

July 17, 2008

Washington State Board of Education
P.O. Box 47206
600 Washington Street SE, Room 253
Olympia, WA 98504-7206

Dear Chair Ryan and Members of the SBE:

As an association of Hispanic businesspeople and entrepreneurs, the Washington State Hispanic Chamber of Commerce is committed to facilitating the development of economic power, educational excellence and social equity. That is why we whole-heartedly support your work to institute the CORE 24 graduation requirements and your dedication to the goal of college and work readiness for all students.

In 2005, only 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 students have long suffered the absence of college-aligned graduation requirements and are often counseled out of the classes they would need to enter training beyond high school. This course-taking gap is a precursor to the college-going gap and an eventual gap in the ability of young adults to earn a family wage.

Many students who are able to pursue post-secondary education find their aspirations are further stunted by a lack of preparation. Most recently, 67 percent of Hispanic students were forced to take and pay for remedial, high school level coursework before beginning community college—right after they were awarded a high school diploma.

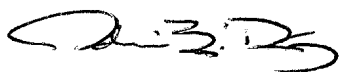
This is an unacceptable inequity that we believe must be addressed by state policy. The college and work ready requirements in CORE 24 provide access to rigorous courses for *all* students and represent the surest way to guarantee equity in our schools.

Some may say our system isn't ready or that more course requirements will cause more students to dropout. To this we say: To delay only compounds current injustice. 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. High expectations encourage high levels of learning and we continue to hear from dropouts that they would have stayed in school if their coursework had more challenging.

We encourage you to take action that will ensure all students are given the opportunities they deserve. Rigorous coursework can help to close the achievement gap.

The Washington State Hispanic Chamber of Commerce is available to assist you in any way possible. For questions or comments about our advocacy and communication efforts please contact us at 206-625-9655. Thank you for your consideration in this critical work.

Sincerely,



Adrian Diaz
Education Chair
Washington State Hispanic Chamber of Commerce