictly based on grades earned for the particular quarter. Since competencies/competency assessments are factored into semester credits, they do not affect the quarter grade which establishes a student's eligibility for a co-curricular activity.

Do competencies change our reporting methods to parents; how course credit is earned; and how transcripts are reported to colleges/universities?

Our reporting methods to parents will be the same. Parents and students can still view their student's grades using the portal. There will be an additional category labeled "Competencies" which will list each identified competency assessment that has been developed in the course and show whether a student has passed or failed it. Course credit is earned through a passing grade (the compilation of all assignments for the semester), and all passed competencies. Transcripts will still be reported to colleges/universities in the same manner. The determination of grades and GPA will remain the same.

What changes is how course credit is earned. It now means, based on the 2006 School Approval Standards, "requiring that granting of credits shall be based on a student's demonstration of competencies as approved by certified school personnel" (Ed. 306.27). In other words, it means that students will need to pass the two to four identified common competency assessments per semester as well as the course in its entirety in order to be eligible to earn credit.

With the implementation of competency assessments in high school courses, transcripts for college/university admissions will be affected *only* if the student does not pass a competency assessment and does not receive credit for the course. On the Londonderry High School Transcript, there will be a designation of an * next to the grade if a student has not met all competencies in the course. In most cases we anticipate that if a student passes the course he/she most likely will have passed the competency assessments. Conversely, if a student fails the course, he/she has probably also failed one or more competency assessments throughout the quarter / semester.

How do the implementation of competencies and competency assessments impact students with educational disabilities and 504? How does it impact the development of student Individual Educational Plans (IEP's) and 504 Plans?

With regard to competency assessments, language in the IEP and/or 504 Plan will include "competency type measures" based on a student's strengths and learning style. Alternative methods of assessment may be necessary to measure a student's understanding of the course competencies depending on nature of disability and IEP and/or 504 Plan. All assessment accommodations / modifications listed in a student's IEP and or 504 Plan will apply to competency assessments.

When is it expected that competencies and competency assessments will be communicated to students and parents?

The School Board has approved ILBA Assessment (amend), ILBAA High School Competency Assessments (amend), IKFB Earning of Credit (new), and IKF High School Graduation (amend), so a series of correspondence will go out to parents through Guidance and Principal's Newsletters. We will have Class Meetings to inform our students of this change in spring 2010 and fall 2010. We will also post this information on our school website, issue press releases, develop a LEO 21 show, and host informational meetings for parents at each grade level on May 6, 2010 and May 13, 2010.

Where will parents be able to access course specific competencies?

Course competencies will be available to parents and the public on the district and high school websites, teacher web pages, and in all course syllabi prior to the start of the 2010-2011 school year.

What board policies do we have in place regarding High School Competency Assessments, Earning of Credit and High School Graduation?

Through our efforts at planning and development of competencies, we have amended IKF High School Graduation, ILBA Assessment and ILBAA High School Competency Assessments. Additionally, policy IKFB Earning of Credit (new) has been adopted. These policies outline the earning of credit, the required subjects, the definition of competencies and mastery of courses, as well as the number of credits for a LHS Diploma, the required subjects and number of credits for a Londonderry Adult Education Diploma, and the alternative credit options.

Londonderry High School Competencies Glossary of Terms:

Approved Courses: Approved courses are defined as any and all courses as described in the LHS *Program of Studies* that is subsequently approved annually by the School Board.

Benchmarks: Benchmarks serve as a standard by which the expected content, concepts, and skills are to be mastered in the content area, course, independent study, internship and online/virtual course.

Common Grading Methods: An established standard of consistent grading in courses as determined by teachers within a given department.

Competencies: The expected content, concepts, and skills to be mastered in approved content, course, independent study, internship, and online/virtual course.

Course Objectives: The expected content, concepts, and skills to be mastered in approved content, course, independent study, internship and online/virtual course.

Competency Assessments: The process by which a student demonstrates sufficient evidence of learning in approved content, courses, independent study, internship and online/virtual course.

Transcript: An official copy of a student's educational record.

Grade Point Average (GPA): The average obtained by dividing the total number of grade points earned by the total number of credits attempted.

Extended Learning Opportunities: Are opportunities of extensions beyond the regular classroom. Examples include: independent study, internship, online/virtual course, adult education courses as approved by the Principal or designee.

Enduring Understandings: The expected content, concepts, and skills that students should know and be able to do in approved content, course, independent study, internship & online/virtual course.

Mastery: A student presenting sufficient evidence of attainment of the required competencies in approved courses, independent study, internship and online/virtual course.

Formative Assessment: A type of assessment that provides ongoing growth, development, practice and reinforcement of the expected content, concepts, and skills to be mastered in an approved content, course, independent study, internship, and online/virtual course. Examples: homework, class work, quizzes, portfolios, projects, tests.

Summative Assessment: A type of assessment that cumulatively measures the expected content, concepts, and skills to be mastered in an approved content, course, independent study, internship, and online/virtual course.