

July 2010

Update on Proposed Changes to Minimum College Admission Standards and College Academic Distribution Requirements

The Higher Education Coordinating Board and the State Board of Education have begun a collaborative effort to update and align high school graduation requirements and college admission requirements. The changes are necessary to ensure graduates of Washington high schools are prepared for a range of career and postsecondary educational opportunities after high school, and to address obstacles to implementing the “Core 24” framework adopted by the State Board of Education (SBE).

In updating the requirements, staff members of both boards are working with stakeholders on a proposal to balance the needs of various sectors and ensure students maintain the broadest possible range of opportunities.

To initiate these efforts, the HECB’s Education Committee and SBE’s Executive Committee met on June 2, 2010 to:

- Explore ways for the two policy boards to work together to keep the state moving forward on shared goals; and
- Consider ways to align high school graduation requirements and college admission requirements.

Members of both boards agreed they share common interests and would like to work together to help students become productive citizens and navigate the system successfully. Members noted the current system is fragmented and creates artificial lines between K-12 and higher education. By working together, the boards can help extend the state’s commitment to education. The two boards are in the process of scheduling a follow-up meeting to be held in late August.

Five general areas of discussion surfaced:

1. What courses should be required in the core curriculum to meet both high school graduation and college admission expectations?
2. Should there be a commonly agreed upon total number of credits required for high school graduation and college admission?
3. How do high school courses count in satisfying college entry requirements?
4. Can course competencies be used to satisfy credit requirements?
5. Should revised requirements be phased in on a common schedule and use common definitions?

1. What courses should be required in the core curriculum to meet both high school graduation and college admission expectations?

Staff members from both agencies were directed to propose a common set of requirements for high school completion and college admission. Table A may represent a reasonable starting point.

The first column contains a proposal from the Core 24 Implementation Task Force (ITF) related to “automatic enrollment.” The courses include 18 required credits outlined in the current Core 24 framework on the college and career ready path.

The second column contains the current HECB College Academic Distribution Requirements (CADRs). The ITF’s Automatic Enrollment proposal contains one more credit in Art and one more credit in Science than the CADRs do. The ITF recommendation does not include two credits of world language required in the CADRs. Debate continues on the need for Algebra II for all high school graduates.

Table A

Subject	Core 24 ITF Task Force: “Core Credits for Automatic Enrollment”	HECB: College Academic Distribution Requirements (CADRs)
English	4	4
Math	3	3 (Algebra II)
Sr. Year Quantitative Course	- *	1
Science	3 (2 lab, 1 algebra based)	2 (2 lab; 1 algebra based; 1 biology, chemistry or physics)
Social Studies	3	3
World Language	-	2
Arts	2	1
Fitness	1.5	
Health	.5	
Career Concentration	1	
Total	18	16

*not addressed by ITF recommendation

After discussing the science requirement, the committees agreed to develop a concurrent proposal for implementation. The committees did not discuss the Art requirement. It is not clear the public baccalaureates want to require an additional Art credit. In fact, current admission standards allow another academic area to substitute for the art credit.

World language remains an issue. It is not likely to become a requirement for high school graduation but would be recognized in the common requirements as an option for students planning to go to college. Math also remains under debate; however, this has largely been addressed in the current rules adopted by the State Board of Education.

It is important to note that the Core 24 framework and the ITF-recommended core for automatic enrollment include key changes from the current high school graduation requirements. These include an additional year of English, an additional year of science, including a second lab science, and an increase of .5 credits in social sciences.

While the change to three years of math is being implemented, other changes are not scheduled to take effect because full implementation of Core 24 has been contingent upon funding an additional class period in high school.

2. Should there be a commonly agreed upon total number of credits required for high school graduation and college admission?

The committees agreed there would be strategic value in a common, minimum number of credits. The agencies were directed to develop a proposal for a shared, minimum number of total credits that would include a set of courses both boards would hold in common. **Twenty credits** were suggested as a reasonable target for the common set of requirements. The total credits would likely include courses not represented in the CADR: fitness, health, and career concentration courses.

3. How do high school courses count to satisfying college entry requirements?

The ITF suggested districts could count “2 for 1” – that is, a single course may satisfy multiple requirements. HECB staff did not expect concerns with courses that meet secondary requirements not included in the CADRs (e.g., students who earn credit for science while meeting a second graduation requirement in Career and Technical Education). However, there might be concerns about courses that meet two of the CADRs (e.g., students who earn credit for physics while meeting a second graduation requirement in math. The CADRs already allow for this with the senior quantitative course). Staff members are investigating this further and will develop a proposal that may involve a phased approach and/or limited ability to double count courses.

The committees also discussed the role of middle school courses in high school graduation and college admission. Currently, the HECB stipulates middle school students may earn designated credits in world language and math that satisfy CADRs. The HECB will propose a broader approach to how requirements might be met in middle school. This change will most likely affect treatment of sequenced courses and courses taken in middle school that meet high school standards and appear on a high school transcript.

4. Can course competencies be used to satisfy credit requirements?¹

What are the implications for higher education if SBE moves away from seat-time requirements? Washington is among 27 states that define credit in terms of time. The ITF recommended the SBE consider eliminating the time-basis of a credit. Although this change in policy is unlikely to result in any large-scale movement away from seat-time, it may act as a catalyst for districts to award more credit based solely on demonstration of competency, with no corresponding coursework. Under current rule, districts may do this now.

Colleges may have some concerns about credit earned without seat-time. One exception might be competency-based credit for world languages. However, elimination of the specified seat-time requirement, in most cases, would mean greater flexibility in hours of instruction – not the elimination of formal instructional time.

World language, because of its national standards and assessments, may be the most accessible discipline to pursue the awarding of competency-based credit without requiring corresponding formal coursework. Both boards encouraged staff to pursue this and to identify other areas where competency-based credit may be appropriate. Further research is needed prior to a staff recommendation.

5. Should revised requirements be phased in on a common schedule and use common definitions?

Both boards agreed that it would be important to implement new requirements on a common schedule to reduce confusion about when the changes take effect and ensure smooth implementation.

Next Steps:

Staff at both agencies are working with stakeholders and will develop draft proposals for discussion by the HECB at its September meeting, and by the SBE at its July and September meetings.

¹ The HECB requires 15-16 Common Academic Distribution Requirements (CADRs). The SBE's Core 24 Graduation Requirements Framework proposes 24 credits/requirements. Washington defines a credit as 150 hours of planned instructional activities **or** satisfactory demonstration of clearly identified competencies defined in written district policy.