



# New Graduation Credit & Pathway Options

## 2021 Legislative Request

### Problem

Many students struggle to find relevance in their high school education and see the current graduation requirements as rigid and impersonal. According to the 2020 Graduation Pathway Options Report, fewer than half of the students surveyed agreed that there is a graduation pathway option that aligns with what they want to do after graduation. This is consistent with what the State Board of Education has heard from many students, parents, and educators who have asked for greater flexibility and relevance.

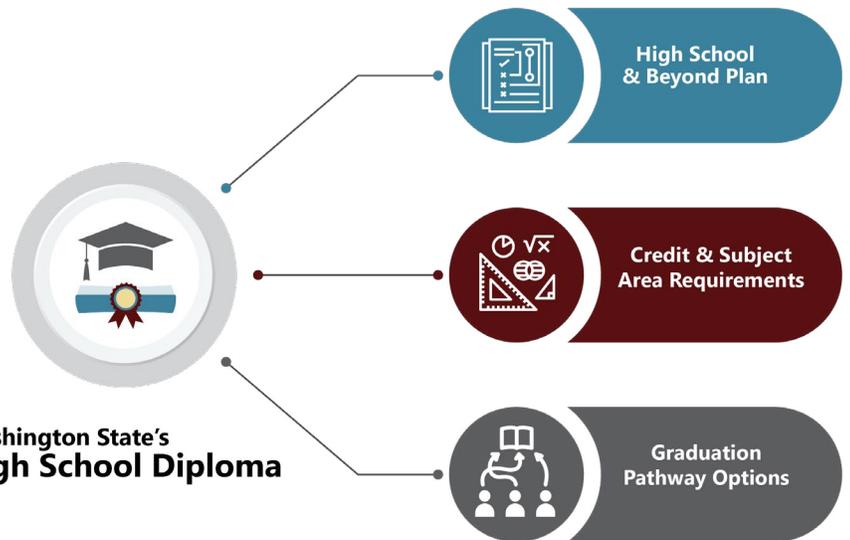
When the Legislature created the graduation pathway options in 2019, the intent was in part to create greater flexibility and relevance for students. However, the Legislature recognized that school districts may meet barriers to implementation and students may face barriers to equitable access. The Legislature charged the State Board of Education with identifying barriers and recommending changes and additional pathways.

The first year of research on graduation pathways showed:

- Students not seeing how graduation pathway options relate to their plans for their future.
- Too narrow a focus on English and math.
- A desire for more authentic pathway options that don't rely on an assessment score or seat-time in a specific course.
- Educators and parents worried about students meeting both pathway requirements and the College and Career Ready Credit Framework (24 credits or 22 available for individual students).

**“Considering underserved students – we need more accessible pathways and pathways aligned to what students want to do.”**

**– Educator, 2020 Graduation Pathway Options Report**



**Background: The state credit framework (24 credits, with 22 permissible on an individual student basis) has been phased-in over the past years, and graduation pathway options were newly implemented with the Class of 2020.**

Unfortunately, systemically marginalized students (like students of color) are more impacted by the education system's rigidity as it can fail to address students' individual needs and interests. The COVID-19 pandemic, closing school facilities, and limiting options, has greatly deepened inequities.

## ***Solution***

The State Board of Education proposes changes that would:

- Provide greater equity and options for students in the future, as well as address some of the present challenges of earning a high school diploma during the COVID pandemic.
- Allow for a higher level of engagement by students in their own education.
- Increase the relevance of the High School and Beyond Plan in shaping each student's pathway.
- Allow students to show their readiness for career and college in ways that align better with individual students' High School and Beyond Plans.

## ***Build Flexibility and Relevance into the Credit Requirements Framework***

We propose creating flexibility in the credit requirements for students who have shown readiness for career, college, civic engagement, and lifelong learning by successfully completing coursework and a pathway option consistent with their High School and Beyond Plan. This is not a reduction of graduation requirements for all students. Rather, it is an option to reduce elective credits for some students who have a plan for after high school and have demonstrated readiness for their next steps. This option would enhance the [Career- and College-Ready Graduation Framework](#), maintaining rigor while also allowing greater personalization for individual students.

Specifically, we propose allowing students to graduate with as few as 20 state required credits provided they have successfully completed:

- A High School and Beyond Plan.
- 17 core required subject area credits.
- 3 personalized pathway credits (electives directly tied to their High School and Beyond Plan).
- At least one graduation pathway option consistent with their High School and Beyond Plan.
- Any other state non-credit or local requirements.

School districts would still be required to provide students the opportunity to complete 24 credits for graduation—schools would continue to provide courses that help prepare students and that students want to take. But completing general elective credits should not hold a student back from graduating once they've completed all the other requirements and completed a high school program that fulfills their personal High School and Beyond Plan.

## ***Create a Portfolio Graduation Pathway Option***

The State Board of Education proposes creating a portfolio graduation pathway option that would allow students to demonstrate their mastery of state learning standards in authentic ways. A portfolio is a form of performance assessment in which the student curates a collection of their authentic work, showing what they can actually do with what they have learned. The student produces real-world artifacts that are assessed against state learning standards. For example, this may include a performance, original art or design, a reflection on learning from an internship or other work experience, or a presentation of findings from a scientific inquiry.

A portfolio or project-based graduation pathway option would:

- Align with mastery-based learning.
- Support strategies such as work-based or project-based learning.
- Provide an option for students to demonstrate integrated learning over a broader set of learning standards and subject areas than English and math.
- Result in a tangible product that serves as a launching pad to the student's next step after high school.

### *How is this different from previous models?*

This proposal is *not* a re-boot of the state’s prior models related to “portfolios,” namely the Collection of Evidence and the Culminating Project graduation requirement.

The Collection of Evidence was an assessment addressing a single subject area, developed and graded by the state at considerable expense, and taken by the student under generally test-like conditions following some individualized instruction. In contrast, the portfolio is a form of performance assessment in which the student presents authentic artifacts showing what they can do with what they have learned. The portfolio would address at least two subject areas, making it **more comprehensive**. It would be **developed and evaluated locally**, under a local policy that meets state requirements. This puts evaluation in the hands of those who most closely know the student and avoids a costly state level review.

The portfolio pathway option has some similarities to culminating projects and capstone projects. One hundred and sixteen districts currently require a culminating project. Almost all of these are small rural districts that may not be able to offer other graduation pathway options, such as dual credit or a broad selection of Career and Technical Education, but could, with some modification, adapt culminating projects to be a meaningful graduation option for their students that would meet the portfolio requirements.

### **On the benefits of portfolios:**

**“As assessment expert James Popham notes, a key benefit of portfolios is that they engage students in self-assessment, allowing them to internalize standards, become self-aware of their learning strengths and needs, and take control of their own learning...Performance assessments are also designed to prepare students for the intellectual rigor, critical and creative thinking, and self-directedness that are required to succeed in college and careers...[They] also tend to be more valid measures of individuals’ higher order thinking and performance abilities than traditional test measures.” (Learning Policy Institute, The Promise of Performance Assessments, 2018)**

### **Improve Pathways Equity**

This legislation would also hold school districts accountable for ensuring equity. It requires school districts to take appropriate corrective actions if they observe disproportionality among student subgroups participating in and completing pathway options.

**Students would demonstrate mastery of the state learning standards in at least two of the following subject areas that align with their postsecondary plans:**

- **The Arts**
- **Computer Science**
- **Educational Technology**
- **English Language Arts**
- **Environment and Sustainability**
- **Financial Education**
- **Health and Physical Education**
- **Mathematics**
- **Science**
- **Social Studies**
- **World Languages**

**“Art and music aren’t just hobbies for some students, they are real and valid postsecondary pursuits. Why not honor what students are truly passionate about? With a portfolio pathway option, it would allow for students to graduate through a music or arts pathway.”**

**– Autymn Wilde,  
2020 Spokane Valley Graduate  
Former SBE Student Member**