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State of Iowa  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION  
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MINIMUM CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS FOR APPROVAL  
OF IOWA ELEMENTARY AND  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS

AND

CURRICULUM REQUIRED BY LAW IN  
IOWA SCHOOLS

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State of Iowa  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION  
Des Moines

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## FOREWORD

The Iowa State Department of Public Instruction receives frequent requests for information about the minimum curriculum that the law requires for approval of Iowa's schools. This circular has been developed to give such information in handy form. While official publications containing the school laws also contain this information, they are available in such limited quantities that (aside from the chief administrator to whom they are supplied) members of school staffs such as principals, curriculum committees, and individual teachers and citizens in general do not always have immediate access to them.

This circular is entitled "Minimum Curriculum Requirements for Approval of Iowa Elementary and Secondary Schools and Curriculum Required by Law in Iowa Schools." Those who wish to study the "original sources" upon which the contents of this informal circular are based are directed to them by the footnotes and other citations included herein.

PART ONE  
REVIEW OF MINIMUM CURRICULUM MANDATED  
BY LAW AND RELATED PROVISIONS

I. Introduction

It is commonly understood that education is a state function. This means that the state constitution and the laws made by the legislature are supreme in matters relating to public education. Reference and practice of long standing adhere to the principle that it is wise to delegate primary responsibility and control of schools to local school districts and their elected boards of education. However, every state has retained certain powers over its schools. Among these powers is that of mandating the minimum curriculum to be offered, and specifying those parts of it which pupils are required to follow.

Iowa has provided greater central control of the curriculum within the past few years. This broadened control of the curriculum was instituted in 1965 by the 61st General Assembly and continued with minor changes by subsequent sessions in 1967 and 1969. Prior to 1967 there had existed certain minimum curriculum requirements of the type common to most states: required offerings in the so-called "common branches" and required courses in areas such as health and physical education, citizenship, U. S. history, and American government.

This circular reviews the mandated requirements that approved schools from nursery school through high school must meet.

II. Curriculum Requirements for a  
School Level

Nursery School

The law does not require that public nursery schools shall be operated; in fact, aside from some reference to children under five years

of age requiring special education (SLI, p. 126, 281.2)<sup>1</sup>, the law is silent on the matter. Nevertheless, in possible anticipation of further legal authorization in the future, the law does state that "they shall be designed to help children use and manage their bodies, extend their interests and understanding of the world about them, work and play with others, and to express themselves." (SSLI, p. 34, 257.25, par. 2)<sup>2</sup>

#### Kindergarten

Legal provision exists for the establishment of kindergartens. (SLI, p. 119, 280.16) "Kindergarten programs shall include experiences designed to develop emotional and social living, protection and development of physical being, growth in expression, and language arts and communication readiness." (SSLI, p. 34, 257.25, par. 2)

Special education services. In May 1969, the Iowa General Assembly added the following subsection to section 257.25: "Provision for special education services and programs, which may be shared by public schools, shall be made for children requiring special education, who are or would otherwise be enrolled in kindergarten through grade eight of such schools."

NOTE: Senate File 1293

Section 1. Section two hundred fifty-seven point twenty-six (257.26), Code 1966, is hereby amended by adding thereto the following: "School districts and

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<sup>1</sup>This reference should be read School Laws of Iowa (1966), page 126, section 281.2. The shortened citation is used throughout this circular.

<sup>2</sup>This reference should be read Supplement to School Laws of Iowa (1967), page 34, section 257.25, paragraph 2. The shortened method of citation is used throughout this circular.

county school systems may when available make special education services and materials enumerated in this chapter available to pupils attending nonpublic schools in the same manner and to the same extent that they are provided to public school students in the school district or county."<sup>3</sup>

#### Elementary School--Grades One Through Six

When the term "elementary school" is used in Iowa, it may refer to either of two grade arrangements, each including kindergarten, if operated: grades one through eight, or grades one through six when grades seven and eight are included in a secondary school. (See SSLI, APPENDIX, I-3, standard 3.2(3), for a definition of the elementary school.) In either arrangement, the law (SSLI, p. 35, 257.25, par. 3) clearly lists those areas which shall be taught within grades one through six. They appear below in alphabetical order for quick identification:

- Art
- Health and physical education, including the effects of alcohol, narcotics, and poisons on the human body
- Language arts, including:
  - English, oral and written
  - Handwriting
  - Literature
  - Reading
  - Spelling
- Mathematics
- Music
- Science, including conservation of natural resources
- Social studies, including:
  - American citizenship, including the elementary study of national, state, and local government in the United States

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<sup>3</sup>Change made by the Second Session of the Sixty-third General Assembly of the State of Iowa (1970).

Cultures of other peoples and nations  
Geography  
History of the United States and Iowa  
Special education services (See page 2.)

Sections of law enacted prior to the one already cited in the preceding paragraph with reference to the elementary school (SLI, p. 118-119, sections 280.3, 280.6, 280.10, 280.12, 280.13, and 280.14) specify what shall be taught in both elementary and secondary schools. These legal requirements (which are still in effect, but not in essential conflict with those adopted in 1965 and since) are listed below in alphabetical order:

American citizenship  
American government, principles of  
Arithmetic  
Geography  
Grammar  
History of Iowa  
Music  
Physical education (more than one period and not less than a total of 50 minutes)  
Physiology and hygiene, "which study in every division of the subject shall include the effects upon the human system of alcoholic stimulants, narcotics, and poisonous substances."  
NOTE: The law, section 280.10, in addition to the stipulation just quoted specifies that the board of education "shall require all teachers to give and all scholars to receive instruction in" this area. It becomes still more specific as follows: "The instruction in this branch shall of its kind be as direct and specific as that given in other essential branches, and each scholar shall be required to complete the part of such study in his class or grade before being advanced to the next higher, and before being credited with having completed the study of the subject."  
Reading  
Spelling  
United States history  
Writing

Certain elements of flexibility are left to the curriculum makers even when faced with this rather formidable list of specific requirements. For example, no mention of specific grades within the six-grade span is made, and no strict time allotments are set out.

### Grade Seven and Eight

The list (SSLI, p. 35, 257.25, par. 4; and SLI, p. 118, 280.7; p. 119, 280.10) of what shall be taught in grades seven and eight as a minimum program (except for the fact that instruction in the constitution of the United States and the constitution of the State of Iowa shall begin not later than the opening of the eighth grade. . .) follows:

#### Art

Constitution of the United States and constitution  
of the State of Iowa

Language arts, which may include:

Composition, oral and written

Grammar

Other communication subjects

Spelling

Mathematics

Music

Physical education (more than one period and not less than  
a total of 50 minutes)

Physiology and hygiene (see details on page 3 under  
the heading "Elementary School--Grades One Through  
Six")

Reading

Science

Social studies

Special education (See page 2.)

Here, again, curriculum makers will see that fairly broad opportunities for "decision making" at the local level exist within the framework of these legally-prescribed minimums.

### Junior High School

The law lists no subjects under the title, junior high school. But it does state that when grades seven and eight are contained in an organized and administered junior high school, the same minimum program legally specified for these two grades must be included. In fact, the minimum program specified to be taught in grades seven and eight applies to these grades "regardless of the organizational structure of the school districts." (SSLI, p. 35, 257.25, par. 5)



Certain school systems in the state have organized their schools in such a manner as to include grades six, seven, eight, and nine. Nationally, schools can be found with each of the following grade combinations: 4 through 8, 5 through 8, 6 through 8, 6 through 9, and even 6 through 10. The term commonly used to designate this type of school organization is the "middle school." In such a school the legal curriculum offerings mandated for each grade level included (grades one through six, grades seven and eight, and grades nine through twelve--where applicable) must be adhered to.

#### High School--Grades Nine Through Twelve

Units or courses that must be taught annually. With the exception of physics and chemistry, which may be taught in alternate years, the minimum program mandated for a high school grades nine through twelve, must be taught annually. The law defines a unit as consisting "of one academic year instruction in the subject" (SSLI, pp. 34-35, 257.25, par. 6h). As indicated below, not all subjects must be taught as full units. Furthermore, courses in fine arts which clearly must be offered are not designated in the law as units.

The following list of required offerings has been arranged in alphabetical order:

- Driver education
- English, including language arts (four units)
- Fine arts, courses in, including as options, but with the units or fractions thereof not specified:
  - Art
  - Dramatics
  - Music

Foreign language (two units)

"However, the units of foreign language may be taught in alternate years, provided there is no break in the progression of instruction from one year to the next."<sup>4</sup>

Mathematics (five units)

General mathematics (one unit)

Sequential mathematics (four units)

Physical education (one unit with one-eighth unit each semester required of each pupil)

", except that any pupil participating in an organized and supervised high school athletic program which requires at least as much time of participation per week as such one-eighth unit may be excused from the physical education course during the time of his participation in such athletic program".<sup>5</sup>

Practical arts (five units), which may include these subjects:

Agriculture

Business education (including commercial typewriting)

Distributive education

Health occupations

Homemaking

Industrial arts

Science (four units)

Chemistry

Physics

NOTE: The units of physics and chemistry may be taught in alternate years. However, four units in science must be available to pupils annually.

Social studies (four units)

American government

American history

Economics

NOTE: The law permits a considerable degree of flexibility in social studies offerings. It states, "Instruction in American history, American government, and economics shall be included in said units but need not be required as full units." (SSLI, p. 35, 257.25, par. 6b)

However, this requirement must be read in connection with section 280.8 (School Laws of Iowa) which requires all high schools to offer and all students to take, "a minimum of instruction in American history and civics of the state and nation to the extent of two semesters, and schools . . . shall offer in addition one semester in social problems and economics."

Social problems may be a part of or combined with economics. Note that American history and American

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<sup>4</sup>Change made by the Second Session of the Sixty-third General Assembly of the State of Iowa (1970).

<sup>5</sup>Change made by the Second Session of the Sixty-third General Assembly of the State of Iowa (1970).

government must be taken by all students as a requirement for graduation. Economics (and social problems) must be offered for at least one semester but may be elective.

NOTE: The above is effective until July 1, 1972. After July 1, 1972, the following is effective:

"All schools offering instruction in grades nine through twelve shall offer, and all students shall be required to take, a minimum of two semesters of American history which shall include the history and contributions of minority racial and ethnic groups, and one semester of the governments of Iowa and the United States, as part of the requirement for graduation. In addition, such schools shall offer, as an elective course, at least one semester in social problems or economics, or a combination thereof."<sup>6</sup>

Special education services

III. Schools That Are Exempted from Curriculum Requirements of Section 257.25 of the School Laws

Schools on special approved list of private college preparatory schools. There are legal provisions (SSLI, p. 39, 257.25, par. 13) under which a private high school or a private combined junior-senior high school operated for the express purpose of preparing its graduates for entrance to accredited colleges or universities are exempted from teaching the minimum program specified in section 257.25, paragraphs 6 and 7 of the school laws. Private schools meeting these specified legal provisions "shall be placed on a special approved list of college preparatory schools...."

Exception for Amish. A section of the law (SSLI, pp. 67-68, 299.24) provides that, under certain specified conditions, members of the local congregation of a recognized church or religious denomination may be exempted from standards set forth in section 257.25 of the school law.

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<sup>6</sup>Change made by the Second Session of the Sixty-third General Assembly of the State of Iowa (1970).

PART TWO

CURRICULUM REQUIRED BY LAW IN IOWA SCHOOLS

All subjects required by law are listed below. The section following each subject or group of subjects indicates the section in which the requirements may be found in the School Laws of Iowa. Notes are appended when necessary to make requirements understood.

It should be noted that Part Two of this publication refers only to those subjects, in addition to those required by local rule, students are required by law to take in Iowa schools and does not cover the entire list of subjects required for school approval in Iowa. School approval requirements are set forth in Section 257.25 of the School Laws of Iowa.

SPECIAL EDUCATION REQUIRED

"The board in each school district shall make provision whereby special education services are made available to all handicapped pupils enrolled in kindergarten and all grades of its schools. Programs offered under this section shall comply with rules and standards promulgated by the state board of public instruction and shall be subject to approval and reimbursement of excess costs as provided in chapter 281. Programs offered under this section may be carried on by cooperative arrangements between districts and county boards of education as provided by chapter 281." Section 280.21

COMMON SCHOOL STUDIES

"Reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, grammar, geography, physiology, United States history, history of Iowa, and the principles of American government shall be taught in all such schools." Section 280.3

Common school refers to the elementary grades.

AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP

"Each public and private school located within the state shall be required to teach the subject of American citizenship in all grades." Section 280.6

All grades in this section refers to grades one through twelve inclusive. This does not mean that a textbook must be used for this instruction. Every lesson can and should be a lesson in citizenship.

CONSTITUTION OF UNITED STATES AND STATE

"In all public and private schools located within the state there shall be given regular courses of instruction in the constitution of the United States and in the constitution of the state of Iowa. Such instruction shall begin not later than the opening of the eighth grade, and shall continue in the high school course to an extent to be determined by the superintendent of public instruction." Section 280.7

NOTE: To date the Superintendent of Public Instruction has not declared any specific requirement.

AMERICAN HISTORY AND CIVICS

"Public and private high schools, academies, and other institutions ranking as secondary schools which maintain three-year or longer courses of instruction shall offer, and all students shall be required to take, a minimum of instruction in American history and civics of the state and nation to the extent of two semesters, and schools of this class which have four-year or longer courses shall offer, in addition one semester in social problems and economics." Section 280.8

NOTE: Section 1. Section two hundred eighty point eight (280.8), Code 1966, is hereby repealed and the following enacted in lieu thereof:

"All schools offering instruction in grades nine through twelve shall offer, and all students shall be required to take, a minimum of two semesters of American history which shall include the history and contributions of minority racial and ethnic groups, and one semester of the governments of Iowa and the United States, as part of the requirement for graduation. In addition, such schools shall offer, as an elective course, at least one semester in social problems or economics, or a combination thereof."

(This Act shall be effective July 1, 1972.)

STIMULANTS, NARCOTICS, AND POISONS

"The board shall require all teachers to give and all scholars to receive instruction in physiology and hygiene, which study in every division of the subject shall include the effects upon the human system of alcoholic stimulants, narcotics, and poisonous

substances. The instruction in this branch shall of its kind be as direct and specific as that given in other essential branches, and each scholar shall be required to complete the part of such study in his class or grade before being advanced to the next higher, and before being credited with having completed the study of the subject." Section 280.10

The law clearly intends to have such teaching emphasized. In earlier grades it is taught in general lessons and with the textbook instruction in those grades where textbooks are used.

#### PHYSICAL EDUCATION

"The teaching of physical education exclusive of interscholastic athletics,<sup>7</sup> including effective health supervision and health instruction, of both sexes, shall be required in every public elementary and secondary school of the state. Modified courses of instruction shall be provided for those pupils physically or mentally unable to take the courses provided for normal children. Said subject shall be taught in the manner prescribed by the state superintendent of public instruction." Section 280.13

#### LENGTH OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION COURSE

"The course of physical education shall occupy periods each week totaling not less than fifty minutes, exclusive of recesses, throughout each school term. The conduct and attainment of the pupils in such course shall be marked as in other

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<sup>7</sup>NOTE: Change made by the Second Session of the Sixty-third General Assembly of Iowa (1970): "except that any pupil participating in an organized and supervised high school athletic program which requires at least as much time of participation per week as such one-eighth unit may be excused from the physical education course during the time of his participation in such athletic program."

subjects and it shall form part of the requirements for promotion or graduation of every pupil in attendance, but no pupil shall be required to take such instruction whose parents or guardian shall file a written statement with the school principal or teacher that such course conflicts with his religious belief." Section 280.14

The Department of Public Instruction urges the use of more time for physical education than the law requires.



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