

October 2010

DRAFT: Proposed Modifications to HECB Minimum Admission Standards

Executive Summary

The State Board of Education (SBE) has been working on revisions to the high school graduation requirements in response to feedback on the “Core 24” framework and recommendations from the Core 24 Implementation Task Force. As part of this process, the HECB Education Committee and SBE Executive Committee began a series of meetings in June 2010 to explore shared goals and consider ways to better align high school graduation and college admission requirements.

The two committees identified five general areas of shared interest:

1. Which courses should be required in the core curriculum to meet both high school graduation and college admission expectations?
2. Which common set of credits should be required for high school graduation and college admission?
3. How should high school courses be counted to satisfy college entry requirements?
4. How should demonstration of competency be used to satisfy requirements?
5. What common timeline should be used to implement any changes to existing requirements?

On September 15, 2010, the SBE provisionally adopted revised graduation requirements for 2016. One of the key features to the revised requirements is that students would be automatically enrolled in coursework that would meet or exceed current HECB minimum admission requirements. Students would have flexibility to opt for a more technically oriented pathway or a more heavily academic pathway based on their plans for high school and beyond.

In response to these changes the Higher Education Coordinating Board proposes to modify the minimum college admission requirements to improve alignment with the revised State Board of Education requirements and to improve flexibility for students attempting to meet the requirements.

The proposed changes would:

- Improve alignment between high school and four-year public college admission requirements by:
 - Adding a third credit in science.
 - Adding an additional credit of fine, visual, and performing arts.
 - Recommending high school students take a course of study that matches the revised state requirements.
 - Place emphasis on competencies rather than defined “seat time” and allow for use of competency-based assessments to meet admission requirements.
 - Reaffirm or modify current policies to ease administrative burden, clarify intent, and ensure alignment with changes to the graduation requirements, including current testing requirements.

Finally, staff of the State Board of Education and Higher Education Coordinating Board identified a number of important issues in the effort to continue alignment progress and improve participation in postsecondary education and training programs. These issues will be the subject of continuing work between the two agencies and subsequent meetings of the two board committees.



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Background

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) and the State Board of Education (SBE) are engaged in a collaborative effort to update and align high school graduation 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. In updating the requirements, staff of both Boards have worked extensively with stakeholders to develop a proposal that will balance the needs of various sectors and ensure students maintain the broadest possible range of opportunities.

The HECB Education Committee and the SBE Executive Committee met on June 2, 2010 to:

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

Members of both Boards agreed that they share common interests and would like to work together to help students become productive citizens and navigate the system successfully. Members noted that 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 State Board of Education held three subsequent meetings in June, July, and September. At those meetings, the SBE dedicated a substantial amount of time discussing changes to the high school graduation requirements and received public comment on the topic.

At the September 15 meeting, the State Board of Education provisionally adopted new graduation requirements consistent with the alignment efforts of the past several months. One of the key changes in these requirements is that students would be automatically enrolled in a 24-credit "career and college" program of study that would meet the current and proposed minimum college admission requirements. Students would have latitude under the new requirements to substitute courses based on their high school and beyond plan.

At the same time, HECB staff have been engaged in conversations with institutions and other stakeholders to discuss impacts of proposed changes in the minimum admission requirements, focusing particularly on options to add flexibility to how students meet the requirements.

The sub-committees of the two Boards met a second time on August 24 to discuss a series of recommendations that respond to five general areas identified in the joint SBE Executive Committee and HECB Education Committee meeting of June 2.

The proposed revisions outline:

1. The specific courses that would be required in the core curriculum to meet both high school graduation and college admission expectations.
2. A common set of credits required for high school graduation and college admission.
3. How high school courses would be counted to satisfy college entry requirements.
4. How demonstration of competency may be used to satisfy requirements.

The fifth area of interest addresses how the requirements would be phased in. Staff will work on a common implementation schedule for the requirements, once the course requirements and other policy changes are further along. Phase-in of new credit requirements requires a minimum of four years to implement; however, some policy changes that create flexibility in meeting requirements may be implemented sooner.

The committees encouraged staff to proceed with the recommendations and gather additional feedback from stakeholders. The recommendations below (and summarized in the chart in Appendix A) were revised, based on the conversation between members of the two Boards and the subsequent action taken by the State Board of Education to move forward on high school graduation requirements.

Specifically, the initial proposal from HECB staff to remove language about WASL equivalency to College Academic Distribution Requirements (CADRs) from the minimum admission standards was replaced with a proposal to replace the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) language with appropriate language for the High School Proficiency Exam.

In addition, the initial requirement for a minimum number of total credits in high school to meet minimum admission standards has been replaced with a recommendation that students complete a high school course of study consistent with the revised graduation requirements.

Finally, the committees asked staff to begin identifying a set of strategies that would support high school to college transitions. These strategies would include existing initiatives such as College Bound Scholarship and GEAR UP, as well as promising new initiatives such as statewide implementation of pre-college testing.

The committees plan to reconvene in December; to focus more explicitly on strategies and initiatives the two Boards can champion to improve high school to college transitions and the educational attainment of Washington residents. They would also plan to engage the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges in the discussion.

Recommended Modifications to Minimum Admission Standards

- **Improve alignment between high school and four-year public college admission requirements.**
 - Add a third credit in science on a timeline concurrent with changes in high school graduation requirements. The SBE has proposed a change that would take effect for the graduating class of 2016. The additional credit could be any science course – including non-laboratory courses.
 - Add an additional credit of fine, visual, and performing art. As in the current standards, a student may substitute other core academic courses for the art requirement. The SBE is considering a 2-credit art requirement.
 - Recommend a high school curriculum that is aligned to the revised SBE graduation requirements. Currently, the HECB defines a set of minimum College Academic Distribution Requirements (CADR) that are typically met in high school.¹ The CADRs include specific courses that are commonly required for admission at all public four-year institutions in Washington; however, they are not designed to represent a complete high school curriculum.

A recommended course of study that includes coursework beyond the CADRs would provide students with better and more consistent information about what is required for a well rounded and meaningful high school course of study that will serve them in any postsecondary endeavor.

- **Encourage emphasis on competencies rather than defined “seat time” and allow for use of competency-based assessment in the admission process.**
 - The current admission standards were based on “credits” rather than “years of coursework” in order to allow for a variety of alternative scheduling options. The move away from specified seat-time requirements in K-12 is consistent with our current policy and the direction in the 2008 Master Plan for Higher Education in Washington. Therefore, the resolution adopting a change to the requirements would include a statement of support for the change in SBE requirements, but it would not require a policy change in the minimum admission requirements.
 - The revised admission standards would include a policy allowing courses to count “2 for 1” when the courses are meeting one academic requirement and one elective requirement (e.g., career education, health and fitness, or another elective). In addition, the current policy already allows for the senior year quantitative course to overlap with either the algebra-based science course or a core math requirement.

¹ Students may meet requirements by taking equivalent college level courses.

- HECB policy would support the use of competency-based assessment to meet requirements. Initially, the policy would allow for competency assessment to meet the world language requirement. The HECB and SBE will work together to establish a process for identification of appropriate assessments in other fields and work with the institutions to allow for those in the admission process as well.

HECB staff will ask the Board to delegate authority to allow competency assessment in additional areas when appropriate assessments are identified and agreed upon by the institutions, HECB, and SBE staffs.

- Students seeking competency-based credit would need to demonstrate proficiency across language skills. Assessments would be aligned to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines in order to ensure consistency across languages. School districts would select the appropriate assessment instrument(s) for each language.

For languages that do not currently have any other nationally available proficiency-based assessment, the district may work with local language communities, colleges and universities, and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to develop a collection of evidence process aligned with ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines.

- Revised minimum admission policy would allow for high school requirements to be met in middle school, provided the courses are part of a sequence, which is successfully continued in high school and/or the course is included on the high school transcript as a high school level course.

- **Incorporate college readiness definitions in high school and college admission requirements.**

- The HECB and the Transition Math Project (TMP) developed college readiness definitions for science, English, and math, including content standards and attributes or “habits of mind” that would help students be successful in college. The “habits of mind” identified in the college readiness projects are important to developing college readiness skills; however, they are not easily integrated into the requirements, and those attributes were not included in the common core definitions.

The HECB and SBE will collaborate to promote the development of these attributes in the high school years, but it is not feasible to add them to the minimum requirements.

- **Allow for alternatives to Algebra II.**

- The HECB will continue to work with the SBE, K-12, and higher education partners to identify appropriate alternatives to Algebra II. Current policy already recognizes one alternative approach to teaching Algebra II content (Integrated Math III). The HECB and SBE will explore additional alternatives to teaching Algebra II content and explore the possibility of an exception to the Algebra II requirement with substitution of another course.

- **Statewide implementation of SAT or ACT testing.**

- Providing universal access to college testing in 11th grade is another step to improving access, college readiness, and reducing barriers for students. It is well established that students who take a college entrance exam (SAT or ACT) are more likely to pursue some kind of postsecondary education.

For example, after implementing its own statewide SAT program in 2006, Maine has witnessed a clear trend towards a more robust college-going culture. Maine juniors who took the SAT in March 2006 under the statewide initiative applied to college in record numbers the following year. Public colleges in the state of Maine saw increases of about 30 percent in the number of students sending SAT scores. Today, there are more Maine high school students sending SAT scores to Maine colleges and going to Maine colleges (both two- and four-year colleges) than before the SAT initiative began three years ago.

Colorado has seen a similar increase in college-going behavior since implementation of statewide ACT administration. Most notably, Colorado officials and ACT observe that there has been an increase in participation among low-income and first-generation students.

Statewide college admission testing can help students identify potential for advanced placement and potential issues related to college readiness prior to the 12th grade, giving students an opportunity to concentrate on work they need to be college ready or enroll in coursework that may lead to college credit while still in high school.

Washington enrolls approximately 81,000 juniors in our public high schools. The estimated cost for testing all juniors would be approximately \$3.8 million for either SAT or ACT with Writing, plus costs associated with test administration.

- **Allow an exemption from high school graduation and college admission standards for students who complete an International Baccalaureate or Cambridge diploma.**

- More time is needed to analyze International Baccalaureate and Cambridge diplomas. Currently, the majority of students entering with these credentials also have regular high school diplomas and meet the minimum college admission standards. It is not clear whether an exception is wise or necessary.

- **Additional issues identified by SBE and HECB staff, but not discussed at the June meeting.**

- The final document outlining admission changes must provide a complete articulation of current policy, including:
 - Reaffirming the current alternative admission policies for freshmen.
 - Reaffirming the graduate admission policy.

- The approved policy must establish a timeline for implementation of changes. The graduation requirements provisionally adopted by the State Board of Education in September would take effect for the high school graduation class of 2016. This is a reasonable timeline but is subject to change. Staff would need latitude to adapt so that changes in both graduation requirements and admission requirements occur on the same timeline.
- Staff recommend that the Board change the requirement for three CADR courses per year to a recommendation of three CADR courses per year. The recommendation will signal the need for a meaningful senior year (the key purpose of the requirement).

Last year, the Board recognized that requiring three CADRs per year puts some students out of compliance as freshman without the opportunity to make up required courses later in their high school career. Upon further discussion of this issue with the university campuses, we found that counting CADRs by year is an undue administrative burden on admissions offices, given the volume of applications they are currently processing.

- Provide HECB staff the latitude to make specified modifications to the policy. For example, adding new competency assessments that would be accepted as meeting distribution requirements.
- Convene a group of college, university, SBE, and OSPI representatives to establish a standard mechanism for assessing applicability of courses offered through nontraditional means – correspondence, distance education, online courses – to satisfy CADR requirements.
- Replace language related to WASL substitution for the first two years of English and math with appropriate language for the High School Proficiency Exam. Since the WASL has been replaced by the High School Proficiency Exam, the revised policy needs to be reflected in the minimum admission standards.