

Why did the State Board of Education change high school graduation requirements?

The State Board of Education is responsible for setting graduation requirements for the state’s 115 school districts. In carrying out that duty, members seek to match requirements that best prepare all students for education and a career beyond high school. That could include community college, four-year college or university study, or other kinds of on-going learning. Today, many in the business community say that it takes about the same level of academic preparation to be successful in the workplace as it takes to be successful as a first-year college student. That was the guiding principle for the State Board in making its decision.

What is the difference between the old course requirements (for students who started high school before 2009) and the Future-Ready Core?

Prior course requirements were divided into four courses of study – Career Prep, College Tech Prep, College/University Prep and the Occupational Course of Study (for certain students with disabilities). The four courses of study implied that students would determine their life’s course while in high school and respond accordingly. The Future-Ready Core ends the courses of study (except for the Occupational Course of Study for qualified students) and, instead, requires students to plan their electives to focus on their specific interests and goals.

The primary changes in course requirements are the addition of a fourth math requirement and the expectation that all students will complete math at an Algebra II level. The other subject requirements remain essentially the same in number. Students will have 21 credits required under the state’s Future-Ready Core (22 credits are required under the Occupational Course of Study). It’s also important to note that local districts may have additional requirements for graduation.

Why is this course of study called the Future-Ready Core?

In researching what students need in high school in order to be successful later, the focus of the State Board of Education members was on helping students be ready for their future. The “core” describes the fact that these 21 state-required courses (22 credits are required for the Occupational Course of Study) form the core of the high school curriculum. In most schools’ schedules, there is room for students to complete as many as 32 courses or even more during their four years of high school.

Is the Future-Ready Core designed to prepare every student exactly the same?

No. The Future-Ready Core is designed to ensure that all students learn what they need for success with a 15 unit core of academic work alongside up to six additional electives that each student can take in high school. The six elective courses, plus others that students take beyond the core course requirements, enable students to customize their high school education to meet their needs and interests.

How does the graduation project fit in with the Future-Ready Core?

The Future-Ready Core refers to the courses that students take, but it is not the only thing that students must do to earn a high school diploma. The North Carolina Graduation Project is a requirement, as are passing scores on the end-of-course tests required for the five essential courses that all students take (Algebra I, Biology, Civics and Economics, English I and US History), passage of the Computer Skills test and meeting any additional local requirements.

The North Carolina Graduation Project is what some call an “authentic assessment.” In other words, it is a way for students to demonstrate their ability to research, create, present and explain a project of interest to them. These skills are often expected in today’s workplace.

Algebra II seems like a difficult level of math for all students to complete. What if a student doesn’t want to take that level of math?

Algebra II is a higher level of expectation than some students have had to meet in the past. However, most college bound students (community college or university) have already passed this level of math in the past. For students who truly do not see Algebra II as being in their best interest, there is an alternative for this Core math requirement, but this decision would be made with input from the student’s parents, teachers, and guidance counselor. If a student is able to complete Algebra II, it is in their interest to do so. Algebra II is a minimum requirement for many college, university and community college programs.

With all the recent attention on high school dropouts, why make it harder to graduate?

The addition of one math requirement is the primary change to the course requirements and even in that area, there are options for students who need them. The purpose of high school graduation requirements is to make sure that students have the academic foundation they need for life after high school. In past years when standards have increased, there has been no impact on the state’s dropout rates. In fact, over half of the students who drop out of school do so because of attendance issues. Only about seven percent of students cite academic problems as the reason for dropping out of school.

What happens to students who move to North Carolina in the middle of high school? Will they have to meet the Future-Ready Core requirements?

Unless a student transfers to North Carolina in the middle of his or her senior year, he/she will be responsible for completing the Future-Ready Core and the North Carolina Graduation Project. The principal will evaluate the student’s transcript to determine how their existing course work aligns to the Future-Ready Core.

