

Age-Appropriate Standards

Audience: parents, educators, school boards, curriculum leaders, and policymakers

Young children should first learn enough about the world to understand difficult ideas before being asked to interpret the world through them.

What “age-appropriate” means

Age-appropriate is a content-and-task standard, not a political label. Required material should fit students’ developmental capacity, serve a clear academic purpose, avoid unnecessary emotional or conceptual burden, and preserve time for foundational learning. The same test applies regardless of the viewpoint, identity framework, political philosophy, religious idea, or moral theory involved.

1. Cognitive readiness	Can students at this age understand the concept with enough background knowledge to reason about it, rather than merely repeat slogans or adult conclusions?
2. Emotional burden	Does the material introduce sexual, graphic, traumatic, or highly conflict-laden content beyond what is needed for the academic purpose?
3. Academic necessity	What specific knowledge or skill is being taught, and why is this content needed at this grade level?
4. Less-burdensome alternative	Can the same competency be taught with simpler, more concrete, less emotionally intense, or more neutral material?
5. Opportunity cost	How much instructional time does it require, and what reading, mathematics, science, play, art, music, or other instruction will be displaced?
6. Assessment neutrality	Is the student graded on knowledge, evidence, reasoning, and accurate description—or on affirming a prescribed identity, ideology, moral conclusion, or political position?

Presumption by age band

Band	Default	Expectation
K–2	Concrete foundations	Reading and language, number sense, stories, nature, family and community vocabulary, friendship, fairness, rules, maps, art, music, movement, play, and simple civic roles. Avoid making complex political, sexual, or systemic social theories the organizing framework for instruction.
Grades 3–5	Knowledge before abstraction	Build chronology, geography, science, U.S. and Minnesota history, civic institutions, and increasingly complex reading and mathematics. Difficult history may be introduced accurately and proportionately when students have enough context to understand it.
Grades 6–8	Systems and competing explanations	Students can examine institutions, discrimination, conflict, reform, political movements, economics, media, law, and competing explanations. Academic tasks should emphasize evidence, comparison, causation, and civic mechanics rather than compelled advocacy.

Band	Default	Expectation
Grades 9–12	Mature analysis and independence	Students can study difficult, controversial, and abstract ideas in depth, compare frameworks, evaluate evidence and consequences, and form defensible conclusions. Schools should distinguish rigorous analysis from compelled political participation or belief.

What this standard does not do

- It does not ban honest teaching of slavery, racism, treaties, Tribal sovereignty, civil rights, discrimination, war, injustice, or other difficult history.
- It does not give any viewpoint a special exemption. A conservative, progressive, religious, secular, identity-based, or other framework faces the same developmental test.
- It does not make disagreement itself inappropriate. Older students should encounter competing arguments and difficult ideas when the academic task and developmental readiness support it.
- It does not replace Minnesota law. This is a draft Minnesota Learning Project standard for evaluating proposed required content and tasks.

Required documentation for a statewide mandate

For each affected grade band, the proposing authority should identify the competency being taught, the developmental rationale, the evidence supporting that grade placement, estimated instructional time, foreseeable emotional or conceptual burden, available less-burdensome alternatives, assessment method, and displaced instruction.

Assessment rule

A student may be required to accurately describe, compare, analyze, or evaluate an idea when developmentally appropriate. Academic success should not depend on affirming a prescribed belief about identity, society, politics, morality, religion, or social conflict.

Status: Draft framework; not adopted law. **Version:** Draft 1.0, September 2026. **Related MLP policy:** MLP-POL-04 Developmental Appropriateness.