



February 19, 2010

Dear Legislator:

We are writing to express our strong opposition to SB 6778 and any proposal that weakens our high school graduation requirements.

SB 6778 will not serve our students well or prepare them for their futures. Regardless of the path they choose, a meaningful high school diploma—one that includes high standards and rigorous assessments—is critical not only to student success, but to preserving our state’s competitiveness and prosperity.

By 2014, 77 percent of new job openings in Washington state that pay enough for an individual to support a small family will be held by people who have had education or training beyond high school. Of these jobs, more than half will be held by people with four-year college degrees.

We can’t afford to give Washington students anything less than a fighting chance for these jobs, which is why we need to make sure that every single one graduates with rigorous college and work ready skills.

Today, more than half of the students entering a two-year college straight out of high school require remedial courses before they can begin taking credit-bearing classes. **This expensive and discouraging result, which increases the probability of students dropping out, is due to the fact that we do not require our students to take *enough* of the courses they need to graduate prepared.**

The Higher Education Coordinating Board, whose work is cited in the bill, advises that students should strive for *more* than the minimum 15 credits required for college admission: “High school students who plan to attend college are strongly encouraged to exceed both the CADR [College Academic Distribution Requirements] and high school graduation requirements to improve their potential for success.” (HECB, Minimum College Admission Standards, 2009)

Our schools must do a better job to ensure students gain the skills necessary for life after high school, rather than making it easier for them to enter the workforce or the college campus unprepared for what lies ahead.

Finally, retreat on our existing graduation requirements would severely weaken our competitiveness for the \$4.35 billion federal “Race to the Top” grant. Race to the Top will reward a small number of states for their efforts to innovatively improve student learning and achievement. Washington will be applying for one of these grants, which could bring us hundreds of millions of new federal education dollars, in June of 2010. We can’t afford to have that application weakened, which is yet another reason to redouble our efforts to help students reach *more rigorous*, college and work ready standards.

We *urge* you to oppose SB 6778. This bill would drop Washington’s graduation requirements to the third lowest in the nation, undo years of progress our state has made to ensure students graduate with basic skills and send the message to current students that the system doesn’t care whether they graduate prepared or not.

Now is the time to do what’s needed for Race to the Top and for Washington’s youth. Let’s take the steps to ensure that all students are held to high standards and graduate prepared for college, work and life.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Excellent Schools Now Member Organizations: *Alliance for Education, ArtsEd Washington, Black Collective, Black Education Strategy Roundtable, Coalition for Equal Education Rights, College & Work Ready Agenda, College Spark, College Success Foundation, Communities in Schools of Seattle, Executive Council for a Greater Tacoma, King County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, League of Education Voters, Pacific Science Center, Partnership for Learning, Powerful Schools, Rainier Scholars, Seattle Biomedical Research Institute, Seattle Breakfast Group, Social Venture Partners, Stand for Children, Tabor 100, Technology Access Foundation, Technology Alliance, WashACE, Washington Alliance of Black School Educators, Washington Biotechnology & Biomedical Association, Washington Coalition for School Libraries and Information Technology, Washington Global Health Alliance, Washington Roundtable and Washington Technology Industry Association.* Our goal is to achieve meaningful education reform that increases student achievement, closes the achievement gap and prepares students to be college and career-ready. You can learn more about us by visiting www.ExcellentSchoolsNow.org