



Washington’s 2008 Alternative School Graduates: Course-Taking and Graduation Requirements

Washington provides many different types of alternative learning experiences for students. Students attracted to some alternative high schools may be below grade level or need to recover credits. Higher graduation requirements present challenges for these students and their schools.

Washington State’s highest performing alternative schools support students with a variety of strategies, including personalization, differentiated instruction, multiple learning options, and alternative crediting strategies (Baker, et al, 2008). Pressure to raise the bar for all alternative programs has increased due to federal and state legislation, as well as social and moral imperatives to prepare all students for college, careers, and citizenship.

A recent study of alternative education in Washington State found only a small percentage of alternative education schools offers the full range of courses necessary for college eligibility. Some college-bound students supplement their education through advanced courses and electives via Running Start programs or skills centers (Baker, et al, 2008). Because course-taking patterns affect students’ achievement in high school and beyond (Adelman, 2006; Bottoms & Feagan, 2003; Stern & Pavelchek, 2006), access to and completion of courses for college and career readiness are critical.

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, equivalent to or more rigorous than the minimum college admission standards set by the Washington Higher Education Coordinating (HEC) Board. Table 1 summarizes

graduation requirements, including notations about course levels.

Table 1.
Credits Required or Proposed for High School Graduation and Required for 2008 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.

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 the senior year, 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

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 percentages of 2008 graduates (N = 283) from the sample of Washington's alternative schools that met minimum HEC Board admissions and Core 24 default college and career ready requirements are presented in Figure 1. Less than 3% of students graduating from the alternative schools met the minimum HEC Board requirements or Core 24 default requirements. This is considerably less than graduates in the study from comprehensive high schools.

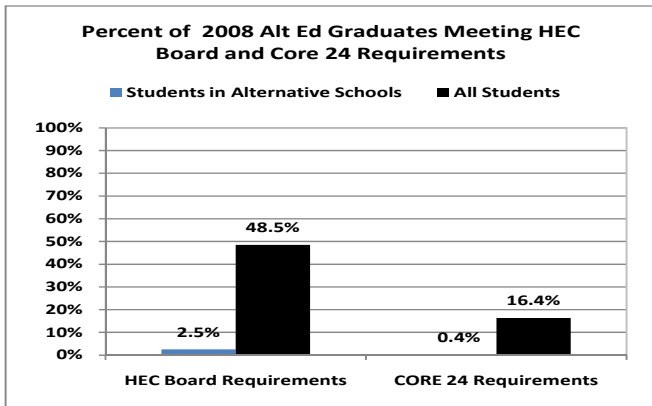


Figure 1. Percentage of 2008 Alternative Education Graduates Meeting HEC Board Minimum Admissions and Core 24 Default College and Career Ready Requirements

Analyzing course-taking by subject with HEC Board criteria (see Figure 2) showed students most frequently met requirements in social studies (80%) and arts (77%), although at slightly lower rates than the sample. Fewer met requirements in English (44%) and science (50%), and even fewer met those in math (9%) and world language (19%).

Among the subjects where the proposed Core 24 requirements differed from HEC Board requirements, fewer students met requirements in health and fitness (66%), career concentration (44%), arts (33%), and science (9%) (see Figure 3).

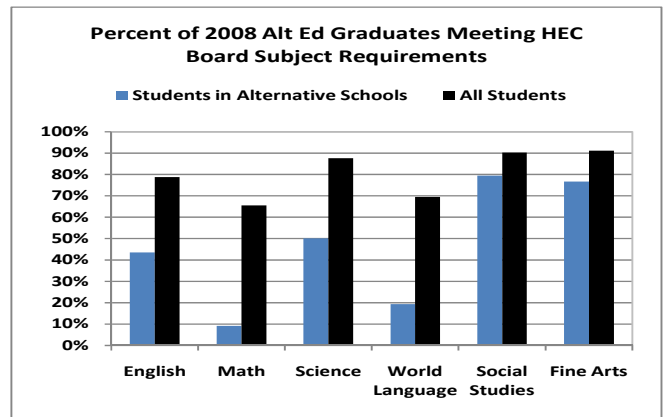


Figure 2. Percentage of 2008 Alternative Education Graduates Meeting HEC Board Minimum Requirement by Subject

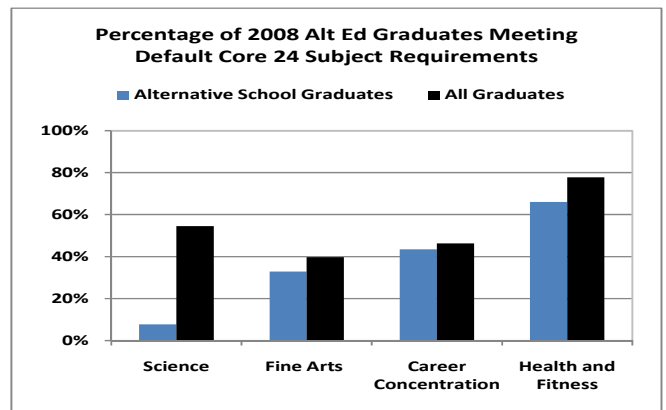


Figure 3. Percentage of 2008 Alternative Education Graduates Meeting Core 24 Default College and Career Ready Requirements by Subject

Note. Although the SBE's definition of career concentration is more broad than occupational education and career and technical education (CTE), only occupational education and CTE career and technical education (CTE) courses were analyzed to address the career concentration requirement.

Additional comparisons showed fewer students from alternative high schools earned math (4% versus 26%) or world language (2% versus 65%) credits in middle school. Fewer took AP or IB courses (3% versus 35%), but similar numbers took at least one Running Start course (12% versus 13%).

References:

Adelman, C. (2006). *The toolbox revisited: Paths to degree completion from high school through college*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved August 27, 2008 from: www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/toolboxrevisit/index.html

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For more information go to www.bercgroup.com

Stern, P. & Pavelcheck, D. (2006). *Who's prepared for college work?*
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