



# High School & Beyond Plan Recommendations Report 2025

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Submitted to the Office of the Governor and the Legislature in response to  
Senate Bill 5243 (2023 E2SSB 5243)

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## **2025 HIGH SCHOOL & BEYOND PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT**

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*Prepared by: Arielle Matthews, Program & Policy Manager*

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In response to Substitute Senate Bill (SSB) 5243, the Washington State Board of Education (SBE) developed recommendations on expanding flexibility and student choice in meeting high school graduation requirements through the High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP). The HSBP is a requirement to earn a high school diploma and serves as a personalized tool that supports students in exploring, planning, and preparing for their postsecondary aspirations. This report outlines recommendations to enhance the functionality, relevance, and impact of the HSBP.

The State Board's recommendations are grounded in community engagement, including listening sessions, focus groups, and student-led conversations conducted in partnership with College Success Foundation, Foundation for Tacoma Students, and Rhizome, and aligns with past recommendations of the state's Mastery-based Learning Work Group. Community input emphasized the role of the HSBP as a lever for equitable access to personalized learning pathways, providing students with multiple, meaningful ways to demonstrate readiness for life after high school. The recommendations in Table 1 below aim to:

- Empower students with greater choice in how they meet graduation requirements.
- Support the transparency of flexibilities that exist locally for students, through mastery/competency-based learning and other applied learning pathways.
- Promote the effective integration of HSBP into school structures, advising practices, and decision-making processes.
- Ensure the HSBP remains accessible, inclusive, and actionable for all students.

The recommendations are closely aligned with the State Board's broader FutureReady initiative, which explores holistic updates to Washington's graduation framework. As that work continues, the HSBP will remain a focus in efforts to build a more personalized, equitable, and future-focused education system for all Washington students.

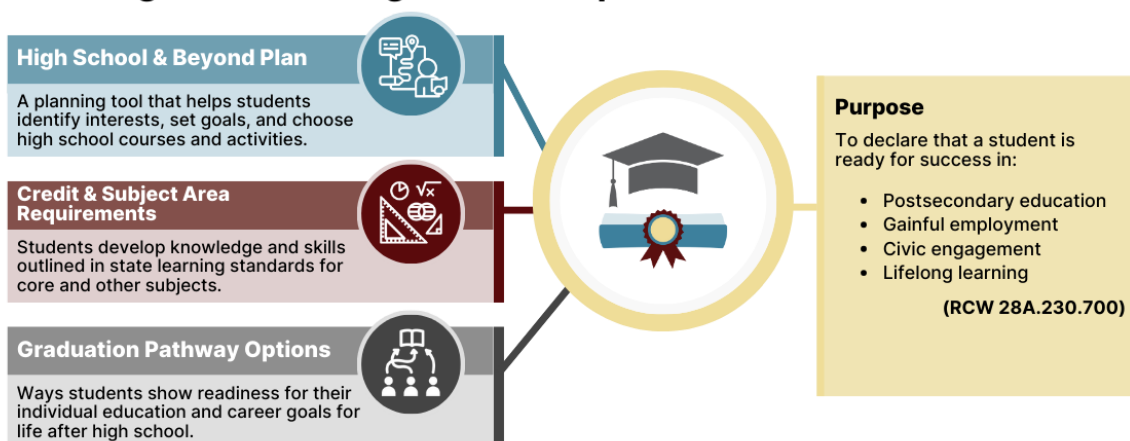
**Table 1: Challenges with the High School and Beyond Plan and recommendations to address them**

Challenge Shared by Community	Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Graduation requirements feel rigid or unclear to many students and families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HSBP should clearly identify flexible options for meeting graduation requirements, including those allowable under local district policy</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students struggle to find real-world connections between school and future opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop exploration activities and build out platform capabilities that help connect students to opportunities that align to their goals</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students wish to share accomplishments and highlight their skills and interests.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add a student portfolio or showcase option to allow students to store their best works and accomplishments</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HSBP content does not provide enough life skill practice (e.g., research, financial literacy, interview prep.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a state model HSBP curriculum with grade level-appropriate materials and activities to practice life skills.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Postsecondary planning feels too focused on four-year college, leaving other pathways underexplored</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote a more balanced and inclusive approach, with robust exploration activities for a variety of pathways</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students don't feel they have enough time or support to engage meaningfully with their HSBP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide regular, structured opportunities for review, reflection, and revision of the HSBP supported by trusted adults and embedded in the regular school day</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students lack access to individualized guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue protecting college and career counseling roles and lower student to counselor ratios</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educators are not always equipped to support students meaningfully with HSBP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invest in professional development to help educators and counselors feel confident in supporting student's goals</li> </ul>

## INTRODUCTION

The High School and Beyond Plan has served as a foundational element of Washington's high school graduation requirements since the graduating Class of 2008. Currently, students must begin their HSBP no later than 7<sup>th</sup> grade with the career interest and skills inventory to inform eighth grade course taking. By the end of eighth grade, students must also begin identifying their four-year course plan that is in line with graduation requirements and their own goals. Throughout their high school years, students will create a resume or activity log that shows their education, work experiences and community service. These components should be revisited and revised at least annually.

### Washington State's High School Diploma



SSB 5243 calls for a universal online HSBP platform for students in grades 7–12 and charges OSPI with facilitating this statewide transition. However, while OSPI is using their limited discretionary funds to support schools in implementation this year, the Legislature did not provide funding which may limit the pace and consistency of rollout across districts. The bill also directs OSPI to explore the option of providing expanded access beginning in fifth grade, with recommendations developed in consultation with the State Board of Education. In addition, the State Board is tasked with providing recommendations on expanding flexibility and student choice within the HSBP.

The State Board's vision for the High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP) aligns with the [Mastery-based Learning Work Group's 2020 report](#), which states: "The High School and Beyond Plan should not just focus on the student's goals for after high school but should help students take ownership over their learning during high school while exploring their values, strengths, passions, and long-term goals. It should also be used to help students

ensure they are learning the skills necessary to reach their post-high school goals. In short, the HSBP is the map to get a student from where they are to where they want to be, both academically and in life.”

The State Board's focus of the current report is on structures that enable students to use their HSBP to guide and customize their school experience. This work builds on the State Board's statutory authority to establish minimum graduation requirements and reflects input from students, families, educators, and community partners across the state.

Themes emerging from community engagement include:

- The need for greater relevance and personalization in graduation pathways
- The importance of applied and experiential learning options
- A desire for policies that recognize diverse definitions of success and support multiple ways to demonstrate readiness
- Added emphasis on career exploration

The recommendations in this report aim to align practice with these values, ensuring that the HSBP becomes not only a planning tool, but a mechanism to promote equity, flexibility, and student voice.

## FutureReady Initiative

The State Board is currently in the process of exploring holistic updates to the state's graduation requirements framework through the [FutureReady Initiative](#). The Board formally launched FutureReady work in 2024, with a cross-sector Task Force convening in early 2025. The Task Force is composed of people representing students and families, community-based organizations, K-12 educators, post-secondary education partners, employers, and policymakers. This initiative will culminate in a major legislative proposal anticipated for the 2027 session and will include further recommendations pertaining to the High School and Beyond Plan.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

SSB 5243 charges SBE with developing recommendations on how the high school and beyond plan could be modified to further support student choice and flexibility in meeting graduation requirements and preparing for postsecondary education and training, including increasing access to mastery-based learning and mastery based crediting opportunities. Successful implementation of these recommendations hinges on appropriate levels of funding being provided from the state to ensure districts have the resources and supports they need guide students.



To inform the following recommendations, the State Board of Education undertook extensive community engagement, centering the voices of students, families, educators, and community-based organizations. In partnership with contracted organizations, College Success Foundation, Foundation for Tacoma Students, and Rhizome, the Board received direct input from youth and historically underserved communities across Washington (you can find the organization’s full reports under supporting documents on [Simbli](#), the State Board’s meeting materials site). These organizations led regional listening sessions, focus groups, and facilitated student-led conversations. This outreach provided valuable insights into how the High School and Beyond Plan can better reflect students’ lived experiences, aspirations, and definitions of success. Additionally, relevant recommendations regarding how to better support students in their High School and Beyond Planning process are included from the state’s Mastery-based Learning Work Group’s [2020 report](#) and the State Board’s [2022 Alignment Report](#). The recommendations in this report are future-oriented by design, shaping the implementation of a more effective HSBP that will serve students for years to come. At the same time, this work is deeply rooted in the voices of students currently navigating the system. While many of the proposed improvements will not fully benefit those nearing graduation today, they are based on insights and lived experiences from students who are actively engaged in high school now who clearly articulated what is not working and what they wish they’d had earlier. Their feedback offers insights into current challenges and a clear direction for meaningful improvements to ensure future students have a more personalized, equitable, and actionable graduation planning process.

As Washington transitions to the new statewide HSBP platform SchoolLinks, there is significant potential to address many of the challenges raised throughout this report, though fully utilizing the capabilities of the platform hinges on consistent funding from the state to ensure all districts can support students. The platform includes several capabilities aligned with these recommendations, such as career-connected exploration tools, customizable course planning features, and student profile components. However, realizing this potential will depend heavily on how the platform is implemented and supported across diverse district contexts. Equitable and meaningful use of the platform will require sustained investment in professional development, integration into school structures, and resources for relationship-building with community partners.

## Center informed student choice

At its core, the High School and Beyond Plan should empower students to make informed decisions about their futures. It should provide opportunities for students to document

their evolving interests, explore aligned learning opportunities, select high school courses and programs, and create postsecondary plans that reflect their individual goals.

Through extensive community engagement, the State Board heard clearly that students need more accessible and comprehensive tools within the HSBP to explore potential pathways. Students, families, and school staff emphasized the importance of regular, structured opportunities for review, reflection, and revision of the HSBP supported by trusted adults such as school counselors, advisors, educators, and community members who understand the student's evolving goals.

A key theme that emerged was the need for better support around academic course planning. Students and families frequently reported confusion about which courses fulfill graduation requirements while also preparing students for their chosen postsecondary pathway. They expressed a desire for the HSBP platform to provide clear, personalized recommendations that show how specific classes relate to a student's future goals whether that includes a two- or four-year college, career training, military service, or direct entry into the workforce.

To meet this need, the State Board recommends enhancing the HSBP platform to clearly identify flexible options for meeting graduation requirements, including those allowable under local district policy. Each district has local policies and procedures regarding what is allowable within their context. For instance, each district has different mastery-based crediting policies and procedures. The new universal HSBP platform should include the capacity for districts to locally share what is allowable for students to meet graduation requirements, including what local mastery-based credit options are available for various courses, to transparently provide students with information about how they can choose to meet different requirements. By surfacing these options in a way that is easy to understand and tied to a student's stated goals, the platform can serve as a bridge between high school planning and real-world readiness.

Providing students with transparent, personalized course recommendations, and showing how they map to both graduation requirements and long-term aspirations, would help increase student agency, foster deeper engagement in learning, and ensure that students are not navigating these decisions alone. A well-designed, student-centered HSBP should reflect and reinforce the principle that students are active participants in shaping their educational journeys.

## Add meaning for students

To fulfill its promise, the High School and Beyond Plan must move beyond a compliance-oriented task and become a tool that actively supports instruction, advising, and meaningful goal setting. Across student and educator feedback, a consistent theme emerged: HSBP activities often feel like disconnected checkboxes, completed with minimal guidance, and perceived as having little relevance to students' personal aspirations.

To increase the plan's relevance, the State Board recommends expanding the frequency and intentionality of career exploration throughout a student's K–12 experience through the HSBP. Administering a variety of career interest inventories at multiple points rather than just once would allow students to reflect on their changing interests and evolving goals over time. Revisiting this process could make the HSBP a more valuable tool for personal reflection and informed decision-making. Students expressed a strong desire to connect the abstract concept of career exploration with real-world experiences. While the new statewide platform will include an "opportunity board" that customizes career-connected options based on a student's interests and completed activities, the availability and quality of those opportunities will depend on each district's capacity to build partnerships with local employers and community organizations. To help address this variability, the State Board recommends that OSPI develop additional exploration activities and expand platform capabilities to better connect students with internships, job shadowing, informational interviews, and other real-world learning experiences aligned with their interests.

The state has already invested in infrastructure to support career-connected learning through Career Connect Washington, which coordinates regional networks and resources to expand student access to meaningful work-based learning. Building on this foundation, the State Board recommends increased state-level support to strengthen and integrate these opportunities across districts. With additional investment, the state could partner with organizations such as the Association of Washington Business Institute (AWBi), which has developed regional internship hubs.

These experiences would also serve as powerful ways to connect schools with families, community organizations, and industry partners, reinforcing the broader ecosystem that supports student success.

In addition, students highlighted a desire for greater emphasis on non-academic life skills as part of the HSBP. Skills such as resume writing, interview preparation, financial literacy, job application processes, and research skills are central to a student's postsecondary



readiness, regardless of the path they choose. Developing grade level-appropriate materials and activities to include in the platform, designed to build upon one another over time, would allow students to practice essential skills and develop confidence before graduating. These competencies represent the “beyond” portion of the High School and Beyond Plan and must be elevated accordingly. One possible way to support this recommendation would be through the development of a state model HSBP curriculum aligned with relevant state learning standards, but flexible enough to be adapted to fit local district needs. For example, the curriculum could provide several different options for implementation delivery, so that schools could use it in either a stand-alone HSBP course or embedded in a more general advisory course. This approach is consistent with recommendations from the 2020 MBL Workgroup report, which highlights the need to make the HSBP more meaningful and useful for students.

Finally, adding a student portfolio or showcase component, that is revisited frequently, would allow students to curate and present artifacts that reflect both their academic and non-academic journey. This type of portfolio would give students in all learning environments a meaningful way to demonstrate growth, reflect on their evolving goals, and celebrate milestones, reinforcing the HSBP’s purpose as a personalized planning tool. SchoolLinks has a profile/resume feature that can address this recommendation, so special attention will be needed to ensure districts provide the necessary support for students to utilize this feature in a way that allows students to translate how their experiences show growth and that is personal, strengths-based, and meaningful. This recommendation also aligns with the work happening in mastery-based learning schools around transcripts including areas where students can curate artifacts to demonstrate their academic and life skills. Recent legislation (SB 5189) directs the State Board to recommend a format for a state-level competency/mastery-based transcript. The MBL Work Group previously recommended the development of a state standardized format for a mastery transcript that would more authentically demonstrate student learning, such as the transcript developed by the Mastery Transcript Consortium. Embedding a portfolio component into the HSBP platform not only deepens its relevance for students, but also lays the groundwork for a more authentic, competency-based approach to recognizing and communicating what students know and can do.

## Dedicate time for student exploration

Community engagement across the state consistently highlighted the need to dedicate meaningful time to support student exploration through the HSBP. Students, families, and community-based organizations stressed that the HSBP cannot serve as an effective,

personalized planning tool unless students are provided with consistent, structured time during the school day to engage with it. When treated as a check-the-box requirement rather than a developmental opportunity, students are less likely to take ownership of their plan or connect it to their long-term goals.

In many schools, time dedicated to career and college planning is limited or inconsistently provided, and students often do not recall engaging with the HSBP until their senior year. Community partners emphasized the need for more frequent and structured opportunities for students to reflect on their interests, explore real-world possibilities, and refine their postsecondary goals over time. The State Board's 2025 [Basic Education Report](#) shows that about 80% of school districts implement the HSBP through advisory, homeroom, or a set of annual activities, while only 42% embed HSBP activities into a credit-bearing course. These findings suggest that although most districts have a structure in place for HSBP delivery, the depth and consistency of engagement can vary. A state model curriculum could help ease this disparity between the intention of the HSBP and what students experience.

While college preparation is appropriately emphasized, students shared that the HSBP experience can feel narrowly focused, with fewer opportunities or supports to explore pathways other than traditional postsecondary education such as work-based learning, apprenticeships, military service, entrepreneurship, and other locally and culturally relevant options. A more balanced and inclusive approach, with robust exploration activities for a variety of pathways, would help ensure that all students see their aspirations reflected in the planning process.

To ensure equitable access to meaningful exploration, clear guidance is needed for how schools can schedule and support HSBP activities. The State Board supports OSPI's recommendations in their 2025 HSBP report regarding dedicated time and delivery models for HSBP implementation and recognizes the importance of embedding this work within the regular school schedule.

Students and families emphasized that for the HSBP to be meaningful, it must be introduced earlier and revisited more frequently throughout a student's educational journey. This feedback strongly aligns with the intent of SSB 5243 to expand access to the HSBP beginning in fifth grade and affirms the importance of the HSBP as a developmental tool—not a one-time task. To truly fulfill the goals of the recent legislation, the HSBP must function as a living document with developmentally appropriate supports, co-created and regularly updated by students, families, educators, and community partners to reflect students' evolving goals, interests, and needs.

## Strengthen infrastructure and educator support

Supporting students in making meaningful use of their HSBP also requires targeted investments in the infrastructure and people who guide them. Students and educators alike expressed further need to strengthen the advising infrastructure across the state to help students plan for their post-secondary goals. SSB 5030 has improved access to counseling services by establishing the comprehensive school counseling program and clarifying the role of school counselors in line with best practices. Under this model, counselors are expected to spend 80% of their time providing direct or indirect services to students, however, the need for more intentional support from adults remains to ensure all students are able to plan for their futures effectively. This includes continued protection of college and career counseling roles to ensure that school counselors can keep the majority of their focus on supporting students, continued efforts to lower student-to-counselor ratios, and integrating HSBP planning into daily or weekly advisory periods or dedicated coursework. Importantly, HSBP implementation should not rest solely on the shoulders of school counselors. Building-wide engagement is necessary to ensure students receive consistent, personalized guidance throughout their high school experience. Such investments are essential to ensure that every student has access to informed, personalized guidance.

The State Board also supports OSPI's recommendations in their 2025 HSBP report to invest in professional development to help educators facilitate high-quality, student-centered exploration. WSAC specifically has multiple training offerings available to educators and community centered around Financial Aid Basics, Navigation, and specialized trainings that vary based on needs raised by counselors and community-based organizations. Trainings such as these would equip educators who guide students with the needed information to do so effectively. This recommendation is further supported by the MBL Work Group's 2020 report regarding the importance of educator training on how to support students with their HSBPs. The report highlights that when teachers understand each student's individual learning goals as articulated in their HSBP, they can tailor their instruction to become more relevant and responsive to their students' interests. This foundational knowledge enables educators to serve as facilitators of broader collaboration. Once school staff are confident in using the HSBP as a student-centered tool, it becomes more feasible to involve families and community-based partners in supporting the student's plan, which is a desire heard from community and school staff alike. This kind of coordinated support system reflects the vision set forth in SSB 5243 where students have ongoing access to informed guidance, real-world exploration

opportunities, and a network of adults who can help them make purposeful choices about their future.

In short, the HSBP is the map to get a student from where they are academically to where they want to be, both academically and in life. Without intentional structures and investments, the HSBP risks remaining an underutilized tool rather than a transformative lever for equity and student readiness.

## CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

The High School and Beyond Plan is a critical component of Washington's graduation framework and holds significant potential to support equitable, student-centered pathways to post-secondary success. However, realizing this potential requires a shift in how the HSBP is understood, resourced, and implemented.

Students, families, and educators across Washington have made clear that the HSBP must move beyond a compliance-driven exercise and become a meaningful, flexible, and integrated tool for exploration and planning. By centering student choice, adding relevance and real-world connection, and dedicating time and infrastructure for implementation, the HSBP can serve as a personalized roadmap that reflects students' evolving goals and supports their readiness for a range of futures.

These recommendations also align with the State Board of Education's broader work through the FutureReady initiative, which explores updates to Washington's overall graduation requirements framework. Launched in 2024, FutureReady brings together a cross-sector task force of students, families, educators, postsecondary partners, employers, and policymakers. As the Task Force develops its recommendations for a comprehensive policy proposal anticipated for the 2027 legislative session, the HSBP will continue to serve as a key focus with further recommendations for increased student relevance and support.

The State Board is committed to continuing to listen, learn, and lead in partnership with students, families, educators, and communities across Washington. Together, we can ensure that every student graduates with a plan that is meaningful, personalized, and aligned with their future.