

On the Proposed Rules for E2SSB 6552

Of particular concern to the League of Education Voters is the provision allowing students to waive credits. Consistent with its Board resolutions that are specifically referenced in E2SSB 6552, the State Board's proposed rules implementing 6552 would allow individual students to waive up to two credits for reason of "unusual circumstances" but maintains that students must still earn the "Core 17" credits in science, math, English, social studies, health and fitness, and art. We feel strongly that allowing "Core 17" credits to be waived would not be within the spirit or the letter of the law that was passed and would be a step backwards for the state of Washington and our students.

The proposed rules include significant flexibility, which incorporates the extensive discussions leading up to the passage of 6552.

There are some who are arguing that opening up waivers to all of the 24 credits is necessary to allow districts flexibility to meet the needs of their students and that the proposed rules do not allow for this flexibility. We respectfully disagree and point out that:

- 7 of the 24 credits can be used towards a student's particular interests and intended path after high school.
 - There are 4 elective credits.
 - In addition to the 4 elective credits, 3 credits may also be used towards the student's personalized pathway
 - 2 credits are designated for World Language OR Personalized Pathway (students not intending to pursue entry into a 4 year college do not have to take World Language)
 - 1 of the 2 art credits may also be used for Personalized Pathway
- The "Core 17" includes a Career and Technical Equivalency (CTE) credit.
- The Legislature's work on E2SSB 6552 included a section directing school boards to provide high school students access to at least one CTE course considered equivalent to a math or science course.

Allowing "Core 17" credits to be waived is oppositional to legislative language that was passed. It also goes against the spirit of increasing academic rigor. If implemented as some are arguing, the graduation requirements will be weaker and less rigorous. Students could receive a high school diploma:

- With Algebra I as their only math credit
- With only one science credit
- With only two English credits
- With no arts credits

These are not scenarios that prepare our students well for life beyond high school. In fact, these scenarios barely prepare students *for* high school, let alone post-secondary education. Multiple studies show that the most effective way to keep students engaged in high school – and beyond – is to challenge them by providing high expectations, rigorous coursework, and relevant pathways to meaningful employment. Rather than eliminate rigor for struggling students, we need to provide them supports to better ensure their academic success.

Adopting standards that don't reflect economic reality does no favors for these students and runs the risk of preserving current inequities. A system that allows waivers of core credits for some students leaves the door wide open for school systems to systematically underserve students. In other words, our kids who need more get less, beginning with our expectation of what they can accomplish.

High school graduation requirements should be consistent across the state.

Our school districts enjoy a great deal of latitude and flexibility for providing students meaningful, high-quality educational opportunities. Appropriately so. However, some elements of our education system must be consistent statewide. Graduation requirements are high on this list. Our state universities don't have different acceptance standards depending on whether an applicant is coming from Bellevue or Kennewick. Preparation for college entrance needs to be consistent to give every student the opportunity to attend a college or university regardless of where they live.

Additionally, while we increase the expectation for school districts to improve graduation rates, we mustn't give them perverse incentives to "dumb down" their graduation standards in order to "compete" with neighboring districts. Higher rates of graduation resulting in meaningless diplomas is not a victory for anyone.

Allowing any of the 24 credits to be waived results in less rigor, not more.

School districts have been operating without waiving credits from the "Core 17." Allowing them to do so now would create less rigorous graduation requirements, not more.

The State Board of Education has done exactly what the Legislature authorized them to do and any further changes should be made through additional legislation.

- 1) *The Legislature explicitly gave authority to the State Board to establish high school graduation requirements.*

The Revised Code of Washington (RCW 28A.230.090) states that the State Board of Education "shall establish high school graduation requirements or equivalencies for students" and goes on to say "in recognition of the statutory authority of the state board of education to establish and enforce minimum high school graduation requirements, the state board shall periodically reevaluate the graduation requirements and shall report such findings to the Legislature in a timely manner as determined by the state board."

- 2) *The Legislature then carved out from that authority the opportunity to further weigh in on any State Board work on graduation requirements during a regular legislative session.*

The Legislature added some parameters in 2009 stating that “the state board shall forward any proposed changes to the high school graduation requirements to the education committees of the Legislature for review.... The Legislature shall have the opportunity to act during a regular legislative session before the changes are adopted through administrative rule by the state board. Changes that have a fiscal impact on school districts... shall take effect only if formally authorized and funded by the Legislature through the omnibus appropriations act or other enacted legislation.” RCW 28A.230.090(2)(c)

- 3) *The Legislature weighed in during the 2014 legislation session, resulting in 6552 in which it included references specifying that credits should not be waived from the “Core 17” credits.*

E2SSB 6552 is the manifestation of the Legislature weighing in on the State Board’s work. The language this Legislature passed directs the State Board of Education to “adopt rules to implement the career and college ready graduation requirement proposal adopted under board resolution on November 10, 2010, and revised on January 9, 2014.” Those two resolutions the Legislature explicitly referenced make clear that any waived credits were intended only “if students need to retake courses to fulfill the 17 core state requirements that all students must meet.”

We have an economic imperative as a state to ensure that students are ready for the next step after high school, whether that is a career or post-secondary education.

- By 2020, 65 percent of US jobs will require post-secondary education and training beyond high school. Yet only 36 percent of high school graduates will both enroll in a two- or four-year college following high school and be academically prepared for the rigor of higher education.
- Over half of high school graduates need remediation upon entering the two-year system and one in ten high school graduates need remediation when attending four-year institutions.
- Fewer than half of Washington graduates have earned the necessary minimum credits required to be admitted into Washington public universities.
- Each year over 12,000 high school graduates enroll in at least one remedial course upon entering in college. Less than half of remedial students complete their developmental education courses and enroll in college level coursework. Remedial math alone is estimated to cost the state \$47 million annually.
- On average, students who earn an associate’s degree earn 19 percent more than students who graduate high school, but do not attend college. Further, bachelor’s degree holders earn 70 percent more than high school graduates who do not attend post-secondary institutions.