



Washington State Graduates: Course-Taking Patterns in Health and Fitness

Physical education increases student participation in moderate to vigorous physical activities and helps high school students gain the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to engage in lifelong physical activity. However, participation in physical education declined from 1991 to 1995 and remained unchanged from 1995 to 2003. In 2007, 54% of high school students were enrolled in a physical education class (Center for Disease Control, 2007).

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 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). The 2009 minimum state requirement for health and fitness is two credits. However, district requirements may exceed the minimum. For health and fitness, in 2007-2008, 186 districts required two credits, and 59 districts required three credits (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 two health and fitness credits to graduate from high

school, and this requirement would remain the same with the implementation of Core 24 (see Table 1).

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

| Subject | 2008 WA State Requirements | 2008 HEC Board Requirements | Core 24 Default Requirements |
|----------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Health/Fitness | 2 | 0 | 2* |

**1-1/2 credits of physical education and 1/2 credit of health 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 health and fitness, 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 health and fitness, 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.

The analysis shows that 77.7% of 2008 graduating students met the current graduation requirements and the proposed Core 24 requirements of 1.5 credits of fitness and .5 credits of health. Another 6.5% of students had a waiver for physical education on their transcripts, and 1.1% had a waiver for health. Although state law permits waivers for physical education, there are no waivers for health. It was unclear how approximately 15% of the students met the minimum health and fitness requirements set by Washington State and school districts. In some cases, these students did not have the required physical education or health credits listed on their transcript, but graduated anyway.

Figure 1 shows a breakdown of the number of health and fitness credits the 2008 students attained while in high school. Nearly all students took some health and fitness credits, even if they did not meet the Washington State minimum graduation requirement of two credits.

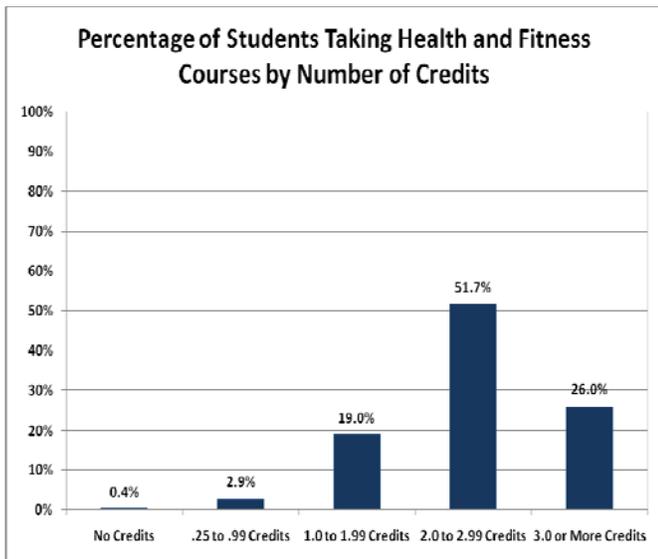


Figure 1. Percentage of Students Taking Health and Fitness Courses by Number of Credits

Figure 2 details the grade level at which students took health and fitness courses. This result shows that the majority of students took health and fitness classes in the freshman and sophomore years. Although there is variation

by year, these results are consistent with previous national research suggesting that slightly greater than half the students are enrolled in physical education classes during any given year (Center for Disease Control, 2007).

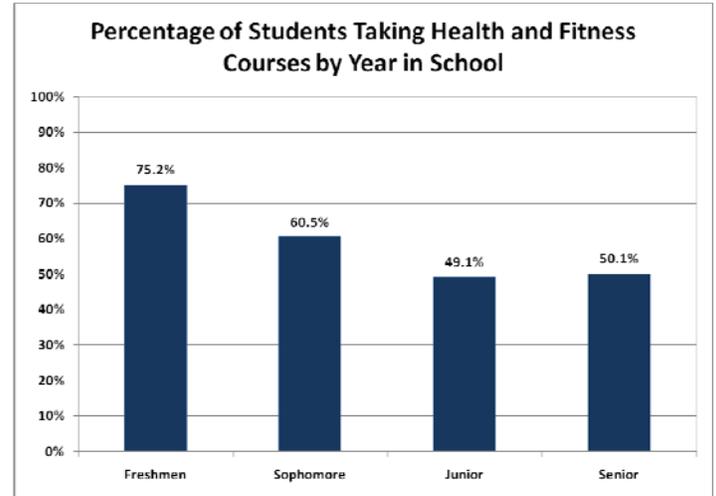


Figure 2. Percentage of Students Taking Health and Fitness Course by Year in School.

References:

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Education Commission of the States. (2005). *State strategies for redesigning high schools and promoting high school to college transitions*. Denver, CO: Author.

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