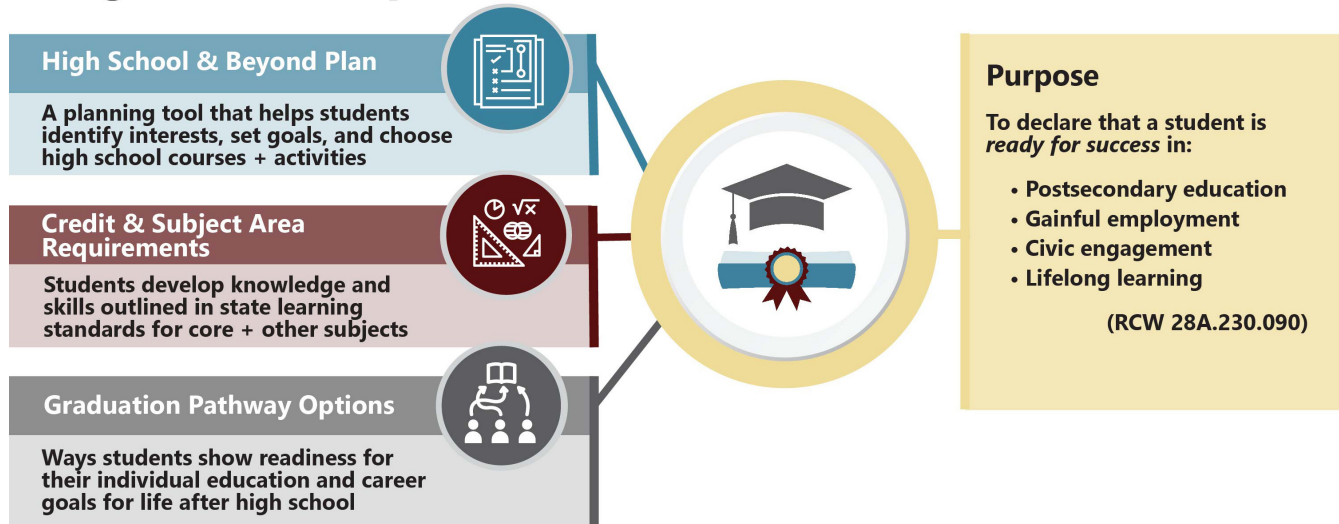




### What are graduation pathway options?

The graduation pathway is one of three required components for earning a high school diploma (see Figure below). Each component serves a different function. Together they fulfill the purpose of the diploma in declaring a student is ready for success in postsecondary education, gainful employment, civic engagement, and lifelong learning.

## Washington State's High School Diploma



While students develop knowledge and skills across subject areas by completing the Credit & Subject Area Requirements (i.e., 24-credit framework), the graduation pathway options provide students multiple ways to show readiness for their individual education and career goals. In other words, what makes the graduation pathway requirement distinct from other requirements is **the focus on the student's individual goals**. The pathway a student completes must align with the student's postsecondary goals as described in their High School and Beyond Plan.

Graduation pathway options include tests and advanced courses in English language arts and math, Career and Technical Education course sequences, and the military vocational aptitude test (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery).

### Problem

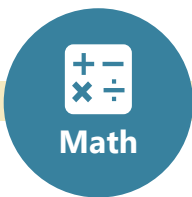
In anticipation of potential barriers, the Legislature charged the State Board of Education with researching the first three years of pathways implementation to identify barriers and provide recommendations for changes to the existing pathways and additional pathways options. While implementation was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the research identified other challenges.

The pathway options do not meet the needs of all students. In some cases, students complete pathways that do not match their individual goals, in which case the pathway is not serving its intended purpose. A strong, consistent theme we heard from students, families, and educators throughout three years of research is the need for more relevant, engaging, and authentic options, including options in subject areas beyond English and math, that can be customized to better align with students' individual goals.





English



Math



Science



Social  
Studies



Health &  
Fitness



Arts



Career &  
Tech. Ed.

## Solution

Based on the research, and in response to the Legislature’s charge, the Board proposes adding a **performance-based pathway** to the options that school districts may offer. This new option will allow students to show what they know and can do in real-world, hands-on ways that align with their individual goals for after high school. It allows students to focus their pathway in two core subject areas (from list above) that most directly align with their education or career goals.

The performance-based option may take a variety of forms – such as a project, practicum, work-related experience, community service, or cultural activity – and may result in a variety of products that can be evaluated – such as a performance, presentation, portfolio, report, film, or exhibit. But, to count as a graduation pathway, the learning experience **must meet state requirements regarding the safety and quality of the learning experience and the assessment criteria for determining the student has applied the learning standards**. Evaluation of the student’s performance must include at least one qualified teacher in each relevant subject area, and the school district must adopt a local policy that meets state requirements before offering the pathway option. The proposal also establishes ongoing data and monitoring requirements at the state and local levels.

## Benefits

Adding a performance-based pathway option will benefit students who are not well served by the original set of options, as well as students who desire more relevant and authentic pathways that align better with their interests and goals for after high school.

The performance-based option will allow students to:

- Show what they know and can do in real-world, hands-on, authentic ways
- Demonstrate learning over a broader set of learning standards and subject areas than English and math (if other subjects align better with their individual goals)
- Customize the pathway to align with their individual goals, increasing the relevance of the High School and Beyond Plan in shaping each student’s pathway

Research shows that performance-based assessments are valid ways of measuring students’ readiness for success in college and careers, and are associated with **increased student engagement, skill development, critical thinking, and post-secondary success**.

In addition, performance-based assessment is a key part of mastery-based learning, an instructional approach the state has invested in expanding. Adding a performance-based pathway option will support the state’s transition to mastery-based learning.

