



Our students will shape and lead the future

News release

Dec. 9, 2015

School board adds world language to middle school curriculum

Board also extended 24-credit deadline to class of 2021.

District will encourage all students to earn 24 credits while revamping schedules, class offerings and supports to make it possible for each student to earn that many credits or more.

In two separate but interrelated actions on Tuesday night, the board both expanded students' access to world language classes and extended the timeline for increased graduation credits.

Starting next fall, eighth-grade students in Everett Public Schools can choose to take Spanish as an elective class. In doing so, they can earn high school credit toward graduation and be on a path to five years of Spanish language study, including two Advanced Placement Spanish Language and Culture courses. This is a step in district plans to offer more world language classes for students in middle and high school.

By extending the timeline for requiring 24 credits to graduate, the board joined other Washington school districts also changing that requirement from the class of 2019 to the class of 2021. Instead of this year's freshmen earning two more credits to graduate, that requirement will begin for the class of 2021 – this year's seventh-graders.

"At least 78 districts out of the state's 295 are extending the timeline to meet the state's graduation requirement increase," said Board President Ted Wenta. "Those districts represent nearly half, 46 percent, of the students in the state. We are all rethinking ways to revamp our existing systems so students have access to enough classes and to the right classes – and so there is enough room in their schedules to make up any credits they might have failed. Systems designed for 22 credit success are not adequate for 24-credit success, no matter how successful students are today."

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Wenta's reference to class schedules calls out the significant barrier created by a six-period high school day. "With six periods in a day in four years of high school, requiring 24 credits leaves no room for failure," he emphasizes.

Superintendent Cohn notes, "Students who are most challenged today in a system that does have room to learn and recover from failure will be even more challenged in a system built with no room to fail."

The school board's decision maintains 22- or 24-credit pathways for this year's eighth- and ninth-grade students and changes graduation requirements for this year's seventh-grade students and all who follow.

Today's eighth- and ninth-grade students can choose to earn a 22-credit diploma, or a new 24-credit diploma with enriched math, science and world language credits.

This year's seventh-grade students and all who follow them will have the advantage of more science, math and world language classes and proving their academic achievements with 24 high school credits.

Getting out of the "6x4 box" is work Everett Public Schools and other districts in this region and statewide have been working on since Senate Bill 6552 was passed by the State Legislature in 2014. The law built in a default timeline of 2019 or the option of extending the 24-credit requirement until the class of 2021. "We and other districts are taking that extra time to do this work well and completely so students have every opportunity to succeed," Cohn added.

When the law passed, Everett Public Schools formed a *24-Credit Steering Committee* to prepare.

Dr. Tony Byrd, the district's associate superintendent, oversees the work of that group and notes the group's initial recommendation to launch the increased requirements for the class of 2019. "For all

of the right reasons, including making sure students are college and career ready when they graduate, we initially felt it best to require 24 credits for the class of 2019. After more than a year of deep study, we are even more convinced that more requirements, more rigor and equally strong support are the right things to do – and that it will take more time to put them in place."

"We chose to undertake this work authentically rather than merely out of compliance," explained Cohn. "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 and other districts in the state can ensure rigor, accountability and supports for student success."

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Cohn's reference to "stable funding" relates to statewide concerns about Supplemental Levy Funds that sunset in 2018. "Everett could lose \$10.1 million in two years unless the Legislature takes corrective action – preferably this session. We would be irresponsible to enact higher requirements and then eliminate ways for students to meet those requirements because of state funding cuts."

Cohn also notes Everett Education Association's commitment to "work with the district, parents and students" to explore ways to redesign high school schedules and expand the existing "6x4 box." "Working collaboratively with our teachers' association and other employee associations early in this process means we're more likely to arrive at solutions that work for all staff who are there for kids every day."

The district's next steps will entail ensuring today's ninth- and eighth-grade students can earn 24 credits because it will position them for college entrance and will give them much more career choice flexibility. "Most of these students will earn those credits, and we'll be building a better system for those who follow to do so also," said Byrd.

Why require 24 credits in the first place?

High school graduation requirements across the state vary. Having the same level of high standards – and the same requirements across the state – ensures all students are achieving to high standards. The state Legislature put this into law in 2013 and required all districts to have the same graduation requirements no later than the class of 2021.

The new requirements also meet those established by the Washington Student Achievement Council's college entrance requirements. This is what students today must earn to get into state universities or colleges. Most of the district's graduates (six out of 10) are meeting those requirements.

In addition to more credits, students must earn more credits in specific subjects – three years of science with three labs, for example. These more rigorous requirements better prepare students for what they must know and be able to do to succeed in college and careers.

The 24-credit requirement includes flexibility for students to follow career pathways and to be ready for a variety of college and career options after high school.

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What has the district's 24-Credit Steering Committee done to get ready for this?

Among the systems in place:

- “Just in time” intervention and credit recovery options. When students enter “the danger zone” of failing or nearly failing a class, schools intervene, work with families and students and teachers to build support so students can get back on track or recover lost credit.
- Expanded summer school programs and credit recovery classes. The district's summer school program is the largest in the region.
- *Naviance* and *High School and Beyond* plans begin in sixth grade and continue all the way through graduation. *Naviance* is an academic and career goal-setting and tracking system students and parents can work on together.
- Three times more course equivalency options are available than were three years ago.
- More middle school courses in which students can earn high school credit are available in advanced math and science, freshman English and Washington State History.
- More opportunities are available for teachers to learn “scaffolded instruction” – techniques to help students progress and build upon what they are learning.

Among systems planned:

- Research and design of different high school schedules
- Spanish language classes beginning in middle school
- More classes to help non-English speaking students learn academic English language to succeed in those subjects

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For more information:

[Mary Waggoner](#), Director of Communications, 425-385-4040

[Dr. Tony Byrd](#), Associate Superintendent, 425-385-4050

[Dr. Jeanne Willard](#), Director of On Time Graduation, 425-385-4078