

**WASHINGTON STATE  
WORKFORCE TRAINING AND EDUCATION COORDINATING BOARD  
MEETING NO. 120  
JUNE 28, 2007**

**HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS:  
MAKING THE HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA MEANINGFUL**

At the June meeting, the Board will have the opportunity to discuss positions regarding requirements for a high school diploma. Board action is anticipated in August. Staff will subsequently use these positions in advocating before the State Board of Education.

**Background**

SHB 2973, enacted in the 2006 Legislative session, directed the Board of Education to reevaluate the graduation requirements for students enrolled in vocationally intensive and rigorous career and technical education programs. Also, E2SHB 3098 required the Board of Education, by December 1, 2007, to develop and propose a revised definition of the purpose and expectations for a high school diploma, including addressing whether a diploma is intended to signify college readiness, readiness for work, or a combination. The definition is to focus on knowledge, skills and abilities rather than courses, credits, and test scores. In 2007, the Legislature passed 2SHB 1906 which directs the Board of Education to amend high school graduation requirements by December 1, 2007, to include a minimum of three credits of mathematics and describe the required content.

Attached is a briefing paper on a meaningful high school diploma and the world of work. The paper includes background on statutes and current rules related to Goal Four of the Performance-Basic Education Act, employer perspectives, and other related issues.

In *High Skills, High Wages 2006* the Board established certain objectives and strategies for youth that are important in considering high school graduation requirements.

*High Skills, High Wages 2006* includes the following objectives:

- All students leave high school prepared for success in further education and/or work.
- There is a Comprehensive Guidance System throughout the K-12 system that provides students and their parents with a curriculum to individually plan their pathways and prepare for future education and/or work after high school.
- There are secondary career and technical education (CTE) programs throughout the K-12 system that enable students to explore career pathways and complete preparatory coursework that matches their aspirations.

*High Skills, High Wages 2006* includes the following strategies in order to meet the above objectives:

- Increase the number of students who complete a CTE sequence and/or course requirements for admission to a four-year college or university or enrollment in college-level classes at a community or technical college.

- Expand implementation of the “Best Practice” guidance system, Navigation 101, across the K-12 system.
- Integrate Individual Education Plans with the 13<sup>th</sup> year plan required for graduation.
- Expand opportunities for secondary students to take CTE preparation programs and career assessments
- Boost the academic content of CTE programs and recognition of academic course equivalencies.

The Governor’s Washington Learns Committee also recommended the implementation of a comprehensive guidance curriculum and the expansion of career and technical education opportunities. The 2006 Washington Learns report also proposed a goal that all students complete a rigorous high school course of study and demonstrate abilities needed to enter a post-secondary education program or career path.

In March of 2005, the Board passed a resolution opposing a proposal by the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) that would have set minimum four-year college admission requirements for math at four credits because of concerns that it would be a barrier for students who are at risk of dropping out or have dropped out, it would reduce career and technical education offerings, and it would not leave enough time left in the day for students to attend skills centers. The HECB recently passed new admission requirements that require three credits of math through Algebra II (or Integrated Math III) with a senior year requirement that may be met by applied math or CTE courses.

**Board Action Requested:** Discussion of the draft motion.

## DRAFT MOTION

**WHEREAS**, Objective 3.1 of 2006 *High Skills, High Wages*, the 2006 State Strategic Plan for Workforce Development, calls for implementation of the Best Practice Comprehensive Guidance System, Navigation 101, across the K-12 system; and

**WHEREAS**, Objective 3.2 of 2006 *High Skills, High Wages*, the 2006 State Strategic Plan for Workforce Development, calls for integrating Individual Education Plans with the 13<sup>th</sup> year plan required for graduation; and

**WHEREAS**, the current State Board of Education requirement that each student shall have an education plan for their high school experience provides no standards for the knowledge and skills students need to learn to plan their careers; and

**WHEREAS**, Objective 4.1 of 2006 *High Skills, High Wages*, the 2006 State Strategic Plan for Workforce Development and the 2006 Washington Learns report both call for expanding opportunities for secondary students to take career and technical education preparation programs; and

**WHEREAS**, the Washington Learns report proposes a goal that all students in Washington complete a rigorous high school course of study and demonstrate abilities needed to enter a post-secondary education program or career path; and

**WHEREAS**, K-12 Education should be student-centered—offering education that prepares students to fulfill their future education and career goals; and

**WHEREAS**, research demonstrates that while few jobs require the extensive use of geometry, algebra II, trigonometry, or calculus; employers are concerned about the inability of many job applicants and employees to apply basic math and algebra skills on-the-job;

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board recommends to the State Board of Education the following revisions to the current high school graduation requirements in order to meaningfully prepare students for the world of work:

1. The adoption of a definition for the education plan (High School and Beyond Plan) that is aligned with “Navigation 101” and incorporates the knowledge and skills needed to adequately plan for one’s education and career beyond high school and that requires integration of Individual Education Plans;
2. The adoption of a requirement for students to complete a program of study that includes either the minimum admission requirements for a four-year institution and/or the completion of a career and technical education instructional program so they will be prepared with the knowledge and skills needed to enter a post-secondary education program or a career path;
3. The adoption of a third credit requirement in math that provides for an alternative to traditional Algebra II, earning that credit in an applied learning curriculum, such as career and technical education courses that embed the math skills needed in the individual student’s career path.



## MEANINGFUL HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA AND WORK Briefing Paper

**Constitutional Obligation:** In 1973, the case of *Seattle School District v. State* (90 Wn.2d 476, 585 P.2d 71, at pgs. 517 – 518) set the following standard for what constitutes a basic education:

*“Consequently, the State’s constitutional duty goes beyond mere reading, writing and arithmetic. It also embraces broad educational opportunities needed in the contemporary setting to equip our children for their role as citizens and as **potential competitors in today’s market** as well as in the marketplace of ideas. Education plays a critical role in a free society. The constitutional right to have the State ‘make ample provision for the education of all [resident] children’ would be hollow indeed if the possessor of the right could not compete adequately in our open political system, **in the labor market**, or in the marketplace of ideas.” [emphasis added]*

**Statutory Framework:** The Legislature enacted the Basic Education act of 1973 in response to the court decision. In 1993, the Legislature amended the definition of basic education in the Performance-Based Education Act that included, in **RCW 28A.150.210**, Goal Four that requires all school districts “...to provide opportunities for all students to develop the knowledge and skills essential to:

*(4) Understand the importance of work and how performance, effort, and decisions directly affect future career and educational opportunities.”*

**Current Graduation Requirements Related to Goal Four:** While no EALRS have been established for Goal Four, WAC 180-51-061 establishes the following graduation requirements related to Goal Four and the world of work in RCW 28A.150.210:

1. A minimum of one credit of occupational education. There is no waiver provided for this credit. Occupational education is defined as ...”*credits resulting from a series of learning experiences designed to assist the student to acquire and demonstrate competency of skills under student learning goal four and which skills are required for success in current and emerging occupations. At a minimum, these competencies shall align with the definition of an exploratory course as proposed or adopted in the career and technical education program standards of the superintendent of public instruction.”*
2. *Each student shall have an education plan for their high school experience, including what they expect to do the year following graduation. [emphasis added]*
3. *Each student shall complete a culminating project for graduation. The project consists of the student demonstrating both their learning competencies and preparations related to learning goals three and four. Each district shall define the process to implement this graduation requirement, including assessment criteria, in written district policy.*

**Employer Perspectives:** The Workforce Board conducts a biennial survey of Washington state employers to determine their workforce needs. Our 2006 survey shows, as do previous surveys, that employers hiring at the high school level have the most difficulty finding those with workplace and job-specific skills, and 88 percent of employers who hire CTE completers are somewhat or very satisfied with those skills.

**Percentage of Employers Hiring at the High School Level Having Difficulty Finding Employees With Various Skills**

Positive work habits and attitudes	80%
Job-specific skills	75%
Problem solving or critical thinking	72%
Communication skills	72%
Team work skills	72%
Ability to accept supervision	66%
Ability to adapt to changes in duties	64%
Writing skills	53%
Math skills	43%
Computer skills	24%
Reading skills	20%
English as second language skills	11%

In 2001, the National Association of Manufacturers found the following:

***Most Common Reasons Companies Reject Applicants as Hourly Production Workers***

Inadequate basic employability skills	69%
Insufficient work experience	34%
Inadequate reading/writing skills	32%
Don't pass drug screening	27%
Inadequate math skills	21%
Poor references from previous employer	20%
Inadequate oral communication skills	18%
Inability to work in a team environment	12%
Inadequate problem-solving skills	11%
Inadequate technical/computer skills	11%
Lack of degree or vocational training	8%
Problems with citizenship/immigration status	7%
Other	4%

In *Teaching for the Basic Skills: Principles for Education Children to Thrive in a Changing Economy*, by Murnane and Levy, 1996, it was found that a ninth grade level of mathematics was a threshold to cross to secure jobs paying a middle class wage.

In *The Economic Roots of K-12 Reform*, by Tony Carnavale and Donna Desrochers, 2003 it is stated "...the current math curriculum that emphasizes arithmetic through calculus ...does not match up with the math requirements of the vast majority of jobs...even a casual analysis of the distribution of occupations demonstrates that relatively few workers—fewer than 5 percent—make extensive use of geometry, algebra II, trigonometry, or calculus on the job."

## **Diploma Issues on Preparing Students for Work**

The issue of what constitutes a meaningful high school diploma can be separated into two fundamental questions—first, what should be expected of all students and, second, what should be expected of students as they pursue their personalized educational plan.

***All Students:*** With respect to the first question and the world of work, the following issues should be considered in the discussion of a meaningful high school diploma:

- Should all students be expected to be ready for entry-level work? Should they all be expected to graduate with work readiness skills?
- Should the definition of the individual high school plan be strengthened to ensure an equal planning opportunity? Should completion of Navigation 101, the comprehensive career guidance curriculum being implemented by the Legislature, be required? Should career preparation skills and knowledge be identified and learned?
- Should the definition of a culminating project be strengthened to ensure all students have an equal opportunity to apply their learning.
- What level of math do all students need?
- Should all students be “college ready” in order to receive a high school diploma?

***Personalized Education:*** Personalized education assumes all students will be gaining skills and knowledge related to their individual High School and Beyond Plan before they graduate. The following questions relating to preparing students for careers and obtaining a high school diploma should be addressed:

- Should students not planning to attend a four year college be expected to learn some foundational occupational skills in their career path? Should the graduation requirements of the High School That Works model be adopted? High School That Works is a school restructuring model that includes a high school graduation requirement for students to take courses necessary to be prepared for entry to a baccalaureate institution or to complete a career and technical education sequence of courses (or both).
- How do we ensure that learning opportunities are available for all students to pursue a foundation level of occupational skills and knowledge in their career pathway?
- Should there be a requirement that the culminating project be related to the student’s individual High School and Beyond Plan?