

REPORT OF THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS TASK FORCE

The High School Graduation Requirements Task Force that was established by the CT Legislature in 2015 by virtue of ***Senate Bill No. 1502, June Special Session, Public Act No. 15-5 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING PROVISIONS OF THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2017, CONCERNING GENERAL GOVERNMENT, EDUCATION, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES AND BONDS OF THE STATE*** has spent six months addressing the charges that were assigned to it. Those charges are:

1. Study the alignment of the changes to the H.S. graduation requirements that were enacted in 2010 with the Common Core of State Standards and make recommendations if needed.
2. Study the feasibility of including cardiopulmonary resuscitation in the H.S. graduation requirements and make recommendation.
3. Study the feasibility of substituting a student's participation in an interscholastic athletic program for the physical education credit to satisfy the high school graduation requirements and make recommendation.

The Task Force Committee Members were: Dr. Joseph J. Cirusuolo, Executive Director, CAPSS and Committee Chairman; Dr. Dianna R. Wentzell, Commissioner, CSDE; Mary Anne Butler, Chief Academic Officer, CSDE; Edward Leavy, AFT-CT; Tom Marak, CEA; Paul Stringer, CFSA; Dr. Karissa Niehoff, Executive Director, CAS; Dr. Susan Bell, Superintendent, Windsor Locks P.S.; Patrice McCarthy, Deputy Director & General Counsel, CABE and Dana Finello, Executive Assistant, CAPSS & Research Assistant for the Committee.

To inform itself properly to address these charges, the Task Force received the following presentations:

1. Charles Toulmin, Director of Policy, Nellie Mae Education Foundation - High School Requirements & Student-Centered Learning
2. Jesse Moyer, Director of State Advocacy & Research, Knowledge Works – H.S. Graduation Requirements
3. Dr. Suzi D'Annolfo, Professor, University of Hartford – Physical Education Athletics
4. Bonnie Edmondson, Education Consultant, CSDE – CPR Issues
5. Alissa Peltzman, V.P. of State Policy & Implementation Support, Achieve – Testimony by Alissa Peltzman on H.S. Graduation Requirements
6. Dr. Salvatore Menzo, Superintendent, Wallingford P.S. along with colleagues, Melanie Montagnon, Ken Daly and Shaun Parkhurst – Wallingford's Mastery-Based Learning Journey, Past-Present-Future
7. John Tully, CCSU & Dr. David Bosso, Berlin H.S. (2012 Teacher of the Year) – The Importance of Social Studies & Its Role In Cultural Competencies & Global Perspectives
8. David Ruff, Executive Director, Great Schools Partnership – Lessons Learned from the NESSC
9. Students: Alexandra Prendergast Danbury H.S; Dante Solano, Meriden H.S. and Sean Hackett, Guilford H.S., (all serve on the State Student Advisory Council) - Presented their opinions and views on some HS graduation requirement issues. Among the issues on which they gave their perspective were World Language and the Student Demonstration Portfolio.

In addition, the members of the Task Force Committee reviewed the following materials:

- CT Core Standards, ELA and Math Standards
- New Social Studies Framework
- Career and Technical Education Standards
- Mastery Based Learning Guidelines
- CAPSS White Paper: A Look in the Future: Personalized Learning in CT
- Connecticut Council for the Social Studies: Guaranteeing a Comprehensive Social Studies Education for Every Student
- CSDE Comments Regarding Feasibility of CPR as a Graduation Requirement
- Definition of “Credit” for Calculating H.S. Graduation Requirements
- Mastery-Based Learning: Guidelines for Implementation by CSDE, June 3, 2015
- State of Connecticut High School Graduation Issues Task Force Final Report, January, 2012
- GSP District Policies Checklist
- GSP Ten Principles of PBL
- SB #1502, P.A. 1502 and P.A. 15-5 – An Act Implementing Provisions of the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2017 Concerning General Government, Education, Health & Human Services and Bonds of State
- Issues Identified by Superintendent Members of the SCSU Consortium
- Personalized Mastery-Based Learning at Windsor Locks P.S.
- National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) – National Education Trends
- The Agreement Between Danbury Public School System & WCSU for Advanced Placement Courses at Danbury H.S.

The Task Force then engaged in thoughtful and comprehensive discussions on the topics related to the charges. Throughout these discussions, the Task Force members considered a number of issues important to establishing rigorous, relevant and realistic graduation requirements for students exiting our public high schools.

- The need to establish and maintain rigor when it comes to setting high standards for student achievement and supporting, assisting and also requiring students to achieve those standards.
- The need to align graduation requirements with the newly adopted State Board of Education Standards for student learning.
- The significance of establishing graduation requirements that are grounded in the development of 21st Century skills and competencies.
- The necessity that graduation requirements allow for personalization of learning and mastery-based approaches to learning.

As a result of this discussion, the Task Force has concluded that the 2021 graduation requirements are in urgent need of a major overhaul in order to align well with the objective of every student meeting the SBE Standards.

The following are the reasons why the Task Force has reached this conclusion.

- The 2021 requirements must clearly specify what have come to be known as 21st Century Skills: skills students must acquire in order to be successful after graduation from high school whether they pursue further academic education, education for a specific career or enter the world of work. Specifically students need:
 - To work in collaboration with others
 - To utilize up to date technology to complete work that needs to be done
 - To define and successfully resolve open-ended problems that have many possible answers
 - To apply a global perspective to situations
 - To productively engage in civic affairs as informed citizens
 - To be flexible and eclectic when confronting situations and determining resolutions
 - To communicate with people whose native language is different from one's own
 - To think outside of the parameters embedded in one's native language, culture and societal norms
- The 2021 requirements need to be embedded in a system that:
 - Provides students with many choices in order to learn content and acquire skills in different ways that align with the students' different primary learning styles.
 - Rewards students with graduation after they have demonstrated mastery of sufficient content and skills.
 - Provides students with the time they need to learn content and acquire skills.
 - Provides many ways for different students to demonstrate that they have in fact mastered sufficient content and acquired adequate skill levels
 - Provides sufficient assistance and support for those students who need it in order to achieve the standards.

- Places heavy emphasis on raising the ground beneath the SBE standards so that every student has an equitable opportunity to achieve them
- The 2021 requirements need to recognize the connections between content and skills that have to be learned in order for students to master the Standards Adopted by the SBE.

In order to address the needs of CT students and the schools that serve them, our state's graduation requirements must:

- Reflect what students need to know and be able to do to be successful in the 21st Century.
- Align well with the jobs of the future and with what students will experience in their Adult lives
- Free students from a system that provides limited opportunities for them to learn deeply and demonstrate that learning in ways that matter to them
- Provide incentives for the integration of content area learning that reflects an accurate understanding of content and the acquisition of skills across a broad range of content areas
- Refrain from relying upon end of course assessments that prevent the very flexibility with respect to content allocation and skill acquisition that is needed if every student is to achieve the SBE Standards

In reaching these conclusions, the Task Force wishes to make it very clear that it is not denigrating the importance of acquiring academic knowledge and skills and of insisting that this acquisition be pursued rigorously. The knowledge and skills that are embedded in the SBE Standards are *must learn* matters for every student. The Task Force is saying, however, that students need to be afforded multiple pathways for mastering that content and acquiring those skills and that the 2021 graduation requirements need to enable instead of impeding the establishment of multiple pathways in both regards.

The Task Force also wants to emphasize the point that simply establishing graduation requirements that demand greater learning will not result in all students mastering whatever content and skills are embedded in the SBE Standards. For this objective to be met, there needs to be in place an educational system that guarantees equity by virtue of being mastery based and personalized so that every student gets the time they need to achieve mastery of specified standards, every student is taught in a way that aligns well with their primary learning style and every student who needs support receives that support.

Finally, the Task Force wants to emphasize the point that moving to a new education system that aligns well with the objective of all students meeting the SBE Standards requires in service education and training for educators because in such a system, the role of educators is substantially different from their role in the system that is presently in place.

As a result of all of this, the Task Force recommends three courses of action.

1. The first embodies initial revisions that need to be made to the Class of 2021 graduation requirements so that the first steps can be taken towards establishing standards that align with the objective of every student meeting the SBE Standards. These first steps are necessary to prevent school district allocating time and money to the implementation of the present requirements for the Class of 2012 when those requirements need to be transformed.
2. The second calls for a major effort to engage educators and others under the direction of the State Board of Education to develop a transformed set of requirements that align tightly with the objective of every student meeting the Standards adopted by the State Board of Education (SBE).
3. The third addresses the specific questions embodied in the second and third charges above.

Initial Revisions

The Task Force's recommendations for initial revisions have as their major purpose a move towards establishing the flexibility that needs to be in place if all students are to meet the SBE Standards without sacrificing the rigor that is embodied in those standards. What would accrue from implementing these revisions will not bring CT where it needs to be but it will begin the process. More important, these revisions will serve as an antidote to the prescriptive rigidity embodied in the 2021 requirements as they now stand and an opportunity to help all CT students experience a more personalized high school experience.

Most CT high schools schedule classes over a seven period day. In the course of a high school career, therefore, most CT students have 28 different opportunities to register for classes. The Task Force's recommended revisions, by virtue of prescribing how students have to acquire only twenty of the twenty five required credits for graduation, would provide most students with eight different opportunities to delve more deeply into areas that are covered by the requirements and/or to pursue interests that are outside of the areas covered by the requirements. By engaging in either one or both of these directions, students would be enhancing their levels of competence as applied to the content and skills embodied in the SBE Standards and their acquisition of 21st century skills.

The following table presents the Task Force's recommendations in this regard and compares them with the 2021 requirements as they now stand.

PRESENT REQUIREMENTS FOR CLASS OF 2012

Minimum of 25 credits

9 credits in the humanities including 4 credits in English including composition, 3 credits in social studies including 1 credit in American history and .5 credit in civics and American government

1 credit in fine arts

1 credit in humanities elective

8 credits in science, technology, engineering and

mathematics including 4 credits in mathematics including algebra I, geometry and algebra II or probability and statistics, 3 credits in science including one credit in life science, one credit in physical science and 1 credit in a science, technology, engineering and mathematics elective

3.5 credits in career and life skills including than 1 credit in physical education, .5 credit in health and safety education and 2 credits in career and life skills electives such as career and technical education, English as a second language, community service, personal finance, public speaking and nutrition and physical activity

2 credits in world languages

RECOMMENDED REVISION

No revision recommended.

9 credits in the humanities in accordance with guidance provided by the CSDE that will support and assist multiple methods for alignment with the SBE standards and the rigor embodied in them

1 credit in the fine or performing arts

REMOVE

9 credits in science, technology, engineering or mathematics in accordance with guidance provided by the CSDE that will support and assist multiple methods for alignment with the SBE standards and the rigor embodied in them.

1 credit in physical education

1 credits in world languages in accordance with guidance provided by the CSDE to support and assist multiple methods for alignment with the SBE Standards and the rigor embodied in them.

1 credit senior demonstration project or its equivalent as approved by the State Board of Education

Remove as a graduation requirement but require districts to offer students the opportunity to choose to earn a credit by completing a demonstration project during their junior or senior year in accordance with guidance provided by the CSDE to support and assist multiple methods for alignment with the SBE Standards and the rigor embodied in them

End of school year examinations for Algebra I, geometry Biology, American history and grade ten English

REMOVE

A TRANSFORMED SET OF REQUIREMENTS

To establish the transformed set of requirements that are needed if all students are to meet the SBE standards, the Task Force recommends the following.

- **That the Legislature charge the State Board of Education to recommend to the Legislature by 1/1/17 a new set of graduation requirements that are tightly aligned with the objective of every student achieving the SBE Standards and that those requirements embody:**
 - **Twenty first century skills.**
 - **Provision of many choices for students to learn content and acquire skills in different ways.**
 - **A requirement that students graduate only after they have demonstrated mastery of required content and skill levels in accordance with SBE Standards.**
 - **Allowances for students to learn content and acquire skills within various time frames.**
 - **Provision of multiple ways for students to demonstrate that they have in fact mastered content and acquired skill levels**
 - **Provision of sufficient assistance and support for those students who need it in order to achieve the standards.**
 - **Provision of an equitable opportunity for every student to achieve the SBE standards.**
 - **A redefinition of credit so that it is more focused on acquisition of content and skills and less focused on time parameters.**

- That the Legislature require the SBE to implement a process for meeting this charge that includes the following.
 - The convening of a task force of educators and others that is chaired by the Commissioner of Education and that includes representatives of the Ct Education Association and AFT CT, representatives of the CT Association of Schools and the CT State Federation of Administrators, representatives of the CT Association of Public School Superintendents, representatives of the CT Association of Boards of Education, members of the State Department of Education staff, representatives of the business community, representatives of the education reform community, parents and students.
 - The provision for the members of this task force with a thorough grounding in a mastery based – personalized learning approach to the education of students.
 - The provision for the members of the task force with information about what states across the country are doing to align their graduation requirements with the standards adopted by their state boards of education.
 - The provision for the task force with sufficient consultant services to both facilitate the work of the task force and to provide guidance as to matters of substance.

SPECIFIC CHARGES

1. The Task Force recommends that cardiopulmonary resuscitation **NOT** be included in high school graduation requirements. The reasons for this recommendation are:
 - Inclusion of a specific requirement of this type is inconsistent with the development of an educational system that allows for the flexibility that needs to be in place if students are to meet the SBE Standards.
 - Provision of effective cardiopulmonary resuscitation instruction would be very challenging for many school districts in terms of the availability of instructors, of the funds needed and of the time that would have to be devoted.
 - Initial cardiopulmonary resuscitation certification has to be renewed periodically so even if required at the high school level, the requirement would not necessarily produce even in the short term many more people able to provide the service.

The Task Force, however, encourages district that have the resources to provide training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation to students who desire such training to do so.

2. The Task Force recommends that students **NOT** be allowed to earn physical education credit by virtue of participating in athletic programs. The reason for this recommendation is that physical education curricula engage every student in a wide and comprehensive set of physical activities designed to instill the value of life long physical fitness. No athletic or set of athletic programs does this nor do these programs ensure the same degree of participation by every participant.