



# Washington State Graduates: Course-Taking Patterns in World Languages

Research shows high school course-taking patterns affect students' achievement in high school and beyond. Most colleges and universities require at least two years of a world language for admission. However, Washington State currently does not require students to take any world language credits to graduate from high school, and graduation requirements in Washington State are not aligned with minimum four-year public college admission requirements.

With the growing concern around preparing students to compete in a global economy and the research linking advanced high school courses to improved student achievement in high school and beyond (Adelman, 2006; Bottoms & Feagan, 2003; Stern & Pavelchek, 2006), 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 10 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 is among the lowest in the nation, as are requirements for specific content areas (Education Commission of the States, 2006). Six states currently require at least one world language credit to graduate from high school, while Washington State does not require any. However, specific subject area requirements vary by district. Four Washington State districts require one or more world language credits (SBE database, 2008). State law requires districts to offer courses with content that meet or exceed the courses required to meet the minimum four-year college entrance requirements.

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 World Language Graduation Requirements with Four-year Public College Admission Requirements*

Subject	2008 WA State Requirements	2008 HEC Board Requirements	Core 24 Default Requirements
World Language	0	2	2

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.

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 world languages, 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.

The analysis shows that 65.5% of students met the HEC Board and Core 24 default college and career ready graduation requirements of two or more credits of world language. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of the number of world language credits students attain while in high school.

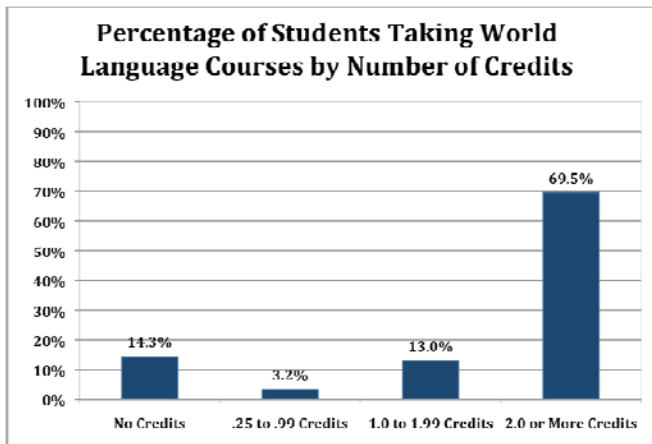


Figure 1. Percentage of Students Taking World Language Courses by Number of Credits

Further analysis reveals 6.3% of students earn world language credits prior to entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade. When students begin taking world language in high school, they usually take the first course in their freshman or sophomore year. Fewer students begin taking world language in their senior year. Figure 2 details the first year students begin taking their world language course sequence.

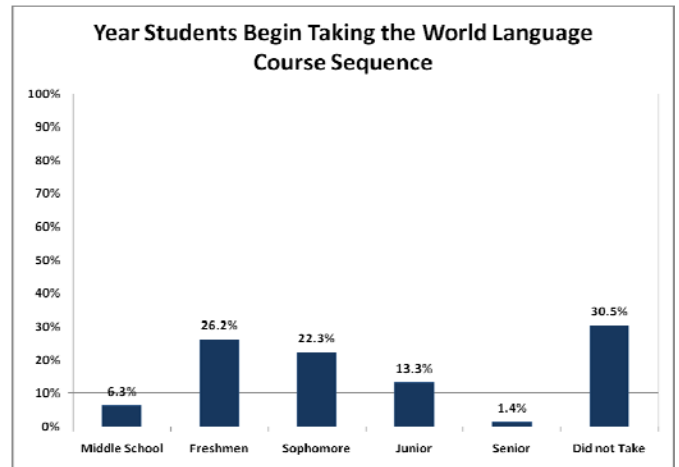


Figure 2. Year Students Begin Taking World language

Table 2 details the type of world language taken by students. Clearly, a greater percentage of students take Spanish, compared to the other languages. This is the most frequent world language offered.

Table 1. Percentage of Students taking Each World Languages

Language	Percent
Spanish	69.3%
French	14.5%
American Sign Language	5.8%
German	4.6%
Japanese	3.5%
Other	2.3%

References:

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

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