

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

HEARING TYPE: __X__ ACTION

DATE: January 9-10, 2008

SUBJECT: **MEANINGFUL HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA UPDATE**

SERVICE UNIT: Ms. Edie Harding, Executive Director
State Board of Education

PRESENTER: Dr. Kathe Taylor, Policy Director
Mr. Eric Liu, Board Lead

BACKGROUND:

The Board will be asked to take action on the purpose of a diploma, as directed by the legislature. The statement has been reworked since the November 2007 draft to reflect feedback provided by Board members at the November meeting and at a subsequent Executive Committee meeting.

In order to adhere to the ambitious timetable the Board has set, decisions will need to be made at the March 26-27, 2008 Board meeting about a set of draft graduation requirements to vet with stakeholders at public outreach sessions in April and May.

To help the Board meet that timetable, staff recommends that the Board take the following actions:

1. Discuss and adopt the language for the purpose of a meaningful high school diploma
2. Direct staff to prepare a series of policy briefs on topics that will inform the Board's actions, and that reflect issues raised at the public outreach sessions. These policy briefs should provide a succinct snapshot of current practice and issues. Possible topics for the policy briefs are listed in this tab.
3. Agree to convene a work session in late February to discuss the policy briefs and to consider their implications for the directions that Washington's graduation requirements could take. Suggested date: February 25, 2008.



MEANINGFUL HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA UPDATE

DRAFT CONCEPTS FOR GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

In September 2007, the Board approved draft concepts to frame its thinking about high school graduation requirements, with the caveat that any changes made to the requirements would need to take into consideration implications for system implementation. They include:

1. **Purpose of a diploma.** The diploma should signify that students are ready for success in postsecondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship. Requirements should address the personalized education needs of students as well as society's needs.
2. **One diploma for all.** The purpose and expectations of a diploma apply to all students (with appropriate recognition for special education students on IEPs). Requirements for the diploma send a clear message to all students about what they need to succeed after high school, and ensure that students have met a common set of standards.
3. **Proposed guiding principles.** Graduation requirements should:
 - Establish overarching expectations/essential skills needed for student lifelong learning;
 - Explore equivalency or competency credits, particularly, but not exclusively in the area of career and technical education;
 - Represent a comprehensive, integrated package;
 - Align with postsecondary education minimum entry requirements.

PUBLIC OUTREACH RESPONSE

The draft concepts were vetted at six public outreach sessions this fall, as well as at state and regional WSSDA conferences and community meetings (e.g., Clover Park Rotary). The formal tabulation of those responses has not been completed as of this writing. That said, there appeared to be general agreement about the purpose of a diploma as preparation for postsecondary education, work and citizenship, and the value of rigor, as long as there was some flexibility in the system for students to pursue that rigor in different ways.

PURPOSE OF A DIPLOMA

The 2005 legislature asked the Board to develop and propose a revised definition of the purpose and expectations for high school diplomas issued by public schools in Washington State. The legislature asked that the definition address two issues:

- 1) Whether attainment of a high school diploma is intended to signify that a student is ready for success in college, ready for successful and gainful employment in the workplace, or some combination of these and other objectives.
- 2) The knowledge, skills, and abilities that students are expected to demonstrate to receive a high school diploma, as well as the various methods to be used to measure student performance, rather than focusing on courses, credits, seat time, and test scores.¹

The Board has considered the purpose of a diploma in its meaningful high school diploma work and in its own goals for students. In an earlier paper, the Meaningful High School Diploma Committee characterized the diploma as a “social contract” to whatever institution or employers the graduate moved on to—a contract that says the graduate has acquired a particular set of knowledge and skills. At its September 2007 meeting, the Board clarified the purpose as follows:

The purpose of a diploma is to prepare a student to be ready for success in postsecondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship. The diploma should meet the personalized education needs of each student, as well as society’s needs.

With respect to methods used to measure student performance, the Board redefined in 2000 a credit to include the “satisfactory demonstration by a student of clearly identified competencies established pursuant to a process defined in written district policy.”²

The Board reviewed a purpose statement for a diploma at its November 2007 meeting and suggested that a revision be made to clarify the nature of a social contract by specifying who the contract is with. That revision, along with suggestions made by the Executive Committee, is incorporated into the staff recommendation below.

¹ ESSHB 3098

² WAC 180-51-050

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends that the Board consider a definition that builds on the ideas listed above and addresses the two issues specified by the legislature:

The purpose of the diploma is to prepare a student to be ready for success in postsecondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship, and to be equipped with the skills to be a lifelong learner. The diploma represents a balance between the personalized education needs of each student and society's needs, and reflects at its core the state's basic education goals. The diploma is a compact between the state and whatever institution or employer the graduate moves on to—a compact that says the graduate has acquired a particular set of knowledge and skills. How the student demonstrates those skills may differ; whether a student earns credit by participating in formal instruction or by demonstrating competency through established district policies is immaterial; they are equally acceptable.

NEXT STEPS

In order to adhere to the ambitious timetable the Board has set, decisions will need to be made at the March 26-27, 2008 Board meeting about a set of draft graduation requirements to vet with stakeholders at public outreach sessions in April and May.

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends that the Board take the following actions:

1. Direct staff to prepare a series of policy briefs on topics that will inform the Board's actions, and that reflect issues raised at the public outreach sessions. These policy briefs should provide a succinct snapshot of current practice and issues.
 - a. **College and work readiness:** How are states defining college and work readiness? What is a college and work-ready curriculum? Is a college and work-ready curriculum the same as alignment with postsecondary education?
 - b. **Personalized education:** How are states defining a personalized education? What are states doing to create flexibility in the curriculum for students to pursue individual interests?
 - c. **Competency-based credit:** How are states operationalizing competency-based credit?
 - d. **Mandatory vs. default curricula:** How do opt-out policies work? What states are using them, and what is their impact?
 - e. **Impact of higher standards on dropout rates:** What do we know?
 - f. **Credit requirements of other states:** What are other states doing with credit requirements in the various subject areas?
 - g. **Culminating project:** What are districts doing?

- h. **High School and Beyond Plan:** What are districts doing?
 - i. **High school funding:** How does it work?
 - j. **Other states' approaches to graduation requirements:** What patterns, themes, and outliers emerge?
 - k. **Cross-crediting and equivalencies:** How do they work? What is the state already doing?
 - l. **Other?**
2. Agree to convene a work session in late February to discuss the policy briefs and to consider their implications for the direction that Washington's graduation requirements could take. Suggested date: February 25, 2008.