



Washington State Graduates: Course-Taking Patterns among Hispanic Students

Research demonstrates that some racial and ethnic groups are not achieving school success at the same rate as other students (Ashley, 2007). In Washington State, course-taking patterns for Hispanic students may limit their access to post-secondary education.

Studies show a relationship between students' course-taking patterns and achievement in high school and beyond. Students who took more rigorous courses scored higher on the National Assessment of Educational Progress and were more likely to enroll in college and earn degrees (Bottoms & Feagan, 2003; Adelman, 2006). Because these findings hold regardless of race or socioeconomic status, preparing students to succeed in advanced courses ultimately contributes to closing the achievement gap.

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 Hispanic 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.

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.

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.

Analysis of course-taking patterns showed Hispanic students in Washington State took less rigorous course loads than other groups of students. Specifically, 28.8%

of Hispanic students met HEC Board requirements, and 8.3% met Core 24 default college and career ready requirements, (see Figure 1). Among the ethnic groups analyzed, Hispanic students were the least likely to meet HEC Board and Core 24 default requirements.

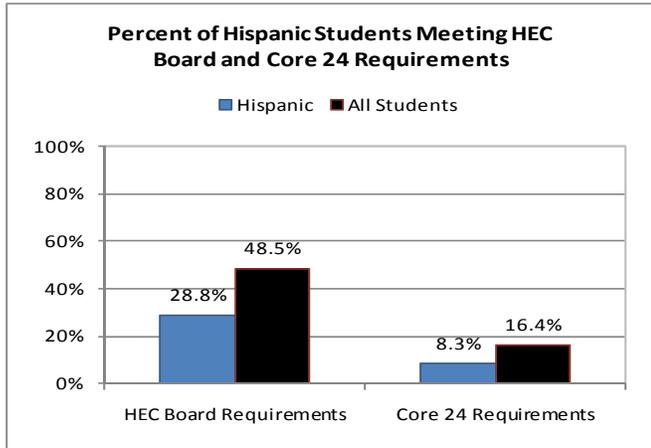


Figure 1. Percentage of Hispanic Students Meeting HEC Board and Core 24 default college and career ready requirements.

A closer look at course-taking patterns of Hispanic students indicates that they met high school graduation requirements at lower rates in nearly every subject area (see Figures 2 and 3). Hispanic students met Core 24 requirements at a higher rate than other students in Occupational Education/Career and Technical Education (Career Concentration).

For the HEC Board requirements, the greatest differences were in math (15%), English (13%), science (13%), and world language (11%). Often students were taking the number of credits required, but were not taking the level necessary to meet minimum HEC Board requirements.

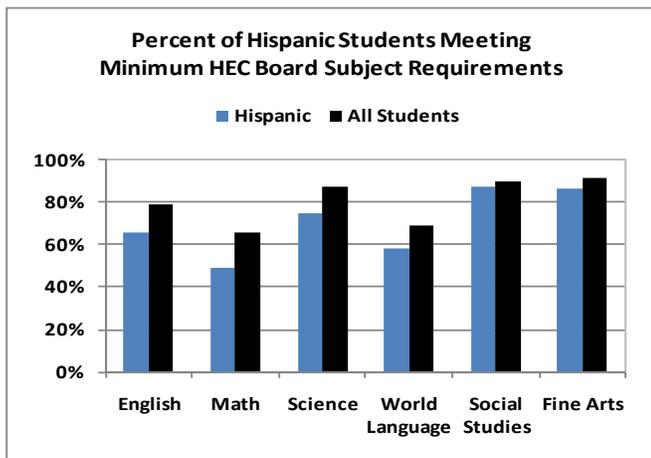


Figure 2. Percentage of Hispanic students meeting HEC Board requirements by subject area.

Among the subjects where the proposed Core 24 default college and career ready requirements differ from the HEC Board requirements, the greatest differences between Hispanic students and all other students were in science (13%) and arts (7%) (see Figure 3).

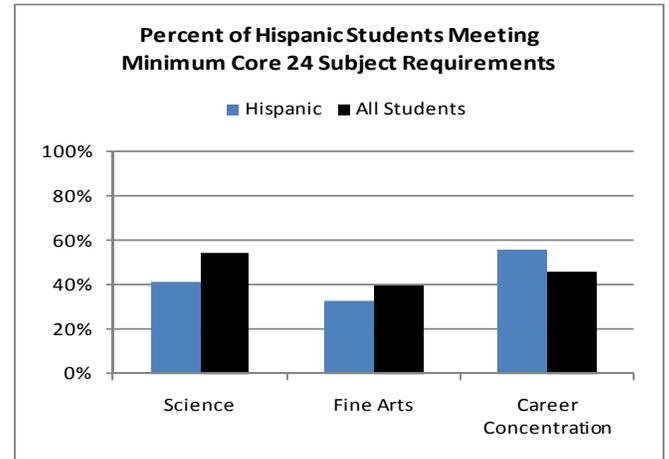


Figure 3. Percentage of Hispanic students meeting Core 24 default college and career ready requirements by subject area.

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.

Further analyses show Hispanic students earned fewer high school math (15.1% compared to 26.1%) and fewer world language credits (4.5% compared to 6.3%) in middle school than the sample. In high school, Hispanic students were the least likely to take AP/IB classes (24.7% compared to 35.1% overall) and Running Start classes (6.0% compared to 13.3% overall). Course-failure rates for Hispanic students were significantly higher than the rest of the sample, with 69.7% failing at least one class compared to 47.3% of all other students.

References:

Adelman, C. (2006). *The toolbox revisited: Paths to degree completion from high school through college*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.

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.

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