

CORE 24/GRADUATION REQUIREMENT REVISIONS

BACKGROUND

The State Board of Education (SBE) adopted a proposed Core 24 graduation requirements framework in July 2008.¹ Since that time, the SBE has received extensive stakeholder input and the recommendations of the Core 24 Implementation Task Force. The SBE will look at the framework once again to determine what changes may be needed and a timetable for moving forward.

POLICY CONSIDERATION

The SBE will consider revisions to the Core 24 framework in the context of the following questions:

- What changes to the proposed Core 24 graduation requirements framework are needed to show that the SBE has responded to the concerns of stakeholders?
- How can the SBE reconcile its advocacy for the state to fund the opportunity to complete 24 credits with its responsibility to ensure students have access to needed graduation improvements now?
- Given the SBE's commitments to no unfunded mandates, what no-cost policy changes will start the process of moving forward to improved graduation requirements?
- How will the SBE know that funding has "started" and rules may be put in place? What type of funding will signal that the rule process may begin for changes with fiscal impact?

Staff is recommending that the SBE consider a revision of the framework called the "Quality Core."

EXPECTED ACTION

Adopt provisionally a revised framework of graduation requirements.

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<http://www.sbe.wa.gov/documents/MHSD%20Memorandum%20%20with%20July%2025%20motion%20amendments%20final.pdf>

CORE 24/GRADUATION REQUIREMENT REVISIONS

The 2009 Washington Legislature made decisive revisions to the basic education act, including several directly relevant to the State Board of Education's (SBE) work on graduation requirements. The statute¹ stipulated that:

"School districts must provide instruction of sufficient quantity and quality and give students the opportunity to complete graduation requirements that are intended to prepare them for postsecondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship...."

The instructional program of basic education provided by each school district shall include...Instruction that provides students the opportunity to complete twenty-four credits for high school graduation, subject to a phased-in implementation of the twenty-four credits as established by the legislature."

The SBE's work on the purpose of a diploma² is reflected in the first statement, while its advocacy for adequate state funding is addressed in the second. The SBE has remained steadfast in it's:

- Advocacy for the state to fund the opportunity for students to complete 24 credits for high school graduation.
- Commitment to no unfunded mandates³.
- Certainty that an essential core of graduation requirements is needed to prepare all students for postsecondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship.

How to maintain all three commitments and move state policy forward within the context of a troubled state economy is the dilemma the SBE now faces.

¹ [28A.150..220](#)

² The purpose of the diploma is to declare that a student is ready for success in postsecondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship, and is equipped with the skills to be a lifelong learner. The diploma represents a balance between the personalized education needs of each student and society's needs, and reflects at its core the state's basic education goals. The diploma is a compact among students, parents, local school districts, the state and whatever institution or employer the graduate moves on to - a compact that says the graduate has acquired a particular set of knowledge and skills. How the student demonstrates those skills may differ. Whether a student earns the credit by participating in formal instruction or by demonstrating competency through established district policies is immaterial; they are equally acceptable." *Adopted by the SBE in January 2008*

³ In its July 2008 motion, the SBE affirmed "the intention of the Board to advocate for a comprehensive funding package and revision to the Basic Education Funding formula, which among other necessary investments should link the implementation of CORE24 directly to sufficient funding to local school districts for a six period high school day, a comprehensive education and career guidance system, and support for students who need additional help to meet the requirements."

The challenge is straightforward. For two years, stakeholders have weighed in. No one disputes high expectations. No one wants a diploma not to have meaning. But some have raised concerns about the ways the requirements would impact struggling students, English Language Learners, and children who have made bad choices or given up on school. They have spoken about diminished resources, unfunded mandates, less local control, and limitations on flexibility to provide support that students need.

On the other hand, stakeholders have also told stories of success and hope. The SBE heard from many students in July 2008 who spoke eloquently about their desire for adults to set a high bar, and they would meet it; for adults who would help them attain their dreams. Parents said, “yes,” systems should be aligned so students know more clearly what the expectations are. Businesses applauded improvements that would help produce graduates who could meet the increased demands of the workplace. The changes the SBE was considering were seen to be a move in the right direction.

The SBE has listened to all views and recommendations, including those of the Core 24 Implementation Task Force (ITF)⁴, whose final report it reviewed at its May 13-14 and June 15, 2010 meetings. The ITF recommendations provide a thoughtful array of policy changes for the SBE to consider, but do not address all of the concerns stakeholders have expressed. Nor could they; the ITF was asked to offer their recommendations only within the context of the Core 24 framework, not to change the framework itself.

At the June 15 meeting, the SBE also reviewed a “straw proposal” for a revised set of graduation requirements. In the ensuing discussion, members reiterated their intent to make the requirements work for all students, prevent tracking, avoid “default” language that sounded like failure, and preserve a “safe harbor” that would assure that all students had a foundation of knowledge and skills that could not be waived or substituted.

The questions the SBE must grapple with now are:

- What changes to the proposed Core 24 graduation requirements framework are needed to show that the SBE has responded to the concerns of stakeholders?
- How can the SBE reconcile its advocacy for the state to fund the opportunity to complete 24 credits with its responsibility to ensure students have access to needed graduation improvements now?
- Given the SBE’s commitments to no unfunded mandates, what no-cost policy changes will start the process of moving forward to improved graduation requirements?

And finally,

- How will the SBE know that funding has “started” and rules may be put in place? What type of funding will signal that the rule process may begin for changes with fiscal impact?

⁴ <http://www.sbe.wa.gov/documents/Core%2024%20ITF%20Final%20Rpt%20April%202010.pdf>

What changes to the proposed Core 24 graduation requirements framework are needed to show that the SBE has responded to the concerns of stakeholders?

The SBE's commitment to no unfunded mandates puts it in the unique position of having to weigh the likelihood of funding in the immediate biennium against the compelling need to act on the knowledge it has accrued. With this realization come certain risks:

- Without a realistic plan for implementation, others are likely to step in. During the last legislative session, legislation supporting an alternative diploma was introduced and is likely to resurface next session. The ability to earn a diploma simultaneously with an earned associate's degree is already a reality.⁵
- If the legislature is unwilling or unable to fund the opportunity to complete 24 credits anytime soon, a vision for change, however well conceived, will not serve students well. Without state leadership, responsibility for progress rests solely on local decisions, and students will benefit differentially, depending on where they live.

The SBE needs to show that it has listened to stakeholders and considered the realities of leading meaningful change in austere fiscal times. Putting forward a revised framework with fewer credits and a new name will signal that the SBE has listened, and has acted to address the concerns without sacrificing its core values for what students need for success. Staff recommends moving forward with a revised, 20 credit framework, the Quality Core.

How can the SBE reconcile its advocacy for the state to fund the opportunity to complete 24 credits with its responsibility to ensure students have access to needed graduation improvements now?

The Quality Core will respond to stakeholders' calls for greater flexibility and local control, increase the likelihood that students take courses which keep all options open, and require fewer new resources to implement. It will also permit the SBE to continue its advocacy for the state to fund the opportunity for students to complete 24 credits (four of them locally determined), but will not delay needed improvements to graduation requirements until funding for those additional credits is available.

This revised graduation requirements framework—a "Quality Core" of 20 college and career ready credits, high school and beyond plan, and culminating project—will significantly move the state's graduation requirements policy forward. It offers an opportunity for the SBE to rebrand the requirements, respond to the budget crisis, and move forward on much-needed requirements. The Quality Core is easier to explain and depict graphically than Core 24, but focuses students in similar ways on opportunities, choices, and preparation, within defined parameters.

⁵ [28B.50.535](#)

The Quality Core requirements work for students because they:

- Provide a solid core of requirements that will position students well for technical and professional opportunities after high school. All students will take courses that align with the minimum four-year public college admission requirements, and/or provide solid technical preparation.
- Allow sufficient space in a standard six-period day schedule for students to take the support classes needed to help them be successful. ELL students, students in need of credit recovery, and/or students who need extra help will have a cushion of time to get the attention they need.⁶
- Allow students to take multiple pathways and enable them to personalize their learning *within the parameters of a solid foundation of common requirements that cannot be substituted*; Quality Core will provide limited, student-driven choice, based on high school and beyond plans.
- Enable students to pursue a Career and Technical Education (CTE) program of student, concentrate in CTE (3 credits) or pursue skills center courses.
- Maintain the emphasis on creativity and innovation represented by the arts credits, while allowing flexibility for students to substitute other courses if they are more closely aligned with students' education and career goals.
- Provide students with preparation comparable to the preparation of students in the majority of other states.

⁶ The SBE's review of districts' 2010 graduation requirements confirms that almost all of the 247 districts with high schools (238 or 96%) exceed the state's minimum prescribed graduation credit requirements, while 110 (45%) require 24 credits or more. The most common number of credits is 22, required by 82 (33%) of the districts.⁶

QUALITY CORE

Subject	Credits
English	4
Math ¹	3
Science ¹	3
Social Studies	3
Health	.5
Career Preparation	1
High School & Beyond Plan ²	
Career and Technical Education/World Languages ³	2
Arts ⁴	2
Fitness ⁴	1.5
Culminating Project	
Total	20

Notes.

¹ One credit of math or science must be taken in the senior year.

² The High School and Beyond Plan should be integrated in the career preparation course and in other relevant places in the curriculum.

³ Two credits in one area. Students who want to take two or more credits each of both CTE and world languages classes may substitute courses where designated.

⁴ Local administrators may allow students to substitute other courses that better meet the educational and career goals expressed in a student's high school and beyond plan. Only one substitution may be made in Arts.

Given the SBE's commitment to no unfunded mandates, what no-cost policy changes will start the process of moving forward to improved graduation requirements?

There are several no-cost policy recommendations from the Implementation Task Force that the SBE discussed at the June 15, 2010 meeting and appeared to generally support. These recommendations will add flexibility for students to build a set of graduation requirements consistent with their education and career goals, and could be put in rule immediately.

Recommendation 1. Support the state’s continued move toward a competency-based system by removing the 150-hour requirement for a high school credit.⁷ Substitute non time-based language for the current 150-hour definition and maintain the competency-based definition.

Few districts, as yet, routinely use the “competency” definition as a means of awarding credit, and even those that do, such as Clark County’s Evergreen School District, do not find many students taking advantage of it. For this reason, a non time-based statement would provide an alternative to a strict reliance on competencies. It is not uncommon for states to have several definitions for a credit. The SBE may want to consider substituting a statement in the WAC such as these examples from other states:

- Successful demonstration of a unit of study as established by the district (Maryland).
- Successful completion of the subject area content expectations or guidelines developed by the state (Michigan).
- Satisfactory completion of all of the required work for a particular course or subject (Kansas).

Recommendation 2: Permit students who complete Career and Technical Education (CTE) course-equivalent courses to earn one credit for the course and satisfy a second requirement; require reciprocity across districts. Work with the Office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction to determine what changes, if any, would need to be made to the standardized transcript to share information adequately across districts.

This is the “Two for One” Policy considered by the ITF. This policy would create flexibility for students by enabling them to earn one credit and satisfy two requirements when taking CTE courses that have been designated by the district to be equivalent to a graduation requirement. By requiring reciprocity across districts, students would not be impacted negatively if they transferred to a district with a different policy.

Statute⁸ already requires districts to adopt course-equivalent policies for CTE courses, and the state has prepared an “equivalency toolkit”⁹ to provide guidance for establishing those equivalencies.

⁷ The relevant language of WAC [180-51-050](#) is as follows: As used in this chapter the term "high school credit" shall mean:

(1) Grades nine through twelve or the equivalent of a four-year high school program, and grades seven and eight under the provisions of RCW [28A.230.090](#) (4) and (5):

(a) One hundred fifty hours of planned instructional activities approved by the district; or

(b) Satisfactory demonstration by a student of clearly identified competencies established pursuant to a process defined in written district policy. Districts are strongly advised to confirm with the higher education coordinating board that the award of competency-based high school credit meets the minimum college core admissions standards set by the higher education coordinating board for admission into a public, baccalaureate institution.

⁸ <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28A.230.097>

⁹ <http://www.k12.wa.us/CareerTechEd/pubdocs/EquivalencyCreditToolkit2.0.pdf>

Recommendation 3: Permit local authority for the substitution of up to two credits in designated subjects; require reciprocity across districts. Work with the Office of State Superintendent of Public Instruction to determine what changes, if any, would need to be made to the standardized transcript to share information adequately across districts.

The SBE's decision on this recommendation may be contingent upon the final form of the graduation framework that it puts forward. For example, the proposed Quality Core designates clearly in which subjects substitutions may be made. Local districts would not need to adopt written district policy to make these substitutions because the parameters would already be prescribed in rule. However, the SBE might want to consider granting local waiver authority for up to two credits under "hardship" conditions; for example, when students enter the school district from another state or country in their senior year.

Recommendation 4: Seek SBE authority for requiring middle schools to initiate the High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP) in middle school, and advocate for funding for increasing comprehensive counseling services at the middle and high school levels.

The SBE currently does not have the authority to require middle schools to initiate the High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP). The ITF recommended that the focus of the HSBP in middle school be on exploring students' options and interests. This is a systems issue, not an individual student graduation requirement issue. Students will graduate even if they start their HSBP later than middle school.

Recommendation 5: Remove the .5 credit requirement for Washington State History, while retaining, as a non-credit requirement, the study of the Washington State Constitution as required by law.

Students are required by law¹⁰ to study the Washington State Constitution as a "prerequisite for graduation." The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) rule¹¹ specifies a one-semester course in Washington State History in grades 7-12. The SBE graduation requirement rule requires students to earn .5 credit in Washington State History¹². Anything that is awarded credit for graduation must align with high school standards, per the SBE's graduation requirements rule.

In the SBE's transcript study of 2008 graduates¹³, 40 percent of the almost 15,000 students in the study took Washington State History before 9th grade. Approximately half of them received credit; the others "met the requirement." It is not clear whether those who received credit participated in a class taught to high school standards.

When the SBE increases the social studies requirement, .5 credit must be civics education¹⁴. The study of the Washington State Constitution could be integrated into that new requirement, or into another social studies requirement. Districts may make that decision locally.

¹⁰ RCW [28A.230.170](#)

¹¹ WAC [392-410-120](#)

¹² WAC [180-51-061](#); [180-51-066](#)

¹³ http://www.sbe.wa.gov/documents/TranscriptStudy2008_FINAL_000.pdf

¹⁴ RCW [28A.230.093](#)

How will the SBE know that funding has “started” and rules may be put in place? What type of funding will signal that the rule process may begin?

The SBE has been clear that it will not support unfunded mandates, and legislation assures that graduation requirement changes, which have a fiscal impact on school districts, must be formally authorized and funded by the legislature.¹⁵ Rules need to be in place by September of the year a class enters ninth grade; therefore, they must be adopted at least four years prior to the graduating class that they affect. Before the SBE can initiate rule-making, it will need to wait until after a legislative session to know if money has been appropriated.

Lead Time Needed to Impact a Graduating Class

Rule Put in Place	First Graduating Class Affected
2011	2015
2012	2016
2013	2017
2014	2018
2015	2019
2016	2020

¹⁵ RCW [28A.230.090](#)

Given this schedule, staff makes the following recommendations for a timetable of rule implementations for new graduation requirements.

Timetable for SBE Action

SBE Action	Year Funding Would Need to Begin	Year Rule Put in Place	Graduating Class Affected
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add math credit. 	Already in rule.	2009	2013
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No rule changes. 	N/A	2010	2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add 1 credit of English. • Add .5 credit of social studies (specifying .5 in civics education). • Specify a math or science must be taken in senior year. • Implement no-cost policy recommendations. • Clarify requirements for Culminating Project. 	Assumes these changes can be made with minimal state fiscal impact. ¹⁶	2011	2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No rule changes. 	N/A	2012	2016
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add 2 credits of world languages or career and technical education. • Add 1 credit of arts. • Start HSBP in middle school; clarify requirements. 	2013	2013	2017
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add 1 credit of science. 	2014	2014	2018

Note. All implementation dates would be pushed back if funding were not received.

¹⁶ Approximately 19% of the 247 districts with high schools will be affected by the addition of English and social studies credits. Forty-six districts will need to add English credits (21 of those will only need to add .5 credit). Forty-four districts will need to add .5 credit of social studies. Fifteen districts will need to make adjustments in both English and social studies credits. All districts will have to add civics education, but civics is already part of the Social Studies Essential Academic Learning Requirements and many districts have already incorporated it.

<http://www.sbe.wa.gov/documents/2010.06.10%20Graduation%20Requirements%20Database.xls>

The table below provides staff recommendations for the graduation requirements components of an SBE legislative package in the coming biennia:

Timetable of SBE Legislative Requests

Biennium	SBE Legislative Request
2011-2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present draft rules for graduating class of 2015 to QEC and legislature for review (legislature must approve any changes to graduation requirements that have a fiscal impact). • Request a pool of funds as incentive money for districts willing to “beta test” new requirements prior to state-mandated implementation.
2013-2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request additional funding for struggling students, comprehensive guidance and counseling, and instructional time. • Request additional money for districts needing resources for science facilities.
2015-2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request additional funding for struggling students, comprehensive guidance and counseling, and instructional time. • Request additional money for districts needing resources for science facilities.

NEXT STEPS: SHORT-TERM

1

July 2010: Provisionally adopt a revised framework of graduation requirements, with final adoption at the November 2010 meeting, after a period of stakeholder engagement.

2

September 2010: Consider MHSD Committee's recommended changes for culminating project and high school and beyond plan; adopt revisions. (See Attachment A)

3

August through November 2010: Engage stakeholders in a discussion of the revised framework.

4

November 2010: Make any final changes to the revised framework and adopt draft rules for the policy changes that require no cost.

NEXT STEPS: LONGER TERM

Several ITF recommendations remain that the SBE may want to take more time for study in order to fully consider the recommendations. For this reason, staff recommends that the SBE in 2010-2011:

- Work with the Higher Education Coordinating Board to explore ways to deepen the "Two for One" Policy and extend it to courses other than CTE-equivalent courses.

The ITF had recommended that the "Two for One" policy apply to either a CTE-equivalent course or another course that has been designated by the district to be equivalent to a graduation requirement. Initial conversations with the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) suggested that the HECB might be concerned about this policy if it were to impact College Academic Distribution Requirements (CADRs).

- Convene a middle school study group to explore middle school preparation for high school, including the possibility of courses meeting "rigorous" standards that could possibly satisfy high school graduation requirements.

The ITF had recommended that the SBE provide opportunities for students to begin meeting high school graduation requirements at the middle level when courses meet rigorous standards as determined by local districts. At issue is the question, under what circumstances, if at all, the Board would permit students to meet some high school requirements based on standards identified by the districts (not necessarily high school level standards). Further discussion on this topic, as well as related high school preparation issues relevant to middle school, would benefit from a more inclusive conversation with the field.

- Work with OSPI assessment staff and other stakeholders to explore more deeply the implications of a state policy that would allow students who meet standard on end-of-course state assessments to earn credit for courses, even if they failed or possibly did not even take the course.

The ITF recommended that the SBE authorize through rule the opportunity for students who meet standard on state-approved end-of-course assessments to earn credit for the associated course, even if the student fails the class. The ITF was split almost evenly in its support for this recommendation. It is an important issue and bears further study, if for no other reason than to allow time to see the end-of-course assessments. Because districts can already make this decision locally, the primary value of a statewide rule would be to allow all students access to the same benefit.

- Consider the merits of allowing students seeking an International Baccalaureate or Cambridge Diploma to substitute state-mandated requirements if needed.

The ITF considered, but did not formally vote on the possibility that local administrators could waive state-mandated graduation requirements for students who receive an International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma or Cambridge Diploma. The ITF did not see this issue to be part of their charge from the SBE, but were interested in seeing the topic explored further.

Culminating Project and High School and Beyond Plans: Draft Proposals from Meaningful High School Diploma Advisory Work Group.

After discussion over several meetings, the Meaningful High School Diploma Advisory Work Group considered and revised the culminating project and high school and beyond plan draft proposals. Both proposals differ from current policy in two ways:

1. Each explicitly connects the two requirements.
2. Each prescribes specific content to increase consistency in implementation across districts.

While the culminating project proposal does not explicitly state connections to basic education learning goals three and four¹⁷, those goals are implicitly addressed. Both proposals leave assessment of the requirements to the discretion of the districts.

Culminating Project¹⁸ Proposal

1. All students shall be required to complete a project or series of projects for graduation that is related to the student's post-high school goals and interests per their high school and beyond plan.
2. The project(s) shall include a portfolio, a presentation, and a product. The project(s) may also include, for example: a research or reflective paper, community service, job shadowing, internship, or other components deemed appropriate by the district.
3. The project(s) shall demonstrate the application of core academic skills and learning competencies from each of the following categories:
 - Learning and innovation skills (creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem-solving, communication and collaboration).
 - Information, media and technology skills.
 - Life and career skills (flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, leadership and responsibility, perseverance).
4. Assessment of skills and successful completion of the project shall be determined by the local school district.

¹⁷ (3) Think analytically, logically, and creatively, and to integrate different experiences and knowledge to form reasoned judgments and solve problems; and (4) Understand the importance of work and finance and how performance, effort, and decisions directly affect future career and educational opportunities.

¹⁸ Culminating Project current rule: (i) *Each student shall complete a culminating project for graduation. The project shall consist of the students demonstrating both their learning competencies and preparations related to learning goals three and four. Each district shall define the process to implement this graduation requirement, including assessment criteria, in written district policy. (WAC 180-51-066)*

High School and Beyond Plan¹⁹ Proposal

All students shall be required to complete a personally-relevant high school and beyond plan that includes reflective practice and shall include documentation (evidence) of a student's:

1. Personal interests and career goals.
2. Four-year plan for course-taking that is related to the student's interests and goals.
3. Research on postsecondary training and education related to one's career interest, including comparative information on the benefits and costs of available choices.
4. Budget for postsecondary education or training and life based on personal and career interest.
5. Participation in a postsecondary site visit(s).
6. Completion of an application for postsecondary education and training.
7. Completion of a resume.

The student's post-high school goals and interests, as expressed in the high school and beyond plan, shall become the basis for the student's culminating project.

¹⁹ High school and beyond plan current rule: *Each student shall have an education plan for their high school experience, including what they expect to do the year following graduation.*(WAC 180.51.066)