

Testimony Re Proposed Revisions for District of Columbia High School Graduation Requirements

Good Evening, my name is Dianne Dunlap and I am a graduate student currently enrolled in the Center for Urban Education under the auspice of the University of the District of Columbia. At this time, I understand that the DC State Board of Education is considering revisions with regard to high school graduation requirements for District students. One of the questions under consideration by the Board is should course credits for high school graduation be reduced, combined or eliminated and if so, in what subjects? This issue is of great importance to me as a future educator and as a resident. My major concern regarding the distribution of credits is to ensure that the quality and content of the education that District students receive is not diminished.

I am sure we are aware of the negative issues that have been widely reported regarding the state of education in this country, especially regarding urban schools. These concerns have been well publicized since the issuing of 'A Nation Risk' in 1983. In addition, there are those who also think that the No Child Left Behind Act proposed in 2001 and subsequently passed, with its emphasis on testing and less on instruction (some feel), has also resulted in some of the poor outcomes we now experience with regard to the education of our children.

I understand that there are several problems that need to be solved regarding the apparent indifference and apathy that is now plaguing some of our children and their school experience. In my view, the biggest problem has been the tendency to require less and less academically of our children. I can see this when I compare the education that I received with that which my children received. There were courses that I took as a District public school student that were either not available or available to a lesser degree when my children attended school.

My review of the proposed distribution of credits leads me to the opinion that while I appreciate the importance of the arts and physical activity in one's life, I do not believe it wise to increase these credits at the expense of courses that are in the area of Social Studies. Research and studies of the past few decades have shown that high school students who do graduate, (The Council on Foreign Relations in its 2012 report indicates that 25% of white students and 40% of Black and Hispanic students do not), are doing so - less educated with each graduating class.

I do not know how it began and why it began, but for some reason watered down instruction and lower academic rigor, has been allowed to develop in some of our schools. When children come to realize that less will be expected of them - they give less. It is for this reason I that believe the Board should augment the number of credits allotted to the area of Social Studies. I would suggest allocating a full credit to Government and Economics and a 0.5 credit to Civics. I know that some believe that some of these classes are geared toward college bound students and that not every student is planning to attend college. I believe, however, that just because a person may not be interested in attending college is not a justification for providing a lesser education to them. I am sure we have heard stories, for example, of students who do not know what the three branches of our government are or why they exist. The fact that someone may not be going to college is not a reason for them not to know the

answer to such basic questions. It is an embarrassment, but the people who should be embarrassed are not the students who have been allowed to “graduated” from our schools so badly prepared, but those who permitted that to happen.

We are being told that employers are having a hard time finding qualified applicants for employment; this is not the time to reduce the academic requirements of our students. America is now competing with other nations in the realms of leadership, economics, technology and other arenas. This country has played a significant role in global affairs for many years. Let us not fall victim to our own hubris by not giving the attention needed to the education of our students now and into the future.