



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

**TO:** College and Career Readiness Working Group  
P-12 Education Committee

**FROM:** John B. King, Jr.

**SUBJECT:** Potential Revision of High School Graduation Requirements

**DATE:** March 4, 2011

**AUTHORIZATION(S):**

### **SUMMARY**

#### **Issue for Discussion**

Do the Regents wish to take steps to better align high school graduation requirements with college and career ready standards and provide additional pathways for students to meet these requirements?

#### **Reason(s) for Consideration**

Review of Policy.

#### **Proposed Handling**

This question will come before the College and Career Readiness Working Group and the P-12 Education Committee for discussion at the March 2011 meeting.

#### **Background Information**

The Board of Regents first examined potential revision of high school graduation requirements at their October and December 2010 meetings of the College and Career Readiness Working Group. Currently, the Regents are completing regional forums across the State and there is a survey in the field seeking feedback and reaction to the various options under consideration. Analysis of survey data and input from the forums will be provided to the Board as it becomes available.

## Policy Directions for Consideration

### **A. Increase Graduation Requirements**

#### **- Require additional credits in mathematics and science**

- Option: Beginning in 2011-12, require four years of mathematics and science or the equivalent to ensure college and career readiness based on demonstrated student needs.
- Currently: 22 credits are required - three units of credit in mathematics and three units of credit in science and students must take and pass one Regents examination in each content area.
- Benefits:
  - Closes the “gap” of time from when students last took a course, better preparing students for college and career and mitigating the need for remediation for some students in college<sup>1</sup>.
  - Potentially decreases number of non-credit bearing college courses and associated costs for students increasing the likelihood of persistence in college.
  - 4<sup>th</sup> year would be an interest-based selection of courses by students increasing the likelihood of engagement.
- Challenges:
  - Additional and/or realigned district resources will be required to develop new curricula and hire additional teachers during a time of fiscal crisis.
  - A national shortage in certified math and science teachers currently exists.
  - Additional course requirements may prevent students from pursuing higher level coursework in their intended area of postsecondary study.
  - To meet additional requirements, schools may have to reduce the number of elective options available to students.

#### **- Increase the passing score on key Regents exams**

- Option A: Increase required score on ELA Regents to 75 and Algebra Regents to 80 beginning with 2012 cohort (phase in with 70, 75 and 70, 75, 80 respectively)
- Option B: Beginning in 2011-12, replace the 0-100 scoring system with a 1-4 cut score system, where a score of 3 indicates “College Readiness.” Phase in movement from 2 as the passing score to 3 as the passing score. (Note: Ideally, articulation agreements would be reached with SUNY and CUNY so that a student who earns 3s in ELA and Math is certain not to require remediation.)
- Currently: As of June 2012, students must achieve a passing score of 65 on all required Regents exams with the exception of students with disabilities who

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<sup>1</sup> As attested to by SUNY/CUNY administrators at the January 2011 P-12 Committee panel on College and Career Readiness

have the “safety net” option of scoring between 55-64 in order to earn a local diploma.

- Benefits:
  - Recent research indicates these “proficiency” scores would be better predictors of college and career readiness<sup>2</sup>.
  - Students will be required to demonstrate greater knowledge and skills in order to achieve “proficiency” on these exams.
  - Shifting to 1-4 performance levels would be entirely consistent with our 3-8 tests and the raising of the 3-8 cut scores in summer 2010.
  - The use of “basic,” “proficient,” and “advanced” for the performance levels 2, 3, and 4 will support a more nuanced handling of the labeling of students scoring between a 65 and a 75 or 80.
- Challenges:
  - Initial decrease in graduation rates for all students.
  - A decrease in the numbers of students with disabilities who graduate with a Regents diploma.

- **Require passing additional exams**

- Option: Require students to pass a second Regents exam in mathematics - phased in for entering cohort of 2011-12.
- Currently: students need to complete 3 units of credit and pass 1 commencement-level Regents exam in mathematics in order to meet the diploma requirements.
- Benefits:
  - Requiring a second Regents exam in mathematics would ensure the students complete additional commencement level coursework that is aligned with the Common Core State Standards and therefore, better prepares them for college and career readiness.
  - The ability to pass a second Regents exam, particularly when taken closer to college entrance, is a useful indicator of college- and career-readiness.
- Challenges:
  - May result in a greater number of students not meeting graduation requirements.
  - May result in students with interests in other subjects being unable to concentrate to the extent desired.
  - Need to backmap alignment of expectations and content from high school to pre-K.

- **Require a College and Career Ready experience**

- Option: require all students to take and pass at least one AP, IB or college-level course to prepare them for college levels of rigor.
- Currently: there is no such requirement.

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<sup>2</sup> Research conducted by Howard Everson in summer 2010 noted that achieving these scores correlated to a significantly reduced likelihood of having to take a college remediation course. This research will be supplemented by further development of the state’s data system and increased access to SUNY and CUNY longitudinal data.

- Benefits:
    - Research suggests that exposure to these curricula increases the level of readiness of students.
  - Challenges:
    - Equity in access to such courses by all districts.
    - Awarding of credit for courses to students who do not get a passing score (but for whom the research suggests there is still a readiness value).
- **Extend the school day/school year**
- Option: 200 days per year and 8 hours per day for all students.
  - Currently: the law calls for and the State aids 180 school days per year and a minimum of 5 hours for students in grades K-6 and 5 ½ hours for students in grades 7-12.
  - Benefits:
    - Research supports that additional instructional time leads to increased academic achievement.
    - Opportunity for greater depth in subject matter.
    - Opportunity for greater flexibility in school schedules.
  - Challenges:
    - Effectively structuring the additional time to engage students.
    - Greater personnel and facilities costs to districts.
    - Current level of school funding is decreasing.
- **Strengthen the Regents exam sequence in English Language Arts (ELA) and Social Studies consistent with the new New York State Common Core Standards**
- Option A: Beginning in 2011-12, implement Grade 9 and Grade 10 ELA exams as census exams (exams taken by all students in the grade level) parallel to Grades 3-8. The Grade 11 ELA Regents would remain the graduation requirement.
  - Option B: Break Global History and Geography into two sequenced courses with separate Regents exams, aligned with both the NYS History Standards and the NYS Common Core Literacy Standards, in grades 9 and 10 – phased in for 2012 cohort with first administration in June 2013.
  - Currently:
    - The Global Studies course is offered as a one and one half to two year course with a Regents exam administered at end of course.
    - ELA exams are administered only in Grades 3-8 and Grade 11, leaving a significant gap.
  - Benefits:
    - More depth in instruction and learning in both ELA and Social Studies.
    - Greater opportunities in Social Studies for integration with ELA for critical writing and reading.
  - Challenges:

- The State would have to redesign the Global Studies Regents exam to account for the change.
- School districts would be administering additional examinations.

## **B. Allow Increased Flexibility and/or Additional Pathways to Achievement**

### **- Student choice in one or more Regents exams**

- Option: Multiple paths to graduation with a Regents diploma
  - ELA, Math + any 3\*, or
  - ELA, Math + 2 Science + 1 other\*, or
  - ELA, Math + 2 History + 1 other\*, or
  - ELA, Math + 1 History + 1 Science + 1 other\*.

\* including a CTE assessment

- Benefits:

- Students taking additional courses in a field of study of interest can fulfill additional diploma endorsements.
- Better student engagement should increase likelihood for persistence towards graduation.
- Recognition of student skill achievement and the opportunity to use multiple measures for measuring student growth.

- Challenges:

- Greater flexibility means students may be able to graduate without demonstrating proficiency in key areas through Regents exams.

### **- Earn credit through demonstration of competency, not seat time**

- Option: Students could earn credit through competency-based activities in lieu of seat time requirements.
- Currently: Regulations require students to complete units of study equivalent to 180 minutes of instruction per week (seat time) in order to earn units of credit for high school graduation.
- Benefits:
  - Students progress at own pace through a course utilizing online/blended/alternative course models, including project-based learning (PBL), work-based experiences, internships, and independent study.
  - Students can more deeply engage a subject area and potentially receive course credit for related outside activities such as work-based experiences, internships, and PBL.
  - Values demonstration of knowledge and skill acquisition, not just the amount of time spent in a classroom.
- Challenges:
  - Scheduling, capacity and staffing in a competency-based model as few districts have experience with this.
  - Providing resources and supports for lower-achieving students and students with disabilities in nontraditional settings/learning activities.

- **Increase maximum credits earned through integrated/specialized CTE courses/programs**
  - Option: Beginning in 2011-12, increase the number of allowable CTE integrated courses from 4 to 10, including all ELA, Math, and Science.
  - Currently: Only four academic credits can be earned through approved integrated CTE programs.
  - Benefits:
    - Allows students the opportunity to pursue an interest-based education.
    - Increases opportunities to learn by application.
    - Earlier access to a CTE program (9<sup>th</sup> grade) may increase engagement and high school completion.
  - Challenges:
    - Equity and access of all options to all students, particularly those in under-resourced or under-served areas.
    - Limited number of approved CTE programs.
    - Establishing a common level of rigor across all CTE programs.
  
- **Flexibility in middle school opportunities**
  - Option A: Beginning in 2011-12, expand Middle School Integration Options:
    - English/History/Art
    - Health/Science
    - English/CTE
    - Math/CTE
    - Science/CTE
  - Option B: Beginning in 2011-12, extend the regulation allowing students in 8<sup>th</sup> grade to fulfill high school assessment requirements to 7<sup>th</sup> grade students.
  - Benefits:
    - Increased learning opportunities for students to advance in their studies at an earlier age.
    - More individualized strategies for meeting student needs.
  - Challenges:
    - Appropriately certified teachers.
    - Development of more online/blended/alternative course models for local implementation.
    - Scheduling.
  
- **As resources allow, expand the Regents assessment program**
  - Option A: Add a Regents exam in Economics in 2013-14 (available for Class of 2014).
  - Option B: Add Regents exams in the Arts (Dance, Theater, Music, Visual Arts) in 2013-14 (available for Class of 2014).
  - Option C: Add a Regents exam in Technology in 2014-15 (available for Class of 2015).
  - Benefits:

- Expanded opportunities for students to demonstrate proficiency in fields beyond the core academic subjects.
- Challenges:
  - Cost.
  - Appropriately certified teachers.

### **C. Rethink the “Safety Net” for Students with Disabilities**

While the local diploma is being phased out for general education students, it remains available to students with disabilities through the “Safety Net” provisions (RCT and 55-64 pass option) of State regulations.

- Options:
  - Phase out the RCT safety net. The RCT safety net regulations sunsets this option for all students entering grade 9 after September 2011.
  - Continue the 55-64 pass score option to earn a local diploma; or propose a specified period of time for the 55-64 pass score option to be in effect, with a phase in of an increase in the pass score over five to six years for all required Regents examinations, for specific Regents examinations or for a specific number of Regents examinations.
  - Allow students with disabilities to obtain a local diploma based on a composite Regents test score as long as the student passes the Math and English Regents examinations at the designated score or safety net score.

Provide additional flexibility to students with disabilities to graduate with a regular diploma based on some substituted course requirements

- Benefits:
  - Cost savings to the State with elimination of the RCTs.
  - Decreases the number and types of State assessments required to be provided at the school district.
  - Coursework for students would be more aligned with the State assessments needed to reach the graduation standards. Currently, students with disabilities who do not pass the Regents examinations require instruction which is not aligned with the current learning standards to prepare them for the RCTs.
- Challenges
  - Training for Committees on Special Education and Guidance Counselors on course credit flexibility options that might lead to a local diploma versus a Regents diploma.
  - Ensuring that students with disabilities have equal opportunities to participate in courses and pathways available to all students that would lead to a Regents diploma.

## **D. Continue development of a Career Skills Credential**

At their January 2010 meeting, the Board of Regents supported developing a Career Skills Credential that would document a student's achievement against the Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) Learning Standards, not as a diploma, but as a supplement to the regular diploma for all students and for some students with disabilities, to replace the IEP diploma.

- Options:
  - Phase I, develop an alternate credential to replace the IEP diploma for students with disabilities who take the New York State Alternate Assessment (NYSAA) only.
  - Phase II, develop a Career Skills Credential to supplement a regular diploma for all students.
- Benefits
  - Strengthens existing requirements and policy relating to career planning, transition planning and annual guidance meetings.
  - Could motivate students with disabilities to stay in school longer to work toward a regular diploma, knowing that they could also exit with this credential.
  - Could enable students' community- and work-based learning and experience to be valued and documented.
- Challenges
  - Design and implementation timing
  - Training for teachers and administrators

### Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Regents direct Department staff to bring to the Board recommendations for action on graduation requirements and graduation flexibility at the April 2011 meeting.