



Washington State Graduates: Course-Taking Patterns in Occupational Education

“Career and Technical Education provides opportunities for students to apply their learning in relevant, real world situations and helps them see the connections to their own futures. Through internships and other cooperative work experiences, they get a head start on a career. Career and Technical Education courses also help students acquire the employability and leadership skills that will enable them to succeed in the workplace”(Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board).

Occupational Education classes (usually, but not always, Career and Technical Education (CTE) classes) give students a chance to sample instructional programs within areas of their interest and particular career pathways of their choice. CTE classes include agriculture, business, technology, cosmetology, health, and more (Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board). Career specific classes give students more opportunities to personalize their education and explore future areas of interest. In 2004, over 165,000 students in grades 9-12 enrolled in Washington State CTE classes.

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). However, specific subject area requirements vary by district. The state requires students to earn one credit of occupational education. One hundred thirty five

districts exceed the state’s one credit minimum 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).

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

Subject	2008 WA State Requirements	2008 HEC Board Requirements	Core 24 Default Requirements
CTE*	1*	0	3**

*Occupational Education courses meet the standards of an exploratory career and technical education course

**For Core 24, this is defined as 3 credits of career concentration.

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 career concentration, 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 occupational education, 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 90.7% of 2008 students met the minimum graduation requirement and 46.3% took three credits of CTE, one way of meeting the proposed Core 24 graduation requirements. Generally, the 9.3% of students who did not meet the minimum Washington State graduation requirements had these credits waived to take more classes in the core subject areas, particularly in the areas of math, science, and world language. State law does not permit occupational education credits to be waived.

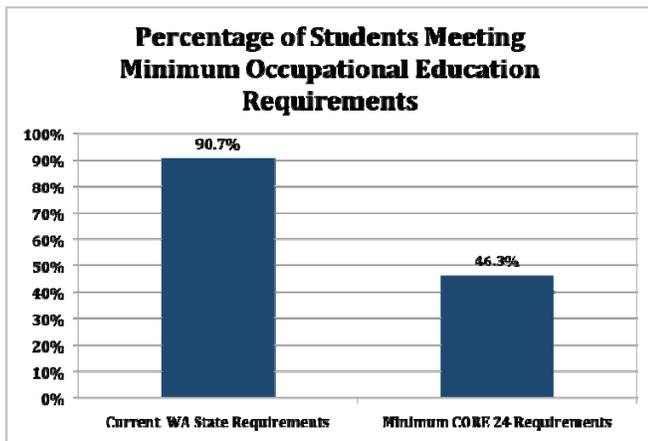


Figure 1. Percentage of Students Taking Occupational Education Courses

Figure 2 shows a breakdown of the number of occupational education credits 2008 students attained while in high school. Figure 3 details the grade level at

which students took the courses. These results show that the majority of students took occupational education courses in high school, and students took these courses during a variety of years.

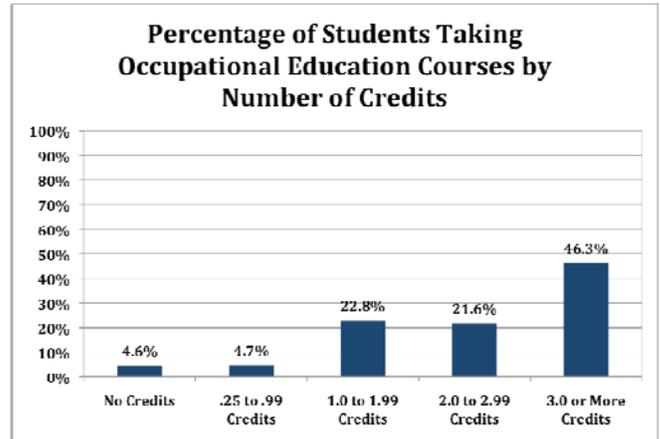


Figure 2. Percentage of Students Taking Occupational Education Courses by Number of Credits

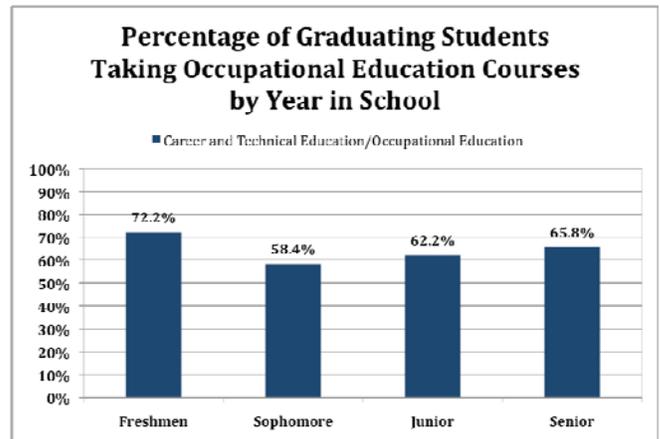


Figure 3. Percentage of Students Taking Occupational Education Courses by Year in School

References:

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

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