

June 2005

Minimum Admission Standards

Increasing College Readiness as a Means to Increasing Student Success

Master Plan Policy Goal 8 - Helping Students Make the Transition to College

Introduction

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) is scheduled at its June 23 meeting to discuss the board's pending proposal to revise the state's minimum admission standards for students seeking to enroll as freshmen at Washington's public four-year college and universities.

State law requires the board to set the minimum freshman admission standards, while each institution of higher education retains the authority to accept or reject individual applicants based on the prospective students' applications for admission. (RCW 28B.76.290 (2))

The admission standards signal to students, parents, and K-12 educators the academic preparation students need to succeed in college. They also inform high schools of the content and quality of courses they must offer to ensure their students have the opportunity to gain admission, enroll in institutions of higher education, and earn college degrees. The large majority of incoming freshman students are required to meet the state's minimum admission standards.

Significant flexibility is provided to the four-year institutions. In recognition that many prospective students demonstrate their preparedness for college in unique ways that are not reflected in the standards, up to 15 percent of new freshmen may be admitted upon each institution's discretion even if the students do not meet the standards. The HECB adopted most of the current minimum admission standards in 1988, and the requirements were fully implemented in 1992. In 2000, the board revised the science standard, requiring entering college freshmen as of fall 2010, to complete two years of laboratory-based science. At least one year must be in a course that requires the student to use algebra.

In November 1991, the board established the practice that high schools and school districts determine which courses are equivalent to academic core courses, in full or in part. Course review and appeal committees were called upon to evaluate and either approve or disapprove the school districts' course equivalency decisions. In 1993, school districts and the baccalaureate institutions agreed to discontinue the course review and appeal committees. Instead, school districts were to determine which courses met the standards and certify them on each student transcript. Not all school districts were able to fully implement transcript reporting due to limitations of technology. In the interim, the HECB created a high school core course database,

where districts list the courses that meet core academic requirements. Baccalaureate institutions reference the database when making admission decisions. For the first time, technological advances will enable all high schools to use the official state transcript for the 2005-06 school year.

Since 2003, HECB staff have studied the minimum admission standards and met with K-12 and higher education representatives to determine whether the current standards should be revised, and if so, to develop a recommendation for revisions. Early in 2004, a workgroup with representatives from public baccalaureate institutions (with input from K-12 stakeholders) recommended revisions to the current minimum admission standards, based on research and the institutions' current experiences with entering freshmen. The participants reached broad agreement that the current standards are inadequate and that more rigorous preparation is required for freshmen entering the state's colleges and universities to succeed in their studies and complete college degree programs. Particular concerns arose about the growing number of recent high school graduates who are unable to perform college-level work, especially in mathematics, when they graduate from high school.

HECB staff presented the proposal to the board's Education Committee on November 10, 2004, and to the full board in a regularly scheduled public meeting on December 10, 2004. Also on December 10, the board authorized HECB staff to begin a negotiated rule-making process. On January 27, 2005, the board approved draft rules-change language and directed staff to conduct public hearings on the proposal. The current standards and proposed changes are summarized in Appendix B. The board also committed to "consider all public comment on the proposed rules submitted at the hearings or in writing, and . . . consider revisions to the proposed rules as needed."

The board has made significant efforts to collect the perspectives of people throughout the state on the proposed revisions to the minimum admission requirements. Subsequent to the January board meeting, board staff conducted public hearings in Des Moines, Ellensburg, Spokane, Tacoma, and Vancouver, and received comments via e-mail, telephone, and correspondence. Board members attended many of the public hearings. During this time, staff also consulted and met with college admission officers, school administrators, school principals, vocational administrators, the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. Staff made presentations at legislative hearings in the House and Senate.

Staff also corresponded with individual legislators on the subject, along with untold numbers of parents and citizens. In April, the HECB executive director fielded questions on the topic during a statewide public radio program. Members of the board also participated in numerous regional meetings on issues related to the minimum admission standards. There has been widespread electronic and print commentary on this subject.

Approximately 200 people attended the board's public hearings. Of this number, 80 testified. In addition, the board received a total of 76 comments via e-mail, letters, and telephone through May 20, 2005. From the K-12 community, the board heard from school board members, superintendents and principals, teachers, high school counselors, and career and technical education staff. From the higher education community, the board heard from college and

university administrators and faculty. The board also heard from a number of state agencies and organizations, parents and students, and business and industry representatives. A summary of the key issues raised during the public comment period is included in Appendix A. A more detailed summary of each public hearing and the written public comments are available upon request.

The public comment period stimulated extensive debate over the most effective strategies for improving students' success in college and their subsequent careers. The comments revealed a significant divide between supporters of the board's proposal and those who oppose it.

Following the June 23 discussion, the board is scheduled to take action on the proposed rules during its regular meeting on July 28, 2005, in Yakima.

Background: Why the board is proposing this change

More Washington students are attending college than ever before. Popular demand has been increasing for years, and the 2005-07 state budget will open the doors of opportunity to many more students. In this respect, Washington is the envy of much of the nation.

However, the higher education system faces a challenge that is at least as stifling as finding room for those who wish to go to college: ensuring that students are prepared to perform college-level work. With so many students planning to enter college in the next few years, it is critical that those who enroll are able to do college-level work when they arrive, and can complete their studies in a reasonable amount of time.

The *2004 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education* promotes as one of its major goals that the state increase the number of baccalaureate degrees conferred throughout its higher education system, to 30,000 per year by 2010. This change – a gain of 2,800 degrees awarded each year – will not happen by chance. Rather, it requires conscientious policy making to accomplish.

The board is being asked to review the following important considerations as it decides what action to take regarding the proposed revisions in the state's minimum college admission requirements.

1) Academic readiness for college and work helps ensure that students complete their studies and graduate

According to the National Commission on the High School Senior Year, more than 70 percent of today's graduates continue on to postsecondary education – yet only half of the students enrolled in a four-year college or university leave with a degree. The commission argues that inadequate academic preparation is the root cause.

Clearly, the best way to ensure that students are prepared to succeed in college – and graduate – is for them to pursue a more rigorous curriculum in secondary school. According to ACT, students taking Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II and one additional higher-level course are much

more likely to succeed in college than those who take a less rigorous sequence of courses. And the more advanced the level of math a student completes in high school, the more likely he or she is to graduate from college.

Developing proficiency in math is not as simple as learning to ride a bicycle; it is a skill that must be practiced repeatedly if it is to be mastered. Yet all too often, students succumb to a case of “senioritis” during their last year of high school; taking easier (or less) coursework, and often falling behind in their skills. To some extent, this malady grew out of the solution to an entirely different problem. According to Stanford Professor Michael Kirst, the high school senior year underwent a transformation in the 1930s, when schools replaced some academic coursework with more electives and vocational programs in an effort to keep kids from dropping out.

And while that theory may have served a purpose 70 years ago, today’s world demands a much more vigorous commitment to academic rigor. Cheryl Kane, executive director of the National Commission on the High School Senior Year, describes the risk of disregarding this evolution: “...as the world of work becomes more complex and opportunities increasingly depend on one’s level of education, students shunted into non-academic tracks are being written off.”

The commission’s report went on to suggest that the new demands of the world economy essentially require all U.S. students to take at least two additional years of formal education and training after high school. “But today,” according to the report, “the United States is slipping behind other nations as the world leader in the percentage of young people who graduate from college. Just 44 percent of our high school students take a demanding academic program; the other 30 million are being prepared for a future that has already vanished, in courses of study that lack rigor and coherence.”

Preparing Washington students to join the 21st century work force and compete in a global economy requires more rigorous academic preparation in high school, as well as a more diligent focus on math and science. Many other countries are ahead of us in that arena; schools in India and China, for example, are graduating more students in crucial fields than are U.S. institutions. No longer is the United States first among world nations in the proportion of young people completing college degrees.

Thomas Friedman, author of a book entitled, *The World is Flat*, notes that India graduated almost a million more students from college in 2001 than did the United States. He says: “China graduates twice as many students with bachelor’s degrees as the U.S., and they have six times as many graduates majoring in engineering. In the international competition to have the biggest and best supply of knowledge workers, America is falling behind.”

And college graduates earn more money. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that those who hold an associate, bachelor’s or graduate degree can expect to earn much more during their careers than those with only a high school diploma or with a little college but no degree. Those with a bachelor’s degree earn over 60 percent more, on average, than those with only a high school diploma.

That gap increases with the level of the degree attained, and the income differential grows larger all the time. Over the course of their lifetimes, workers who possess a bachelor’s degree earn

about \$1 million more than those holding only a high school diploma. The U.S. Department of Labor also reports that college graduates are more likely to remain employed, and are better equipped to adapt to the ever-changing workplace.

However, not only do students without baccalaureate or more advanced degrees earn less over time, but students who enroll in college but do not complete their studies often end up paying a heftier price in student loans. Every year, hundreds of thousands of young people leave college unsuccessfully, burdened with large student loan debt but without the earning power of a college credential. In one study, only 2 percent of students who had borrowed money to complete their bachelor's degree defaulted on one or more loans, while 22 percent of borrowers who dropped out were in default.

2) Preparing for college also prepares students for work

Plenty of evidence suggests that the skills needed to succeed in college are also the skills needed for success in today's workforce. In testimony before Congress earlier this year, Kati Haycock of The Education Trust said, "... the academic skills required for work are comparable to those required for college. The point is that high school graduates should be prepared to choose college or work. Right now, they are not being adequately prepared for either."

To suggest that college readiness and work readiness are an either/or proposition is both inaccurate and unfair to students. Students who choose a career path that does not include postsecondary study not only benefit from more rigorous coursework in high school, but increasingly require it. A study by the non-profit organization Public Agenda (*Reality Check 2002*) found more than 60 percent of employers reporting that recent graduates had poor math skills, while nearly 75 percent pointed to a deficiency in grammar and writing skills.

"Unqualified and untrainable, these high school graduates are likely to become trapped in unskilled, low-paying jobs that do not support a family well above the poverty level, provide benefits or offer a clear pathway for advancement." (*The Expectations Gap, A 50-State Review of High School Graduation Requirements*, Achieve, 2004).

Certainly, not every student chooses to go to college. However, students should have an opportunity to make the choice, whether they choose early in their high school career, late in their high school career, or even later, after they have graduated from high school or have been in the workforce for awhile. We cannot predict which individual students will go to college based on socioeconomic factors, race, or whether they attend high school in an urban or rural school district. We can, however, communicate clearly with students and parents what is necessary to have a chance to be admitted to the college of their choice, to be prepared for college-level work, and to successfully graduate from college.

Those students who do not choose college may find jobs that do not require a college degree. However, those higher-wage jobs will demand advanced levels of proficiency in math and science. For example, in addition to a four- to five-year apprenticeship, sheet metal workers must have studied algebra, geometry, trigonometry and technical reading. Tool and die makers need algebra, geometry, trigonometry and statistics, and earn an average annual salary of \$40,000.

High school graduates who are not academically prepared to enter the workforce are often more likely to end up in jobs “by accident,” rather than by choice. In fact, according to Public Agenda, 70 percent of young workers without degrees say they are in their current jobs by chance, and only about 15 percent see those jobs as a career.

Long before students leave high school and begin looking for work, other factors play a role in their academic pathways, including the expectations of others. The vast majority of young adults recognize the value of a college degree, and about 80 percent of high school students intend to attend college when they start. Yet only 68 percent of parents expect the same for their kids – and only about half of today’s teachers see college in their students’ futures.

Students themselves report that counselors and teachers sometimes underestimate their potential, and that their schools’ curricula and expectations are too low. Fewer than three-in-10 teenagers surveyed in 1998 thought their school was “very academically rigorous.” (*Who’s Who Among American High School Students*).

Four out of five college students and non-students alike say they would have worked harder in high school if their schools had demanded more of students, set higher academic standards, and raised expectations of how much coursework and studying was necessary. (*Rising to the Challenge: Are High School Students Prepared for College and Work?* Achieve, 2005). Research shows that a student who has an opportunity to learn at a high level has a much higher probability of completing a college degree.

3) Closing the achievement gap

Studies consistently show that the strength of the high school curriculum is the greatest predictor of future success. Graduates themselves who say they faced high expectations in high school are twice as likely to feel prepared for both work and college. (Achieve, Inc.)

Yet even in secondary schools with college-preparatory curricula, high-performing minority students are often excluded from higher-rigor courses. And it is African American and Latino college students who most often feel that their high schools should have done more to prepare them for higher education. Existing research shows that highly prepared low-income and minority students are about as likely to attend college these days as poorly prepared affluent students. And rigorous academic coursework can mitigate the influence of a family’s socio-economic status.

According to the Achieve study, “What courses they take matters for all students, but it is particularly important for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Taking a rigorous high school curriculum that includes math at least through Algebra II, cuts the gap in college completion rates between white students and African American and Latino students in half.”

And students who attempt to make up the difference through remedial coursework often do not fare as well. Half of those who take even one remedial math course are unlikely to graduate from college, and a disproportionate number of these students are from low-income, African American or Latino families.

Only four-in-10 students who begin full-time at a four-year institution of higher education obtain a bachelor's degree in four years, and only six in 10 earn a degree in six years. This statistic is even worse for low-income and minority students.

Among white students, 66.8 percent earn a degree within 10 years, compared to 45.7 percent of African American students and 47.3 percent of Latino students. And while 77 percent of students from high-income families graduate in six years, only 54 percent of students from low-income families attain that goal.

In Washington state, K-12 education reform might be viewed as the first step toward improved learning outcomes for students. Next, the proposed revisions to the minimum college admission standards are a second step. The alignment of high school graduation requirements and college admission standards would become the logical final step in a progressive course of action intended to close the achievement gap that plagues Washington's students.

4) Reducing the need for remedial coursework

Most high school graduates in Washington state go on to some form of postsecondary education within a year. And within three years of high school graduation, nearly half of all high school graduates have enrolled at a community or technical college in Washington, whether for academic preparation, job training, or basic skills.

Many of these students are not prepared for college-level study – particularly in math – and require remedial instruction before they can make progress toward a degree. In 2003-04, about 55 percent of community and technical college students who graduated from high school in 2003 enrolled in remedial classes.

And many of these students may be taking a pre-college, intermediate algebra course for the first time. Currently, high school graduates are able to complete their minimum required math studies as early as their junior year, and discontinue math study. As a result, many high school graduates' math skills may have atrophied in the two years between their last high school math class and the start of college.

The need for remedial coursework forces the state to divert resources that would be better spent on other college programs. In fiscal year 2003-04, the state spent about \$41.3 million in general fund dollars on pre-college courses for students.

5) Ensuring that students and their families know what it takes to succeed

More students enroll in community colleges now than in any other sector of the higher education system. More than one third of all students entering the state's community colleges intend to transfer and ultimately obtain a baccalaureate degree. Yet many students who successfully navigate through secondary school expect similar success in college, only to have their hopes dashed after enrolling.

Some are disappointed that their placement scores require them to take remedial coursework before they can pursue more rewarding studies. Others may have been stellar high school students who gained admission into more selective institutions, only to discover that they were ill equipped for mastering the coursework in their chosen majors. And nearly half of the students who intend to go to college after high school have not taken the college-prep coursework needed to ensure success.

The 2004 *Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education* dictates that increasing student success is a responsibility, not a choice. To that end, the HECB is obligated to inform students about what it takes to succeed in college. The proposed revisions to the minimum admission standards communicate clearly to students, parents and families about requirements for academic preparation for both college and work.

There is no shortage of data to illustrate the importance of obtaining a baccalaureate degree. But whether a student decides to go on to college and pursue a degree or enter the workforce directly out of high school, rigorous academic preparation is critical to success. We can no longer afford to categorize students into “ready for college” and “ready for work,” as if the skills and preparation needed for success follow different tracks.

6) The cost of doing nothing

The evidence in support of changing the state’s minimum admission standards leads to one overarching, albeit somewhat ominous conclusion: The best way to guarantee that the situation will not improve is to do nothing.

Without this change, students will not have the full advantage of being adequately prepared for college when they walk through the doors of higher learning. Degree completion will take longer, and cost more – for students and their families, as well as the state. Low-income and minority students will continue to experience a disparity in college enrollment and completion.

The state will continue to divert funds to remedial coursework, and away from other important higher education needs. Students in U.S. colleges and universities will have to scramble to keep pace with their counterparts in other countries. And high school graduates who choose to enter the workforce rather than attend a four-year college or university will not have the skills they need to perform their jobs in an increasingly high-tech world.

Increasing the minimum admission standards for students entering college is not without challenges. However, the consequences of doing nothing are much more severe than the supposedly unintended – and largely hypothetical – consequences of going forward with the proposal.

Analysis and discussion: Rising to the challenge

It is not easy to raise expectations for student learning. It would be easier to leave the standards as they are, and later lament the fact that many more students enter college, but do not graduate. And lower-income students who do not graduate would continue to struggle under the double burden of having to repay student loans while earning less money than they would have with a degree.

Washington's K-12 education reform initiatives show that efforts to increase standards, although challenging, make a real difference for students. Our colleagues in K-12 continue to make great strides in challenging students, parents, teachers and administrators to identify and implement strategies to improve student learning.

K-12 education reform is only the first step in preparing Washington's students for the future. It is our responsibility to build on the foundation created by these efforts. The proposed revisions to the minimum admission standards are the next step. Adopting these standards will prepare students for success in college and success in the workplace, whichever they choose.

We should not fool ourselves – there may be significant challenges involved in implementing the proposed admission standards. It is unknown to what extent these challenges will actually occur, but by anticipating them and working together, Washington educators and policymakers can successfully address them. Increasing student success is a responsibility, not a choice.

Implementation Date

The original HECB staff proposal was to make the revised minimum college admission standards effective in 2008. This provoked criticism for providing short notice to this year's high school freshmen. The class of 2008 is already expected to complete an array of first-time requirements to receive a Certificate of Academic Achievement and graduate from high school. Students must pass the WASL, complete a culminating project, and submit a plan for high school and beyond. Students, parents and school districts are well on their way to meeting these new requirements. Adding new minimum admission standards in the same year could have the unintended consequence of interrupting this important work.

Adopting revised requirements now, while delaying implementation, would allow school districts time to prioritize their efforts. They could focus on meeting the new requirements for the class of 2008, rather than “changing horses in midstream.” Yet they also could make decisions in the context of knowing what the revised minimum admission standards will require, and when they will be required. Delaying implementation would allow districts more time to add new courses in math and science, add teachers where needed, inform students and parents of the changes, and reallocate resources.

School districts will have flexibility to determine which of their courses are equivalent to core courses

The proposed revised minimum admission standards include the statement, “The rules supersede previously established higher education coordinating board guidance and policies governing minimum basic admission standards and alternative admission requirements for freshmen.” The

proposed standards, as currently written, do not acknowledge a 1993 agreement between the four-year institutions and school districts. Under the agreement, school districts are responsible for determining which of their courses are equivalent to the minimum admission standards. The board's 1993 letter describing the agreement states:

The provosts for the six baccalaureate institutions have agreed that their institutions will no longer review high school courses for equivalence with the HECB Minimum Requirements for Admission to Public Baccalaureate Institutions.... Rather, school districts may determine what curricular patterns meet the specific HECB Minimum Requirements and certify on each student transcript what requirements have been met.

The agreement is between the four-year institutions and the school districts, and therefore does not meet the definition of “previously established higher education coordinating board guidance and policies.” The agreement is not superseded by the proposed minimum admission standards.

Students need not take “advanced” math to meet the requirements

Math heightens mental acuity and makes students sharper in all subjects. The proposed changes to the standards would add a fourth credit of math. The intent is to ensure that students retain their math skills throughout high school. As a result, many students will complete a higher level of math than they would have under the previous standards. However, the proposed standards do not directly require students to complete a higher level of math than was required by the previous standards.

Students could choose from several options to meet the proposed requirement:

- They could move to a higher level of math (pre-calculus) if they have completed intermediate algebra or integrated math III.
- They could take an algebra-based science course in place of math after completing algebra II or integrated math III.
- They could take another course in which they apply their math knowledge/skills (such as statistics, applied math, or certain career and technical courses) if the high school determines the course is equivalent to an academic core course.
- Students who successfully complete math through pre-calculus would meet the required four credits of math, even if they take it before their fourth year of high school.

Washington needs more qualified math teachers

Washington does not have enough math teachers. The state also has a shortage of special education, world languages, and science teachers. Raising the standards would not fix this. But it would create an incentive for the baccalaureate institutions, lawmakers and policymakers to work together to fill this gap as quickly as possible. The state has a responsibility to give students a good foundation in math so they can succeed in college and work. Preparing more teachers is clearly a responsibility of higher education, and the board is committed to making this issue a top priority. The board will work with baccalaureate institutions, lawmakers and policymakers to identify and implement strategies to increase the number of newly qualified teachers and to retain the state's highly qualified teachers. The board believes it is especially important to find ways to encourage highly qualified teachers to teach – and remain – in underserved areas of the state.

Students would have time to take some electives

High schools would be able to assess whether career and technical education courses satisfy academic core requirements, and identify ways that students may continue to participate in valuable career exploratory, applied, and other elective courses. However, there is no denying that in some cases, meeting the proposed standards would reduce the number of electives that students could take. The benefit to students is that as a result, they would be better prepared to succeed in college and in work.

Students would be able to take a “credit” rather than a “year-long course”

The board's initial proposal in December 2004 used the term “year-long courses.” The January 2005 draft of proposed revisions to the Washington Administrative Code instead used the term “credit” in an attempt to recognize block scheduling, in which students complete a year of coursework in one term.

Avoiding an unfunded mandate

School districts have enormous demands on their existing resources. Asking them to provide more classes to prepare students for college and for work would strain an already heavily burdened system. There is no denying that the proposed standards would require districts to examine, and in some cases, reallocate or increase the courses they offer. Finding ways to encourage highly qualified teachers to teach and stay in underserved areas would give districts more flexibility in making these decisions. And delaying implementation of the proposed standards so they do not conflict with key elements of education reform would help reduce the risk of overburdening school districts.

Colleges would have flexibility to administer admissions

Colleges and universities make admission decisions based on a variety of economic, demographic, and institutional factors – many of which change every year. The public four-year institutions estimate that between 50 and 80 percent of the students they currently admit already meet the proposed standards.

Under the proposed standards, colleges and universities would be able to continue to admit up to 15 percent of entering students who do not meet the minimum requirements, but have otherwise made a compelling case that they are ready to succeed in college. College and university administrators told the board they believe this 15 percent waiver would continue to give them sufficient flexibility.

Seat-time and competency-based college readiness requirements are both important in communicating what it takes to be successful in college and in work

Education is in a period of transition. Seat-time requirements do not necessarily measure *what* a student has learned, or *how well* he or she has learned the subject matter. Yet, while competency-based requirements can be a better measure of student learning, they are complex to develop, understand and administer. States that are making progress toward competency-based requirements have found there is a lengthy transition period where the new requirements must continue to be accompanied by seat-time requirements. We are having that same experience in Washington.

Seat-time requirements may never disappear completely. However in the future, much more emphasis should be placed on competency-based learning assessment. In the *2004 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education*, the board calls upon Washington institutions of higher education to develop competency-based college readiness requirements. Through this approach, college readiness will be expressed as a set of skills – identifying what students must know, and be able to do, in order to succeed in college. The state's Transitions Math Project has made great strides in developing such standards for math. The Transitions Math Project is funded through a combination of Gates Foundation and state monies. In addition, the HECB recently received state funding to develop similar standards for English and science.

While that work progresses, it is vital to convey to students, families, and K-12 educators the urgency to upgrade the state's minimum college admission standards for students who will reach high school age in the next few years.

Work Together to Implement the Standards

The board was asked to join with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State Board for Community and Technical College, the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, and other key stakeholders in a joint action plan. The plan is expected to cover key issues related to raising the standards. Examples include developing strategies to prepare more K-12 math and science teachers, and identifying college readiness standards in core content areas. A key issue for the joint action plan is developing strategies to communicate the college admission requirements to every student – and his or her parents – as early as middle school. The state has a responsibility to communicate what is necessary to succeed in college and in work, while students still have the opportunity to obtain these skills in high school.

Conclusion

Over the past few months, the board has made assiduous efforts to communicate the proposed college admission standards and listen to all opinions; through public hearings, presentations to many organizations, meetings, and written comments. The board received much thoughtful and pertinent input throughout the process. HECB staff have analyzed the input and brought forward for the board's consideration such challenges as timing concerns and resource constraints.

Board staff have brought forward opportunities to clarify the proposed standards, by allowing students to meet requirements by completing “credits” rather than “year-long courses,” and by recognizing the existing agreement that allows school districts to determine course equivalencies. Board staff have also identified an opportunity for the board to support school districts' efforts, by making teacher education a top priority for higher education. Based on the board's discussion during its June 23rd meeting, staff will present a recommendation for action on the proposed minimum admission standards during the board's regular meeting on July 28 in Yakima.

Raising the issue of the minimum college admission standards has shown there is a problem. Students, parents, high school teachers, school district administrators, college instructors and professors, college administrators, state policymakers – all are in agreement that Washington students deserve the best opportunity we can provide to help them succeed.

We have more work to do. In addition to raising the standards, we need to address teacher education. We look forward to developing a more meaningful P-16 framework, as called for in the board's *2004 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education*. State policymakers, too, recognize the importance of helping students make the transition to college. Their commitment to this goal is seen in several recent actions. The Legislature committed funding in the 2005-07 operating budget for developing college readiness standards. The state Senate reorganized its 2005 committee structure to create the Early Learning, K-12 and Higher Education Committee, to ensure that decisions about education are made in the context of education as a whole. And, over the next 18 months, the governor's Washington Learns task force will examine funding and policies for early learning, K-12 and higher education, and make recommendations to strengthen and improve Washington's education systems.

Revising the minimum college admissions standards is a single step in meeting the state's commitment to education. By helping students make the transition to college, we will ensure that more students succeed, in both college and work.

Appendix A: Summary of Public Comments from Five Hearings and Open Comment Period (mail, telephone, e-mail) through May 20, 2005

Appendix B: Proposed Minimum Admission Standards

Appendix C: List of Sources

Summary of Public Comments from Five Hearings and Open Comment Period (mail, telephone, e-mail) through May 20, 2005

Most people expressed support for the goal of improving students' preparation for college through more rigorous high school course work, particularly in mathematics.

There was widespread support for the goal of a broad, diverse population of students earning college degrees. There was also strong support for the need to improve student preparation as a way of ensuring success in college. Many expressed appreciation for the board's initiative to open the discussion on minimum admission standards to the public.

Several people testified that rigorous work by more high school students would better prepare them for college. Many – particularly faculty from community colleges and universities, business and industry representatives, and parents – expressed dismay at the level of preparation that students currently receive.

There was widespread agreement on the need to increase the rigor of preparation in the high school years, particularly in mathematics. Many noted that too many students are not taking math in their senior year – and some are not taking math in either the eleventh or twelfth grades. Some said the problem is not that students have not studied math, but that many have not studied math recently – and that if math coursework is not included in the senior year, many students forget what they have learned. University representatives particularly emphasized the importance of students studying math and quantitative reasoning during the fourth year of high school. A university admissions officer explained that it would not make sense for an athlete to get ready for a track meet by practicing diligently and then laying off a long time right before the race, yet this is what many students are doing with math studies. Many said the proposed admission standards would be an important step in changing this situation.

Several K-12 and university representatives noted that most students are already meeting the proposed minimum admission standards at the universities, and the public universities are already accepting students who by and large meet this requirement. There was widespread concern that all students, however, must know about these requirements in order to ensure equitable opportunity.

The majority of business and industry representatives, many speaking on behalf of business associations, spoke about the dearth of Washington students entering careers in engineering, science, and technology.

Business/industry speakers indicated they are importing too much of their workforce from outside the state; primarily because of a lack of preparation by Washington students in math and science. Speakers testified that Washington high schools are not keeping up, nor is the U.S. as a whole preparing students with adequate skills in math and science – compared to many other nations. Some suggested that Washington needs to upgrade its academic requirements as several other states have done, or are in the process of considering. In addition, numerous other

countries have higher requirements than are typical in American high schools. Speakers contended that jobs requiring technical knowledge are increasing four times faster than others, and if our students are not fully prepared, we will lose out to many other countries that are rapidly increasing the education level of their workforce. Representatives of high-technology businesses expressed particular support for the board's proposals, noting the importance of a better-educated workforce, especially in science, math, and technology.

There was widescale agreement that Washington should increase its academic requirements, and that the proposed minimum admission standards would be a positive step forward. In addition, speakers noted that students and their parents must be told – beginning in the middle-school years – about the importance of math and science coursework in high school.

Several K-12 superintendents and principals, particularly from rural schools, expressed concern about the effect of the proposed minimum admission standards on staffing.

There was widespread concern that schools would not have enough well-qualified instructors to teach the additional courses in math and science that would be needed to meet the new requirements. Finding certified teachers is already a problem for small districts. Of particular concern is the need to ensure that if the plan goes forward, that teachers are fully prepared to provide the additional coursework. Furthermore, it would likely take high schools more time than is planned in the 2008 timeline to sufficiently increase their staffing.

Several K-12 educators expressed concern about the need for universities to increase their preparation of new math and science teachers.

Many who testified noted that the need to provide remedial courses at the high schools for students who do not pass the WASL could limit the number of faculty available to teach additional math courses. The concern was also expressed that because the additional math requirement would take effect in 2008 – the first year Washington students would be required to pass the WASL in order to graduate – a focus on higher-level math coursework could reduce the extra assistance available to these students.

Some indicated that the proposal could create an increased need for career guidance in K-12 if the new standards had a negative effect on career and technical education.

K-12 career and technical education directors and several parents raised concerns about the potential effect on career and technical education.

Some who testified addressed the issue of high school students who are not college bound but are more interested in moving directly and quickly into the workforce. If the board's proposal were adopted and the new admission standards became, in effect, the 'de facto' high school curriculum in the state, more students might drop out of school, or be unable to participate in occupational training pathways.

Many people expressed concern that additional math, science and college-prep coursework would not allow for electives – particularly the career and technical education courses that are so important to many students. There was widespread support for preserving the strengths of career and technical education; particularly from parents, career and technical education staff, school principals, and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board.

Career and technical education program directors suggested that the board's proposal could result in a serious decline in high schools' ability to offer career and technical education, particularly through Skills Centers. Because Skills Centers typically require a commitment of three periods out of the day, these students would have a more difficult time scheduling both career and technical coursework, along with the three core courses called for in the proposal. Rural schools indicated that they would be particularly affected by this change.

Many career and technical education directors suggested that school districts should have the authority to determine whether their elective courses in career and technical education programs would be able to satisfy the academic core requirements (e.g., applied physics, applied math). This authority would help offer additional choices for students and enable many more to meet their college requirements in courses in which they could apply their math and science knowledge and skills.

A number of those who testified raised concerns that the revised admission standards would lead to increased “tracking” of students – into either “college bound” or “non-college bound,” which could create additional barriers for students.

Several people testified that under current practices in some high schools, students who do not appear to be college bound are often moved into career or vocational programs, which results in “tracking” students as either college bound or non-college bound. Efforts to develop career and technical education programs that are academically rigorous and move students from high school to two-year colleges have helped reduce tracking and have better prepared students for the needs of the workforce. There is concern, however, that implementation of the proposed minimum admission standards could lead to a return to tracking over time, because career and technical education programs could diminish as scarce resources are moved to academic core courses. Some testified that the revised standards could result in high school counselors advising students out of career and technical education if they are “perceived” to be college bound.

Several people noted that one long-term result of the proposed standards could be an increased high school drop-out rate, particularly if students who are at risk of dropping out or have dropped out and re-entered the education system perceive a lack of relevant courses, or a lack of courses that are geared toward alternative learning styles.

Some people noted that many students would see themselves falling behind as they moved through high school, and could lose hope of ever attending college. Others expressed concern that the revised standards might limit opportunities for students who are late bloomers.

Several people expressed concern that the revised admission standards would negatively affect disadvantaged communities, particularly students of color. Some people noted that when we make it more difficult for certain groups of students (who may not come through the pipeline as readily as others) to have access to needed courses, we will be faced with issues of equitability and equal opportunity.

Some expressed the need to look at improving K-12 and early education systems so that children are better prepared to meet higher standards long before high school. To implement these standards without giving students the tools they need to achieve the standards seemed presumptuous to some who testified – particularly in disadvantaged communities where children are denied many of those tools at an early age.

Most K-12 educators urged the board to delay the effective date of the new rules until 2010.

The issue expressed most frequently concerned the timing of the proposed change. The board's proposal would make the new standards effective for students graduating from high school in 2008. The class of 2008, this year's ninth graders, is also the first high school class that must pass the WASL in order to graduate. There was widespread agreement that it would be unfair to change the rules for these students in midstream.

Numerous K-12 educators indicated that high schools do not have sufficient time to make the changes needed to respond to the board's proposal of more rigorous standards. Frequently mentioned examples of significant changes that high schools would need to make to respond to the proposed admission standards included: 1) adding new courses in math and science; 2) adding more staff; 3) informing students and parents of the changes; and 4) reallocating resources.

Several high school superintendents and principals explained that their high schools are currently undergoing reforms as a result of both state and federal (*No Child Left Behind*) requirements. Schools are focused on getting students prepared for the WASL. The State Board of Education has increased high school graduation requirements, and schools are implementing a performance-based system that includes a senior project. High schools are overwhelmed with these changes, and most educators said the proposed timeline is simply too short.

A majority of those who offered testimony recommended that the board delay action until at least 2010, to give 'due notice' of the change while helping assess schools' capacity to provide students the opportunity to meet the revised standards. Many advised the board that if the plan is implemented too quickly, it will not succeed.

Many people called for putting off the decision about any implementation date until further study, citing numerous school reform initiatives that are currently being implemented in Washington's schools, and noting the state is just beginning to see the positive outcomes of those actions. Several people advised the board to slow down its process to allow time to assess the current initiatives – before new initiatives (and potentially unfunded mandates) are put into place.

Some people did acknowledge the board is being asked to be sensitive to concerns, but should be aware that there is never a good time for changes such as these.

A number of people addressed the issue of remediation, raising questions about the extent of the problem and the need, therefore, to make changes in the standards at this time. Others provided considerable anecdotal evidence about the severity of the problem, calling for revisions in the current admission standards as a needed remedy.

Some speakers contended that students will require less remediation if they complete the coursework called for in the proposed minimum admission standards, especially in math. They called for the implementation of more rigorous standards for this reason.

Most K-12 representatives contended that remediation is primarily a concern of the two-year colleges, and that only a small percentage of students who enroll in the four-year universities need remediation. For this reason, they opposed moving to more rigorous standards, particularly in math, at this time.

By contrast, several university spokespersons contended that remediation is a serious concern for their institutions, and that many students do come to them requiring remediation. And, students select college majors and future career options based in large part on their preparation. Some students cannot enter careers that require higher math preparation, closing doors that could have remained open had students completed more math in high school.

Some community college faculty noted that remediation in the community college system is simply not as effective as they would like it to be. For some students, the first year of college is too late to catch up if they are not adequately prepared in math. Once a student passes a certain window of opportunity, the data indicates that they will never do as well.

Some people spoke about the occupational programs at community colleges (such as dental hygiene, electronics, and nursing) that do require a significant amount of math preparation. Students and their parents must be advised about this. An 'open admissions policy' at the two-year colleges does not mean there is open admission into specific degree programs at the two-year colleges.

Some who offered testimony – particularly community college and high school math teachers – recommended that high schools offer 'refresher math' in the senior year without requiring the higher level of math attainment that the policy calls for as a way of easing the remediation problem.

[This testimony revealed a misunderstanding in the board's proposal, which would allow high schools the authority to determine which courses would satisfy core course requirements for college admission. This type of course could potentially be offered to meet the fourth year math requirement once students have completed the required level of math; which is the current intermediate algebra II level.]

Many questioned the board's credit-based (seat-time) standards, as the state is currently moving to competency-based standards.

Several people noted that the proposed minimum admission standards call for increasing “credits” in math and other college preparatory courses – which amounts to a seat-time requirement at the very time we should be moving toward competency-based standards. Several K-12 educators called for school districts to have the ability to determine the equivalency options for students to obtain essential academic skills through competency-based approaches.

Some asked for college readiness standards with input from the universities, and referenced the HECB's earlier work on competency-based standards.

Several high school principals, teachers, and counselors indicated that the high schools need clarification of what constitutes a college core course (college preparatory courses).

Many K-12 educators raised concerns about high schools’ applied courses – such as in the Tech Prep curriculum – asking whether the schools or universities should determine equivalency. If the proposal goes forward, course equivalency must be considered and clarified during implementation. Many applied courses should count as academic core courses. Several people asked for clarification about what is an algebra-based science course.

There were concerns that the requirements were calling for *year-long courses*, and that this would be incompatible with many high school schedules. Many high schools have moved into block scheduling in which they offer 90-minute courses, enabling students to complete year-long courses in half-year sequences.

[This testimony revealed a misunderstanding in the board's proposal. The board changed its terminology from “year-long courses” as used at the December board meeting, to “credits” as used in the proposed rules presented at the January meeting. Some respondents requested that the board clarify the confusion between requiring a year-long course vs. a unit or credit.]

Several of those who offered testimony, particularly high school counselors, raised concerns about the effect of the proposed minimum admission standards on dual-credit programs.

K-12 educators and some parents noted that more of their students are beginning algebra in the pre-high school years, which puts them on a faster track to complete math requirements in high school. It is not unusual for a student to complete requirements through intermediate algebra by the sophomore year. Some people asked how to plan for these students under the proposed standards – whether through Advanced Placement, Running Start, or other alternatives. Running Start particularly affects the state’s community colleges, so more dialogue will be needed if courses are to be expanded to accommodate students who wish to pursue a more rigorous, earlier preparation.

Many expressed concern that the emphasis on core courses would result in fewer students able to take elective courses in the arts – such as music and drama.

Several high school principals spoke about their strong arts programs and the negative effect the proposed standards would have on these programs down the road, as resources would have to be allocated away from these courses in order to expand math and science coursework, and as students would have less time for electives. They noted that high schools will have to increase their math staff, which will likely create reductions in other areas and could shift resources away from the arts.

Many parents commended the arts programs in which their children are involved, and raised concerns about how students would be able to participate in arts courses given potential scheduling conflicts with the increased academic core requirements.

There was strong interest from all sectors in joint action planning and collaborative efforts to support K-12 and higher education planning and implementation.

Several K-12 representatives cited the need for more opportunities to discuss issues around college preparation with the colleges and universities. Many recommended that the board hold off on changes to minimum admission standards until there has been extensive discussion – including on-site at high schools across the state with students, parents, teachers, administrators, and school board members. The impact on the high schools will be serious and the board must take the schools into consideration as part of the proposal. Many noted that this is a K-20 issue, rather than a K-12 issue.

Many in the K-12 community criticized the board for not communicating proposed changes early enough, and not engaging them in a dialogue. However, many individuals indicated that there was an extensive process to develop the proposal for new minimum admission standards that included state education agencies and boards, representatives from the six public baccalaureate institutions, the State Math Council, Partnership for Learning, individual school counselors, principals, teachers, registrars from higher education institutions, and business/industry groups.

Many people supported having standards that clearly communicate the universities' entrance requirements, which would help students prepare better in high school. A clear, well communicated policy is needed for all students and their parents. Some people noted that while many students say they plan on going to college, they don't take enough courses to truly prepare for that decision. We need to clearly communicate what the standards are.

There was widespread concern that the board's policy will not get to students early enough to make a difference. Students and parents need information as early as middle school to facilitate their understanding of the importance of solid academic preparation to prepare for future success in college and the workforce. More statewide attention should be given to various communication tools to get to students earlier. Also, the proposal does not sufficiently speak to pre-high school students.

Some people raised concerns that it would be difficult to fit all these courses in for the average student on an Individual Education Plan (special education) or a 504 plan (disabled students) along with WASL requirements.

Some respondents indicated the proposed standards would inequitably affect some students who already are having a hard time fitting in all the classes they need – along with WASL requirements; specifically special education and disabled students.

Some K-12 educators raised concern about the need for the universities to raise the current 15 percent waiver in order to enroll freshman who may be deficient in their completion of academic core courses, but who would otherwise have the capability to enter and likely succeed in college.

No speakers from the universities called for raising the 15 percent threshold for freshman admission, as they currently do not come close to using their 15 percent allowance. For students who have special interests (such as art or music), the baccalaureate institution representatives noted they have always been able to review alternative circumstances, and the institutions will continue to give those students a chance. The colleges want to admit better prepared students who can succeed. These changes will force a comprehensive review by the universities of the student, to look at the whole student and not just grades.

There was widespread support to eliminate the Admission Index.

No one testified in favor of retaining the Admission Index. Many people indicated that we have emphasized grades and test scores too much in the past, and that what is most important is a rigorous curriculum. K-12 teachers and parents especially noted that students worry about their GPA too much, and we need policies that encourage students to take more difficult courses.

Proposed Minimum Admission Standards

Goals of the minimum basic admission standards are to ensure that:

- Freshmen selected to enroll at the state’s public baccalaureate institutions are ready to succeed academically and earn bachelor’s degrees;
- The amount of remedial instruction required for recent high school graduates is minimized;
- Universities recognize that experiences and activities beyond academic achievement can contribute to a successful college application; and
- Students and families understand that completion of a rigorous curriculum in high school is critically important to prepare for success in college.

	<i>Current Standards</i>	<i>Proposed Rules in WACs January 2005¹</i>
Timeline		These rules take effect for all freshmen seeking admission to the state’s public baccalaureate institutions during and after the summer 2008 academic term.
Academic Distribution Requirements		Students must take a minimum of 3 credits of core courses each year of high school, including the senior year.
<i>English</i>	4 years , including 3 years of literature and composition.	4 credits of English, including 3 credits of literature and composition; may include one credit of elective English, such as creative writing, journalistic writing and English as a second language.
<i>Mathematics</i>	3 years , including algebra, geometry and advanced mathematics.	4 credits of mathematics, with at least 1 credit completed in senior year of high school, including: 1 credit each of algebra, geometry, and intermediate algebra or 3 credits of integrated math through integrated math III; and 1 credit that may include courses such as a math elective, statistics, or an algebra-based science course.
<i>Science</i>	2 years , including 1 year of laboratory science (equivalent of biology, chemistry, physics, or principles of technology). Note: Students applying for college freshman admission beginning in fall 2010 must have completed 2 years of laboratory science, including 1 year of algebra-based biology, chemistry or physics.	2 credits of laboratory science, including 1 credit of algebra-based biology, chemistry, or physics. Note: the requirement for 2 years of laboratory science, including 1 year of algebra-based biology, chemistry or physics is moved up from 2010 to 2008.

¹The December 2004 proposal submitted to the board referred to “year long courses.” In the proposed WACs approved by the board at its January 2005 meeting, the wording was changed to “credits” in recognition of schools that schedule an equivalent course in a shorter time period (block scheduling by many high schools results in year-long courses being offered in one term, or half-year).

Minimum Admission Standards - Increasing College Readiness as a Means to Increasing Student Success

Appendix B

<i>Foreign Language</i>	2 years of the same foreign language, Native American language, or American Sign language.	2 credits of the same foreign language, Native American language, or American Sign language.
<i>Arts</i>	1 year of fine, visual or performing arts or electives from any of the other required subjects.	1 credit of fine, visual, or performing arts, or 1 additional credit in math, English, social science, laboratory science, foreign language, native American language or American sign language.
Minimum Grade Point Average	Minimum unweighted cumulative Grade Point Average of 2.0 on a 4.0 scale.	No change
Admission Index (Each student receives a score based on grade point average and college admission test scores.)	Achieve a minimum score of at least 13 at Central, Eastern and Western Washington universities and The Evergreen State College, and at least 28 at Washington State University and the University of Washington.	Eliminate the Admission Index requirement
Required tests	SAT or ACT	SAT or ACT. Students unable to provide standardized test scores may petition the institution for a waiver. International students are not required to provide test scores. No more than 5 percent of the new freshmen enrolled annually at each institution may receive waivers from this requirement. Note: Students who pass all sections of the WASL will be determined to have completed the first two years of high school core requirements in English and math.
Comprehensive Review	Institutions may admit students who do not meet the minimum standards by considering such non-academic characteristics as a personal essay, community activities, personal circumstances or special talents. No more than 15 percent of new freshmen at each institution may be admitted through this alternative process.	No change

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