

# High School Graduation Requirements Task Force Overview

June 2017

The District has experienced steady increases in high school graduation rates over the past seven years. This improvement has been coupled with increases in public school enrollment and higher standardized test scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress.<sup>1</sup>

While there is much to celebrate associated with these improvements, several data points also indicate that DC students are not ready for the next steps in college or careers when they graduate from high school. Specifically,

- Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) scores, which predict college readiness, show that only 27% of DC students are college-ready in reading, and 25% of DC students are college-ready in math<sup>2</sup>
- The 6-year college graduation rate for DC students was just 23% in 2012<sup>3</sup>
- The average SAT score is 1285 out of 2400, compared to the national average of 1484<sup>4</sup>
- Of DCPS students who took at least one AP exam, just 34% received a passing score of 3, 4 or 5 on one or more tests<sup>5</sup>
- Over 80% of DC graduates take remedial courses at the University of the District of Columbia<sup>6</sup>

Why are we seeing a dissonance between a 69% high school graduation rate and college and career readiness predictors? Is it a factor of implementation of the requirements, the requirements themselves, or other factors?

The high school graduation requirements task force will dive into this topic, exploring three principal questions:

1. What do we as a city want our high school diploma to mean?
2. How should we measure whether a student has achieved the standards of a diploma?
3. What changes to DC's graduation requirements, if any, should be made to ensure our diploma reflects achievement of these standards?

Based on findings to the above questions, the task force will recommend changes to the requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> OSSE, 2016. "[National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)](#)."

<sup>2</sup> OSSE, 2016. "[2015-16 PARCC Results and Resources](#)"

<sup>3</sup> Washington Examiner, 2012. "[Most DC High School Graduates Don't Finish College in Six Years](#)"

<sup>4</sup> CollegeBoard, 2016. "[2016 College-Board Seniors, State Profile Report, Dist. of Columbia](#)"

<sup>5</sup> DCPS, 2017. "[AP Data Sets](#)"

<sup>6</sup> Washington Examiner, 2012. "[UDC Officials: Fund Us like DC Public Schools](#)"

## Background: Current Graduation Requirements

The District of Columbia's graduation requirements, established in 2007, require students to earn 24 prescribed credits and complete 100 hours of community service. The number of required classes is on par with or exceeds requirements for the rest of the nation<sup>7</sup> and provides the same diploma for all graduates.

Across the nation, states and districts have provided more than one pathway to earning a high school diploma. For example, in San Jose, California, students pursue one of four pathways. Two pathways are aligned to the standards outlined by the University of California, the state's system of state universities, and the other two pathways are alternative requirements for students who receive special education services or attend alternate programs.

Other states and cities support student learning through graduation requirements with interdisciplinary senior projects (Philadelphia<sup>8</sup>), a focus on skills including reading, research, and technology usage rather than on specific English classes (New Hampshire<sup>9</sup>), global citizenship coursework in addition to core subjects (Vermont<sup>10</sup>), and honors or college preparatory pathways (multiple states and cities). Some states require students to pass a standardized test or complete a standards-based portfolio project to receive their diploma.

DC's existing high school graduation requirements are generally aligned with the entry requirements for competitive universities, state colleges, and most trade schools. Despite this alignment, however, some of DC public schools' most talented graduates are struggling at elite colleges. For example, a student who was the valedictorian at a DC school wrote a *Washington Post* op-ed about how he struggled to catch up with other students upon entering Georgetown University."<sup>11</sup>

In short, DC students who meet all of the city's high school graduation requirements are being exposed to the core classes colleges and trade schools recommend, but achievement data suggest this coursework may not be enough to help them succeed in college-level courses and obtain college degrees. It is worth revisiting these requirements to ensure students are prepared to succeed upon graduation from high school.

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<sup>7</sup> Education Commission of the States, 2016. "[Standard High School Graduation Requirements \(50-state\)](#)"

<sup>8</sup> The School District of Philadelphia, 2005. "[Promotion and Graduation](#)"

<sup>9</sup> New Hampshire Department of Education, 2013. "[New Hampshire Common Core State Standards-Aligned English Language Arts and Literacy Competencies](#)"

<sup>10</sup> State of Vermont Agency of Education, 2017. "[Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements](#)"

<sup>11</sup> Washington Post, 2012. "[I Went to Some of DC's Best Schools. I Was Still Unprepared for College.](#)"

Appendix: Academic Graduation Requirements for a District of Columbia 24.0 Diploma

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Credits (Carnegie Units)</b>
<b>English</b>	4.0 credits
<b>Mathematics</b> (including Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II)	4.0 credits
<b>Science</b> (must include three lab sciences)	4.0 credits
<b>Social Studies</b> (must include World History 1 and 2, United States History; United States Government, and District of Columbia History)	4.0 credits
<b>World Language</b>	2.0 credits
<b>Art</b>	0.5 credits
<b>Music</b>	0.5 credits
<b>Health and Physical Education</b>	1.5 credits
<b>Electives</b>	3.5 credits
<b>Total</b>	<b>24.0 credits</b>