



# Washington State Graduates: Course-Taking Patterns among English Language Learners

Current research demonstrates that some racial and ethnic groups are not achieving school success at the same rate as other students (Ashley, 2007). One explanation for this gap is lack of English-language proficiency, which disproportionately affects racial and ethnic minorities and puts these students at an educational disadvantage. Currently, 8% of Washington’s public school students are English Language Learners (ELL) (OSPI, 2009).

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. Table 1 summarizes graduation requirements, including notations about course levels.

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 ELL students, 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](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.

**Table 1.**  
*Credits Required or Proposed for High School Graduation and Required for WA Public Four-year College Admission*

Subject	2008 State Minimum Graduation Reqs.	2008 HEC Board Reqs.	Core 24 Default Reqs.
English	3	4*	4*
Math	2	3**	3**
Science	2***	2***	3
Social Studies	2.5	3	3
Arts	1	1	2
World Language	0	2****	2****
Career Concentration	1	0	3
Health & Fitness	2	0	2
Electives	5.5	0	2
Total	19	15	24

\*Including 3 credits of literature

\*\*Algebra I, II, and geometry or Integrated Mathematics I, II, III

\*\*\* Including at least 1 credit of laboratory science (2 labs in 2010)

\*\*\*\*Including 2 credits of the same world language

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.

Analysis of course-taking patterns showed fewer ELL students in Washington State took courses that met the minimum entry requirements of a Washington four-year public college. Specifically, 7.1% of ELL students met HEC Board requirements, compared to 48.5% of

all other students, and 1.3% met Core 24 default college and career ready requirements, compared to 16.4% of all other students (see Figure 1).

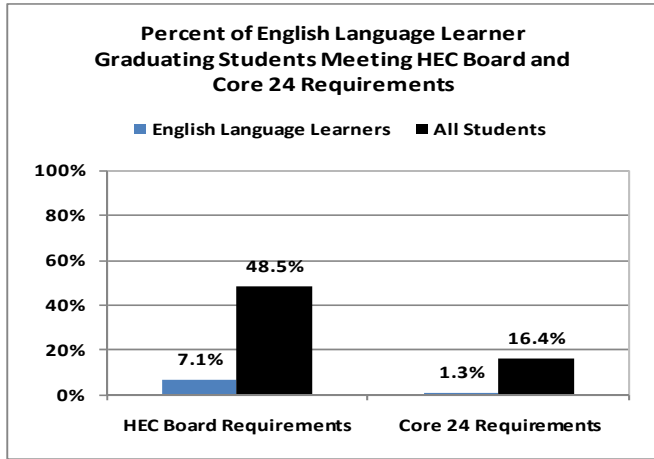


Figure 1. Percentage of ELL Students Meeting HEC Board and Core 24 Default College and Career Ready Requirements.

A closer look at course-taking patterns of ELL students indicates that they met high school graduation requirements at lower rates in every subject area, except occupational education/career and technical education. For the HEC Board requirements, the greatest differences between ELL students and all students were in English (49%), world language (33%), and math (30%) (see Figure 2). In English and math, students were often taking the number of credits required but were not taking the level necessary to meet minimum HEC Board requirements.

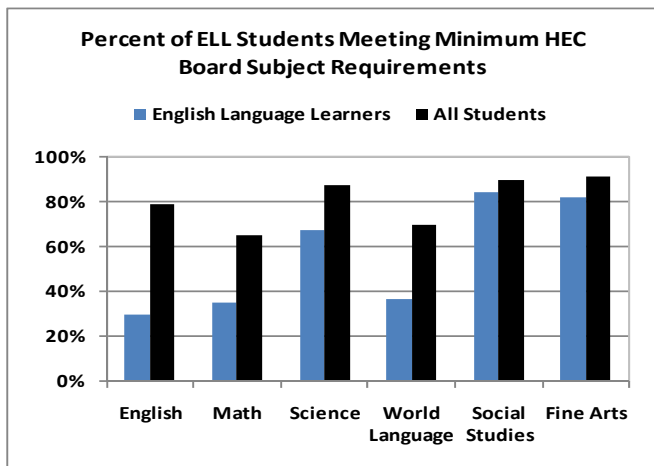


Figure 2. Percentage of ELL Students Meeting HEC Board Requirements by Subject Area

Among the subjects where the proposed Core 24 default college and career ready requirements differ from the

HEC Board requirements, fewer students met the science (20%) and fine arts (11%) requirements (see Figure 3).

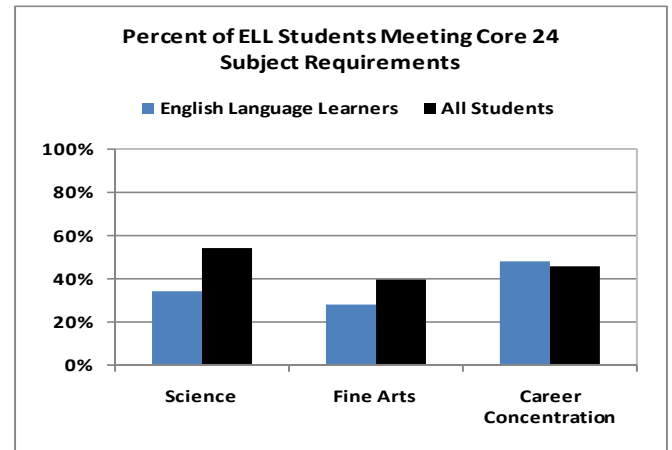


Figure 3. Percentage of ELL Students Meeting Core 24 Default College and Career Ready Requirements by Subject Area

Note: This brief does not include an analysis of health and fitness requirements. The health and fitness requirements were analyzed from a sample of students after the original study was completed.

In the analysis, fewer ELL students earned high school math or foreign language credits in middle school compared to the sample (see Table 2). In high school, fewer ELL students took AP/IB classes and Running Start classes (see Table 3). Course-failure rates for ELL students were higher than the sample, with 64.4% failing at least one class, compared to 47.3% of all other students.

Table 2. Percent Earning Credits in Middle School

	ELL Students	All students
Math	4.2%	26.1%
Foreign Language	3.3%	6.3%

Table 3. Percent Earning AP/IB and Running Start Credits

	ELL Students	All students
AP/IB	12.9%	35.1%
Running Start	5.4%	13.3%

References:

Ashley, N. (2007). Educating all our children: A comprehensive plan for reducing the dropout rate in King County. Prepared by Heliotrope for the Reinvesting in Youth Steering Committee.  
 OSPI (2009). School Report Card. <http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/summary.aspx?year=2008-09>