

Comments by Erich Martel, Retired DCPS HS Teacher ([ehmartel@starpower.net](mailto:ehmartel@starpower.net))

The goal in setting graduation requirements is to ensure that all high school students leave our schools well-prepared for college and the workplace. Today’s “creative knowledge economy” means our children must acquire skills beyond the three R’s, **such as teamwork, presentation skills, and critical thinking skills** –  
**COMMENT: These cannot be taught in abstraction. DESPITE ALL ONE HEARS, THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS “CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS” THAT EXIST APART FROM SPECIFIC SUBJECT AREA CONTENT. IF YOU WANT STUDENTS TO “THINK CRITICALLY,” THEY MUST GAIN MASTERY OF MULTIPLE AREAS OF KNOWLEDGE, SO THEY HAVE THE FACTS AND INFORMATION ABOUT WHICH THEY CAN “THINK CRITICALLY.”**  
 while ensuring that they are also prepared to make healthy decisions about their bodies. Research and experience shows that completing a challenging, well-rounded curriculum that exposes students to a wide range of academic and technical knowledge builds a solid foundation for future success and citizenship

Since January 2012, the DC State Board of Education (DCSBOE) held eight (8) public meetings and heard from hundreds of teachers, students, experts, and members of the public on an initial draft of proposed high school requirements. Those thoughts were taken into account along with research  
**WHAT RESEARCH? PLEASE POST IT. IF IT’S NOT POSTED FOR THE PUBLIC TO SEE, THEN IT PROBABLY DOESN’T EXIST.**

to create this new draft proposal. We also acknowledged recommendations from the Common Core State Standards and benchmarked our proposal against other states’ requirements. Overall, the State Board sought to strike a balance between traditional classroom learning – the acquisition of knowledge – and skills that students can creatively and critically apply in the real world. **“KNOWLEDGE” CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM “SKILLS.”**

This is a transitional document. The DCSBOE recognizes that time-in-seat is not an accurate measure of academic attainment, nor whether a student has acquired the skills they need to succeed.

**COMMENT: THIS IS MISLEADING. WHO SAYS THAT “TIME-IN –SEAT IS AN ACCURATE MEASURE OF ACADEMIC ATTAINMENT”? THE STATEMENT ALSO SOUNDS LIKE A PUT DOWN ON TEACHERS. THE LENGTH OF A CLASS IS DETERMINED BY THE AMOUNT OF TIME IT TAKES TO COVER THE CONTENT MANDATED BY THE COURSE STANDARDS. THIS IS ALSO VERY MISLEADING, BECAUSE IT IMPLIES THAT STUDENTS ARE FORCED TOSPEND LONG PERIODS OF TIME IN COURSES THAT THEY CAN MASTER IN A SHORT WHILE. FOR MANY OF OUR STUDENTS, IT’S THE OPPOSITE: THEY NEED MORE TIME, BUT IT’S OFTEN INTERRUPTED BY PEER DISRUPTION AND ABSENTEEISM.**

Consequently, our recommendation also reflects an interest in moving towards a competency-based system – where focus of a student’s education is on achieving specific skills that may be aquired through learning or performance outside the classroom.

**HERE AGAIN IS REFERENCE TO “SKILLS” THAT ARE NOT EVEN GENERALLY LINKED TO CONTENT. WHO IS GOING TO CERTIFY WHAT HAS BEEN LEARNED? THERE HAS BE AN AGREED UPON, CONFIDENTIALLY MAINTAINED TEST. TEN YEARS AGO, WE ENCOUNTERED THIS ISSUE WITH INCOMING TRANSCRIPTS, WHICH LOCAL SCHOOLS OFTEN GAVE TOO MANY OR TOO FEW EQUIVALENCE CREDITS. THIS NEEDS MORE WORK, IT MUST NAME SPECIFIC SUBJECTS.**

**Proposed Graduation Requirement for Consideration by the SBOE**

Subject	Units (changes)	Notes	Rationale
English	4.0	Maintains current unit requirement. The content covered should align with the Common Core State Standards.	<i>The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) call for four (4) years of English, a norm found across states. Colleges and employers seek</i>

			<i>individuals with excellent research, analytical, and oral and written communication skills developed through a rigorous English/language arts curriculum.</i>
Mathematics	4.0	Maintains current unit requirement.  At a minimum, students are to complete Algebra II or its equivalent. Students may earn credit for high school mathematics courses taken in middle school if their rigor can be verified. The content covered should align with the Common Core State Standards.	<i>While the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) can be met within three (3) years, an additional year is recommended. Students need advanced math to help them solve increasingly complex problems in a technological world. Math sharpens analytical skills and helps people navigate the everyday world of saving, investing, and life as an informed citizen in a democracy. Nonetheless, existing research supports the inclusion of a course beyond Algebra II. Studies show that this additional course is the best way for students to retain and apply knowledge learned in Algebra II, allowing for a deeper master of the content.</i> <b>WHAT STUDIES, PLEASE! THIS IS TOO VAGUE</b>
Science	4.0	Maintains current unit requirement. To satisfy this requirement, students must take Biology and two (2) other laboratory courses, which may include physics, chemistry or engineering.	<i>Too many students are not adequately prepared for the new technology/innovation economy. There is an increasing need (and demand) for employees with an educational background in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and students will need to be well prepared for work in these fastest-growing sectors.</i>
Social Studies	4.0	Maintains current unit requirement. To satisfy this requirement, students must take courses in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• World history (1.0)</li> <li>• United States history (1.0)</li> <li>• Washington, DC history (0.5)</li> </ul> The remaining 1.5 units may be selected from subjects such as: government/civics, global studies, economics or financial literacy.	<i>Courses in social studies produce well informed, tolerant, global citizens who can think critically about how the past shapes the future of world events. Based on public feedback, these proposed requirements retain 4.0 units for social studies.</i> <b>RETAIN US GOV'T (0.5 CU); RETAIN TWO YEARS OF WORLD HISTORY WITH AN OPTION TO REPLACE ON WITH AP WORLD OR A REGIONAL HISTORY ; RETAIN US HISTORY IN ITS PRESENT CHRONOGY; MAKE DC HISTORY AN ELECTIVE. IT'S ALREADY IN GRADE 3</b>
World Language	2.0*	To satisfy this requirement, students must take two (2) years of the "same" language. Students may earn units for high school language courses taken in middle school, online or in study abroad programs, if their rigor can be verified.	<i>In addition to cognitive benefits, proficiency in a foreign language creates globally competent citizens as well as prepares students for a number of employment opportunities at home and abroad. We acknowledge that mastery of a foreign language requires more than two (2) years of language study; the hope of this Board is that world languages will be taught in elementary school.</i> <b>IF WE ARE GOING TO REQUIRE TWO YEARS OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE, IT MUST BE THE SAME ONE (THAT WAS DETERMINED 7 YEARS AGO – WHAT HAPPENED?) STUDENTS MUST</b>

			<b>HAVE TO PASS A VALID TEST TO PASS OUT OF HAVE SOME OTHER OBJECTIVE DETERMINATION. ENCOURAGE FURTHER STUDY; DO NOT MANDATE IT</b>
Visual/Performing Arts	0.5*	Participation in dance, art, theater/drama, or other structured visual/performing arts courses may satisfy this requirement. Students may also earn credit for participating in courses, training, or performances outside of school, such as the youth ballet.	<i>Participation in the visual and performing arts is linked to gains in math, reading, cognitive ability, critical thinking, and verbal skills. These benefits accompany positive social and emotional development among other gains. THERE MUST BE AN INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OUTSIDE OF DCPS OR THE CHARTERS, WHICH LEAVES OSSE. IN FACT, ALL INCOMING TRANSCRIPTS SHOULD GO THROUGH OSSE, BOTH ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE TRANSCRIPTS.</i>
Music	0.5*	Participation in chorus, band or orchestra programs may satisfy this requirement. Students may also earn credit for participating in courses, training, or performances outside of school, such as the DC Youth Orchestra.	<i>In addition to gains in academic achievement, participation in music helps develop well rounded and culturally aware students while at the same time building capacity for reasoning, imagination and mental dexterity.</i>
Music & Visual/Performing Arts Elective	1.0*	To satisfy this requirement, students may select from either music or visual/performing arts courses. Participation in dance, art, theater/drama, or other structured visual/performing arts courses, as well as chorus, band or orchestra programs may satisfy this requirement.	<b>NO: DO NOT JUST HEAP ON WHAT MAY BE GREAT FOR ONE STUDENT, BUT IS TOTAL BORE AND OBSTACLE TO ANOTHER. THE PLACE TO EXPAND MANDATORY MUSIC IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL,</b>
Electives	3.5 (-0.5)	This may include an established and verified study abroad program.	<i>To take advantage of students' individual interests and preferences, this flexibility is provided. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? IF IT IS STUDY IN A SCHOOL THAT ISSUES CREDITS, YES. THE CRITERIA MUST BE DEFINED AND THERE MUST BE AN INDEPENDENT ENTITY TO DETERMINE EQUIVALENCE.</i>
Physical and Health Education	2.5* (+1.0)	This requirement is consists of three (3) components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical Education (2.0 units, +1.0) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Credit may be earned through a PE class, participation in a team sport or Junior ROTC. Participation in a team sport can satisfy up to 0.5 of the PE requirement.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Health Education (0.5 units)</li> <li>• Physical Activity (225 hours) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Students must engage in at least 225 minutes of physical activity each week (or 67.5 hours per semester, in alignment with the Healthy Schools Act).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<i>Aligned with the Healthy Schools Act, and recognizing the prevalence of obesity among the District's youth, physical education and physical activity is a priority. Recognizing the importance of all physical activity, this requirement may be met through a number of different mechanisms. Further, to ensure that students receive a minimum level of exposure to health education (which should emphasize sexual health), 0.5 units are devoted to health education. REMOVE THE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY 225 MINUTES/WEEK. IT IS COMPLETELY UNENFORCEABLE. REGARDING THE COUNCIL LAW, LET THE COUNCIL WORK IT OUT WITH DCPS AND THE CHARTERS. THE COUNCIL CAN'T MAKE THE</i>

			BOARD USE ITS GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS AUTHORITY TO IMPLEMENT SOMETHING THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH GRADUATION.
Community Service	100 hours	Maintains current requirement. Students must perform 100 hours of community service prior to graduation.	<i>This requirement helps students develop a sense of citizenship as well as a connection to their community.</i>
College & Career Readiness		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At least 2.0 units must be earned through courses that appear on the approved “College Level or Career Prep” list (AP, IB, CTE, and/or dual-enrollment college level courses). These units can be used to satisfy any of the requirements.</li> <li>Students must complete a Thesis / Culminating Project in their junior or senior year. It may be completed within a required or elective course or separately.</li> </ol>	<p>MEMBERS, AP IS COLLEGE LEVEL. MOST OF OUR STUDENTS ARE NOT AT COLLEGE LEVEL.</p> <p>LAST YEAR OVER 50% OF THE AP SCORES FOR DC PUBLIC WERE 1s. THERE NEEDS TO BE A SEPARATE, WELL-PLANNED VOCATIONAL DIPLOMA. YOU CAN MAKE ALL THE RULES YOU WANT, BUT THEY WILL NOT MAKE STUDENTS WHO ARE YEARS BEHIND INTO COLLEGE READY. <b>IT CHEATS THE STUDENTS WHO ARE READY AND WHOSE LEARNING IS DISRUPTED BY BORED STUDENTS FORCED TO BE IN THE SAME CLASSES. TALK TO TEACHERS!!</b></p>
<b>TOTAL UNITS REQUIRED</b>		<b>25.5 Units + 100 hours of community service + Physical Activity + Thesis / Culminating Project</b>	
		<i>* Requirement may be met through demonstration of proficiency</i>	

All courses fulfilling the revised high school graduation requirements must be aligned with District of Columbia State Standards (including the Common Core State Standards in English language arts/literacy and mathematics) for the particular subject area.

**Next Steps**

The DC State Board of Education is committed to adopting the most comprehensive graduation requirements possible with the goal of ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, are prepared for college and career success. The Board has developed a framework and timeline to ensure that the public is included in the decision-making process.

12.19.12	<i>Release of Revised High School Graduation Requirements Proposal</i>
12.19.12 – 1.23.13	<i>Comment Period on Revised High School Graduation Requirements Proposal (comments may be submitted to <a href="mailto:sboe@dc.gov">sboe@dc.gov</a>)</i>
1.23.13	<i>Public Meeting on the Revised High School Graduation Requirements Proposal (to testify, email <a href="mailto:sboe@dc.gov">sboe@dc.gov</a> or call 202.741.0888 and provide your name, organization and phone number)</i>
2.6.13	<i>Final Release of Proposed High School Graduation Requirements with Rulemaking (published in the DC Register)</i>
3.20.13	<i>Public Meeting and Vote on Proposed High School Graduation Requirements</i>

### Guiding Questions

The Board is seeking specific answers on a few key questions. The public is encouraged to answer these questions when submitting comments and/or suggestions.

- 1) Overall, do the set of graduation requirements reflect what is needed for preparation for college, career and citizenship?
- 2) Should additional units be included? If so, in what subject? Please explain your reasoning.
- 3) Should credits be reduced, combined or eliminated? If so, in what subject/s? Please explain your reasoning.
- 4) The Board is considering adopting a “diploma of distinction,” where high school students, through additional coursework that goes above and beyond the current credit requirements may be recommended for this distinguished diploma. If the Board is to propose such a diploma, what should it include?
- 5) Should one unit/course be taken online, as some states now require?
- 6) Are there subjects or skills that should be required, such as civics, personal finance, teamwork, or communications?