

## PROFICIENCY-BASED DIPLOMA<sup>1</sup>

Deer Isle-Stonington High School seeks to create an educational system in which each student who enters high school earns a diploma signifying that the student is prepared for a variety of post-secondary options, including both college and modern, fulfilling careers. Proficiency-based learning, or teaching the most essential skills students will need and then ensuring that students actually learn those skills, is an important component of such a system. There are two major differences between proficiency-based learning and the traditional classroom:

1. *Strong performance in one area cannot average out weak performance in another area.* For example, in a traditional English class, a student's high grades on vocabulary tests might average out deficient scores in writing, specifically spelling, grammar, and mechanics. As long as the student's overall average is at least 70%, the student will earn credit and move on. In a proficiency-based English class, a student would need to demonstrate proficiency in both vocabulary and writing in order to earn credit. Even if the student's overall average is greater than 70%, the student must demonstrate mastery of all standards in the course to earn credit.
2. *Students must demonstrate proficiency in all standards in a course before moving on.* If students have yet to master a specific skill, such as using fractions in a math class, they must continue working until they can demonstrate that they have mastered that skill. In this way, skill gaps cannot develop that result in students graduating without having mastered basic skills and being unprepared for college and careers.

In many ways, grades and report cards in a proficiency-based system will look familiar to students and parents. Students will need to demonstrate proficiency on all of the standards in a course to "earn credit" for that course, although students will need to meet all graduation standards in order to earn a diploma. An overall average of a student's performance will still be reported as a traditional letter/number grade. Because poor performance on certain standards cannot be averaged out by strong performance on other standards, students, parents, colleges, and employers can be assured that "passing a course" means that the student is truly prepared for the next level of learning. In a proficiency-based system, students will still have GPA's and class ranks. Student's will still be able to successfully apply to a wide range of colleges. In fact, [dozens of colleges in New England have endorsed proficiency-based learning](#).

Proficiency-based learning seeks to accurately report a student's achievement of essential academic skills separate from non-academic factors, such as behavior, attendance, completion of homework, and turning work in on time. However, these non-academic factors are important and should be reported. These factors are included in an "Academic Initiative" standard that factors into a student's course grade.

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<sup>1</sup> Standards-based diploma, mastery-based diploma, and competency-based diploma are all terms that can be used interchangeably with "proficiency-based diploma."

For the 2015-16 school year, proficiency-based courses will be signified by a (\*P) in the [2015-16 Program of Studies](#).

- [How Are Proficiency-based Grades Determined at DISHS?](#)
- [Overview of Proficiency-based Grading](#)

The graduating class of 2019- 9th graders entering DISHS in September 2015- will graduate with a proficiency-based diploma. Students in the graduating classes of 2016-2018 will take some courses that are proficiency-based while the school transitions to a fully proficiency-based system. Students in the graduating classes of 2016-2018 will still need to earn 23 credits in order to earn a diploma.

- [Class of 2016-2018 Graduation Requirements](#)
- [Class of 2019 Graduation Requirements](#)

For additional information about proficiency-based learning, please see:

- [What are learning standards?](#)
- [How does proficiency-based learning work?](#)
- [What is a proficiency-based diploma?](#)
- Maine Department of Education: [Getting to Proficiency](#)

**School-wide Expectations:** In February of 2009, the Deer Isle-Stonington School Committee approved changes to the graduation requirements policy that created a “standards-based diploma.” With community and student input, our staff has identified two school-wide academic expectations, “Creative and Practical Problem Solver” and “Clear and Effective Communicator.” These two standards represent achievement of essential skills that our staff feels students need to master in order to be prepared for whichever post-secondary options they choose to pursue. The school-wide academic expectations are “cross-cutting” and apply to all content areas and grade levels. Because Deer Isle-Stonington High School feels that student mastery of the school-wide academic expectations is essential to a student's post-secondary success, students will need to demonstrate that they have achieved proficiency in order to earn a DISHS diploma. For students in the Classes of 2016-2018, School-wide Expectations are assessed through a Senior Exhibition and Graduation Portfolio. School-wide expectations will be assessed as part of the proficiency-based diploma for students in the Class of 2019 and subsequent classes.

**NOTE:** *The graduating class of 2021 will need to demonstrate proficiency in five School-wide Expectations:*

- *Students are Clear & Effective Communicators*
- *Students are Creative & Practical Problem Solvers*
- *Students Are Self-Directed & Life-Long Learners*
- *Students Are Responsible and Involved Citizens*

- *Students Are Collaborative and Quality Workers*

*These standards will be phased in over time. For the Class of 2019, students will need to meet the standard in Creative & Practical Problem Solver, Clear & Effective Communicator, and Self-Directed & Life-Long Learner.*

**Senior Exhibition:** All students need to successfully complete a Senior Exhibition in order to earn a DISHS diploma. Senior Exhibition is an opportunity for students to independently design, implement, and exhibit their learning on a topic or subject that they are passionate about or deeply interested in. Students will need to present their Senior Exhibition in front of a panel which will assess whether or not the student has demonstrated that he or she has mastered the school-wide academic expectations. Students will have two options for completing their Senior Exhibition:

1. Senior Exhibition Seminar. This 1/2-credit class will allow students to work with a teacher to complete their Senior Exhibition. The Senior Exhibition Seminar teacher will help students select topics, find mentors, write project proposals, and prepare for their exhibitions.
2. Independent Study. Students may choose to complete their Senior Exhibition as part of a traditional independent study. Students choosing this option would need to be self-motivated with a strong work ethic, as they would not have time in their daily course schedule to work on Senior Exhibition. Any students completing Senior Exhibition as an independent study must also have the Principal approve the independent study.

For a more detailed description of Senior Exhibition, see the [“2015-16 DISHS Senior Exhibition Handbook.”](#)

### **Graduation Portfolio [Graduating Classes of 2016-18]:**

Portfolio Tasks (commonly referred to as “SWE’s”) will be part of a student’s 9th-11th grade coursework; 12th grade will be reserved for Senior Exhibition and remediation, if needed. By the end of 11th grade, students must be “proficient” in each of the two school-wide academic expectations as demonstrated through the Graduation Portfolio. Proficiency will be determined by the student selecting portfolio tasks for **each** school-wide expectation which “meet the standard.” Students will select 15 portfolio tasks for each school-wide expectation. Students may select one “independent SWE” for each standard per semester to add to their portfolio.

A portfolio task will “meet the standard” if the average (mean) score of all the criteria on the school-wide rubric is greater than the school determined benchmark of 2.7

NOTE: An average score will not be calculated for the portfolio task if there is a score of '0' or '1' on any of the criteria on the school-wide rubric.

After students complete a portfolio task in a class, the teacher will assign both a letter/number grade AND will score the task using the appropriate school-wide rubric. Tasks will be scored on the following 4-point scale:

- 0 No Evidence, Not Completed.
- 1 Does Not Meet Standard
- 2 Partially Meets Standard
- 3 Meets Standard
- 4 Exceeds Standard

Teachers will record the portfolio task scores in TaskStream before returning the assignment to students. Students who have “met the standard” on the portfolio task will put the task in their graduation portfolio.

Classroom teachers will work with students who do not meet standard on a portfolio task during the course to revise it until it meets standard. During this time, the Learning Center will also be an option for support. For a specified period of time after a course has ended, a student who has not met standard on a portfolio task may revise the portfolio task until it does meet standard. If a student has still not met standard on a task after the revision period, the task cannot be revised to meet standards and the student will need to retake the course or take a different course to have the opportunity to meet standard on a different assessment. **The SWE revision periods for 2015-16 will be:**

**October 9th: deadline to revise SWE’s from 2014-15 2nd semester courses.**

**March 18th: deadline to revise SWE’s from 2015-16 1st semester courses.**

The Graduation Portfolio will house each student's portfolio tasks and will be overseen by the student's advisor. Advisors will be provided with their advisees portfolio scores after each reporting period (progress reports and report cards). Advisors will help their advisees create an “action plan” for any advisees who have not met standard on a portfolio task more than two weeks after the end of the course in which it was assigned.