

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

HEARING TYPE: X INFORMATION/ACTION
DATE: MAY 11, 2007
SUBJECT: **AMERICAN DIPLOMA PROJECT**
SERVICE UNIT: State Board of Education
PRESENTER: Eric Liu, Chair, Meaningful High School Diploma Committee

BACKGROUND:

Attached are some questions and answers about the American Diploma Project Network. Additional information will be handed out at the meeting.

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 24, 2007

TO: State Board of Education Members

FROM: Kathe Taylor, Policy Director

SUBJECT: Membership in the American Diploma Project Network

The Governor has asked the Board for a recommendation about whether Washington should join the American Diploma Project Network (ADPN). As you know, at the Board's last meeting in March, there were several presentations about the American Diploma Project. Following is a brief summary of what the ADPN is, and what benefits and drawbacks there might be to joining the network.

The ADPN is coordinated by Achieve, Inc., and currently consists of 29 states (including Northwest states Oregon and Idaho) that have committed to establishing policies that will enable the state to take the following action steps:

- Align high school standards and assessments with the knowledge and skills required for success in postsecondary education and work.
- Administer a college- and work-ready assessment, aligned to state standards, to high school students so they get clear and timely information and are able to address critical skill deficiencies while still in high school.
- Require all students to take a college- and work-ready curriculum to earn a high school diploma.
- Hold high schools accountable for graduating students who are college ready, and hold postsecondary institutions accountable for their success once enrolled.

In order for a state to join the ADPN, the governor, chief state school officer, a state higher education official and someone representing leadership of the state's business community must commit to lead an effort to align expectations for high school students with the skills students need to succeed in college and work. Although the Governor has extended the Board the courtesy of requesting a recommendation, the decision to join the ADPN can be made with or without the Board's endorsement. The Governor's office would send a letter of intent to Achieve. There is no fee to join, although there is a fee-per-service for intensive technical assistance. This fee would be negotiated depending on what the state might require of Achieve. (See the accompanying document, "American Diploma Project Network: Frequently Asked Questions for States" for more information.)

How would Washington benefit from joining the ADPN?

The primary benefit to the state would be access to a group of like-minded states, convened by Achieve on a regular basis to share strategies for addressing policy design, implementation and advocacy needs. The state would also benefit by being able to tap

into the resources of Achieve for research and development, access to national experts, and overall technical expertise. For instance, Achieve is currently engaged in research and development work that will describe the knowledge and skills that widely-used college admissions and placement exams measure. It is also identifying promising strategies that states can use to raise graduation rates while also raising graduation requirements. Washington would be assigned a lead contact at Achieve with significant expertise in state education policy, high school redesign, postsecondary and business outreach and advocacy and political communications.

What drawbacks might there be to joining?

The pivotal question is, “To what extent is Washington in alignment with the action agenda of Achieve and the ADP?” The Meaningful High School Diploma (MHSD) Committee has considered that signing on to the ADPN could lock, or appear to lock, Washington State into a commitment to implement specific policy changes (such as X years of math or foreign language for all graduates). There have also been some concerns that the Committee hasn’t had enough time to study the ADPN and compare it to any comparable reform agendas. The Board can discuss these issues at the May meeting. If Board members can agree in principle that each of the four action agenda items is reasonably consistent with a policy direction in which Washington is headed, then there are few apparent downsides to joining.

Should Washington diverge from Achieve’s agenda at some time in the future, it can withdraw from the ADPN without penalty. Although states commit to the action agenda, all states are “works in progress” in relation to the four action agenda goals and because the states have significant flexibility in how they pursue the agenda, membership would not unduly limit Washington state’s ability to pursue our brand of reform. The 29 current member states differ in the priority they have given to each goal, and in the number of credits and types of courses required for graduation. For instance some states have differentiated diplomas; others don’t. Some have already put in place graduation requirements for four years of math in designated content areas; some haven’t. It is left to the state to decide how to proceed in a way that best advances the action agenda of the ADPN and the state.

AMERICAN DIPLOMA PROJECT NETWORK

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR STATES

How does a state become part of the American Diploma Project (ADP) Network?

To join the ADP Network a state's governor, chief state school officer, state higher education official and leadership of the state's business community must commit to lead an effort to align expectations for high school students with the skills students need to succeed in college and work. States that have joined the ADP Network have expressed this commitment in writing to Achieve, indicating an intention to develop and carry out a plan for addressing the four policy priorities (see below), and the state's timetable for action.

What does it mean to be a member of the American Diploma Project Network?

Twenty-nine states—educating more than half of America's public school students—have joined the ADP Network. Membership is both voluntary and free. The only "price of admission" to the network is the commitment by the state's ADP leadership team to work together to raise high school standards to align with the demands of college and work. Network states have committed to addressing these four policy priorities:

- *Aligning high school standards and assessments with the knowledge and skills required for success after high school.* This requires anchoring high school standards to real world college and workplace expectations.
- *Requiring all graduates to take rigorous courses, aligned with state standards that prepare them for life after high school.* ADP calls for four years of grade level English, including literature, writing, reasoning, logic and communications skills and four years of math, including courses that cover the content typically found in Algebra I and II, geometry, data analysis and statistics.
- *Streamlining the assessment system so that the tests students take in high school also can serve as placement tests for college.* This means that states should give all high school students an assessment before their senior year that is capable of measuring readiness for credit-bearing postsecondary courses and 21st century jobs. This should enable schools to fill learning gaps prior to graduation, reduce the need for remediation, eliminate unnecessary tests and increase the likelihood of postsecondary and workplace success.
- *Holding high schools accountable for graduating students who are ready for college or careers and holding postsecondary institutions accountable for students' success once enrolled.* To do this, states must develop longitudinal data systems that track individual students' progress and support effective transitions from secondary to postsecondary education and beyond.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Each state develops its own plan to carry out the shared policy agenda.

Does it cost anything to be part of the American Diploma Project Network?

No. Membership in the network is voluntary and free. Achieve does provide other programs and services (such as Alignment Institutes and reviews of state standards and assessments) on a fee-for-service basis that states may participate in to advance the ADP project in their states. Use of these services is also voluntary; no state is required to use Achieve-provided services.

What are the benefits of participation for all Network states?

States that participate in the ADP network receive the following key benefits:

- Added legitimacy to state efforts by being part of a well-regarded national effort.
- Ability to learn from state education policy leaders in other states that share a common policy agenda.

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- Joint efforts with like-minded states—such as the development of an Algebra II exam—that can improve quality and decrease costs to individual states.
- Annual convening of every participating state’s ADP leadership team to share strategies for addressing priority policy design, implementation and advocacy needs.
- Invitational convenings/workshops for particular constituencies (for example, Achieve is co-hosting a national summit for college presidents and higher education executives and a separate convening for chairs of state boards of education).
- Invitational convenings/workshops on particular topics to develop and refine plans/policies for assessment, accountability, data and other areas and share strategies across states.

How does Achieve’s research and development work support the ADP Network?

Achieve conducts research on a variety of topics related to the ADP agenda. For example, R & D conducted by Achieve in the past several years has:

- Identified must-have English and math skills high school graduates must have to be prepared to succeed in college and the workplace.
- Described the knowledge and skills that are measured by state high school graduation exams, and the level of performance required to pass the tests.
- Described high school graduation requirements and related policies in the 50 states.
- Identified the key elements of an early warning data system that can help identify potential dropouts in time to trigger appropriate prevention and intervention strategies.

Research and development work currently underway will:

- Produce grade-by-grade math benchmarks (K-8) and model course descriptions in high school math, aligned with ADP benchmarks.
- Produce grade span (middle and high school) English language arts benchmarks.
- Describe the knowledge and skills that widely used college admissions and placement exams measure.
- Identify promising strategies that states can use to raise graduation rates while also raising graduation requirements.

This research, and more, is publicly available and can be found at www.achieve.org

How does my state communicate with Achieve?

As the Network has grown, Achieve has created a State Outreach Team to increase its capacity to work with participating states. The mission of this team is to enable Achieve to help ADP Network states by:

- Staying abreast of states’ progress and plans to address the ADP policy agenda.
- Identifying key successes and lessons that can be shared with other states.
- Identifying the most critical common challenges states are facing so Achieve can, where appropriate, conduct research, provide additional support and, formally and informally, convene network states.

Each state has been assigned a lead contact at Achieve. Achieve team members have significant expertise in state education policy, high school redesign, postsecondary and business outreach and advocacy and political communications. For more information about the Achieve Outreach Team, please contact Dominique Raymond, the State Outreach Team Coordinator at 202-419-1564 or draymond@achieve.org.

AMERICAN DIPLOMA PROJECT NETWORK FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR STATES

How does Achieve help Network states build momentum?

To continue to build public support nationwide for why these sweeping changes are needed, Achieve:

- Creates and disseminates case-making tools to help states buttress the case for the ADP agenda and develop and mobilize teams of advocates—including business leaders, teachers, principals, parents and community groups—to support the Network agenda at the state and local levels.
- Mobilizes financial and technical resources to support the Network.
- Conducts and publishes relevant research on topics related to the ADP agenda.
- Works closely with national organizations in the business, K-12, and higher education communities to keep these issues at the center of attention.
- Produces an annual 50-state report, *Closing the Expectations Gap*, on the key progress and important lessons learned as states raise expectations for high school graduation.

What are Alignment Institutes?

To date, 13 Network states have participated in Achieve's Alignment Institutes, whose goal is to help each state develop and adopt Academic Standards for College and Work Readiness that are jointly "owned" by the K-12 and postsecondary education systems, and by employers. Participating states form a cross-cutting team that leads the state effort, which typically lasts 12-15 months. Achieve provides Alignment Teams from participating states with the tools, training, and technical assistance they need to create and adopt the standards, and begin to use them as the foundation for high school graduation requirements, postsecondary placement standards and related policies.

Through these institutes, participating ADP Network states develop:

- Academic Standards for College and Work Readiness in math and English that will ensure that high school graduates have the knowledge and skills they need to enter and succeed in credit-bearing courses and high skills, high-growth jobs.
- Commitment from postsecondary institutions and faculty to use the academic standards in admissions and/or placement decisions.
- Validation and support for the academic standards from the business community.

What is the multi-state Algebra II end-of-course assessment? Should our state participate?

Nine Network states are working together to develop a common end-of-course assessment for Algebra II: Arkansas, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island. The multi-state Algebra II exam will be designed to provide high school students and schools with information on how well students are meeting standards, as well as provide postsecondary institutions with information they need to place students into credit-bearing courses. Thus, it will provide especially useful diagnostic information that can help lower remediation rates and keep doors to postsecondary education open for more students. The assessment will be pilot-tested in spring 2007 and operational in 2008. Additional ADP states are welcome to participate.

For more information about the American Diploma Project Network, please go to www.achieve.org