



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on May 17, 2011

Conn. H.S. Board: Seniors Must Know English to Graduate

Connecticut's New London High School (left) board recently passed a requirement that all its students must attain a certain level of proficiency in English in order to graduate.

According to [NBC Connecticut](#):

That is not to say that the school is instituting an "English only" program in which where students are told they can only speak English in the schools. New London's program is a literacy program in which students will be required to achieve a certain level of English reading and writing literacy by the 10th grade.



News 8 WTNH [adds](#):

The policy adopted Thursday by the Board of Education says students who achieve "goal," the highest level on the reading portion of the Connecticut Academic Performance Test, will have earned the right to graduate.

The New London student body includes immigrants from 28 different countries, only 16 percent of whom achieved the "goal" last year, though 55 percent of all students were considered proficient. Furthermore, the school website has translations for 52 different languages.

Aware that the mandate will likely inspire cries of racism or bias, *The Blaze* [writes](#):

Consider the facts behind New London, CT's stipulation that high school students must be proficient in English before they can receive a diploma.

The rule will not be applied until 2015.

Students will have several different tests from which to choose.

[Students] have until [their] 21st birthday to establish that [they] have a reasonable grasp of the English language.

Because the new requirement will not be in effect until 2015, current high school students are virtually grandfathered in. Likewise, students are provided a number of test options in order to prove proficiency in English. They may also pass a reading test administered by the Northwest Education Association, and a writing exam from the well-known testing organization Pearson Assessments.

Members of the city's school board assert that the mandate will help improve the students' chances of prospering in their chosen vocations:

"We know from colleges and employers that our students are going to have to know how to read and write in English if they are going to be successful," explained Superintendent Nicholas Fischer.



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Even community leaders support the measure, though they contend that the schools must improve their teaching of the language to students.

Elizabeth Garcia Gonzalez, executive director of Centro de La Comunidad and a former school board president, remarks, "It's good that we are raising the standards, and I don't see a problem with testing," but points out her concerns "about a student who comes into the high school at 11th grade and can't speak the language."

The Republican website GOP USA [noted](#) concerns similar to those of Gonzalez, and provided its own solution:

Take the funds that are plunked down on the table for the Swahili, Hindi, African, Ukranian translations (or any other non-English language on the never-ending drop down list on the school's website) and invest in the teaching."

For years, lawmakers — many of whom support establishing English as the national language — have emphasized the importance of learning English. During the [May 5](#) GOP presidential hopeful debate, former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum supported the promotion of English, asserting that establishing it as the national language is the best way to help immigrants succeed in this country.

Additionally, politicians have claimed that establishing a national language would have a unifying effect in America. During the 2007 Republican presidential debate, former U.S. Representative from Colorado Tom Tancredo [articulated](#) such sentiments:

Believe me when I tell you the preservation of the English language is important for us for a lot of reasons, not the least of which is it holds us together. It is the glue that keeps a country together. Any country. Bilingual countries don't work, and we should not encourage it.



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