



The Education Trust

Closing the gaps in opportunity and achievement, pre-k through college.

February 24, 2014

Hon. Sharon Tomiko Santos
Chair
House Committee on Education
Washington State Legislature
232A John L. O'Brien
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Dear Chairwoman Santos:

I write today in support of SB 6552, which would increase the rigor of Washington's high school diploma. Specifically, the bill directs the State Board of Education to adopt rules implementing the career and college ready graduation requirement proposal adopted by resolution in November 2010 and then revised in January 2014. This bill is a step forward in ensuring that Washington's students are better prepared for life after high school, and we urge you to support it.

The data are clear that far too many of Washington's young people lack options after high school. Washington trails most other states when it comes to college-going rates for high school graduates. Only about half of the state's graduates go on to college, and only 4 in 10 meet the admissions requirements of the state's four-year universities. But the problem extends beyond students bound for college: among young Washingtonians interested in military service, many — including one-third of African American and one quarter of Latino students — struggle to meet the minimum requirements necessary to enlist in the Army, a traditional path to a middle class lifestyle. Washington's students deserve better — they deserve a meaningful high school diploma, one that signifies they are ready for both college and a career.

SB 6552 attempts to remedy these preparation deficiencies by increasing the credits necessary for graduation to 24, ramping up math and science credits, and better aligning high school graduation requirements with those of four-year colleges. Moreover, by requiring 24 credits to graduate, SB 6552 simply extends efforts the Legislature began last year when it included the 24-credit diploma within the definition of a basic education and provided funding for its implementation.

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Around the country, other states expect more of their students than Washington. Thirty-six states require, or soon will require, at least three credits in science. Currently, Washington requires only two. Many other states require four years of math. Again, Washington requires only three. As a result, Washington's students not only lack the prerequisites for four-year college admissions, they are quite simply less prepared than other states' students for the world of work.

Contrary to often voiced concerns, more rigorous coursework does not result in more dropouts. For example, when San Jose Unified, a racially and economically diverse urban district in California, chose to require students to complete the courses required for admission to state universities, graduation rates held steady. In fact, evidence suggests that more rigorous course requirements will help with student engagement. In a national study of high school dropouts, nearly 70 percent said they dropped out because they were not inspired to work hard. Two-thirds said they would have worked harder if more was demanded of them — through higher academic standards or more homework and studying.

SB 6552 derives from years of research and planning by the State Board of Education and Department of Education. It is a thoughtful improvement over Washington's existing high school graduation requirements. Enacting it into law will provide Washington's students with a more meaningful high school diploma and better prepare them for college and career. I urge the committee to pass it promptly.

Sincerely,



Kati Haycock
President