

BELLINGHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
School Administration

March 30, 2007

**MEMORANDUM**

*Information*

**TO:** Dr. Dale Kinsley, Superintendent

**FROM:** Sherrie Brown, Executive Director of School Administration

**SUBJECT: Recommendations for Changes in Graduation Requirements**

In today's world, high school graduates must possess advanced skills and knowledge to successfully pursue a college degree or seek employment in a highly competitive, global workforce. Traditional comprehensive high schools were designed to educate efficiently, providing different programs or tracks for students based on their perceived academic abilities. Top-performing students were guided through a more challenging academic track to prepare them for college. Other students were guided into less rigorous academic courses or vocational programs with the assumption that they were not college material. These approaches are no longer adequate for preparing all students for life in the knowledge economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Low expectations for high school graduates are unacceptable today when the ability to think analytically, communicate effectively and solve complex problems is essential. All students must be expected to develop the core knowledge and skills sought by both colleges and workplaces.

Preparation for higher education and the workforce are not the only reasons for improving high school education in the United States. The health of our democracy depends on it. Democratic institutions require an educated citizenry that is knowledgeable, reflective and able to embrace its civic responsibilities. Young people must leave school with an informed point of view, knowledge of the world, a capacity to grapple with complex problems and a willingness and ability to engage and communicate with people different from themselves.

Our district is guided by a strategic plan that reflects high standards and expectations for performance by students; high standards for school and district performance; and active involvement by a diverse community. There is a commitment within the Bellingham School District to having all students graduate prepared for college, careers and citizenship. College readiness is generally defined as the level of preparation our graduates need to enroll and succeed in postsecondary institutions and the courses they need in order to be eligible for admission to four-year colleges. It is assumed that preparation of students to meet these goals is not just the responsibility of the high schools, but requires a K-12 system effort. It is imperative basic skills be acquired in the years preceding high school that support student success in their high school courses of study.

The High School Graduation Requirements Task Force was formed to review the current level of preparation and expectation the district has for our graduates. Members of the community and representatives from all four high schools participated on the task force. At times, experts were invited to task force meetings who could provide additional insight into our discussions. For example, when we discussed math graduation requirements, the math chairs from all three high schools joined the task force. In addition, the world language chairs from all three high schools joined us for our discussions about the world language recommendations. The task force reviewed the district strategic plan, current district graduation requirements, data regarding graduation rates, college readiness and college/university entrance requirements. Based upon their study of these issues, the task force is recommending changes in Bellingham's graduation requirements and they have included a proposed timeline for implementation. The task force believes that with these new requirements, our graduates will have the option to go into careers in engineering, arts, education, vocational trades, medicine, and other professions because they will be prepared to make these choices.

Changes in graduation requirements would only affect future students, not those currently in high school. The task force has intentionally proposed a gradual phasing-in of the new requirements to ensure that structures are in place throughout our K-12 system to support all students in experiencing success in meeting the new requirements. English would be phased in first and the changes would begin with this year's seventh grade class. Math and Technology Connections changes would begin with this year's sixth grade class. The world language requirements would start with this year's fifth grade class. Phasing in the new requirements will provide our district with time to adjust staffing needs, modify schedules, provide professional development for staff, and purchase additional instructional resources.

As part of the review process, the task force thoroughly explored how changes would impact individual student schedules and course choices. The task force believes that the following recommendations support students in graduating college ready, but do **not** prevent them from taking four or more years of elective classes. Students with a very full schedule that includes four years of mathematics, four years of English, two years of world language and four years of science can also take four full years of an elective such as music, art or technology courses (see attachment #2 for possible scheduling scenarios that include new recommendations). In addition, the task force has outlined suggestions for classes and course sequences that will be forwarded to the curriculum department for their consideration.

### **Task Force Recommendations:**

Students in high school are expected to complete all requirements to be eligible for graduation. Since each student has a unique set of needs and abilities, it can be expected that their high school experiences and the amount of growth observed will vary widely among students; however, all students must meet the minimum requirements as defined in board policy 2410 in order to graduate from the Bellingham School District. Since the last review of district graduation requirements in 2004, the BSD has committed, in the district strategic plan, to having all our graduates ready for college, career and citizenship. We believe that the following recommendations will support the district's goal.

## English

Current BSD Requirement:	3.5 credits
Required for College/University Entrance:	4.0 credits
<b>Task Force Recommendation:</b>	<b>4.0 credits</b>
Implementation Recommendation:	Beginning with the class of 2012 (this year's seventh grade class)

The task force is recommending the addition of a .5 English credit requirement. They recommend consideration be given to allowing .5 speech, .5 Culminating Project and other English course choices to be added to the English options that could fulfill this additional requirement.

### 1. Mathematics

Current BSD Requirement:	2.0 credits
Required for College/University Entrance:	3.0 credits
<b>Task Force Recommendation:</b>	<b>3.0 credits through Algebra II</b>
Implementation Recommendation:	Beginning with the class of 2013 (this year's sixth grade class)

The task force is recommending the addition of a 1.0 math credit requirement:

- Students must earn three (3) credits in mathematics through Algebra II and meet state minimum proficiency standards in math as demonstrated on state assessments/requirements.
- Students who do not pass the WASL are required to take math through their senior year or through Algebra II and meet state minimum proficiency in math as demonstrated on state assessments/requirements.

### 3. World Language

Current BSD Requirement:	0 credits
Required for College/University Entrance:	2.0 credits in one language
<b>Task Force Recommendation:</b>	<b>2.0 credits in one language</b>
Implementation Recommendation:	Beginning with the class of 2014 (this year's fifth grade class)

The task force is recommending the addition of a 2.0 world language credit requirement. Both credits must be earned in one language e.g., two years of Spanish, German, French, etc. They also recommend that the Curriculum Department examine alternative ways for students to earn world language credits. Suggested alternatives/recommendations include:

- Providing the opportunity for students to earn one of the two world language credits in middle school.
- Allowing students to earn one of the two credits by demonstrating proficiency in a language relative to a nationally recognized standard, such as those established by the National American Council of Teaching World Language Standards.
- Developing a process that would allow individual students with unique circumstances to appeal their situation to the building principal e.g., students who transfer into the BSD after the first semester of their junior year from a district that did not have a World language requirement.

- Providing alternative ways for students to earn credit if they have proficiency in a language not offered in the Bellingham School District e.g., Punjabi or Chinese.

#### 4. Technology Connections

Current BSD Requirement:	.5 credit
Required for College/University Entrance:	0 credits
<b>Task Force Recommendation:</b>	<b>0 credits</b>
Implementation Recommendation:	Beginning with the class of 2013 (this year's sixth grade class)

Currently all students must earn a .5 credit in Technology Connections. They may waive Technology Connections if they can demonstrate competency through a challenge process. Ann Reed, Director of Instructional Technology and Libraries, informed the task force about new guidance from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation that will now require students to demonstrate competencies in the skills currently taught in Technology Connections by the end of the eighth grade year. Based upon this information, the task force recommends that Technology Connections continue to be required for the classes of 2007 through 2012. Beginning with the class of 2013, Technology Connections would no longer be required in high school because the skills students need will be embedded throughout their course work in middle school. This proposal provides two years for Gigi Morganti, Director of Career and Technical Education (CTE), to work with CTE staff to identify high school courses other than Technology Connections that can fulfill the occupational education credit.

The Graduation Requirements Task Force reviewed other content areas including science, physical education, health, arts and social studies but is not recommending any additional changes. At this time, our district's requirements meet or exceed the Higher Education Coordinating Board's (HECB) requirements in these areas for entrance into colleges and universities.

Members of the Graduation Requirements Task Force will be available at the April 5, 2007 school board meeting to answer any questions about these recommendations.

#### Attachments:

1. Comparison of College/University Entrance Requirements and Bellingham School District Graduation Requirements with Recommended Changes
2. Scheduling Scenarios Showing New Graduation Requirement Recommendations

**Comparison of College/University Entrance Requirements and Bellingham School District  
Graduation Requirements with Recommended Changes**

<b>Content Area</b>	<b>HECB College/University Entrance Requirements</b>	<b>Current BSD Graduation Requirements</b>	<b>Task Force Recommendations</b>
<b>English</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>4.0</b> <i>Class of 2012</i> <i>(7<sup>th</sup> Graders—2006-07)</i>
<b>Math</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>3.0</b> <i>Class of 2013</i> <i>(6<sup>th</sup> Graders —2006-07)</i>
<b>Science</b>	<b>2.0 – 4.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>No change</b>
<b>Social Studies</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>No change</b>
<b>Occupational Education</b>	<b>No Recommendation</b>	<b>.5 Tech Connections .5 Occupational Ed.</b>	<b>1.0 w/oTech Connection</b> <i>Class of 2013</i> <i>(6<sup>th</sup> Graders—2006-07)</i>
<b>Physical Education</b>	<b>No Recommendation</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>No change</b>
<b>Health</b>	<b>No Recommendation</b>	<b>.5</b>	<b>No change</b>
<b>World Language</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2.0</b> <i>Class of 2014</i> <i>(5<sup>th</sup> Graders—2006-07)</i>
<b>Arts</b>	<b>0 – .5</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>No change</b>
<b>Other Courses</b>	<b>No Recommendation</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>5.0</b>
		<b>Total Required for Graduation (23)</b>	<b>No Change</b>

## Scheduling Scenarios Showing New Graduation Requirement Recommendations

Grade	Period	Schedule 1		Schedule 2		Schedule 3		Schedule 4	
		1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>
9	1	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English
	2	Algebra	Algebra	Geometry	Geometry	Geometry	Geometry	Algebra 1-b	Algebra 1-b
	3	Science	Science	Science	Science	Science	Science	Science	Science
	4	PE	PE	Social Studies	PE	Social Studies	PE	Social Studies	
	5	Social Studies		World Lang.	World Lang.	World Lang.	World Lang.	PE	PE
	6			Arts or OcEd	Arts or OcEd	Arts or OcEd	Arts or OcEd		
10	1	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English
	2	Geometry	Geometry	Algebra II	Algebra II	Algebra II	Algebra II	Geometry	Geometry
	3	Science	Science	Social Studies	Social Studies	Science	Science	Social Studies	Social Studies
	4	Social Studies	Social Studies	Science	Science	Social Studies	Social Studies	Science	Science
	5	Health	PE	World Lang.	World Lang.	World Lang.	World Lang.	PE	Health
	6			Arts or OcEd	Arts or OcEd	Arts or OcEd	Arts or OcEd		
11	1	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English
	2	Algebra II	Algebra II	Math	Math	Math	Math	Math Support	Math Support
	3	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies	Science	Science	Social Studies	Social Studies
	4	OcEd	OcEd	Science	Science	Social Studies	Social Studies	World Lang.	World Lang.
	5	World Lang.	World Lang.	Health	PE	Health	PE	OcEd	OcEd
	6			Arts or OcEd	Arts or OcEd	Arts or OcEd	Arts or OcEd		
12	1	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English
	2	Social Studies		Math	Math	Math	Math	Math Support	Math Support
	3	Arts	Arts	Social Studies	PE	Science	Science	World Lang.	World Lang.
	4	World Lang.	World Lang.	Arts or OcEd	Arts or OcEd	Social Studies	PE	Social Studies	
	5					Arts or OcEd	Arts or OcEd	Arts	Arts
	6								
Summary:		4.0 English 3.0 Math 3.0 Social Studies 2.0 Science 2.0 World Language 1.5 PE 1.0 OcEd 1.0 Arts 0.5 Health		4.0 English 4.0 Math 3.0 Social Studies 3.0 Science 2.0 World Language 1.5 PE 1.0 OcEd 4.0 Arts or OcEd 0.5 Health		4.0 English 4.0 Math 3.0 Social Studies 4.0 Science 2.0 World Language 1.5 PE 1.0 OcEd 4.0 Arts or OcEd 0.5 Health		4.0 English 4.0 Math 3.0 Social Studies 2.0 Science 2.0 World Language 1.5 PE 1.0 OcEd 1.0 Arts 0.5 Health	

Note: (1) Yellow spaces indicate open classes that may be filled with other courses, e.g. Culminating Project or additional courses from any department.