

Five Action Steps to Increasing Graduation Requirements

Step One:

Know the Diploma Requirements – and there can be More than One Diploma – in your State (or district)

Your work in changing high school graduation requirements will—and should—relate to your campus or system’s efforts to develop college and work-ready high school assessments, course descriptions, and placement policies. Whether or not this is the case, you should identify other relevant initiatives underway or on the “drawing boards,” and:

1. Identify at what level graduation requirements are set – the state level, or the local district level.
2. If they are set at the state level, what are they? Do they differ by type of diploma, and how? Will action by the state board suffice, or is new legislation needed to change graduation requirements?
3. If your graduation requirements are set at the district level, which districts predominantly feed your college and what are their graduation requirements?
4. Become familiar with the course-taking requirements advocated by national organizations like Achieve or ACT, and the specific [graduation requirements in other states](#);

Step Two:

Assess College and Work-Ready Course-taking in your State

Prior to enlisting the support and assistance from a broader group of stakeholders, as leaders of the effort, you need to review the data that support the call for increased course-taking requirements to learn:

1. What percentage of students statewide graduate high school with the courses required for admissions to a regional public 4-year college in your state? How do these data look for low-income students? African American, Hispanic, and Native American students? Students in rural, urban, and suburban schools?
2. What percentage of students admitted to your college have completed a sequence of rigorous college preparatory courses?
3. What is the correlation between course-work completion and success in introductory college courses?

Step Three:

Determine the Parameters of the Graduation Policy

Ideally, decisions about college and work-ready graduation policy will be set at the state-level, since high school students are likely to apply to more than one institution and will need to be prepared for any setting. Comparing course-taking requirements in other states and among different student groups in your state and on your campus likely will highlight key decision points for your state or district. These can include:

- What courses do students need to take to be well prepared for success in college and careers?
- Are the courses anchored in college- and career-ready expectations?
- Will the new requirements be mandatory for all students, or will there be an opt-out provision?
- How will the state ensure consistent rigor in courses across the state?
- Will students be able to earn credit by proficiency?
- Will the state create multiple but equally rigorous curricular pathways to graduation?
- Will the state establish an honors and/or technical honors diploma?
- How will the new requirements be phased in to ensure equitable access and participation?

Step Four:***Build a Coalition***

Postsecondary education administrators and faculty are natural leaders of a coalition that will present to the local school board, state board of education, or legislature, a proposal to change high school graduation requirements. Important members of that coalition should include: building and trade unions; civil rights groups; teachers' unions, parent and student groups, and state and local chambers of commerce. This early communications effort should have these objectives:

- Raise awareness of the research supporting the proposed course of study;
- Identify those opponents, supporters and messengers who are most likely to enter the public debate about raising graduation standards;
- Provide these key individuals and organizations with appropriate outreach and information while listening to their goals and concerns;
- Generate constructive feedback from the most well-known education and business organizations, as well as from influential opinion leaders and students, parents and educators; and
- Use the input and feedback to inform the state's ultimate adoption of the proposed course of study.

Step Five:***Conduct Community Outreach***

As soon as the policy is passed or adopted, the underlying goals of the communications effort need to shift to increasing visibility and transparency in an effort to broaden the base of support for the policy across the state. Parents and educators in many parts of your state will simply not believe that all students need Algebra II, or that course-taking requirements can increase without a trade-off between diminished course quality or increased drop-outs.

Colleges and universities have established and well-known outreach vehicles to many communities, particularly those with large concentrations of under-represented students. You can use these vehicles, such as college visits and college fairs, to



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spread the message about the need to take a more rigorous course-load, the recommended (or required) courses, and opportunities for federal aid (the Academic Competitiveness Grants) and other incentives accompanying this more rigorous course-taking.



Achieve Alignment Institute
Alignment of Academic Standards for College and Work:
Five Action Steps

Five Action Steps	Tasks	Timeline	Person(s) Responsible	Support from Achieve
Step One: <i>Know the Diploma Requirements</i>				
Step Two: <i>Assess College and Work-Ready Course-taking in Your State</i>				



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