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Background:

Competency Determination (CD) is a state level requirement for high school graduation that ensures students have mastered a core set of skills and knowledge aligned to 10th grade standards. Following the passage of Ballot Question 2 in November of 2024, MCAS can no longer be used for Competency Determination. In February of 2025, the Somerville School Committee passed a temporary CD requirement while we waited for more guidance from the state. In July 2025, DESE shared new guidance. In response, administrators from the District, Somerville High School, and Full Circle have met to develop a new local CD policy based on the guidance. The draft Competency Determination Policy attached for the Committee's review and adoption demonstrates Somerville Public School District's response to the new requirements.

Law Governing This Requirement:

State law requires students to satisfy the requirements of the "competency determination" (CD) in order to graduate from high school. G.L. c. 69, s. 1D (i). In November 2024, Ballot Question 2 amended the competency determination requirements as shown below, where the text that is underlined is newly added; text that is struck through is deleted:

The "competency determination" shall be based on the academic standards and curriculum frameworks for tenth graders in the areas of mathematics, science and technology, history and social science, foreign languages, and English, and shall represent a determination that a particular student has demonstrated mastery of a common core of skills, competencies and knowledge in these areas, ~~as measured by the assessment instruments described in section one I~~ by satisfactorily completing coursework that has been certified by the student's district as showing mastery of the skills, competencies, and knowledge contained in the state academic standards and curriculum frameworks in the areas measured by the MCAS high school tests described in section one I administered in 2023, and in any additional areas determined by the board. Satisfaction of the requirements of the competency determination shall be a condition for high school graduation.

Updates in State Requirements:

There are two state requirements for the local CD:

1. Student must successfully complete required coursework
2. Students must show mastery of the required coursework

The policy must also include:

- The coursework requirements in each of the required subject areas, including the specific courses the district considers applicable for the purposes of the CD;
- The measure(s) the districts will use to determine whether the student has demonstrated mastery in each of the named subject areas;
- Considerations for students with disabilities and English learners;
- Considerations for late-enrolling students;
- A description of the limited instances in which the district may use MCAS scores to determine competency;
- The process by which a student can appeal the district's decision to award or deny a CD; and
- The process by which a current or former student may request a transcript review

DRAFT Competency Determination Policy

The following policy is recommended to comply with the new expectations from DESE and has been developed by SPS staff from Somerville High School, Full Circle, the Multilingual Learner Department, and the Special Education Department.

Overview:

Competency Determination (CD) is a state-level requirement for high school graduation that ensures students have mastered a core set of skills and knowledge aligned with 10th-grade standards. Following the passage of Ballot Question 2 in November 2024, MCAS can no longer be used to determine Competency Determination. While assessments may be used to measure student mastery, it is not the intent of the Somerville Public Schools to create or institute any additional high-stakes testing mechanisms. When possible, various measures should be used to demonstrate mastery.

A determination of competency shall include:

Demonstrating a mastery of skills in English language arts, mathematics, and science; and the satisfactory completion of relevant coursework aligned to the standards measured by the high school English language arts, mathematics, and science MCAS assessments administered in 2023.

An additional requirement for mastery in US History will apply to the graduating class of 2027, and beyond.

A department-approved substituted equivalent course may be used when it is certified by the relevant academic department as meeting the same or higher academic standards as the original required course. For the purposes of this policy, “equivalent courses” refers to courses aligned with the same or higher learning outcomes or standards, including those offered within specialized programs.

General:

To show mastery, a student must successfully complete, in accordance with the District’s grading policy:

1. A final assessment for a course; or
2. A capstone or portfolio project; or
3. An equivalent measure identified by the department as assessing at least half of the standards for a given subject area.

A student enrolled in the Somerville Public Schools will be determined to have satisfactorily completed coursework and earned full credit in accordance with the district’s grading policy and the requirements outlined below:

- Satisfactorily completing coursework shall mean a student earns full credit in a course with a final grade of 60 or higher ~~and by meeting the School Attendance Standard for that course~~. The final grade may be represented on the transcript as a “P” or a letter grade of D- or higher.

English Language Arts:

For English Language Arts, a student must **satisfactorily complete coursework** in the equivalent of two (2) years of high school English language arts courses as follows:

- English 1 and 2
- Or *their equivalent courses*

Beginning with the class of 2028, students will **show mastery** in English Language Arts by:

- Passing a final assessment, capstone project/portfolio, benchmark assessment, or series of benchmark assessments that has been identified by the department as assessing at least half of the standards at or above the grade 9 & 10 level.
- Students who do not show mastery on their first attempt will be given additional opportunities in the same or future courses so they have as many opportunities as possible to demonstrate mastery before ~~their time of~~ they would become eligible for graduation.

Students in the class of 2026 and 2027 will follow the 2025 Competency Determination Policy.

Mathematics:

For Mathematics, a student must **satisfactorily complete coursework** in the equivalent of one (1) year of mathematics courses as follows:

- Algebra 1
- Geometry
- Or *their equivalent courses*

Beginning with the class of 2028, students will **show mastery** in mathematics by:

- Passing a final assessment, capstone project/portfolio, benchmark assessment, or series of benchmark assessments that has been identified by the department as assessing at least half of the standards at or above Algebra 1 & Geometry
- Students who do not show mastery on their first attempt will be given additional opportunities in the same or future courses so they have as many opportunities as possible to demonstrate mastery before ~~their time of~~ they would become eligible for graduation.

Students in the class of 2026 and 2027 will follow the 2025 Competency Determination Policy.

Science:

For Science, a student must **satisfactorily complete coursework** in the equivalent of:

- One (1) year of Biology; or
- One (1) year of Physics; or
- One (1) year of Chemistry; or
- One (1) year of a Technology/Engineering course.
- Or *an equivalent course*

Beginning with the class of 2028, students will **show mastery** in science by:

- Passing a final assessment, capstone project/portfolio, benchmark assessment, or series of benchmark assessments that has been identified by the department as assessing at least half of the standards in one of Biology, Chemistry, Physics, or Technology/Engineering.

- Students who do not show mastery on their first attempt will be given additional opportunities in the same or future courses so they have as many opportunities as possible to demonstrate mastery before ~~their time of they would become eligible for~~ graduation.

Students in the class of 2026 and 2027 will follow the 2025 Competency Determination Policy.

U.S. History:

For U.S. History, beginning with the graduating class of 2027, the student must **satisfactorily complete coursework** in the equivalent of a one (1) year U.S. History course.

Beginning with the class of 2028, students will show mastery in U.S. History by:

- Passing a final assessment, capstone project/portfolio, or benchmark assessment or series of benchmark assessments that has been identified by the department as assessing at least half of the standards in United States History. This includes the AP U.S. History Exam offered by the College Board.
- Students who do not show mastery on their first attempt will be given additional opportunities in the same or future courses so they have as many opportunities as possible to demonstrate mastery before ~~their time of they would become eligible for~~ graduation.

Students in the class of 2027 will follow the 2025 Competency Determination Policy requirements for a US History Course.

Students With Disabilities:

The Somerville Public Schools must provide both a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to students with disabilities and also determine that the student has met Competency Determination and local graduation requirements prior to graduation the student. Discussion of competency determination must be part of the IEP Team's transition planning.

- All content area courses in this policy, including those specifically for students with disabilities, are aligned to the curriculum frameworks and the priority standards for those content areas.
- For students placed in approved out-of-district schools, the District will work collaboratively with the out-of-district placement to confirm that placement is able to provide the student with a program that meets SPS' CD policy requirements.
- A department ~~may also shall~~ develop an alternative method for demonstrating mastery for an individual student ~~if the based on the~~ student's disability and accommodations require this. This alternative method will be in alignment with other measures of mastery and will also assess at least half of the priority standards for the particular subject area at the level defined above in each subject area.
- Students enrolled in specialized programs, including AIM, Life Skills, and SHIP Programs, will engage in coursework aligned to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks through access points that address individualized learning standards. These students may demonstrate mastery through alternative performance-based measures such as portfolio projects, capstone tasks, or applied work-based learning experiences designed to assess proficiency in at least half of the priority standards within each required content area, as appropriate to their instructional level and transition goals.

Multilingual Learners

The Somerville Public Schools will provide the appropriate support so that students who are multilingual learners can access the courses necessary to achieve the Competency Determination in each subject

- Multilingual Learners at the beginning and intermediate levels of English language development may enroll in specially designed (ESL/ SEI/ SLIFE) courses for English, Math, Science and Social Studies. The curriculum of these courses is aligned with the standards of the general education courses, and the courses are equivalent for demonstrating attainment of standards. In these courses, student work is aligned with the standards and is assessed through equitable opportunities to demonstrate attainment with supports appropriate for their WIDA levels.
- Multilingual Learners enrolled in General Education courses for English, Math, Science and Social Studies receive instruction that is appropriate to their language development needs. In these courses, student work is aligned with the standards and is assessed through equitable opportunities to demonstrate attainment with supports appropriate for their WIDA levels.

Late Enrolling Students:

Students who enroll in the Somerville Public Schools after their ninth-grade year may be granted a determination of competency in one or more of the following ways:

- As a part of the registration process for students entering our schools after grade 9, their transcripts and/or report cards will be reviewed. This process will now include reviewing prior courses for alignment with our Competency Determination related coursework. SPS will award components of the CD requirements in a particular subject area based on a students' transcript and/or report card.
- In the limited circumstance where a student enters high school after grade 9 and is unable to provide documentation of their prior coursework, the student may earn the CD by attaining a qualifying score of at least "Meeting Expectations" or "Exceeding Expectations" achievement levels on the relevant high school MCAS assessment; or Meeting the standard for a substituted equivalent that the relevant department certifies satisfies the same academic standards.
- The Principal shall be the arbiter for all disagreements in transcript review. An appeal of the principal's decision may be made to the Superintendent. The Superintendent's decision on transcript reviews as related to CD is final.
- The competency determination review will happen at time of course registration.

Appeals Process:

Students who have not yet met the Competency Determination (CD) requirements will be notified by Oct. 1st of their Junior year.

By February 1, students and their parents/caregivers may submit a written appeal of the CD determination. Appeals must be emailed or in writing to the Principal and should include specific information supporting the basis for the appeal.

Regardless of whether a family submits an appeal, the school team will continue to monitor the progress of all students who have not yet met CD requirements and provide ongoing support to ensure every student has the opportunity to meet graduation standards.

Appeals for Former Students:

Former students who completed local graduation requirements but did not graduate due to Competency Determination may also appeal for diploma consideration under current CD standards.

- Students from prior graduating classes who were denied a diploma solely for not meeting MCAS-based CD requirements may now petition, to the sitting principal, for a diploma.
- Somerville Public Schools will review transcripts to verify successful completion of required coursework and meeting current CD standards
- Verified students will be awarded a diploma consistent with DESE guidance.

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