



Washington State Graduates: Course-Taking Patterns in Arts

Research shows high school course-taking patterns affect students' achievement in high school and beyond (Adelman, 2006; Bottoms & Feagan, 2003). Most colleges and universities prefer, if not require, students to take arts credits. Washington State currently requires that students take one arts credit to graduate from high school. Implementation of Core 24 would increase the arts requirement.

With the growing concern around preparing students to compete in a global society, education leaders and policy makers have begun to recommend raising graduation requirements. From 2004 to 2008, the number of states requiring all students to take a college and work preparatory curriculum for graduation grew from zero to 20, with an additional ten states considering increasing graduation requirements to better prepare students for college and career (Achieve, 2004, 2009).

Washington State's minimum graduation requirement of 19 credits (20 credits in 2013) is among the lowest in the nation, as are requirements for specific content areas (Education Commission of the States, 2006). Currently, Washington State requires a minimum of one credit of arts to graduate, and all districts in Washington meet this credit requirement, but do not exceed it. The class of 2008 was the first class required to take one credit of visual or performing arts to graduate; previously, students were allowed to take a "restricted elective," which could include arts or another subject area graduation requirement (SBE database,2008).

The Washington State Board of Education (SBE) is revising high school graduation requirements to better prepare students for career, postsecondary education, and citizenship. The proposed Core 24 graduation requirements framework, approved in July 2008 with implementation contingent on funding, is more rigorous than current Washington State graduation requirements and, in some content areas, more rigorous than minimum college admission standards set by the

Washington Higher Education Coordinating (HEC) Board (see Table 1). In 2008, students were required to take one arts credits to graduate from high school, and this requirement would increase to two credits with the implementation of Core 24 (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Comparison of Washington State High School Arts Graduation Requirements with Four-year Public College Admission Requirements

Subject	2008 WA State Requirements	2008 HEC Board Requirements	Core 24 Default Requirements
Arts	1	1	2

Note. The Core 24 default college and career ready requirements align with the Higher Education Coordinating Board minimum college admissions requirements. Some students may choose an alternative Core 24 pathway. In some subject areas, such as arts, the proposed Core 24 requirements exceed HEC Board requirements.

Prior to proposing new requirements, the SBE commissioned a transcript study. Researchers from The BERC Group examined course-taking patterns for 14,875 students who graduated in 2008 from 100 schools in 100 districts across Washington. This research brief, with an emphasis on arts, is one in a series of research briefs. More information about the study can be obtained at http://www.sbe.wa.gov/documents/SBETranscriptStudy2008_FINAL.pdf

This study was conducted to provide a baseline of information that would inform the SBE's graduation requirements initiative. The proposed Core 24 requirements were not in place for the class of 2008, and students were not trying to meet these requirements.

Figure 1 shows that 91.2% of students in the study met the 2008 Washington State minimum graduation requirement and HEC Board arts requirement. Generally, the 8.8% of students who did not meet this requirement took additional core classes in other subject areas, including math, science, and world language, contrary to state law. Only 39.7% of students met the proposed 2-credit, Core 24 arts requirement.

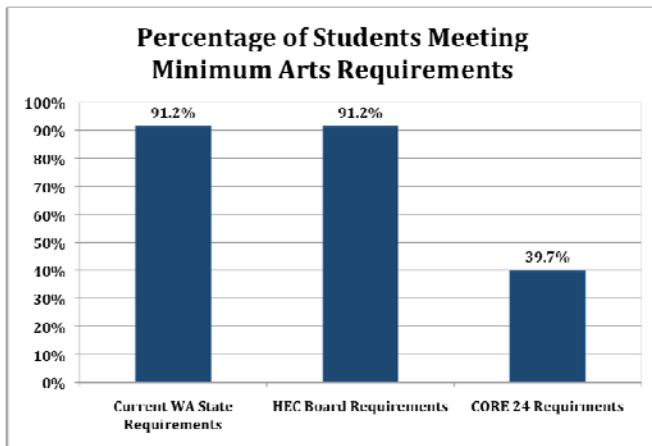


Figure 1. Percentage of Students Meeting Arts Requirement

Figure 2 shows a breakdown of the number of arts credits 2008 students attained while in high school. Figure 3 details the grade levels at which students took arts courses. These results show that the majority of students took arts courses in high school, with some students far exceeding minimum high school graduation requirements. Each year, approximately 50% of students enrolled in an arts course.

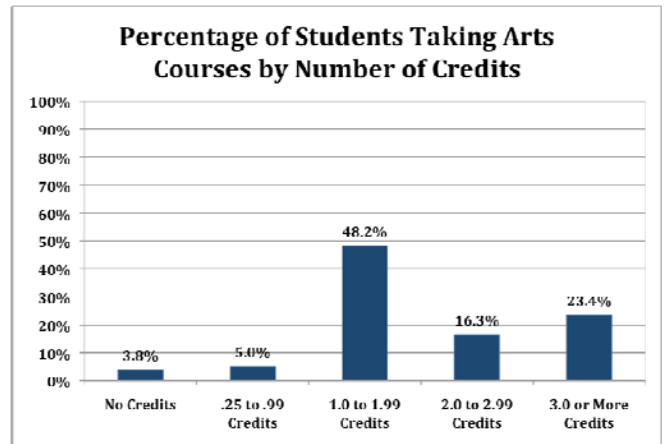


Figure 2. Percentage of Students Taking Arts Courses by Number of Credits.

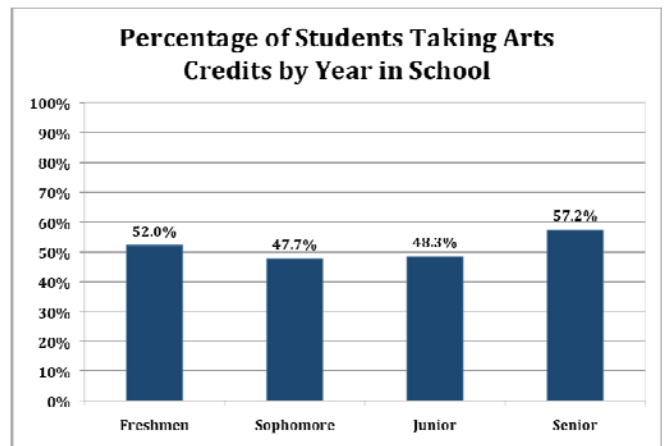


Figure 3. Percentage of Students Taking Arts Courses by Year in School.

References:

Achieve Inc. (2004). *The expectations gap: A 50-state review of high school graduation requirements*. Washington, DC: Achieve, Inc.

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Bottoms, G. & Feagin, C. (2003). *Improving achievement is about focus and completing the right courses*. Southern Regional Education Board, Washington, DC.

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SBE database, (2008). <http://www.sbe.wa.gov/documents/Copy%20of%20Graduation%20Requirements%20Database%202010.xls>