

Written Testimony Regarding RHSP/DAP Graduation Requirements

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HB 1 Sections 5.02 and 5.09

The SBOE must enact new graduation requirements for the Recommended High School Program and Distinguished Achievement Program—requiring four credits in the four foundation courses, with at least one course requiring a research writing component.

Legislative Intent

Enhance the college/workforce readiness of all Texas public school graduates.

Recommendations for Rule Changes in RHSP/DAP Graduation Requirements

- A selection of one of the following courses for the fourth mathematics credit that require Algebra II as a prerequisite—Statistics, Pre-calculus, Calculus, any Advanced Placement mathematics course, and any dual credit mathematics course;
- Requirements for science include the three laboratory-based science courses—Biology, Chemistry, and Physics *plus* one additional laboratory-based science course for which the three courses serve as a prerequisite;
- Evaluation of high school courses currently approved for graduation, particularly in the areas of mathematics and science, to ensure courses represent advanced high school instruction (instead of courses to strengthen skills from prior courses), and are sufficiently rigorous to equip students with the knowledge and skills they need for college/workforce readiness; and
- Reformulation of the Integrated Physics and Chemistry course to ensure course rigor is equivalent to all TEKS standards established for Physics and Chemistry if IPC is to qualify as one of the four science courses accredited for graduation.

Rationale

- The Texas economy demands a more highly-educated workforce.
 - Today only 10 percent of American jobs will be available for unskilled workers.
 - Nineteen of the 25 fastest-growing occupations in Texas require some post-secondary education, with half requiring at least a bachelor's degree.
 - Only one quarter of Texans aged 25 to 65 have a bachelor's degree or higher, while an almost equal number do not even have a high school diploma.
- On the whole, Texas high school graduates are under-prepared for post-secondary education.
 - In 2005, only 17 percent of Texas high school graduates who took the ACT college readiness test demonstrated the academic proficiency necessary to succeed.
 - Texas students scored 5th lowest in the nation on the math section of the SAT; over the past 10 years, the average SAT score in Texas has dropped one point, while the nation's average has increased by 18 points.
 - According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 42 percent of students entering higher education in Texas today require remediation or developmental education.
- A rigorous curriculum is vital to students' future success.
 - The high school curriculum—including what is studied, how much of it, and how intensely—is the best predictor of whether a student will obtain a bachelor's degree.
 - Curriculum is a better indicator of post-secondary success than socioeconomic status,

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standardized test scores, or high school GPA; a strong curriculum can compensate for educational disadvantages associated with socioeconomic status.

- Improvement in curriculum, or “opportunity-to-learn,” can play a significant role in closing the achievement gap for Hispanic and African-American students.
- Course selection, especially in math and science, plays a significant role in determining post-secondary readiness.
 - Research produced by the U.S. Department of Education indicates the likelihood of attaining a college degree is increased by 50 percent when students complete just one course for which Algebra II is a prerequisite.
 - In 2005 students who completed a mathematics course beyond Algebra II posted ACT scores at least 2.8 points higher than the state’s average math score.
 - Texas students who complete the three core high school science courses score at least 2.8 points higher on the ACT than students who complete only two lab-based science courses.
- The academic rigor of foundation courses currently approved for credit in the RHSP/DAP, particularly in math and science, must be strengthened.
 - Integrated Physics and Chemistry is described by the TEA as being “designed for students who need additional instruction in the physics and chemistry concepts covered in Science TEKS Grades 4-8.” IPC is a remedial course, not a course that contributes to post-secondary readiness of high school graduates.
 - Similarly, Mathematical Models with Applications is described by the TEA as “a course for high school students with a minimum prerequisite of Algebra I”, which “should build on the mathematical background of the students yet stretch their knowledge toward topics studied in Geometry and Algebra II.” In other words, Math Models serves as a remedial course for students who have not mastered sufficient skills to take more advanced math courses, although they were able to pass the state assessment for Algebra I.

- IPC and Mathematical Models are two examples of courses that are currently approved for graduation credit, but do not belong in a college-readiness curriculum in their current form.

Additional Remarks

- Adding course requirements for the RHSP/DAP is a way for Texans to strengthen high school learning. If, however, we simply add courses—rather than adding courses of advanced knowledge and skills—efforts to reform graduation requirements will confer no educational benefit.
- To help ensure the new rules increase the educational value of the entire high school program, the SBOE should identify a list of courses within each of the four subject areas that will enhance the academic rigor of the current RHSP/DAP diploma and designate the courses accredited for graduation under these programs.
- The vast majority of students in Texas public schools **can** master the academic challenges of the RHSP and **should** transition from high school to college or vocational training. There is no reason to believe that Texas youth are incapable of attaining the same level of academic learning as their peers in other developed nations. Changes must be introduced to ensure Texas youth graduate with a sufficiently high level of educational proficiency that will enable individuals to earn a living wage in today’s increasingly knowledge-based job market.
- There are students who may be unable or may not wish to complete requirements of the RHSP; some Texans express concern that increasing the rigor of the RHSP may be onerous to these students. These concerns should be allayed by provisions of current state policy that allow students to earn a high school diploma by completing the Minimum High School Program, a less rigorous academic program.

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