



July 6, 2010

State Board of Education
Capitol Building, Room 253
P.O. Box 47206
Olympia, Washington 98504

Dear Ms. Harding:

We, the engaged and diverse groups who comprise the Excellent Schools Now Coalition, strongly urge you to prioritize the statewide implementation of a 24-credit high school graduation requirement to ensure every public school graduate is ready to succeed in college and the world of work.

Washington State has one of the lowest numbers of credits required to graduate of any state (see attached chart from *Education Week*) and only requires two years of science. We urge you to add a third year of science and hold the line on the current math requirements.

Why is this important for our kids? Washington has set a low bar for credit requirements for high school graduation. As a result, many students graduate unprepared to succeed in college or the workplace. More than half of the students that go straight into a two-year college after high school require remedial courses before they qualify for credit-bearing classes. These students are more likely to drop out of college and fail to complete the training necessary to compete in our global economy.

As things currently stand, too many of our high school graduates are not prepared for community college or apprenticeships — and many do not even meet the minimum admission standards for our public baccalaureate institutions.

This disparity in college and career readiness disproportionately affects low-income students and students of color. Having low high school graduation requirements means that we systemically enable the achievement gap and limit access to higher education and career pathways for underrepresented students.

In Washington, skills in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) are critical for the state's economic competitiveness and prosperity: The state currently ranks 4th in the nation in the number of high-tech companies, but 46th in the number of STEM college graduates. This is an alarming disconnect that must be addressed. Increasing the number of courses high school students must take in math and science would represent a step toward solving this problem. And, as we raise expectations, we must also ensure that the system supports our students and educators so all kids can meet those high expectations.

We urge the State Board of Education to adopt revisions that add more flexibility to Core 24 and then move expeditiously to rule-making. Accordingly, we propose that 20 credits -- aligned to nationally recognized post-secondary admission standards -- define the core of a student's high school experience to maximize success in college and careers. And, that the remaining 4 credits

are defined in conjunction with a more robust high school and beyond planning process. Please know that we will continue to seek funding for districts to implement this 24-credit diploma.

In 2009, the advocacy community worked hard to ensure the landmark education reform legislation that redefined basic education included a strong college- and career-ready frame. We celebrated the addition of this language to state law: “The instruction program of basic education provided by each school district shall include instruction that provides students the opportunity to complete twenty-four credits for high school graduation, subject to a phased-in implementation of the twenty four credits as established by the state board of education under RCW 28A.230.090.”

This is not the time to retreat on the strong graduation requirements that the 2009 Legislature put in motion. We have an obligation to ensure that we set all of our students up for success in college and careers. It’s not just about doing the right thing for our students and their families. Smart reforms to our education system will drive critically needed economic growth and prosperity.

Thank you for your leadership.

Respectfully,

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 Global Health Alliance Washington Roundtable
Washington Technology Industry Association

Excellent Schools Now Coalition’s goal is to achieve meaningful education reform that increases student achievement, closes the achievement gap and prepares students to be college and career-ready. To learn more about us, please visit www.ExcellentSchoolsNow.org