

Washington state is at a point of choice. Right now, our high school graduation requirements guarantee that many students are ineligible for university entrance and unprepared for community college and work training. Over the next few years, we can address one of two challenges: We can choose not to change our graduation requirements and struggle to help the droves of students we are currently failing; or we can strengthen graduation requirements, work to provide the necessary resources and make sure more and more students leave our system prepared.

Washington Leads supports the State Board of Education's CORE 24 graduation requirements proposal and refuses to accept a status quo that continues to leave students behind. This document provides responses to the most common issues raised in opposition to CORE 24. For more information on the CORE 24 proposal, please visit the State Board of Education's [website](#).

**Issue: There isn't enough flexibility in CORE 24. Once students decide their course of study, they won't be able to switch later on. It is unfair to demand this of young people.**

**Response:** What's unfair is ultimately closing students off to study and training after high school due to lack of preparation. This is what the system is inflicting on students right now. CORE 24 is designed so that ALL students receive the courses they need to succeed after high school—whatever path they choose. Within CORE 24, a student may elect to “emphasize” in either a college or career pathway. At no point, however, does this “lock a student in” to a certain path. He or she can switch at any time and still be eligible for continued study or training.

**Issue: CORE 24 is really only geared toward four-year universities as an outcome.**

**Response:** The Board has gone to great lengths to ensure that CORE 24 is not just geared toward four-year universities, but aligned to the entry requirements and preparation standards of apprenticeship and technical programs, as well. The CORE's “career emphasis” reflects this and allows students to tailor their course of study (using electives and career concentration credits) to the training that best suits their plans.

**Issue: There simply isn't enough funding.**

**Response:** Funding is always a large concern when any new education reform is made. The Basic Education Funding Task Force is currently studying the definition of “basic education” and has been informed of the Board's work to institute a diploma that prepares all students for the world of college and work. They continue to watch the Board closely and will make their recommendations in September.

However, with 41 states requiring more credits of their high school students, should funding really be an excuse for Washington to continue the status quo? Why not set the bar high and leave it up to the legislature to grant or refuse funding?

**Issue: When do students who fail classes fit credit retrieval and still graduate on time?**

**Response:** The Board has built a flexible set of electives into CORE 24, which could be used by a student in need of credit retrieval.

**Issue: There is a lack of high school counselors (ratio of 1:700 in middle school and 1:500 in high school).**

**Response:** Navigation 101 may be the partial answer. We may never get enough counselors, but many districts throughout the state who have adopted the Navigation 101 program have seen incredible transformations in student achievement—without significantly increasing their staff.

Additionally, if CORE 24 is properly implemented, students won't have to rely as heavily on counselors to figure out what courses they need to graduate prepared for further training: All students will be automatically enrolled in the necessary courses. This would especially help poor and minority students who have traditionally been counseled out of rigorous classes.

**Issue: This is a top-down imposition that will take away local control over credits.**

**Response:** By state law, districts still have the ability to determine the types of courses to be used to fulfill state requirements based on the needs and desires of the larger community. Districts also retain the ability to control the content of the Culminating Project and High School and Beyond Plan.

**Issue: This will create huge scheduling problems for principals.**

**Response:** There will undoubtedly be a number of implementation challenges for CORE 24. However, the Board is committed to helping schools and districts by creating and communicating best practices for implementation. Additionally, the switch to CORE 24 will not be overnight. The Board is currently discussing phasing-in CORE 24 beginning in 2013, with full implementation in 2016.

**Issue: What's the hurry? Shouldn't this be a longer-term process?**

**Response:** To delay only compounds the injustice that in 2005, only 31 percent of African American students and 28 percent of Hispanic students completed the courses needed to even be eligible to apply to Washington's public four-year colleges or universities. Our system will never be ready unless we take the first step and make a commitment to prepare our students for the challenges that lay ahead.

The Board is also blessed with the unique opportunity to do this work at the same time the state is determining a new structure for basic education funding. By delaying we miss any chance for collaboration and complementary policy.

**Issue: Certified CTE courses aren't available in all districts. What will those districts do?**

**Response:** The Board is considering changing the CORE's CTE requirement to a more flexible set of electives known as "career concentration" courses that could include more math and science for students focusing on STEM or more art classes for art students. This would provide students even more flexibility along their paths.

**Issue: Struggling students won't be able to cope with this framework.**

**Response:** Current summer school students have given the Board feedback that this type of policy framework would have actually saved them from summer school and retaking courses. Even failing students recognize that the right blend of solid expectations and sequenced courses would allow them to succeed and get back on track.