

Analysis of District Graduation Credits and Graduation Rates

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The State Board of Education (SBE) has proposed increasing the high school graduation requirement from 19 to 24 credits in order to better prepare students for success in postsecondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship, and to equip them with the skills to be a lifelong learner. This requirement is known as CORE 24. Concerns have been raised that requiring more credits would increase the dropout rate among some types of students, especially those from low-income families and among many students of color (who are more likely to live in low-income homes). Others believe that implementing CORE 24 would have little or even a *positive* effect on graduation rates because:

- The average district already requires more than 24 credits to graduate (mean=24.5).
- Research has shown that requiring more credits in “academic” subjects prepares students better for work and college after they leave high school¹.

Analyses of all 246 districts with high schools were conducted to determine the current relationship between Washington state district graduation requirements (number of credits) and their extended graduation rates² from the Class of 2007 (the most recent available). These analyses found either no or a slightly positive relationship between higher credit requirements and the extended graduation rates, regardless of a student’s income level or race/ethnicity. In other words, **if CORE 24 is implemented (pending funding), dropout rates will likely stay the same or decrease slightly**. Table 1 illustrates these trends for each student group. It shows for all students a very weak positive relationship between district credit requirements and graduation rates (i.e., as credit requirements increase, graduation rates increase; conversely, dropout rates decline). When the data are disaggregated, the relationship remains significant for White and low-income students. By contrast, there is no relationship between district credit requirements and graduation rates for Black, Asian, Hispanic, and American Indian students; in other words, there is no effect.

Table 1: Correlation between the Number of Required Graduation Credits and the Extended Graduation Rate, by Student Group

	All	Low income	American Indian	Asian/Pac Is	Black	Hispanic	White
Correlation	.178**	.192**	.096	.001	.153	.056	.161**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.003	.209	.990	.082	.431	.012
# of districts	246	241	172	173	130	203	244

** Statistically significant

¹ For example, see http://www.cesifo-group.de/portal/page/portal/ifoHome/b-publ/b3publwp/wp_abstract?p_file_id=9338 for Bishop, J, & Mane, F. (2004), *Educational Reform and Disadvantaged Students: Are They Better Off or Worse Off?* CESifo Working Paper No.1309.

² The extended graduation rate includes students who take more than four years to graduate. This is the measure used for accountability purposes and recognizes that some students require more time to graduate. Students have until age 21 to complete their education in the K-12 system.