

Making Core 24 Work For All Students: Building Policy Flexibility

GROUP: _____

Worksheet 2: Credit Not Defined by Time. The ITF has discussed the possibility of eliminating the time-based requirement for a credit as a way to create more flexibility within a 24-credit requirement. The advantages and disadvantages of the policy, identified by the ITF previously, are listed below.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consistent with the state’s direction toward standards-based learning• Does not artificially connect learning to time• Creates more flexibility for districts to focus on student-centered learning that will enable students to progress at their own rates• Eliminates existing inconsistencies created by differences in schedules; evidence suggests that the time-based requirement varies across districts, depending on the type of schedule the schools are following, and is not being met by all districts• Eliminates inconsistencies in the ways districts define and count “instructional hours”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May be viewed as less objective, measurable and easy to understand• Lacks the power of a time-based requirement to act as an equalizer—a form of standardization that reduces the likelihood that districts will cut corners• Creates no minimum, measurable threshold of expectation

For discussion:

Based on the feedback you have received to date and the further thinking you have done, would you:

1. endorse the idea of eliminating the time basis for a credit? _____yes _____no
 - a. If no, how would you revise this idea?

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2. If the time basis for a credit were merely decreased from 150 hours, it may be criticized as decreasing teacher-student contact time, or watering down the meaning of a credit.

a. How would you respond to this perspective?

b. How would you address the concerns raised in the following school district's letter to the SBE?

To avoid significant increases in dropouts, CORE 24 will force districts to move from a predominantly 6-period bell schedule to a 7- or 8-period bell schedule (thereby creating 28 or 32 potential "credits"). For a 180-day school year, this will reduce the amount of instructional time/credit from 180 hours to 150 hours or 135 hours, respectively, thereby significantly changing the meaning of the term "credit."

Although the root causes of dropouts are varied and complex, the final actions in high school are remarkably consistent. Students fall behind on their credits and, at some point, usually mid-sophomore to early junior year, think they are too far behind to catch up, and drop out. Currently, the mode number of required credits is 22, and the most common bell schedule is a 6-period day. If we raise that requirement to 24 without changing the bell schedule, we will exacerbate the discouragement and increase the dropouts.

Although 105 of the 246 districts in Washington that have high schools currently require more than 24 credits to graduate, they also generally offer between 28-32 "potential" credits. A paper presented at the SBE's Implementation Task Force clarifies this relationship (Taylor and Burnham, "Analysis of School Bell Schedules and Graduation Credit Requirements," 5/18/2009). Although bell schedules in about 13 percent of the districts were unknown, of those which were known, it shows those districts as requiring:

- a. 19-23.5 credits, 62.9% were 6-period districts;
- b. 24-27 credits, 92.8% were 7-period or block districts; and

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c. 28-31 credits, 97.3% were 7-period or block.

Therefore, the issue SBE must directly address is whether dividing the same school day into a larger number of smaller parts (i.e., from 6 periods and 180 hrs/credit to 7 or 8 periods and 150 or 135 hrs/credit) is a wise or an unwise strategy for purposes of creating a more meaningful high school diploma. We don't believe that a more meaningful diploma necessarily results from requiring more credits, if the credits themselves are less meaningful.

In the absence of some clear thought on this topic that can demonstrate a clear benefit, districts in Washington will be pressured to engage in a lot of window dressing (i.e., creating more class periods even though they contain less substance), solely for the purpose of being able to claim that our larger credit requirement created a more meaningful diploma.

Questions to Discuss:

Is it accurate to say that "CORE 24 will force districts to move from a predominantly 6-period bell schedule to a 7- or 8-period bell schedule (thereby creating 28 or 32 potential "credits")?" Why or why not?

The district assumes "*districts in Washington will be pressured to engage in a lot of window dressing (i.e., creating more class periods even though they contain less substance)*". Is this a reasonable assumption, and if so, what would decrease this likelihood?