

From: [Cohn, Gary](#)
To: [EPS.Maillist](#)
Subject: Graduation Requirements & World Languages
Date: Tuesday, December 08, 2015 8:53:33 AM
Attachments: [image003.png](#)

Dear Colleague:

Good morning! As always, things are “happening” in our district. We’ve some exciting accomplishments of which to be proud, and some pivotal decisions are necessary to respond to state requirements and to our strategic plan. By the way, this is a long email, but I think it’s worth slogging through it all.

SOME EXCITING NEWS!

In case you’ve not yet heard, Garfield Elementary is a 2015 *Washington School of Distinction*. Only 92 schools in the state earned the award this year, representing the top 5 percent of Washington’s schools. We’ll be honoring Garfield’s staff at a school board meeting on Jan. 26, 2016 if you’d like to join that congratulatory celebration.

This is *Computer Science Education Week*! You may already know this, judging by the news of all the computer science activities happening in all of our schools this week. [Code.org](#) claims this is the largest event in history, and we’re “in”!

On Wednesday, a number of schools will be showcasing computer science skills for the public at the Community Resource Center from 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. I will be learning how to code from some high school students – right along with members of the school board. Please feel welcome to join us!

This weekend our schools will be competing in the FIRST Robotics event at Glacier Peak High School in Snohomish. You might enjoy watching our own Robotics teams compete right in our neighborhood this weekend!

NEWS ABOUT POTENTIAL CHANGES AHEAD

At its meeting tonight, our school board will consider decisions on two separate, but interrelated actions that impact how we deliver middle and high school coursework and revise our systems to better prepare students with the skills and knowledge they must have to be college and career ready.

If our school board approves [Agenda Item 14.03](#), eighth-grade students in Everett Public Schools will be able to choose to take Spanish as an elective class starting in fall 2016. In doing so, those students could earn high school credit toward graduation and start on a path to five years of Spanish language study, including two Advanced Placement Spanish Language and Culture courses.

If the board approves [Agenda Item 14.04](#), our timeline for requiring 24 credits to graduate will be extended for two years. This means the classes of 2019 and 2020 will be required to earn 22 credits to graduate, and the 24 credit requirement will be delayed until the class of 2021 and beyond. In other words, instead of this year's freshmen needing to earn two more credits to graduate, that

requirement is extended until the class of 2021 - this year's seventh grade students. If the board takes this action, we will join nearly 80 other school districts, which have already decided on a two-year extension. Together, these districts represent nearly half (46 percent) of the state's students.

WHY ARE THESE CHANGES BEING CONSIDERED?

The state passed a law in 2014 that requires 24 credits in specific subjects in all school districts no later than for the class of 2019. The law provides districts an option to extend the implementation by one or two years. Adding world language in middle school is one of many ways the district can provide students more support to meet that requirement. Systems designed for students to earn 22 credits will not meet the needs of all students to earn 24 by 2019, which is when we had originally planned to institute that requirement.

It comes down to a matter of time. We are funded for six high school class periods in four years. $6 \times 4 = 24$. There is no room for failure in this 6X4 box. The students now struggling to achieve 22 credits are those for whom we have an even higher obligation to rethink how we deliver rigorous course work and the support necessary for each student to graduate college and career ready.

Adding more classes at middle school that can count as high school credit is one way of “enhancing” our systems to support students. The new 24-credit requirements include two years of world language. Students who choose to take and pass Spanish as a middle school elective will have a jump start on that requirement. This will be a continuation of strategic work we have done to make more high school classes available to middle school students, for example Washington State History, freshman English, and advanced math and science classes.

However, this middle school Spanish elective and extending the timeline to implement the 24-credit requirement another two years are not the only steps we must take to rethink and revamp our systems.

I chose to approach this 24-credit work authentically, rather than merely out of compliance. That means we didn't just add the easiest credits possible. We assembled a large team of people to study the implications of moving to 24 credits, and to develop options and detailed plans to accomplish this goal. We also created a study group through our recent contract bargained with the EEA, a group that is just getting started on this work and needs time to do its job.

We already know it's not enough to simply 'require' students to get the credits; we must make it possible for them to do so and challenge and encourage them to take advantage of that possibility. Requiring more world language, more science and more math is the right thing to do to prepare students for their futures. It's our obligation to do so. With more time, stable, ample funding and stakeholder collaboration, we can change how students earn credits today.

What I mean by “stable and ample funding” relates to not just our district's concerns, but state-wide concerns about Supplemental Levy Funds that sunset at the end of 2017. (You may recall the voters approved an additional 4% Supplemental Levy in the summer of 2010; it expires in 2017.) That levy reduction could cost our district \$10.1 million unless the legislature takes corrective action, hopefully this session. When we embarked on the 24-credit design process, we counted on the

legislature making progress funding schools in compliance with the Supreme Court's *McCleary* decision. We all know how well that's worked out! So, I have come to the conclusion that we would be irresponsible to implement the greater requirements as originally planned, and then have to eliminate ways for students to meet those requirements because of state funding cuts.

For these reasons, our school board, cabinet members, and I have been actively engaging elected representatives in conversations about the need for stable and ample funding for K-12 – until the Legislature actually complies with *McCleary* to amply fund education (not just creates a plan, or promises to fund our schools). The stakes are too high for us not to be spending as much time as possible explaining this complex issue to those who hold the power to make positive decisions and changes.

Every change or proposed change in an organization creates impact ripples. Changing our systems to ensure students graduate with additional, more relevant, and more rigorous course work is no exception. Another elective in the existing middle school schedule is both an opportunity and a loss for students and for staff. An extra elective in that existing system changes the learning path for a student and means the student perhaps does not take P.E. or band or another elective class. It means choices for that student, and the choices may not be easy. That extra elective within a middle school schedule also means some teachers' assignments would change. We all know change can be difficult, and we are responsible for supporting our colleagues whose responsibilities change. In addition, I plan to add a WIAA-level soccer program for middle school students, in addition to district-sponsored soccer clubs. This opens up more physical exercise and teaming opportunities for middle school students.

If the board approves item 14.03, we'll continue work with the Everett Education Association, our other employee associations whose members are affected, and school administrators to institute the change fairly, reasonably, and according to our bargaining agreements and legal requirements – and always with what's best for students in mind.

We have done a tremendous amount of work already to prepare for 24 credits, and to implement our strategic plan priorities. We have a great deal more to do. I've concluded it's prudent to give ourselves a bit more time to get the job done right. Whatever the school board decides tonight, we will work together to get through the challenges. You have my commitment and the board's on that value that is so important to our district's culture and long-term success.

Best regards,



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