



THE WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Title:	24-Credit Graduation Requirements Implementation Update	
As Related To:	<input type="checkbox"/> Goal One: Develop and support policies to close the achievement and opportunity gaps. <input type="checkbox"/> Goal Two: Develop comprehensive accountability, recognition, and supports for students, schools, and districts.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Goal Three: Ensure that every student has the opportunity to meet career and college ready standards. <input type="checkbox"/> Goal Four: Provide effective oversight of the K-12 system. <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Relevant To Board Roles:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Policy Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> System Oversight <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Communication <input type="checkbox"/> Convening and Facilitating
Policy Considerations / Key Questions:	This is an initial update on implementation of the 24-credit graduation requirements, and is presented for the Board’s information only. How the graduation requirements are impacting students and districts may lead to future policy considerations.	
Possible Board Action:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Review <input type="checkbox"/> Approve	<input type="checkbox"/> Adopt <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Materials Included in Packet:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Memo <input type="checkbox"/> Graphs / Graphics <input type="checkbox"/> Third-Party Materials <input type="checkbox"/> PowerPoint	
Synopsis:	<p>This memo presents an update on issues districts are managing, and challenges districts are confronting, as they put in place the new requirements. Staff reviewed data and interviewed administrators at several districts, to collect information. Districts identified concerns that were unique to their districts and some that multiple districts were looking at, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • credit retrieval for students not on-track to meet requirements • staffing • facilities • possible changes to school schedules • counselor professional development • communicating to students and parents • development of CTE course equivalencies. <p>This memo includes a closer look at credit retrieval and the possible number of students who would be impacted, the option in the law to waive two credits for some students, scheduling options that allow students the opportunity to earn more than 24 credits in high school, and competency-based, equivalency, and “two-for-one” crediting.</p>	



GRADUATION REQUIREMENT IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

Policy Considerations

For most districts, the incoming ninth graders in the Class of 2019 will be the first class to graduate under the 24-credit requirements. For districts who received a waiver to postpone implementation for up to two years, current middle school students will be the first to graduate with the new requirements.

This memo presents an update on issues districts are managing, and challenges districts are confronting, as they put in place the new requirements. No State Board of Education (SBE) action on graduation requirement is expected at the May 2015 Board meeting. However, as the Board continues to monitor the implementation of the new requirements, some challenges may prompt the Board to act to develop state policy to address the challenges. Changes to graduation requirements may also lead to the development by districts of inventive, effective practices that the Board may wish to highlight or promote. During the next months, and over the next few years, SBE staff will continue to update the Board on the implementation of graduation requirements.

Background

Changes to Graduation Requirements

From the Class of 1985 to the Class of 2012, 19 credits were required for graduation. The Legislature directed the implementation of 24 credits for graduation in 2009 (ESHB 2261), subject to funding and approval by the Legislature. Several changes in graduation requirements since the Class of 2012 have been either directed by the Legislature or adopted by the SBE and approved by the Legislature. These changes represent a phase-in of the 24-credit graduation requirements and include:

- One additional math credit starting with the Class of 2013, and an increase in total credits required for graduation to 20.
- One additional English credit and .5 additional social studies credits starting with the Class of 2016.
- One additional lab science credit starting with the Class of 2019, and the addition of three Personalized Pathway Requirements (classes the student may choose based on their education and career goals in their High School and Beyond Plan), and an increase in total credits required for graduation to 24.

Graduation Requirement Waivers and Extensions

In recognition that some districts may need longer to implement changes, both the rules implementing the graduation requirement changes for the Class of 2016 (WAC 180-51-067) and the legislation (E2SSB 6552) approving the graduation requirement changes for the Class of 2019, allowed districts an additional two years to implement the changes.

- A total of 22 districts submitted a postponement for implementing the Class of 2016 requirements.
- So far, 33 districts, with more to be approved at the May 2015 meeting, have submitted a postponement for implementing the Class of 2019 requirements.

- So far, nine districts have postponed both the changes for the Class of 2016 and the Class of 2019.

Challenges to Implementing the 24-Credit Requirements

SBE staff interviewed administrators from several districts, including both larger urban districts and smaller rural districts, as well as ESD personnel. Information was also obtained from the applications for the temporary waiver for implementing the 24-credit graduation requirements. The most challenging issues for districts, in the approximate order of importance as expressed by the districts, include:

1. Credit Retrieval

High schools with six-period schedules offer 24 opportunities for students to earn credit. From the Class of 2016 to the Class of 2018, there are 20 credits required by the state. This generally leaves time available in students' schedules to retake classes if needed. With 24 credits required for the Class of 2019 and beyond there are no opportunities to retake classes within a six-period school schedule if the student fails one or more classes.

2. Staffing

Districts anticipate challenges for staffing science, world language, arts and additional courses (Personalized Pathway Requirements and electives) that would be part of the 24-credit requirements.

3. Facilities

Multiple districts were concerned with additional science facilities.

4. Exploring changes to school schedule

Partly to address the issue of credit retrieval for students, multiple districts cited needing more time to explore changes to their schedules, including block schedules, trimesters, or extending the school day, in their applications for the temporary waiver to implement the 24-credit requirements. Staffing and collective bargaining issues may come into play when districts look at changing the school schedule.

5. Counseling for the new requirements, the High School and Beyond Plan, and Personalized Pathway Requirements

Professional development of counselors, exploring the implications of Personalized Pathway Requirements, and further development of the High School and Beyond Plan to support the new requirements, were seen as challenges for districts.

6. Development of communication plans for parents and students

7. Development of Career and Technical Education Course Equivalencies

8. Unique district challenges that impact implementation of graduation requirements such as:

- a. Leadership changes at the high school or district level.
- b. Building of a new high school, associated with a review of all the high school's program.
- c. Reviewing local graduation requirements and deciding how they will work with state requirements.

A Closer Look at Some of the Challenges and What Districts are Doing to Address Them

Credit Retrieval

Districts have long offered the opportunity to retrieve credit for students who need to earn credit for high school graduation. Some credit retrieval options include:

1. Summer school or before or after school programs.
2. Online instruction.
3. Staying in high school for longer than four years.
4. PASS (Portable Assisted Study Sequence) available free of charge to migrant students to retrieve credit in districts that receive Office of Migrant Education funds.

Students may stay in high school longer than four years without cost to the student. There is usually a fee for summer school that is borne by a student and the student’s family. For online courses there may be a fee, depending on the district and the online option.

What Are Current Credit Accumulation Patterns?

For a ‘snapshot’ look at how many credits students are earning currently, SBE staff reviewed credit accumulation data that originated from the CEDARS student information management system. For this simple examination, only data from 10th grade students with multiple years of credit history in 2013 and 2014 were examined.

Figure 1 shows the total high school credit accumulation of 10th graders in 2014. The graph shows that most students successfully accumulated about 12 credits (the peak number of students are in the range of having earned 11.51 to 12.0 credits). Many high schools in the state have six-period school days, with 12 opportunities to earn credit in the 9th and 10th grade combined, so students who have earned at least 12 credits when they are 10th graders are likely on-track to earn at least 24 credits by the time they graduate.

To the left of the peak are students who earned 11.5 credits or fewer in their 9th and 10th grades.

Figure 1: Total Credit Accumulation of 10th Graders in 2014

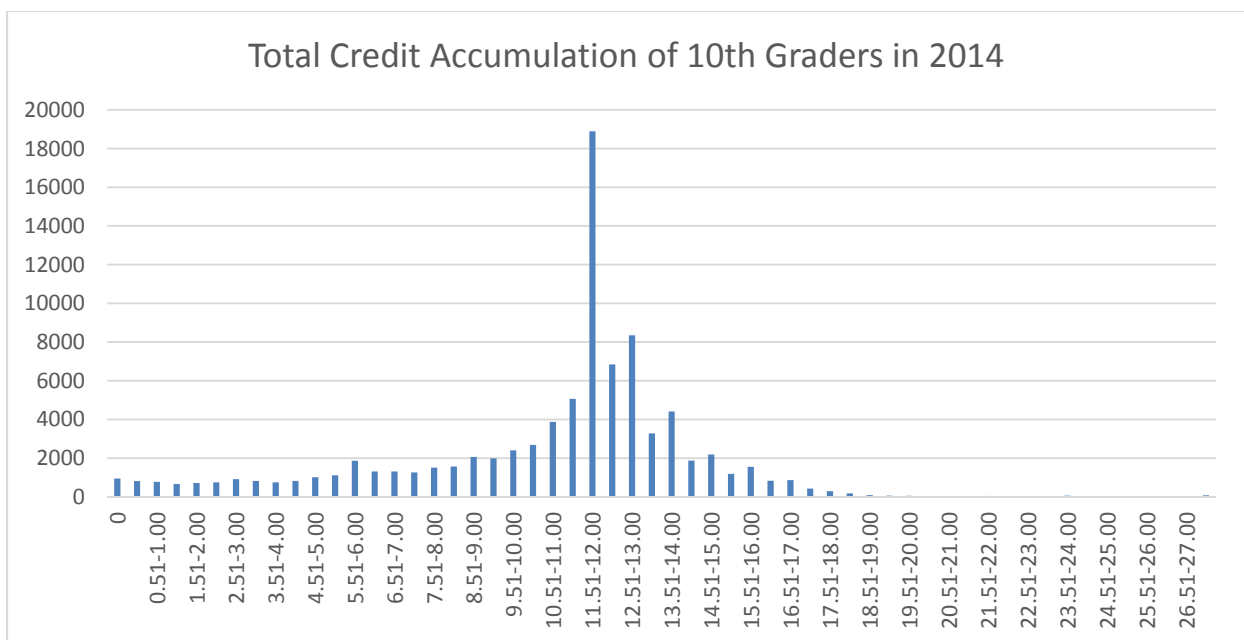


Table 1 summarizes the number and percent of 10th grade students in 2013 and 2014 who are not on-track to earn 24 credits in high school.

Table 1: The Percentage and Number of Students Accumulating Fewer than 11.5 Credits by the End of Their 10th Grade Year. The total number of students are students who have credit history data.

Year	Percent	Number	Total Number
2013	43%	36,148	84,990
2014	42%	36,992	88,768

These data suggest that perhaps 40 percent or more students currently fail one or more classes in their freshmen or sophomore years. This recent credit accumulation data approximately agrees with a 2008 SBE study of over 14,000 transcripts of high school seniors that found that 47.3 percent of students fail at least one credit during high school.

The transcript study found that 40 percent of the students that failed a course did not make it up because the course was an elective or the student had already met the graduation requirement in the subject area they failed. About one third (32 percent) of the students re-took the course and passed. Both of these sets of students graduated with fewer than the possible number of credits. Other students made up the credit through before- or after-school classes, summer school or online courses.

These data suggest that especially for schools that have six-period days, supporting all students earning 24 credits to graduate may involve developing new ways for students to be awarded credit, and may involve increasing the capacity for students to earn credit outside of the regular school day.

Student Waiver of Up to Two Credits

The State Board of Education Resolution of January 2014 stated that, “While students must attempt 24 credits, up to two of the 24 credits may be waived by local administrators if students need to retake courses to fulfill the 17 core state requirements that all students must meet . . .” The law (E2SSB 6552, Chapter 214, Laws of 2014) that directed the SBE adopt rules to implement the graduation requirements of the resolution changed this waiver somewhat by directing the SBE to adopt rules to authorize “school districts to waive up to two credits for individual students based on unusual circumstances and in accordance with written policies that must be adopted by each board of directors of a school district that grants diplomas.” The bill also directed the Washington State School Directors Association to create a model policy:

The Washington state school directors' association shall adopt a model policy and procedure that school districts may use for granting waivers to individual students of up to two credits required for high school graduation based on unusual circumstances. The purpose of the model policy and procedure is to assist school districts in providing all students the opportunity to complete graduation requirements without discrimination and without disparate impact on groups of students. The model policy must take into consideration the unique limitations of a student that may be associated with such circumstances as homelessness, limited English proficiency, medical conditions that impair a student's opportunity to learn, or disabilities, regardless of whether the student has an individualized education program or a plan under section 504 of the federal rehabilitation act of 1973. The model policy must also address waivers if the student has not been provided with an opportunity to retake classes or enroll in remedial classes free of charge during the first four years of high school. The Washington state school directors' association must distribute the model policy and procedure to all school districts in the state that grant high school diplomas by June 30, 2015. (Sec. 203)

The Washington State Directors Association have completed their model policy, which describes unusual circumstances:

- Unusual circumstances may include, but are not limited to:
- Homelessness;

- A health condition resulting in an inability to attend class;
- Limited English proficiency;
- Disability, regardless of whether the student has an individualized education program or a plan under Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973;
- Denial of an opportunity to retake classes or enroll in remedial classes free of charge during the first four years of high school;
- Transfer during the last two years of high school from a school with different graduation requirements.
- Other circumstances (e.g., emergency, natural disaster, trauma, personal or family crisis) that directly compromised a student’s ability to learn.

Districts may use this model policy or a district-developed policy to allow students that meet these definitions of “unusual circumstances” to waive flexible requirements to retake courses to meet the core graduation requirements.

Scheduling Options to Offer More Opportunities for Earning Credit

Based on information submitted with districts’ 2014 Basic Education Compliance, 72 districts current report requiring more than 24 credits for graduation. These districts have schedules that allow students to earn more than six credits per year.

In multiple applications for the waiver to delay implementing the 24-credit requirements, districts currently with six-period days stated that they are exploring changing their schedules to allow more opportunities for earning credits.

In some districts, different high schools have different schedules. For example, block schedules may be used in an alternative school, allowing more opportunities to earn credit in schools where more of the students need to retrieve credit.

One district interviewed employs a trimester schedule, awarding .5 credits for each trimester class. Algebra and Geometry, along with freshman and sophomore English are year-long courses. In these courses, a student could fail one of the trimesters, and still earn the credits necessary to meet the graduation requirements. This schedule, combined with multiple supports to make sure students would be able to recover missed academic content, worked well for this high-functioning district with a very high free-and-reduced lunch population. District administrators felt they were well equipped to adapt to the 24-credit graduation requirements. They emphasized that they believed it was more the positive culture of the high school than the system structures that allowed them to improve outcomes for students. Because of this district’s high school schedule, the district does not extensively use or need course equivalencies or two-for-one crediting.

Studies in Washington in the last decade found correlations between school schedules and students taking the courses needed for high school graduation and admittance to university, and in meeting standard on state assesments. The 2008 SBE Transcript Study showed that slightly more students in schools with block schedules met the College Academic Distribution Requirements (CADR). A 2006 study¹ of Washington schools found that students in schools with a seven-period day, and in schools with a modified block schedule (with both blocked and traditional periods), performed better on the Washington standardized tests than students in schools with six-period day or a 4x4 or alternating block schedule.

¹ Baker, D, joireman, J., Clay, J, & Abbot, M. (2006). *Schedule matters: The relationship between high school schedule and student academic achievement*. Washington School Research Center, Seattle, WA.

Competency-based crediting

In 2011, the SBE adopted rules that removed a time-based definition of credit. Districts have the flexibility to define credit to suit the needs of local districts and to meet graduation requirements. Based on information submitted with districts' Basic Education Compliance, 82 districts offer competency-based crediting. Most commonly, credit is offered for World Language. Also, some district offer credit for students meeting standard on statewide assessments.

Transcripts offer course codes for "Local Competency Exam" ("L"), and "National Competency Exams" ("N"). The course codes are used to indicate students have earned credit for passing an exam. A Local Exam is one that is used only in Washington state, and a National Exam is one that is used in Washington and at least one other state. An initial data pull of the use of these course codes in 2014 indicates that 6071 students had the opportunity to earn credit using a National Competency Exam, and 1692 students had the opportunity to earn credit using a Local Competency Exam.

These data suggest the potential for greater use of competency-based crediting. Competency-based crediting might allow greater flexibility for students and districts and expand options for students to earn 24 credits towards graduation.

Implementing "Two for One" and Equivalency Crediting

CTE course equivalency allows some CTE courses to also meet core competency credit. At the May 2015 meeting, the Board may approve state CTE course equivalency frameworks. Districts may also develop their own CTE course equivalencies. CTE courses that are equivalent courses may also be "two for one" courses, i.e., they meet a core academic graduation requirement and a CTE (or occupational education) graduation requirement, so the student can meet two graduation requirements with one earned credit.

Flexibility in the definition of credit through district policy (WAC 180-51-050) could allow the identification of non-CTE courses for "two for one" crediting, such as a "Big History" course counting for both a science graduation requirement and a social studies graduation requirement. The Civics requirement, when embedded in another social studies course, is another example of "two for one" crediting.

Such "two for one" courses increase the flexibility in a student's schedule, since it frees a slot in the student's schedule to take an elective, although the student would still need to earn the required number of credits to graduate (WAC 180-51-067 and WAC 180-51-068).

For CTE course equivalencies, the core credit is recorded on the student's transcript, and a certificate documenting completion of the CTE course is included in the student's High School and Beyond Plan (RCW 28A.230.097):

(2) Career and technical courses determined to be equivalent to academic core courses, in full or in part, by the high school or school district shall be accepted as meeting core requirements, including graduation requirements, if the courses are recorded on the student's transcript using the equivalent academic high school department designation and title. Full or partial credit shall be recorded as appropriate. The high school or school district shall also issue and keep record of course completion certificates that demonstrate that the career and technical courses were successfully completed as needed for industry certification, college credit, or preapprenticeship, as applicable. The certificate shall be part of the student's high school and beyond plan. The office of the superintendent of public instruction shall develop and make available electronic samples of certificates of course completion.

For "two for one" crediting other than CTE course equivalencies, there are no standard processes for recording credits in a student's transcript, so record keeping of graduation requirements met through this method is done locally, through various approaches. Other than CTE course equivalencies and embedded Civics, no district interviewed is using "two for one" crediting. Because of the difficulties communicating the option to students, parents, and educators, and challenges with recording and

tracking the graduation requirement, this option does not appear to be being used extensively in the state.

Summary

During this spring of 2015, districts are planning on implementing the 24 credit requirements. Most of their attention, however, is currently centered on testing with the first administration of the Smarter Balanced assessments. Assessment graduation requirements and credit requirements interact. According to districts, the overlap between students who struggle with passing the assessments and students who are credit deficient is large. Student credit deficiencies and low assessment performance are warning signs for each other, and both indicate the student is not receiving or retaining core academic knowledge and skills.

For several of the options that would allow districts and students flexibility in meeting 24-credit graduation requirements, such as competency-based crediting or equivalency credit, more work needs to be done to make these options operate smoothly and effectively for the purpose they were intended.

Districts that have high school schedules that allow students the opportunity to earn more than 24 high school credits have fewer concerns about addressing the 24-credit graduation requirements. According to the waivers to implement the 24-credit requirements, many high schools that are currently on six-period schedule are looking at shifting to a different schedule. To maximize the benefit of a shift, a change to a different schedule most likely would need to be combined with a change in instructional philosophy and strategies. As one administrator stated, if the concern with new requirements was seniors meeting graduation requirements early and wasting much of their senior year, he had seen an increase in state graduation requirements in another state that led to districts shifting to block schedules. After the change, some students still met graduation requirements early and wasted much of their senior year. (Albeit in meeting the increase graduation requirements, these students were arguably better prepared for college and careers.) The goal is to make sure that all students use their time in high school effectively, both in meeting required courses and in choosing their electives, to take courses that challenge and engage them and move them toward their education or career goals.

Action

No Board action on graduation requirements is expected at the May 2015 meeting. SBE staff will continue to study the implementation of graduation requirements.

If you have any questions regarding this memo, please contact Linda Drake, linda.drake@k12.wa.us