

# Frequently Asked Questions — *and Answers!*

## 1. How is DPS preparing all students for college and career?

Our goal in DPS is to give our students many opportunities and ways to succeed, so they leave us with **choices** for their futures. Those choices might include attending college, or entering a training program for a specialized career certification, or joining the workforce or the military after graduation.

We want all DPS schools to be focused on preparing students to graduate ready for college and career, which is one of our five goals in the district's strategic plan, the **Denver Plan 2020**.

To ensure students graduate ready to take on what's next for them with their college and career journey, DPS high schools are focused on:

### INTENTIONAL PLANNING

It starts with the ICAP (Individual Career and Academic Plan), which helps students identify and explore their passions. Through developing an ICAP, our students create a personalized plan that helps them decide which courses to take while in high school and puts them on a path toward their future college and career aspirations.

### ACCESS TO HANDS- ON EXPERIENCES AND COLLEGE-LEVEL COURSES

DPS programs are making access to higher education a reality, particularly for underrepresented students, such as first-generation college students, low-income students, students of color and English language learners. In DPS, students have access to programs like Early College, which allows students to simultaneously earn a high school diploma and college degree for free, and the new CareerResidency Youth Apprenticeship Program, which combines traditional high school classroom learning with on-the-job experiences and gives students access to high-opportunity careers in top fields. Each year, thousands of DPS students explore career paths while in high school.

### ESSENTIAL SKILLS

Essential skills are the life skills, professional traits and behaviors we teach our students now, so they can apply them in their future career. These traits include things like how we communicate with others, problem solve and work together as a team.

## RIGOROUS COURSEWORK

By setting high standards in what we teach and expect, students rise to the challenge and are more prepared for education opportunities after high school. We work with our students to make sure they have the reading, writing, math and science skills that they will need to be successful in any path they choose for their future.



In DPS, our students work really hard, and it is important for our students to understand that they have access to tools to make their college and career aspirations within reach.

**By taking advantage of college and career programs, DPS students are more likely to graduate from high school, enroll in college and complete a college degree.**

## 2. Why do we have new graduation requirements beginning with the Class of 2021?

DPS is one of many districts revising its graduation requirements to meet the statewide graduation guidelines approved by the Colorado Board of Education, a decision based on data showing that Colorado students were not consistently prepared to enter college and the workforce after graduation. We knew we had to do better.

Our schools must prepare DPS graduates for college and career — here is why it matters:

**74%**

OF JOBS IN COLORADO WILL REQUIRE TRAINING OR EDUCATION BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL — INCLUDING AN ASSOCIATE OR BACHELOR'S DEGREE, CERTIFICATE OR APPRENTICESHIP — BY THE YEAR 2020

- **In Colorado, 53% of students in two-year colleges and 20% of students in four-year colleges require remedial courses**, which leads to the student incurring additional tuition fees and an increased time to complete their degree, increasing the potential for a student to drop out of college. Our new graduation requirements mirror what is expected from college admissions standards, so students won't need remedial courses and will feel confident and prepared for their futures. In all cases, students should work with their school counselors to make sure they're meeting all requirements.
- When students graduate from a DPS high school, **we want them to leave with choices**, prepared to be successful in any path they choose — whether that's the workforce after graduation, continued training for specialized industry certifications or going to college.
- **In DPS, when we think about college, this can include many different options:** technical colleges that specialize in workforce training (like Emily Griffith Technical College), two-year community colleges (like Community College of Denver), and four-year universities (like Metro State, CU and CSU).

Not only will future jobs require students to be prepared, but getting ready now can save time and money.

### 3. What are the new requirements and how do they fit within daily school work?

Starting with our Class of 2021 (students who are freshmen during the 2017-18 school year), we have new graduation requirements. There are three components:



#### THE ICAP

**Plan your work, and work your plan.** Students begin creating their ICAP (Individual Career and Academic Plan) as early as sixth grade with support from counselors, teachers and parents. An ICAP is a very useful guidance tool in college and career planning, as it helps students identify what they're passionate about, which courses to take to fulfill graduation requirements and what they'll need to do now to be successful in their futures.

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#### COMPLETE REQUIRED COURSEWORK

**As students work through their ICAP goals, they'll pick out classes to take in high school that will help them successfully meet graduation requirements.**

The course requirements for graduation total to 24 units of credit in required areas, all meant to provide each student with a well-rounded education. Generally, you can think of a "unit of credit" as essentially a year; so when we say four units of English Language Arts are needed, think of that as four years, or one for every grade in high school. However, there are exceptions, so you should check with your counselor. Here is how the 24 units of course requirements are broken down by subject area:

- **English Language Arts:** Four units
  - **Math:** Four units
  - **Science:** Three units
  - **Social Studies:** Three units
  - **Physical Education:** One unit
  - **Arts or eligible CTE:** One unit
  - **Approved electives:** Eight units
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#### COMPETENCY DEMONSTRATIONS

**Show what you know in English, math, career.** The "what's new" with our graduation requirements is students now will show a level of understanding in English, math or career readiness through the competency requirement. This requirement helps us make sure our students are absorbing what they've learned, are able to build on their skills and abilities and can apply them to the real world. Each of the options in our competency requirement menu opens the door to a future opportunity for a graduate. We know our students learn in many different ways — some love working on projects, others feel comfortable taking exams, whereas others might look for ways to use their college-level courses — therefore, we have a full menu of ways students can demonstrate competency.

## 4. What will I learn during the ICAP process? How will it help me succeed in high school and prepare for life after high school?

ICAP stands for Individualized Career and Academic Plan, and with our students, we call it their “plan for their future.” We want our students to own this plan and use it as a tool to set goals, learn about college opportunities, decide which classes to take in high school, get educated on financial aid and learn essential skills. **With ICAP, students can:**

### IDENTIFY AND EXPLORE

Through many career exposure opportunities — including career fairs, visits with professionals and interest profiler quizzes — the ICAP helps students identify and explore their passions, a step that is so critical in self-discovery and can be highly motivating.

### REACH GOALS

From there, students dig deeper, and learn about all aspects of college and career as they define and accomplish goals. A goal can be to work hard to pass college-level courses while in high school, to earn debt-free college credit that saves students both time and money. It can also be to combine learning with hands-on work by completing an internship. There are endless dreams, and with ICAP, we build a plan to support students in realizing their dreams.

### CONNECT SCHOOLWORK WITH COLLEGE AND CAREER

ICAPs are the driving force behind any and all college and career opportunities as it helps students see the relevance between the classes they’re taking and what that means for work in the future. Students can take the geometry skills they’re learning in high school and apply them on-the-job at an internship. Professional traits, or essential skills students learn in their classes? Tied to the ICAP. Financial planning and scholarship applications? Also connected to ICAP. Taking Advanced Placement courses that help students get into the college of their dreams? Also connected to ICAP. We encourage our students to invest their time and effort into their personalized ICAP, as it is an investment in themselves.

### BE FREE TO EXPLORE CAREERS

We look at the college and career journey as one that can change often along the way. We want our students to feel empowered to explore what they’re interested in and what they want to pursue. We encourage them to do so because the freedom to explore is what helps students discover what’s really right for them. Our schools help students explore many career opportunities while in high school. In DPS, students can try on a career, and if it doesn’t fit, try on another one. It’s all part of the process of helping students uncover what they’re passionate about while showing them what that can mean in the real world.



**Studies show students who complete an ICAP have a better chance of graduating on time, an increased likelihood for college enrollment and degree completion, and higher test scores and Grade Point Averages (GPAs).**

# 5. What are “essential skills” and how will I be able to develop them while in high school?

Across the state of Colorado, schools are preparing students with the in-demand skills they’ll need to enter the workforce, called “essential skills”. Students will develop essential skills throughout their DPS experience that will serve them well in professional and higher education settings. Upon graduation from DPS, students should be able to demonstrate the following essential skills for college and career readiness:

 <p><b>Entrepreneurial Skills</b></p>	 <p><b>Personal Skills</b></p>	 <p><b>Civic/Interpersonal Skills</b></p>	 <p><b>Professional Skills</b></p>
Critical thinking	Self-awareness	Collaboration	Task and time management
Problem solving	Initiative and self-direction	Teamwork	Career awareness
Creativity and innovation	Personal responsibility	Communication	Information literacy
Inquiry and analysis	Self-management	Global and cultural awareness	Productivity
Risk taking	Adaptability and flexibility	Civic engagement	Accountability
	Perseverance and resilience	Strong character	Self-advocacy
			Leadership

Essential skills are included across all content areas and classes, and are sometimes referred to as 21st century skills or traits of a young professional, depending on the classes students take.

# 6. What does it mean to demonstrate competency?

Demonstrating competency, whether through coursework or assessments, means being able to show that you’ve learned certain skills, abilities and concepts, and that you are able to apply them academically and in the real world. This is an important skill in order to compete and be successful in today’s economy.

In order to graduate from DPS, every student will demonstrate competency in English, math or career readiness by completing one or more items in our competency menu.

## 7. What are my options for fulfilling the competency demonstration requirement?

Our competency menu was developed by looking at all of the different ways students learn and grow. Therefore, there are many options for students to choose from in completing this requirement, from earning a C- or better in a concurrent enrollment college-level class to completing a portfolio.



How one student proves they're ready for what's next may not be the way another student shows it, and that's okay. To review the menu, visit [collegeandcareer.dpsk12.org/competency-menu/](https://collegeandcareer.dpsk12.org/competency-menu/).

We encourage our students to complete as many of the options as possible so that they are prepared for a variety of opportunities after graduation. It's also important that students understand which of the many options most closely align with their future goals. In general, the college readiness measures like ACT, SAT and Accuplacer are aligned to the standards set by Colorado colleges and universities; however, each college or university may have unique admissions standards, so it's important for students and families to work with school counselors and other school staff to understand individual requirements.

We want families to be informed of all college and career opportunities. For additional questions about each option, see your counselor, teacher or school leader.

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## 8. Are supports available for English Language Learners and newcomers?

Yes. As a district, we have sharpened our focus on equity to ensure every student we serve, regardless of native language, is supported to achieve at the highest levels.

DPS is working to develop resources and partnerships to ensure that students in all schools have multiple ways to meet the new requirements and demonstrate learning. Students and families should leverage the ICAP as the foundational tool to explore opportunities and identify ways to demonstrate readiness in at least one measure in English and math, or to demonstrate career readiness if a student is focused on workforce readiness.

English Learners make up one-third of all students at DPS and we celebrate our diversity. Our ELs and Newcomers (students new to the U.S. with limited or interrupted education and minimal literacy skills) will be provided with ELA program services. Historically, ELs who successfully complete the ELA program services have had higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates than all other DPS students. Spanish-speaking students who receive instruction in Spanish while building their English proficiency are more likely to remain on track to graduate. Depending on a student's English proficiency level, they may need more time to complete the graduation requirements. In those cases, we can increase the path to graduate to a fifth or sixth year, as long as the student is under the age of 21.

## 9. Are supports available for students with disabilities?

**Yes.** All of our students deserve access to educational opportunities that allow them to achieve at the highest levels. As part of our equity core value, we believe all students can graduate from high school ready for college and career. We support each learner’s individual needs in meeting graduation requirements, and invite you to review our [Graduation Guidance for Students with Disabilities](#) document, where you can learn about accommodations available to make the three graduation requirements accessible to all students.

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## 10. If I attend a charter school, do the new graduation requirements apply to me?

**Yes.** All schools — district-run and charters — must adhere to the new requirements to ensure all students have equitable chances at college and career success. Some charters have modified graduation requirements, so students should check with individual schools on any specific requirements they have for graduation.

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## 11. Do I have to graduate high school in four years?

**No.** In some cases, students may need or want more time, and that’s okay. Students can stay at DPS until they are 21-years-old. Additionally, DPS offers many programs that offer free college courses and the CareerResidency apprenticeship program after the fourth year of high school.

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## 12. How can I make sure I’m on track to graduate on time?

There are many ways families can ensure students meet the rigorous graduation requirements and graduate on time:

### **ATTEND SCHOOL REGULARLY**

When students attend school every day and on time, they are much more likely to be on track academically. When absences add up, students miss valuable lessons and the opportunity to practice. Studies from across the country show that students who have poor attendance are more likely to fall behind in school. Schedule appointments during afterhours and non-school days.

### **KEEP PACE WITH YOUR ICAP**

Much research has been done to show what a helpful guidance tool the ICAP is; make sure you are using it to your advantage. The plan is rooted in what you need to graduate from a DPS school and to be successful after you graduate. Students should work with adults — counselors, teachers and parents — to maintain and complete their plan.

## PROFICIENCY MATTERS

New skills are built upon skills previously learned, which means being able to read, write and do math at grade level is critical to academic growth and development. By having a thorough understanding of grade-level content, students are ready for the challenges that come with moving forward to the next grade. Families can measure assessments and proficiency levels on the parent portal, and have conversations with teachers to discuss progress.

## IF YOU FALL BEHIND, LOOK INTO RECOVERY OPTIONS

We realize things happen in life, and we offer many supports through our schools, including credit recovery classes and summer learning opportunities to get students back on track academically.

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## 13. Whom should I contact if I have a specific question?

As a partner in each student's education, DPS is profoundly invested in not only getting students to the graduation stage but also with setting them up for success after they graduate. Please **talk to your counselors, teachers and school leaders** for additional questions, and visit [collegeandcareer.dpsk12.org](https://collegeandcareer.dpsk12.org) for the latest news and guidance.