

Testimony to the DC State Board of Education

January 23, 2013

Dear DC State Board of Education,

My name is Charlotte Frazier and I am a graduate of DC Public Schools. I graduated from Wilson High School in 2011 and am currently attending the University of Pittsburgh. I am writing to you today to testify about some of the proposed changes to the DC high school graduation requirements. I testified on May 18, 2011 about the need to remove the thesis requirement from the regulations in place at that time, and I want to say that I am still opposed to this and some of the other proposed requirements.

I am strongly opposed to the return of a thesis or culminating project under the College and Career Readiness category of graduation requirements. Not only does the Board not provide a rationale for this addition but I also feel it is an unnecessary and unfitting addition to DC graduation requirements for a number of reasons. (1) There is no official credit listed in accordance with this requirement. This implies that the Board of Education is placing a credit unit on what would normally be a regular classroom assignment. Imagine having to assign a credit unit for every single assignment submitted in high school! (2) There is no possible way that the Board of Education can ensure that this project does not fall solely onto the backs of English teachers. It is unfair to all English teachers to have them change their curriculum to fit in a thesis or culminating project that may not even fit in with the subject area. (3) It is completely unfair to discount a thesis or culminating project based on the grade and course it was written in. When I was in high school the only true thesis paper I wrote was in my 10th grade African Studies course. Preventing a student from graduating because they wrote their thesis at the wrong time (in 10th grade rather than 11th or 12th) or in the wrong class is totally illogical. (4) Lastly, there is no way that the Board of Education can fairly grade completion of such a project. The wording of the proposed amendment states that students must complete this assignment, not even that they have to pass it. Therefore, I see no reason that this addition to College and Career Readiness would even have an impact because what are students actually learning if they simply doing something for completion?

I commend and thank the Board of Education for including the new addition of dual-enrollment college level courses as counting toward the 2.0 credit units needed for College and Career Readiness. As a student who took two courses at Georgetown University in her senior year along with trying to finish up extra courses to fulfill this requirement, I say thank you! It was astounding to me that my courses at Georgetown could not fulfill the CTE/College and Career Readiness requirement for my own graduation. They counted only as electives.

I also want to bring the Board's attention the proposed addition of the hours of physical activity needed for graduation. I find this to be completely arbitrary and impossible to actually keep track of. (1) There is no way that the Board of Education can define in its entirety what "acceptable" physical activity would be. (2) It will be impossible for all students to complete these hours because so many of DC Public School students have responsibilities outside of school. From childcare of their younger siblings or

children, to supporting their families by working late hours, to working in a job that will help pay for college, I do not see the fairness in adding another burden on their shoulders by making them jog in place while trying to complete their necessary responsibilities. (3) Lastly, I see this addition to graduation requirements as one that would end up being quite easily falsified because there is no way that the Board of Education or school personnel can properly track every minute of physical activity listed. I do not see any reason why the Board would add in a requirement knowing full well that students will falsify their hours. It is only bringing an atmosphere of mockery upon District of Columbia graduates and the school system that supports them.

Finally, the Board should give great consideration before increasing the number and specific types of credits required for graduation. The reality is that attaining the current graduation requirements is such a challenge that many students do not complete high school. Drop out rates vary by school but are far too high in our district overall. Each proposed increase in credit requirements places one more hurdle in front of students, and some of the proposed changes further limit students' ability to take courses in special subjects of personal interest—business, technology, and the like. Increases in the arts, for example, may build well-rounded students, but simultaneously deny students the opportunity to explore courses geared more directly to their career-oriented interests. Furthermore, some of the proposed ways of attaining credit are also attainable only by more advantaged students who have the opportunity to take part in ballet programs, study abroad and the like. For the vast majority of DC high school students, those experiences are simply things they may have heard about but have never had the opportunity to consider doing. It seems that students with more advantages will have an easier time attaining credit than those of more limited means and opportunity. I hope that the Board will be cautious about setting requirements in place that will create unfair advantages for some and higher hurdles for students who struggle with the greatest disadvantages.

I thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony.

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