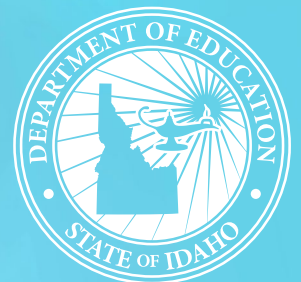




IDAHO'S Education Flexibility Guide

OPPORTUNITIES FOR
Student-Centered
Design



Disclaimer

This is not a legal document and is not to be relied on as such. Neither the list of areas of flexibility nor information summarizing legislative mandates and administrative rules is exhaustive. The information provided should also not be considered a complete synopsis of the state's requirements or a district's obligations. Passages quoted from the legislative and administrative codes reflect text made available through the website of the Idaho Legislature as of May 2022. Please consult official versions of source documents for current requirements.

Introduction

Student-centered, individualized learning sounds like a great idea, right? So ... how do you go about it?

This Flexibility Guide is designed to inspire and help teachers, principals and district and charter administrators to explore and embrace this approach in ways that best meet local needs. Student-centered education is, in a word, flexible.

Idaho has a proud history of collaborative efforts focused on empowering local control and flexibility for schools, communities, educators, and students. The 2013 Governor's Task Force for Improving Education made 20 recommendations, including a call to implement a system in which students advance based on mastery of content instead of seat time. In early 2015 – not long after I took office as Superintendent of Public Instruction – the Idaho Legislature endorsed the task force recommendation.

As a longtime Idaho teacher, I was thrilled to embrace an approach that was both innovative and logical: basing a student's progress on what they've learned and how they can best learn it.

Students love the flexible, personalized approach of mastery-based education, which focuses on measurable learning objectives that empower them as they develop skills and knowledge. And Idaho is now recognized as a national leader in student-centered learning. Our Mastery Education Network has provided grants and technical support to more than 100 schools and districts, not to mention the many that have embraced the approach without formally joining the network.

Other recommendations of the governor's task force also were eagerly implemented by me and my department, greatly improving the flexibility and success of Idaho education.

Our Advanced Opportunities program gives students a jump-start on college and career, and it evens the playing field between families of all income levels by providing \$4,125 for each student in Idaho's middle and high schools to use for dual enrollment in college courses. The funds also can be used to cover overload courses, advanced placement exams and work force training. This program has drawn national acclaim and saved millions of dollars for Idaho families. And, not surprisingly, it is hugely popular with students, many of whom earn associate's degrees by the time they finish high school.

And, by reducing red tape and increasing the flexibility of education laws and rules, we have given local districts more autonomy to adapt to local needs and conditions. This drives continuous improvement by enabling our schools to be more innovative.

With dedicated leaders and innovators like you, the ability of Idaho schools and students to excel is tremendous.

This guide is designed to highlight available education flexibilities and empower districts, schools and teachers to create the best education environment for each Idaho student. As you read it, consider the factors that have limited or blocked your vision of how to best serve students and use this guide to expand and support your efforts.

Please read on, explore and enjoy!

Sherri A. Ybarra, Ed.S.

Superintendent of Public Instruction

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About This Guide

Across the country, states have been working to bring up to date aspects of their public education systems that remain anchored in early 20th century design principles, such as age-based progression, and policies that use a student's "seat time" rather than demonstration of mastery as the key to awarding course or unit credit. Often the approach taken is to create "work-arounds" in the form of statutory- or regulatory-authorized exceptions to rules or permission for school districts to seek a waiver of a state requirement that restricts efforts to innovate or otherwise improve instruction and student outcomes.

By contrast, Idaho's state level policymakers and education leaders have taken a different, multi-faceted approach and arrived at a uniquely Idahoan solution to some of today's most pressing challenges.



Public K-12 districts and schools have access to a set of tools that create room for both educators and the students they serve to be instigators of student-centered innovation opportunities.

1. Student and Family Driven Opportunities

Idaho empowers students and their families to choose educational options and pathways that are most appropriate for each individual learner's preparation for college, career, and life.

2. District and School Flexibility

Idaho enables and encourages educators and administrators to innovate toward the establishment of student-centered education systems that create opportunities for all students and are responsive to the needs and learning preferences of students, while maintaining focus on equity and quality across all learning experiences.

The real promise of Idaho's student-centered learning approach is that, in addition to being instigators (or initiators of) student-centered opportunities, both central stakeholder groups — students and their families; district and school staff, as well as other stakeholders and community partners, are encouraged to be collaborators on student-centered opportunities. Only through such partnerships can schools build a *student-centered education system that creates opportunities for all Idahoans to improve their quality of life*. This is the vision of the State Board of Education, as well as that of students and their families, of public school educators and administrators, and of other members of every community in the state.

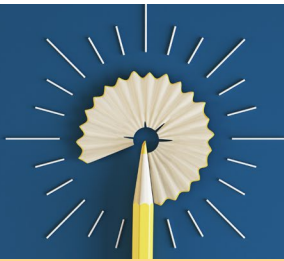
Throughout this guide, the following references are used frequently:

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Idaho's Vision for a Student-Centered Education System

Nearly a decade ago, the Idaho Legislature established student-centered learning as an imperative. In doing so, legislators found that:

- Moving toward mastery-based education where students progress as they demonstrate mastery of a subject or grade level is in the best interest of Idaho students; and
- Moving from the current time-based system to a mastery-based approach will allow for more personalized and differentiated learning; create a focus on explicit, measurable, transferable learning objectives that empower students; and emphasize competencies that include application and knowledge along with skill development.¹



Vision and Goals of the Idaho State Board of Education

(Idaho State Board of Education. Board Mission and Strategic Plan — 2023-2028)

Vision: A student-centered education system that creates opportunities for all Idahoans to improve their quality of life.

Goal 1: Educational System Alignment (systemness) — *Ensure that all components of the educational system are integrated and coordinated to maximize opportunities for all students.*

Goal 2: Educational Readiness (student-centered) — *Provide a rigorous, uniform, and thorough education that empowers students to be lifelong learners and prepares all students to fully participate in their community and postsecondary and workforce opportunities by assuring they are ready to learn at the next educational level.*

Goal 3: Educational Attainment (opportunity) — *Idaho's public colleges and universities and career technical education programs fuel a strong workforce pipeline evidenced through a greater number of students completing certificates and/or degrees, including workforce credentials.*

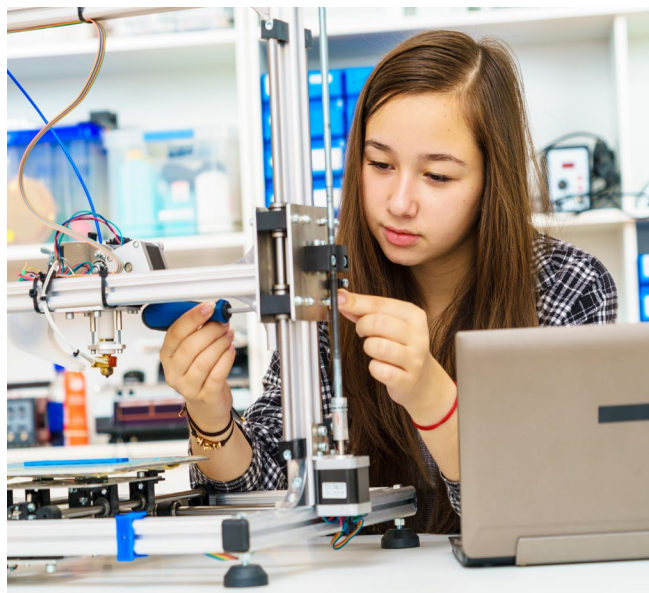
Goal 4: Workforce Readiness (opportunity) — *The educational system will provide an individualized environment that facilitates the creation of practical and theoretical knowledge leading to college and career readiness.*

Policymakers and the SDE are working to realize this vision — through passing student-centered policies, creating resources to guide and support local action, administering programs so schools can enable more choices for students and their families, and allowing students to define their own pathway and access state funding to expand learning opportunities, and implementing other strategies.

WHAT'S SO DIFFERENT ABOUT STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING?

Student-centered learning leverages student interest and customized support to boost engagement, improve achievement, and empower lifelong learning.

- From the perspective of students and their families, student-centered learning expands opportunities for learners to explore their interests and select learning environments that meet their needs, both in and outside of the classroom. These choices often extend to the combination of learning activities and experiences a student completes to earn credits, progress to the next level of learning, and graduate from high school, and even the ways in which a student demonstrates mastery of academic concepts and skills, as well as the pace of work in each area of study. Students who need more time in a given area are also given more support. Students who are ready to advance to the next grade or level can do so without regard to their age or the amount of time they have spent in a given grade.
- From the school and district perspective, as well as that of their community-based partners, building, administering, and continuously improving a student-centered education system involves supporting a variety of approaches and high-quality learning models, many anchored in policies which allow students to move ahead — to the next concept, course, or grade — once they have demonstrated mastery of academic content and related skills.



From both perspectives, enabling individualized learning plans and pathways is a strategy that can be used to make sure each learner has high-quality learning opportunities to choose from, guidance in navigating (and even designing) the best choices, and ongoing support toward success.

EXPANDING OPTIONS FOR ALL IDAHO STUDENTS THROUGH MASTERY-BASED EDUCATION

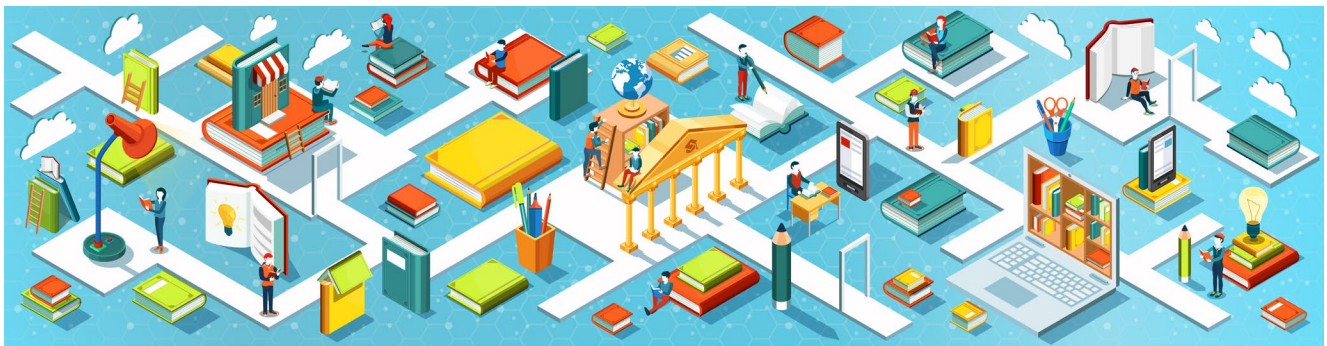
“Mastery-based education” means an education system where student progress is based on a student’s demonstration of mastery of competencies and content, not seat time or the age or grade level of the student.” [Idaho Statute 33-1632](#)

In Idaho, as in a growing number of states, mastery-based education is opening doors to collaboration between students, their families, community partners, and educators regarding the design and use of new learning experiences and other opportunities that significantly expand student engagement. New flexibility and support for schools and students, including student progression on demonstration of mastery (not completion of a fixed number of course hours), and the clarity of expectations created by college and career ready competencies, are fueling the growth of mastery-based education. (See section on p. 11 for more in depth information.)

COLLABORATION IN THE DESIGN OF STUDENT-CENTERED EDUCATION

Designing a student-centered education system requires extensive collaboration.

- Students must have and exercise their voices as the primary participants in the system, with family, school, and community support.
- Schools must leverage a wide range of policy priorities, strategies, funding streams, professional learning opportunities, external partnerships, and more, to create and/or support the opportunities students need.
- Community partners, including higher education providers, businesses, industries, and civic organizations, must help shape, and even provide, opportunities for students including work-based learning, extended learning, and other advanced learning.



Student and Family Driven Opportunities

OPPORTUNITIES STUDENTS CAN LEVERAGE

Idaho has made great strides to ensure that there are an array of opportunities in place that can be leveraged by students, particularly from the middle grades and beyond, to individualize a learning experience that meets their unique interests and needs. They include the following:

Choices in Learning Opportunities

The Department of Education's School Choice department supports high-quality educational choices for Idaho families and students, including the option for a student to enroll in a public school other than the one they would otherwise be expected to attend. Also known as Open Enrollment, this broad authorization of school choice was established by the state legislature, and allows a student to select from a range of options such as a charter school, magnet school, or alternative school or program.²

Other types of learning opportunities available to students include:

- **Blended/Online Learning** — A student may participate in blended and online programs that meet state-defined quality standards established for online programs. These programs may include college level online courses and supplemental online education courses offered to high school students by their school districts.
- **Advanced Opportunities Program** — this college and career acceleration program provides \$4,125 on behalf of students in grades 7-12, to use towards overload courses, dual credit, workforce training, certification exams, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs.
- **Extended Learning** — students have the opportunity to request credit for approved extended learning opportunities that take place outside of the classroom.

In addition to these options, if there is sufficient interest, a group of students (equal to or greater than the average class size in the school) may enter into **Innovative Classroom Agreements** with school districts to establish an innovation classroom which will provide students with an alternative curriculum as defined and approved by the local education agency.

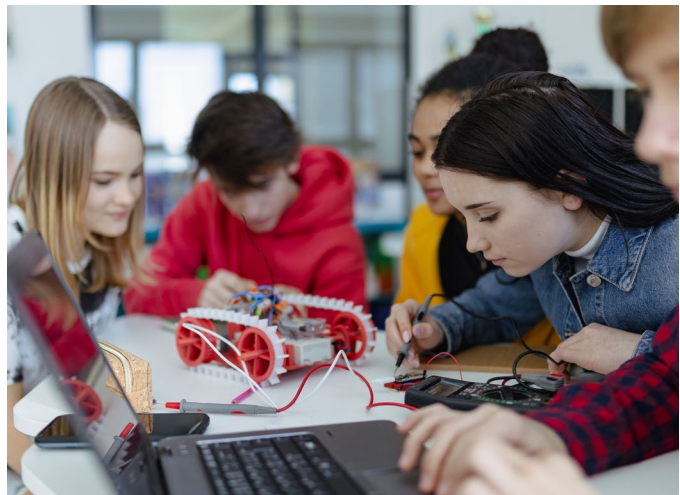


Alternatives for Earning Course Credit

- **Alternatives to the Middle Level Credit System** — schools may offer students the opportunity to demonstrate proficiency of the appropriate content standards to be eligible for grade level promotion.
- **High School Credits Earned in Middle School or Junior High** — students may earn high school credit when in middle school or junior high, provided the students completes the course with a grade of C or better, the course meets the same content standards as those required in high school, and the course is taught by a properly certified educator.
- **Mastery-Based Alternatives for High School Credit Accumulation** — students may demonstrate content mastery to earn high school credits rather than completing course hours.

Flexibility and Incentives to Support Student Choices

- **Dual Enrollment** — state statute allows non-public students and public charter school students to enroll part time in any public school, including another public charter school. Dual Enrollment also creates options for all students, including:
 - » a student may be jointly enrolled in a regular public school and an alternative public school program; and
 - » a student may have credits earned from an accredited postsecondary institution counted toward the state's high school graduation requirements.
- **Flexible Schedules** — students who are at least 16 years of age, maintain a specified grade point average, receive parental permission, achieve a college and career readiness score, and meet other enumerated requirements may be relieved from completing certain high school graduation requirements, thus allowing the student flexibility to take other elective courses or participate in apprenticeships or internships, among other activities.
- **Advanced Opportunities Early Graduation Scholarship** — these scholarships, totaling approximately \$2,000 for every year that is skipped, are available to students who graduate early from high school.



These opportunities provide flexibility for personalization in the development of a career pathway plan. A student who seeks and achieves designation as a Self-Directed Learner (as described in greater detail on p. 10), is given a number of options to support a learning plan, including flexible attendance, which may include virtual attendance).

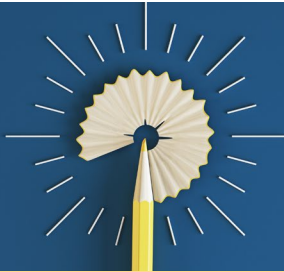
PERSONALIZATION THROUGH CAREER PATHWAY PLANS

A student's career pathway plan, which is used to guide learning toward a career pathway and secondary success, is required by law to be developed in collaboration with students, parents or guardians, for all students in grade 8 or above. Similar to an Individualized Education Plan, required for a student with disabilities, each student's learning plan must be reviewed annually and updated as needed.³

A plan must:

- Consider and address, as appropriate, the student's plans for high school and post-high school options.
- Outline a student's program of study and learning activities, aligned to post-graduate goals, that:
 - » will allow the student to meet state and district graduation requirements and "become contributing members of society"; and
 - » include a "rigorous academic core and a related sequence of electives in academic, career technical education, or humanities."⁴
- Be parent-approved (the school district must make a good faith effort to notify the parent or guardian of the responsibility for plan development and approval).

Any of the opportunities described above may be included in the plan. In addition, the plan may also be used to support a student's Self Directed Learner designation.⁵



Resource to Support Development of a Career Pathway Plan

[Next Steps Idaho](#) provides guidance on these plans, including that the pathway plan process is to begin with a career cluster interest survey, which explains what education requirements are needed for each career cluster, as well as the potential pay and growth opportunities that are available for each cluster.

- Next Steps Idaho encourages students to focus on how they learn through the [learning styles survey](#). This process also asks students to consider how they envision their own future and their ideal lifestyle and, through an activity tracker, the state encourages students to engage in experiential learning. Additional topics covered include making real-world connections, plans after high school, and achieving student goals.⁶
- Through this planning process, students have flexibility to personalize their own education and career pathways. For example, some students are able to use the Idaho Career Information System to create their required career learning plans.⁷ The career pathway plan also provides students with access to college and career advisors.

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

The career pathway plans are also one way that students can take advantage of a relatively new opportunity called Self-Directed Learning. As defined by the Idaho Legislature in a bill passed early in 2022, the self-directed learner is a student:

- “(a) Who demonstrates mastery of content knowledge through grades, assessments, or mastery-based learning rubrics;*
- (b) Whose teacher or teachers designate the student as such. The teacher may consider the student’s mastery of the content, academic growth, timeliness for assignments, self-motivation, ability to establish goals, and reach age-appropriate learning outcomes;*
- (c) Who, starting in grade 5, demonstrates mastery of addition and multiplication for numbers 0-10, as well as related subtraction and division problems, known collectively as “math facts”; and*
- (d) Who, starting in grade 8, demonstrates an informed choice of postsecondary career and education goals by:*
 - (i) Completing and updating his student learning plan as defined in section 33-1001(30), Idaho Code;*
 - (ii) Supplementing his student learning plan, as applicable, with the following that further his postsecondary goals:*
 - 1. Extended learning opportunities as defined in section 33-6401, Idaho Code;*
 - 2. Courses and examinations funded in chapter 46, title 33, Idaho Code; or*
 - 3. Any other credits or programs permitted under Idaho Code or district policy as applicable to the student’s learning plan; and*
 - (iii) Identifying and writing down self-determined personal life goals, including an explanation of how attending specific classes will lead to the fulfillment of personal life goals.”⁸*

Once a student is designated as a Self-Directed Learner, the student has the right to flexible learning. Flexible learning includes: flexible attendance, attending school virtually, extended learning opportunities, and *“any other agreed-upon learning inside or outside the classroom.”* Starting in 8th grade, *“flexible learning should further the student’s progress toward postsecondary goals.”* The “self-directed learner” status, however, may be rescinded if the student fails to meet the agreed-upon criteria or fails to stay current on classroom assignments.

For purposes of school accounting and reporting, Self-Directed Learners are reported as enrolled in attendance for a full day in school.

District and School Flexibility

The student and parent opportunities described above shed some light on the degree to which state policymakers in Idaho have been, and continue to, create an environment in which local education leaders and their stakeholders can collaborate in the design and delivery of their schools' instructional program. To inform the efforts of district and school personnel, as well as their boards of trustees, this section highlights the flexibility afforded in three areas of state policy:

1. Mastery-Based Education
2. Instructional Program Design
3. Credit Accumulation Requirements and Options



MASTERY-BASED EDUCATION

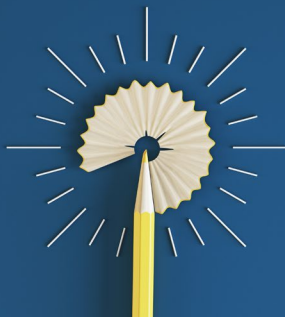
Mastery-Based Education developed from the first recommendation of the 2012 Governor's Task Force for Improving Education (K-12) Education ([final report](#)). The Idaho State Board of Education directed the report, and during the 2015 legislative session, [statute 33-1632](#) was passed. The statute includes an annual \$1.05 million set aside to support schools moving to a mastery-based education. By outlining essential mastery components, providing context and direction, in addition to and furnishing ongoing funding, many feel the statute is one of the strongest of its kind throughout the nation. Thirty schools, from 18 districts, were part of the first cohort, forming the Idaho Mastery Education Network (IMEN).

During the 2019 legislative session, the statute was updated to allow any school in the state the opportunity to access resources and develop, and implement mastery-based education. **The Idaho legislature is one of only a few that have credit accumulation requirements that include alternative approaches available to districts. These options open the door to the use of mastery-based education by schools and districts across the state.** Considerable effort has been made to develop accessible, foundational building blocks and resources for Mastery-Based education:

- **[The Idaho Mastery-Education Framework](#)**, pulled directly from the statute, guides all the mastery work in Idaho. This four-part framework is a starting place for districts and schools to design environments where *“students are empowered, competencies are demonstrated, learning is personalized, and mastery is recognized.”*⁹



- **The Idaho College and Career Readiness Competencies** — relying heavily on work by the National Association of College and Employers, the 2017 adopted State Board of Education competencies are now operationalized with sub-skills to achieve them and rich performance level descriptors to measure student growth.
- **The Idaho Mastery Staging Guide** — this impressive resource is a curation of all the training and resources that the original 30 schools received in their first years of development.
- **Grant Fund Application** diversity:
 - » Systemic Change — for schools, teams of schools, or districts seeking system wide change. *Example: Four elementary schools in one district are partnering together with a nationally recognized district to focus on raising math scores.*
 - » Projects — grants for individual classrooms or schools to move closer to mastery perspectives through smaller grants and shifts. *Example: A charter STEM High School partnering with a regional university to allow the students access to all higher education online curriculum.*
- A revitalized and fully transparent State Department of Education [website](#) with dozens of resources.
- Free Professional Development in support of the [Student Driven Learning](#) practices that lead to a mastery perspective and approach.

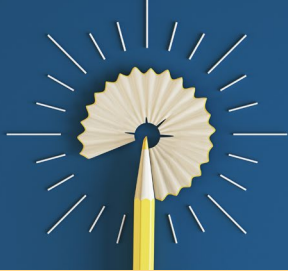


Examples of Mastery Success and Variety in Interpretation and Implementation

- Through a variety of means, and a determined and collaborative effort, an alternative school focused on meeting the explicit instructional needs of their students and saw a 26% increase in student proficiency on the state ELA test, an 8% increase on the math test, and over a six-fold graduation rate increase.
- In a traditional high school, the entire science department worked hard to shift to a project-based model. Among many impressive results, the enrollment for Dual Credit Chemistry classes increased from 15 students to 90 students, Physics course enrollment went from 4 students to 32, and the Botany courses doubled in size from two sections to four.
- Returning to school after pandemic disruptions, the teachers at another alternative high school worked to build expectations and student ownership. Beyond increased student engagement and participation, students earned twice the number of credits in the same time as the year before, moving from 700 earned to 1400 earned.
- Determined to build stronger relationships, one traditional high school worked with district and community partners to start a thriving Future Hispanic Leaders of America organization in addition to a Hispanic parent advisory committee.

INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM DESIGN

In Idaho, state policies and resources, as well as support for school districts and schools, reflect the State Board's vision and stem from the state constitution's charge to *"establish and maintain a general, uniform, and thorough system of public, free common schools."*



A Thorough System of Public Schools

Last amended in 2021, the legislative code section titled Thorough System of Public Schools,¹⁰ emphasizes preparation for future success in the workforce and in life, with choices that include academic or career technical education following high school graduation. It also recognizes that student success cannot be assured without attention to creating positive learning environments and teaching the skills, such as communicating effectively, as well as building knowledge across the curriculum — covering all disciplines.

(Excerpt from Idaho Code Section 33-1612. Thorough system of public schools)

"...A thorough system of public schools in Idaho is one in which:

- (a) A safe environment conducive to learning is provided;*
- (b) Educators are empowered to maintain classroom discipline;*
- (c) The basic values of honesty, self-discipline, unselfishness, respect for authority, and the central importance of work are emphasized;*
- (d) The skills necessary to communicate effectively are taught;*
- (e) A basic curriculum necessary to enable students to enter academic or career technical postsecondary educational programs is provided;*
- (f) Students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for meeting challenging academic achievement standards and succeeding in the workforce and in life;*
- (g) The students are introduced to current technology;*
- (h) The importance of students acquiring the skills to enable them to be responsible citizens of their homes, schools, and communities is emphasized;*
- (i) Students have the right to an uninterrupted education that covers all disciplines, including music, the arts, and physical education if such courses are offered by the local education agency;..."*

Advanced Opportunities Program

While, as described below, there is broad deference given to districts and schools in designing an instructional program that meets the “thoroughness” requirements, the [Advanced Opportunities](#) program, creates not only an obligation for every high school to enable student participation in learning opportunities that may extend beyond the instructional program administered by the school, but also provides funding to allow students to select opportunities that best meet their needs.¹¹

According to the state, this program allows students to “*individualize their high school learning plan to get a jump start on their future.*”¹² Additional information and resources are provided on the [Idaho State Department of Education — High School Graduation Requirements](#) webpage.

Many of the program’s benefits are highlighted below, along with a summary of requirements imposed on schools and districts regarding program implementation.

Pupil Allocation

Under the program, every student attending an Idaho public school is entitled to an allocation of \$4,125 to use towards Advanced Opportunities in grades 7-12. A student who has earned fifteen (15) postsecondary credits using program funds must identify postsecondary goals before earning additional credits. The funds can be used for any of the following:



OVERLOAD COURSES

A student taking a full course load (of at least 12 credits) offered by the student’s local school may take additional high school level courses for credit. Such courses may be offered online, during the summer, and before or after school, but must be offered by a provider accredited by the organization that accredits Idaho public schools and taught by an individual certified to teach the grade and subject area course in Idaho. Qualifying courses are eligible for reimbursement of up to \$225 per course from the student’s program allocation.

DUAL CREDIT COURSES

By taking a dual credit course, which may be taken online or from a school or college/university campus, a student can get course credit on both their high school and college transcripts. Such courses must be offered by a regionally accredited postsecondary institution and be a credit-bearing 100 level course or higher. Qualifying courses are eligible for reimbursement of up to \$75 per credit from the student’s program allocation.

Note: A school’s advisor must counsel any student who “wishes to take dual credit courses that the student should ascertain for himself whether the particular postsecondary institution that he desires to attend will accept the transfer of coursework credits under this section.”¹³

POSTSECONDARY CREDIT-BEARING, AND CAREER TECHNICAL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS

A student can utilize Advanced Opportunities funds to pay for a variety of college-credit bearing or career-technical exams, plus proctor fees and administrative fees, from a list of eligible exams and costs maintained by the State Department of Education. Eligible examinations include:

- Advanced placement (AP);
- International baccalaureate (IB);
- College-level examination program (CLEP); and
- Career technical education examinations that lead to an industry-recognized certificate, license, or degree.

COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS AND PRELIMINARY COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS

A student can utilize Advanced Opportunities funds to pay for a variety of college entrance examinations and preliminary college entrance examinations, plus proctor fees and administration fees, from a list of eligible exams and costs maintained by the State Department of Education. However, a student may not use Advanced Opportunity program funds to take the same examination more than once. Eligible examinations include the SAT, the PSAT, the ACT, and other similar examinations identified by the department.

CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION WORKFORCE TRAINING COURSES

A student may take regionally approved workforce training courses, including but not limited to a federally registered apprenticeship, from a list of eligible courses and costs developed and maintained by the State Department of Education, in collaboration with the Division of Career and Technical Education. Eligible courses must:

- Be provided by an Idaho public technical college;
- Lead to an industry-recognized certificate, license, or degree;
- Be required training for occupations deemed regionally in demand;
- Be courses that are not otherwise available at the student's high school; and
- Allow high school-aged students to participate.

Qualifying courses are eligible for reimbursement of up to \$500 per course or \$1000 per year from the student's program allocation.

Criteria for Challenging a Course

A local board, at its discretion, may establish course-specific criteria (or criteria for a given set of standards) by which a student who successfully meets the criteria is counted as having completed all required coursework for the course and is awarded high school credit for the course.

Advanced Opportunities – Early Graduation Scholarship

Early Graduation Scholarships are available for high school students who graduate at least one full year early. Equating to roughly \$1,800 per student, such scholarships can be used at Idaho public post-secondary institutions. The awarded amount will double for students who graduate two years early and will triple for students who graduate three years early. A qualifying student must apply for college admission within two years of their high school graduation or the scholarship expires.

School Responsibilities

All high schools must provide opportunities for students to participate in Advanced Opportunities (defined in Rules Governing Thoroughness as *“Placement courses, Dual Credit courses, Technical Competency Credit, or International Baccalaureate programs”*) or courses at a postsecondary campus.¹⁴

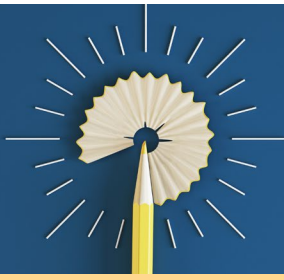
Parents of participating students may enroll their child in any eligible course, with or without the permission of the public school in which the student is enrolled; however, parents and students must agree to program requirements and public school personnel must assist parents in enrolling students in eligible courses. Additional responsibilities for schools in administering the program include:

- Every public school is required to establish timelines and requirements for students’ participation in the program. In doing so, the school must provide for appropriate transcription of credits, reporting of program participation and associated financial transactions.
- A reasonable effort must be made to ensure that prospective participants consider the challenges and time necessary to succeed in the program.
- Schools should make reasonable efforts to provide students with guidance on how program participation contributes to college and career pathways.
- Public schools must collaborate with Idaho public postsecondary educational institutions to assist students who enroll in dual credit courses or, after early graduation from high school, in postsecondary courses.

Decisionmaking Authority

In directing the State Board of Education to adopt rules to establish a thorough system of public schools, the legislature directed the board to not *“otherwise impinge upon the authority of the board of trustees of the school districts. Authority to govern the school district, vested in the board of trustees of the school district, not delegated to the state board, is reserved to the board of trustees.”*





Local Authority: Education Law and Policy Framework

The local authority described in this statutory provision is reflected across many aspects of the state's education law and policy framework, which includes:

- **Idaho Code** of statutes passed by the state legislature, including [Title 33](#) Education, as well as appropriation bills.
- **Administrative Rules of the State Board of Education and State Department of Education** (Idaho Administrative Code — [IDAPA 08 Administrative Rules](#)) implementing statutes passed by the state legislature. Two rules, in particular, enable student-centered innovation opportunities and are highlighted throughout this guide: [IDAPA 08.02.03. Rules Governing Thoroughness](#) and [IDAPA 08.02.01. Rules Governing Administration](#).
- **State Department of Education** policy implementation, program administration and grant dissemination, guidance and technical assistance.

Local Control

Administrative [Rules Governing Thoroughness](#) define instruction as being “*inclusive of subject matter, content and course offerings,*” the patterns of which (described as patterns of instructional organization) are established locally and designed to assure every student meets locally developed standards. These standards must, at a minimum, be the standards adopted by the state, which are incorporated by reference in the Rules Governing Thoroughness and made available, with related resources on the State Department of Education's [Idaho Content Standards](#) webpage.



Each Idaho school district and school creates its own instructional program and student-centered learning models, including through principles of local decision-making, the ability to seek waiver of graduation requirements, and flexibility created to allow collaboration between schools, students and families, and other stakeholders that broaden learning opportunities available to students. In almost every aspect of the school's instructional program and the options available for meeting credit requirements, students have choices and their selection of school-based, as well as extended learning, opportunities and their election of options should guide future action by school and district leaders.

Local decision-making is expected in many aspects of instructional program design, including the following:

|| INSTRUCTION AND PROGRAMS

All schools will “*deliver a core of instruction and advisement programs for each student*” in elementary schools, middle schools/junior high, and high schools. Rules Governing Thoroughness establish the elements of a comprehensive advising program, which must be an integral part of the educational program, including:

- A guidance curriculum that identifies knowledge and skills to be attained by all students at various stages of their development and provides appropriate activities for their achievement; and
- Individualized planning with students and their parents in specified domains: personal/social development, educational development, and career development.¹⁵

|| CONTENT STANDARDS

To graduate from an Idaho public high school, a student must meet all state adopted content standards and **any more rigorous standards set by the school district.**

|| CURRICULUM

Each school district **adopts its own curriculum** and determines how its standards are taught.

|| INSTRUCTIONAL COURSES AND OTHER REQUIRED INSTRUCTION

The State Department of Education notes that “*Courses must have properly endorsed and certificated instructors, be associated with an accurate assignment code, and have a start and end date, but **course descriptions, titles and how the time is organized, is up to local control.***” (emphasis added)¹⁶ Instruction provided by a school district is required to include, but **is not limited to**, content area descriptions set out in the Rules Governing Thoroughness, including some specificity regarding courses and instruction to be provided at specific grade levels (e.g., language arts and communication instruction is to include reading, writing, English Literature, technological applications, spelling, speech and listening, as well as cursive writing in elementary schools).



|| SPECIAL INSTRUCTION FOR LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS

Rules on Thoroughness call for “*special instruction that allows limited English proficient students to participate successfully in all aspects of the school’s curriculum and keep up with other students in the regular education program,*” while **leaving instructional design decisions and other details to be made at the local level.**

SPECIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Rules on Thoroughness call for “*special learning opportunities for accelerated, learning disabled students and students with other disabilities,*” with requirements that include the following:

Gifted and Talented Programs¹⁷

School districts must provide for the special instructional needs of gifted and talented children served by their schools, including options for students to participate in Gifted Education courses as part of the instructional program; however, decisions regarding specific offerings are to be made at the local level. Under a provision of the Idaho Code regarding the education of exceptional children, the State Board must provide support for districts to develop a “*variety of flexible approaches for instruction and training that may include administrative accommodations, curriculum modification and special programs.*”¹⁸



Each school district is required to develop a Gifted and Talented Program plan, which must be updated every three (3) years thereafter, including program options and identification procedures. Screening procedures used by the district are to gather information concerning the specific aptitudes and educational needs of each student meeting screening criteria. Such information is then required to be used to match student needs with appropriate program options.

Requirements regarding Special Education and Alternative Secondary Programs are also included in the rules.¹⁹

WORKFORCE SKILLS

Rules Governing Thoroughness also define expectations for providing all students with opportunities to develop workforce skills in three distinct areas, while **leaving instructional design decisions to individual school districts and schools.**²⁰

Academic Skill Development

This area focuses on each student’s development of academic skills and some of the specific skills necessary for entering the workforce:

- self-management skills (i.e., ability to plan, self-discipline, respect for authority, ongoing skill improvement)
- individual and teamwork skills (i.e., personal initiative, working with others)
- thinking/information skills (i.e., reasoning, problem solving, acquiring and using information)
- vocational-technical skills (based on the State Board of Vocational Education’s standards of the industry).

Other Skill Development

This area focuses on opportunities to be provided to help students become contributing community and family members, such as homemaking skills; balancing work and family responsibilities; and entrepreneurial skills.

Work-Based Learning Experiences

This area focuses on instruction organized to facilitate students' transition into the workforce and further education which may be provided as part of a school's program of instruction and incorporated into a Parent Approved Student Career Pathways Plan. The rule establishes criteria for a student to receive credit for these experiences.

Additional Flexibility

Districts and schools may also incorporate any of the following into their programs:



Innovation Classrooms

A bill enacted by the state legislature in 2021, allows school districts to enter into innovation classroom agreements to provide students with an alternative curriculum, which may encompass one or more subject areas but must include mathematics, history, English language arts, or science. An “alternative curriculum” is defined as *“a curriculum in one (1) or more subject areas that is different than the curriculum in such area or areas offered by a school district.”*²¹

Participating students are required to take all state-mandated tests and any classroom used for these purposes is required to comply with all applicable laws, including federal, state, and local laws prohibiting discrimination, and laws governing safety.

Extended Learning Opportunities

As defined by the state legislature, extended learning opportunity means *“an out-of-classroom learning experience that provides a student with: (1) Enrichment opportunities outside of a classroom setting; (2) Career readiness or employability skills, including internships, pre-apprenticeships, and apprenticeships; or (3) Any other type of out-of-classroom educational opportunity approved by the state board of education or the student’s school district or public charter school.”*²² According to the Idaho Code, a school district must have a policy establishing a process through which entities may apply to offer extended learning opportunities that will qualify for credit and define which entities are eligible to apply, including but not limited to nonprofit organizations, businesses with established locations in the state, trade associations, and (for opportunities available only to middle level or high school students), the United States armed forces.²³

See **Middle-Level Credit System** and **High School Graduation Credit**, below, for an overview of requirements for students to earn credit through Extended Learning Opportunities.

CREDIT ACCUMULATION REQUIREMENTS AND OPTIONS

Idaho has established credit accumulation requirements that a student must meet, with some exceptions, in order to be promoted to the next grade (beginning no later than grade seven (7)) and to graduate high school with a diploma. And, like most states, Idaho allows a student who does not meet credit requirements to participate in credit recovery opportunities.²⁴ However, Idaho's approach provides such significant alternatives and options for students that credit recovery, particularly in a student-centered learning system, should become a thing of the past. Careful monitoring of student progress on a personalized learning plan, and additional support with areas of need, are powerful tools to keep learners on-track.

Although the state legislature, like most of its counterparts in other states, requires that schools provide a minimum hours of instructional time each school year (requirements defined by grade-level — 450 hours for Kindergarten; 810 hours for grades 1-3; 900 hours for grades 4-8; and 990 hours for grades 9-12),²⁵ it is significant that these requirements do not constitute a traditional seat time approach to credit accumulation. These and other types of flexibility are described below.

Middle Level Credit System

Rules Governing Thoroughness²⁶ require a school district to implement a credit system no later than grade seven (7) and specify inclusion of components that address credit requirements, credit recovery, alternate mechanisms, and attendance.

Flexibility Within Middle-Level Credit System Requirements

At a minimum, a school district's middle-level credit system must incorporate the components specified in administrative rule, including graduation credit to be awarded for a student's successful completion of a qualifying high school course prior to enrollment in grade 9.²⁷ **A school district may establish credit requirements beyond the state minimum for student promotion from middle grades.** Several alternatives are authorized in the Rules Governing Thoroughness:

- **Alternate mechanism:** A school district may require a student to demonstrate proficiency on the appropriate content standards as an **alternative to using the credit attainment requirement**. If a school district elects to use demonstration of proficiency, it must submit its Alternate Mechanism to the State Department of Education. The State Department of Education Middle-Level Credit System webpage also notes:

*"A district may implement an alternate mechanism for grade level promotion for a student who may not meet the requirements of the credit system. The alternate mechanism allows a student to demonstrate proficiency in the appropriate content standards. This can apply to all courses of study or to specific subject areas in which a student may not be earning credits. Credit recovery is a narrower focus on a particular course or actions that caused or is leading to credit loss. An alternate mechanism or credit recovery does not have to wait to be implemented until credit loss has already occurred. Schools are encouraged to intervene early and often when it starts to appear that a student may not meet their credit requirements."*²⁸



- **Alternative requirements or accommodations for special education students:**

“The Individualized Education Program (IEP) team for a student who is eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act may establish alternate requirements or accommodations to credit requirements as are deemed necessary for the student to become eligible for promotion to the next grade level.”

- **Alternative requirements or accommodations for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students:**

“The Educational Learning Plan (ELP) team for LEP students, as defined in Subsection 112.05.g.iv., may establish alternate requirements or accommodations to credit requirements as deemed necessary for the student to become eligible for promotion to the next grade level.”

ATTENDANCE

Under either approach — credit attainment or a demonstration of proficiency alternative — a school district must make student attendance an element of its Middle Level Credit System; however, **neither the weight to be assigned to an attendance element or any other details of including attendance are prescribed** in the Rules Governing Thoroughness.

High School Graduation Requirements

The Rules Governing Thoroughness establish minimum requirements for a student to be eligible to graduate from an Idaho high school.²⁹ Idaho’s minimum graduation requirements are tied to the Rule’s definition of credits — meaning 1 credit is equal to 60 hours. To receive a diploma, a student must, at a minimum:

- Take a minimum of 46 high school credits, which include 29 credits in core subjects.
 - » Take six (6) credits of math.
 - » Take six (6) credits of science.
 - » Take nine (9) credits of Language Arts/Communications.
 - » Take five (5) credits of Social Studies.
 - » Take two (2) credits of Humanities.
 - » Take one (1) credit of Health/Wellness.
- Complete a senior project.
- Complete a Government and Civics Proficiency.

A local school district may establish requirements that go beyond the state’s minimum for high school graduation requirements. These requirements may also be waived at the request of a school district, as described below.

Graduation Options

STEM DIPLOMA

To earn a STEM diploma, a student must complete 8 credits in mathematics, 8 credits in science, and 5 credits in the student’s choice of any or all subjects of science, technology, engineering, or mathematics. Any such student is not required to complete more than the total required credits specified in Rules Governing Thoroughness.³⁰



WORKFORCE READINESS AND CAREER TECHNICAL EDUCATION DIPLOMA

A student may also earn a Workforce Readiness and Career Technical Education diploma which requires successful passage of a technical skills assessment and workplace readiness assessment, and demonstration of competency of career technical education program standards in addition to credit requirements.



SEAL OF BILITERACY

A student may earn a Seal of Biliteracy by studying and attaining proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation, which *“encourages students to pursue biliteracy, honors the skills [that] students attain, and can be evidence of skills that are attractive to future employers and college admissions offices.”*³¹

Flexibility Regarding Credit Accumulation

DEMONSTRATION OF MASTERY IN LIEU OF SEAT TIME (GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS WAIVER)

Any school district may request and receive State Department of Education waiver of the credit requirements described above by submitting a letter to the Department, signed by the superintendent and chair of the board of trustees of the district, and include the reasons for not requiring 60 hours of total instruction per credit.³²

SATISFYING HIGH SCHOOL CONTENT AND CREDIT AREA REQUIREMENTS FOR COURSES COMPLETED BEFORE GRADE NINE (9)

A student who, prior to entering grade nine (9) completes a high school course with a grade of C or higher, subject to additional requirements established in Rules Governing Thoroughness, will have met the high school content and credit area requirement for the corresponding high school course.³³

ADVANCED OPPORTUNITIES

The Administrative Rule establishing high school graduation requirements specifies that a school district must offer students at least one advanced opportunity to earn credit toward graduation.³⁴ These opportunities include, but are not limited to:

- Placement Courses
- Dual and Concurrent Credit Courses (or other qualifying courses offered at a postsecondary campus)
- Advanced Placement Courses
- Tech Prep Courses
- Technical Competency Credit
- International Baccalaureate Programs

FLEXIBLE SCHEDULE

A student meeting a set of criteria established in the Idaho Code may request to be relieved of the obligation to complete any high school graduation requirements not yet satisfied.³⁵ While this is a great opportunity for flexibility, this option is limited to individual students and is not a school- or district-wide program that may be implemented.

Criteria require a student to:

- Be 16 years old
- Maintain a 3.5 cumulative GPA
- Receive permission from a parent or guardian
- Achieve a college and career readiness score
- File certain information with the student's school
- Complete certain courses, including the civics requirement under Idaho Code; and the economics credit, government credits, and senior project required under the board's graduation requirements.



EARLY GRADUATION

A student meeting a set of criteria established in the Idaho Code may file with the student's school a notification of intent to graduate early.³⁶ This filing must include the student's participation portfolio and an essay explaining why the student wishes to graduate early and outlining the student's future education or training plans.

Criteria require a student to:

- Be at least 16 years of age
- Maintain a cumulative 3.5 grade point average
- Obtain permission from a parent or guardian
- Achieve a college and career readiness score
- Complete certain courses, including the civics requirement under Idaho Code; and the economics credit, government credits, and senior project required under the board's graduation requirements

PART TIME PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

Part time enrollment “allows students to enroll in public schools for one or more courses.”³⁷ Idaho provides non-public students and public charter school students with the opportunity to earn dual enrollment credit by enrolling in any public school, including another public charter school.³⁸

Next Steps

Through the collaborative efforts of many stakeholders, Idaho has created an impressive array of flexibility policies and resources for educational systems to empower, encourage, and prioritize each individual student. The conditions have never been more open to support their growth and provide the circumstances they need to achieve their best! What do the students in your system need? This document and the Idaho State Department of Education are here to support and guide you.

www.sde.idaho.gov

Follow the Idaho State Department of Education on social media for updates on professional development opportunities, inspiration and support!



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THIS GUIDE WAS DEVELOPED IN COLLABORATION WITH



FORESIGHT LAW+POLICY

Appendix: State Resources

Student and Family Driven Opportunities

ADVANCED OPPORTUNITIES

- [Academic Advising Worksheet](#)
- [Advanced Opportunities Administrative Access Portal](#)
- [Advanced Opportunities Brochure](#)
- [Advanced Opportunities Learning Plan — Sample](#)
- [Advanced Opportunities Student Application Portal](#)
- [Advanced Opportunities Student Guidebook](#)
- [Advanced Opportunities YouTube Videos](#)
- [Career Pathway Plan — Next Steps Idaho](#)
- [Dual Credit Advising](#)
- [Early Graduation Scholarship](#)
- [Student Opportunities Assistance Program \(non-public school program\)](#) — Non-public school students in grades 7-12 may apply to be reimbursed for approved college course costs taken for dual credit.

MIDDLE LEVEL CREDIT

- [High School Credit in Middle School \(YouTube\)](#)
- [Student Learning Plans \(YouTube\)](#)

District and School Flexibility

GIFTED AND TALENTED

- [Best Practices Manual for Gifted and Talented Programs in Idaho](#)

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

- [High School Graduation Minimum Requirements](#)
- [Idaho STEM Action Center](#)
- [Seal of Biliteracy](#)

MASTERY-BASED EDUCATION

- [Assessing Mastery: An Introduction to Performance Task Exemplars](#)
- [Student Learning Indicators and Idaho Core Teaching Standards](#)
- [Innovate to Elevate](#)
- [Key Shifts of Mastery-Based Learning from the Staging Guide and Framework](#)
- [Mastery Indicators and Teaching Standards](#)
- [Performance Assessment Template](#)
- [Prioritizing shifts associated with moving to mastery-based education principles](#)
- [Summary: Determining Mastery for Advancement, Grading, & Crediting](#)

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES & INDIVIDUAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLAN

- [Individual Professional Learning Plan Template](#) — Instructional staff employees in Idaho are required to complete an Individual Professional Learning Plan, which is based on the Idaho framework for teaching evaluation. Schools and districts can work with educators to use these plans and related resources for mastery-based education and other student-centered learning.

Endnotes

- 1 [Idaho Code Section 33-1632. Mastery-Based Education](#)
- 2 [CRS 22-36-101 Choice of programs and schools within school districts](#)
- 3 Requirements for student learning plans originated in Idaho Code Section 33-1001(30) and are now referred to in Idaho State Board Rules as career pathways plans. See <https://adminrules.idaho.gov/rules/current/08/080203.pdf>
- 4 [IDAPA 08.02.03. Rules Governing Thoroughness. 08. College and Career Advising Guidance Programs](#)
- 5 Within this same code section, the “career pathway plan” is included in the definition of “student success indicators” — these indicators of student achievement and growth used as part of the state’s continuous improvement plans include “the percentage of students who create student learning plans in grade 8 or who annually update their student learning plans thereafter.”
- 6 Next Steps Idaho. 8th Grade. <https://nextsteps.idaho.gov/high-school-students/grade-8>
- 7 Dr. Clark, Linda. Idaho State Board of Education. Idaho’s Career Information System Helps Students and Adults to Find the Right Career (2018) (the Idaho Digital Learning Academy use of the CIS system). <https://boardofed.idaho.gov/resources/article-idahos-career-information-system-helps-students-and-adults-to-find-the-right-career/>
- 8 [Idaho Legislature, Senate Bill 1238 \(2022\)](#)
- 9 See also [Crosswalk of the Framework](#)
- 10 [Idaho Code Section 33-1612. Thorough System of Public Schools](#)
- 11 The state legislature, in establishing the program (Idaho Code Section 33-4602), authorized the State Board of Education to promulgate rules to implement the program. The State Board did that in Rules Governing Thoroughness. Information included in this document reflects a combination of statutory and regulatory requirements and options. [IDAPA 08.02.03 Rules Governing Thoroughness. 106 Advanced Opportunities and 007. Definitions](#)
- 12 [Idaho State Department of Education. Advanced Opportunities](#)
- 13 [Idaho Code Section 33-4602\(2\). Advanced Opportunities — Rulemaking](#)
- 14 [IDAPA 08.02.03 Rules Governing Thoroughness. 106 Advanced Opportunities and 007. Definitions](#)
- 15 [IDAPA 08.02.03. Rules Governing Thoroughness. 08. College and Career Advising Guidance Programs](#)
- 16 [Idaho State Department of Education. Mastery Education](#)
- 17 [IDAPA 08.02.03. Rules Governing Thoroughness. 171 Gifted and Talented Programs](#)
- 18 [Idaho Code Section 33-2003. Responsibility of School Districts for Education of Gifted/Talented Children](#)
- 19 [IDAPA 08.02.03. Rules Governing Thoroughness. 109 Special Education and 110 Alternative Secondary Programs](#)
- 20 [IDAPA 08.02.03. Rules Governing Thoroughness. 40 Workforce Skills](#)
- 21 [Idaho Code Section 33-1636. Innovation Classroom](#)
- 22 [Idaho Code Section 33-6401. Extended Learning Opportunities](#)
- 23 [Idaho Code Section 33-6402. Extended Learning Opportunities](#)
- 24 [Idaho State Department of Education. Middle Level Credit System](#)
- 25 [Idaho Code Section 33-512. Governance of Schools; IDAPA 08.02.01 Rules Governing Administration. Sec. 250 Pupil Accounting and Required Instructional Time](#)
- 26 [IDAPA 08.02.03 Rules Governing Thoroughness. 107 Middle Level Credit System](#)
- 27 [Idaho Code Section 33-512C. Encouragement of Gifted Students](#)
- 28 [Idaho State Department of Education. Middle Level Credit System](#)
- 29 [IDAPA 08.02.03 Rules Governing Thoroughness. 105 High School Graduation Requirements](#)
- 30 [Idaho Code Section 33-523. STEM Diploma](#)
- 31 See [Idaho State Department of Education. Seal of Biliteracy](#)
- 32 See [Idaho State Department of Education. Seal of Biliteracy](#)
- 33 [IDAPA 08.02.03 Rules Governing Thoroughness. 105 High School Graduation Requirements](#)
- 34 [IDAPA 08.02.03 Rules Governing Thoroughness. 106 Advanced Opportunities and 007. Definitions](#)
- 35 [Idaho Code Section 33-6102. Flexible Schedule](#)
- 36 [Idaho Code Section 33-6104. Early Graduation](#)
- 37 [ExcelinEd. Part-Time Enrollment: Policy Analysis \(2021\)](#)
- 38 [Idaho Code Section 33-203. Dual Enrollment](#)

