



Washington State Graduates: Course-Taking Patterns among Caucasian Students

Research demonstrates differences in school success for various racial and ethnic groups (Ashley, 2007). In Washington State, course-taking patterns for Caucasian students may increase 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 Caucasian 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.

Course-taking analysis of Caucasian students in Washington State indicates that Caucasian students took

more rigorous courses than other students. Specifically, 50.6% of Caucasian students met HEC Board requirements, compared to 48.5% of all students in the study, and 17.5% met Core 24 default college and career ready requirements, compared to 16.4% of study participants (see Figure 1).

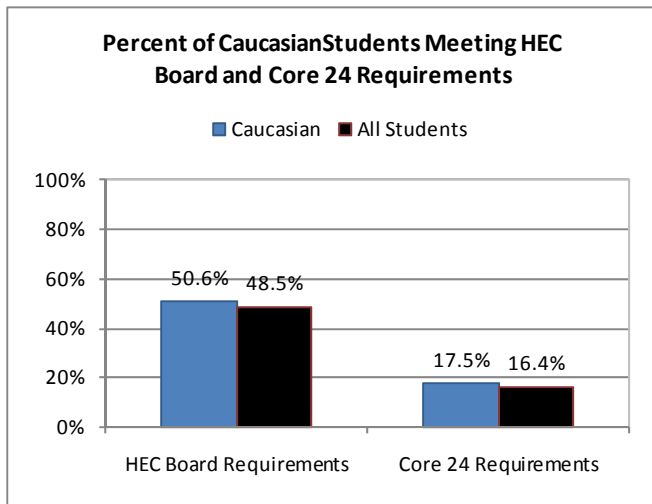


Figure 1. Percentage of Caucasian Students Meeting HEC Board and Core 24 Default College and Career Ready Requirements

A closer look at course-taking patterns of Caucasian students indicates that they are meeting high school graduation requirements at the same or slightly higher rates than study participants in every subject area (see Figures 2 and 3). However, more Caucasian students (61.1%) met the Core 24 default requirements of three science credits, including two lab credits, compared to the sample (54.6%). This is an area of relative strength.

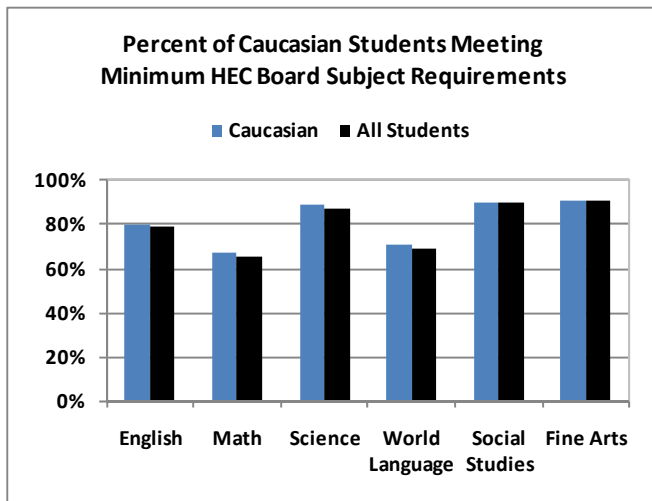


Figure 2. Percentage of Caucasian students meeting HEC Board requirements by subject area

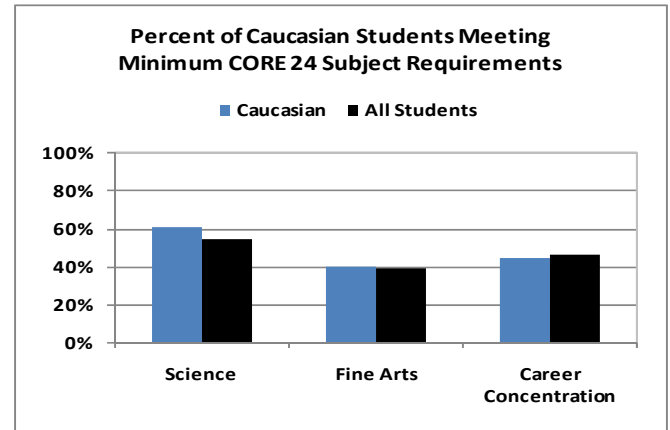


Figure 3. Percentage of Caucasian students meeting Core 24 Default College and Career Ready Requirements by Subject Area
Note: This brief does not include an analysis of health and fitness requirements. The health and fitness requirements were analyzed from a sample of students after the original study was completed.

In the analysis, a similar percentage of Caucasian students earned high school math or world language credits in middle school compared to the sample (see Table 2). In high school, Caucasian students took AP/IB classes and Running Start classes at a slightly higher rate than the rest of the sample (see Table 3). Course-failure rates for Caucasian students were lower than in the rest of the sample, with 43.4% failing at least one class, as compared to 47.3% of all other students.

Table 2.
Percent Earning Credits in Middle School

	Caucasian Students	All students
Math	27.7%	26.1%
Foreign Language	6.9%	6.3%

Table 3.
Percent Earning AP/IB and Running Start Credits

	Caucasian Students	All students
AP/IB	36.2%	35.1%
Running Start	14.4%	13.3%

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.