



Memorandum

Date: December 1, 2012
To: Senate Committee on Early Learning and K-12 Education
From: Susan Mielke, Committee staff
Re: Issue Brief: **Washington State Minimum High School Graduation Requirements**

The current Washington State minimum requirements for high school graduation are:

1. **Earn a minimum of 20 high school credits.**
2. **Pass state assessments or approved alternatives for the state tests.**
3. **Complete a Culminating Project.**
4. **Complete a High School and Beyond Plan.**

1. **Earn a minimum of 20 high school credits.**¹ The State Board of Education (SBE) establishes the state minimum graduation requirements and is required to periodically reevaluate the graduation requirements and forward any proposed changes to the Legislature. Any changes that have a fiscal impact on school districts can take effect only if formally authorized and funded by the Legislature.

In 2010, after three years of study and seeking input throughout the State, the SBE recommended revising the graduation credit requirements to require students to attempt 24 credits (with up to two credits that may be waived by local administrators).² In 2011, the SBE approved a phase-in of changes within the required 20 credits that were estimated to have no cost to school districts. The changes will be implemented beginning with the class of 2016.

Course	Class of 2013 Credit Requirements	Class of 2016* Credit Requirements	SBE Proposed 24 credits (Not currently required)
English	3	4 (207 of 247 districts already require)	4 **
Math	3	3	3 **
Science	2 (1 lab)	2 (1 lab)	3 (2 labs) **
Social Studies	2.5	3 (208 of 247 districts already require)	3 **
Arts	1	1	2 **
Health & Fitness	2	2	2
World Language	0	0	2 **
Occupational Education	1	1	1
Career Concentration	0	0	2
Electives	5.5	4	2
Total Credits required	20	20	24
Changes		<p>Within 20 credit requirement</p> <p><u>Increases:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English from 3 to 4 credits • Social Studies from 2.5 to 3 <p><u>Decreases:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electives from 5.5 to 4 <p><u>Designates:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • .5 for health and 1.5 for fitness • .5 of social studies is for civics <p>*Districts may seek a 2-year extension to implement the new requirements.</p>	<p><u>Increases:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science from 2 to 3 • Arts from 1 to 2 • World Language from 0 to 2 • Career Concentration from 0 to 2 <p><u>Decreases:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electives from 5.5 to 4 <p><u>Designates:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science includes 2 labs <p>**Meets or exceeds HECB/SAC minimum subject requirements for 4-year public college admission.</p>

There are 247 school districts with high schools; 241 require more than **20 credits** to graduate; 105 require **24 or more** to graduate; 14 require **30 or more** to graduate.³

- 2. Pass state assessments or legislatively-approved objective alternatives for the state assessments.**⁴ Currently Washington uses the grades 3-8 Measurements of Student Progress (MSP), the 10th grade High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE) and End-of-Course (EOC) exams to test its students. The HSPE and EOCs are used as the state's high school exit exams. Students in classes of 2013 and 2014 will be required to earn a CAA/CIA by passing a reading, writing and one end-of-course mathematics exam. Beginning with the class of 2015, students must pass reading, writing, two end-of-course mathematics exams and one end-of-course biology exam.

There are three legislatively-approved alternative assessments:

- *Collection of Evidence*. Student classroom work samples compiled with the help of a teacher.
- *GPA Comparison*. A student's grades in English courses and/or math courses are compared with the grades of students who took the same courses AND passed the HSPE. This option is only available to 12th grade students.
- *Advanced Placement and College Admission Test Scores*. Student's scores on the SAT reading and mathematics reasoning tests, ACT reading and mathematics tests, and specified Advanced Placement examinations may be used as alternatives to the state assessments.

- 3. Complete a Culminating Project.**⁵ The student must demonstrate both learning competencies and preparations related to student learning goals three (*thinking analytically and problem solving*) and four (*understanding the importance of work and finance*). Each school district determines the guidelines and assessment criteria for the Culminating Project.

- 4. Complete a High School & Beyond Plan.** Each school district determines the guidelines for the High School & Beyond Plan.

Comparison of Washington's requirements with other states

Credits⁶

- **Ten** states require 20 credits. **Thirty** states require more than 20 credits.
- **Twelve** states require 4 credits of mathematics in 2012; 4 states will require 4 credits in 2013; one state will require 4 credits in 2014; one state will require 4 credits in 2020.
- **Four** states require a mathematics course in each year of high school, or during senior year or will by 2016.

Assessments⁷

- **Twenty-five** states, including **Washington**, require or plan to require students to pass an exit exam to graduate from high school.
- **Three** states require or plan to require students to take an end-of-course exam which accounts for a percentage of a student's final grade in a course.
- **Two** states administer EOCs but do not require students to meet a passing standard in order to graduate.

Implications of the Common Core State Standards: Washington State is a member of the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC), which received a federal grant to develop assessments of the Common Core State Standards in English/Language Arts and Mathematics. To continue as a member of SBAC after the beginning of the 2014-15 school year the state must agree to use the SBAC's tests as its federal accountability assessments. A similar effort to develop common standards in Science is underway. It is unknown whether there will be federal funds for development of assessments of the science standards.

Possible issues to be considered:

- Will SBAC's 11th grade exams (*summative or EOC?*) be used for graduation (*exit exams*) in Washington?
- What cut scores will Washington want?
- If these exams are Washington's exit exams, what will the alternative assessments be?
- What retake opportunities will there be?

Endnotes

¹ Under 28A.230.122, a student who completes all the requirements of an International Baccalaureate programme is considered to have satisfied state minimum credit requirements for graduation from a public high school.

² SBE Resolution, November 10, 2010. <http://www.sbe.wa.gov/documents/2010.11.10%20Grad%20Req%20Resolution.pdf>

³ <http://www.sbe.wa.gov/documents/Graduation%20Requirements%20Database%202011.xls>

⁴ RCW 28A.655.061 through .065

⁵ WAC 180-51-061 and WAC 180-51-066

⁶ *Diplomas Matter*, Education Week(2012); and <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/01/28/10128.pdf>

⁷ 2011 State High School Tests: Changes in State Policies and the Impact of the College and Career Readiness Movement, Center on Education Policy:
<http://www.cep-dc.org/displayDocument.cfm?DocumentID=385>