

High School Graduation Requirements Task Force Meeting #3

September 13, 2017 at 6:00 PM

441 4th Street, NW, Suite 1114

Washington, DC 20001

Attendance

High School Graduation Requirements Task Force Members:

Present:

- **Markus Batchelor** (Task Force Co-Chair, State Board of Education, Ward 8)
- **Erin Bibo** (Deputy Chief, College & Career Programs)
- **Jerome Foster II** (Student, Washington Leadership Academy)
- **Cosby Hunt** (Teacher & Senior Officer of Teaching & Learning, Center for Inspired Teaching)
- **Dwan Jordon** (Senior Advisor, Friendship PCS)
- **Sandra Jowers-Barber** (Director, Division of Humanities, University of the District of Columbia College)
- **Kimberly Martin** (Principal, Wilson High School)
- **Karla Reid-Witt** (Parent, Banneker High School)
- **Cathy Reilly** (Executive Director, Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators)
- **Naomi Rubin DeVeaux** (Deputy Director, DC Public Charter School Board)
- **Jimell Sanders** (Parent, Houston Elementary School)
- **David Tansey** (Teacher, McKinley Technology High School)
- **Justin Tooley** (Special Assistant for Legislation & Policy, Office of the State Superintendent of Education)
- **Laura Wilson Phelan** (Task Force Co-Chair, State Board of Education, Ward 1)

Phone:

- **Julie Camerata** (Parent, DC International, Executive Director, DC Special Education Cooperative)
- **Latisha Chisholm** (Special Education Coordinator, Anacostia High School)
- **Cara Fuller** (Principal, Ballou STAY High School)
- **Jane Spence** (Deputy Chief, Secondary Schools, DC Public Schools)

Absent:

- **Tom Brown** (Executive Director, Training Grounds, Inc.)
- **Celine Fejeran** (Deputy Director, Raise DC)
- **Larry Greenhill, Sr.** (Vice President, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers)
- **Senovia Hurtado** (School Counselor & Parent, School Without Walls)
- **Sanjay Mitchell** (Director of College & Alumni Programs, Thurgood Marshall Academy PCHS)
- **Carol Randolph** (Chief Operating Officer, DC Students Construction Trades Foundation)
- **Shenita Ray** (Director of Online Operations, Georgetown University School of Continuing Studies)
- **Jahari Shelton** (Student, Sidwell Friends School)

SBOE Staff:

- **John-Paul Hayworth**, Executive Director
- **Paul Negron**, Program Support Specialist
- **Maria Saliccioli**, Policy Analyst
- **Alexandria Smith**, Communication Fellow

Executive Summary

The High School Graduation Requirements Task Force (TF), led by Ms. Wilson Phelan and Mr. Batchelor, held its third meeting on September 13, 2017. TF members worked to find a common understanding of the District's high school graduation requirements. The group also discussed how graduation requirements impact students' post-secondary success. After several rich conversations, the group generated a list of 20 questions they would like to ask high school students. The TF chairs and Board staff will refine the questions into a 4 – 6 question protocol that, after TF member review, will be used in student focus groups. This work will help the group gain a deeper understanding of how the District's high school graduation requirements impact current students, as well as the areas where the requirements may be in need of improvement.

Student focus groups will take place between the third and fourth TF meetings. The TF adjourned until its fourth meeting on September 27, 2017.

Agenda Items

Welcome

Task Force Co-Chair Markus Batchelor opened the meeting by reminding the group of its norms and pointing out the Parking Lot, where task force members can put any thoughts that cannot be immediately addressed.

A task force member suggested a Google form to collect post-meeting feedback.

Task Force Co-Chair Laura Wilson Phelan reviewed the meeting objectives:

- Understand DC's high school graduation requirements
- Identify TF members' questions about how current requirements impact post-high school preparedness
- Agree on 4 – 6 key questions to ask students on the impact of the requirements
- Sign up for a time to ask students these questions
- Continue to build trust with one another

Ms. Wilson Phelan reminded the group of the TF's jurisdiction, which is to address the requirements themselves. It is critical for the TF to understand the link between the preparedness of students for life after high school and the requirements themselves, and the TF would move toward collecting questions and gathering firsthand data from student focus groups. Using the same questions for each focus group ensures uniform data, and the information TF members gather will be analyzed. At that point, the TF will be able to work with shared data.

Ms. Reilly cautioned that the group should remember the conversation that took place the last time the requirements were addressed. Ms. Wilson Phelan agreed and thanked TF members for sending emails about the types of students they were interested in hearing from.

Ms. DeVeaux reinforced the idea of speaking with former District students; it is important to speak with current students, but it is also critical to talk to people who met the District requirements and still struggled. He added that there is research on this issue, but not on District students' outcomes specifically. Ms. Wilson said that she found it important to speak to both current and former students. She noted that it was a difficult group to organize but that the TF would try its best. Mr. Tansey added that it should not just be students who went to college and graduated, but also alumni who dropped out. She said that students who are unable to succeed in college-level courses are an important topic of discussion. Dr. Spence asked if there are courses District students should be taking, if there are things the District asks students to do that we do not want them to do, or is there a different way for students to demonstrate their preparation to graduate?

Review DC Requirements

Mr. Batchelor provided an overview of the requirements. He asked TF members to discuss their questions about the HS graduation requirements with partners.

Ms. Reid-Witt asked if course descriptions exist; Ms. DeVeaux explained that each LEA provides course descriptions, but they are not standardized across the city.

Mr. Tansey asked what the requirements were for students to be college- and career-ready, and Ms. Wilson Phelan replied that this would emerge later in the scope of work.

Mr. Hunt asked why geometry is a requirement, and whether research points to its benefits in the same way that research recommends algebra. Mr. Tansey, who is a math teacher, responded that it is a recommended course and that algebra and geometry are different, important elements of math. Mr. Hunt asked if you can do calculus without geometry, and Ms. Reilly replied that you could not do carpentry without geometry. Mr. Tansey added that it would limit a student's ability to engage in higher math if he or she did not take geometry.

Dr. Jowers-Barber asked if there was a way to ensure the requirements match students' college coursework. She said that these requirements are either insufficient, or mastery of these requirements is not adequate, because it needs to be retaken at the college level.

Mr. Batchelor suggested that groups write these questions down with their partners and share them after they have had an opportunity to discuss. Ms. Wilson Phelan added that TF members should discuss whether the requirements are clear.

In response to a question from Ms. Reilly, Ms. Martin explained that the two years of world language requirement refers to two years of the same language. Ms. DeVeaux asked to clarify the history requirements and what World History I and II indicate. She said she would not understand them on a transcript if she were a college administrator. Mr. Jordon indicated that it read to him as though there were five required history classes, even though the requirements call for students to take four history credits. Ms. Martin, a principal, explained that US History counts for a world history credit.

Ms. Reid-Witt asked if courses look the same on each school's transcripts. Ms. Martin explained that all of DC Public Schools (DCPS) uses the same system, and all DCPS transcripts look the same. Ms. DeVeaux responded that LEAs might have slightly different transcripts. Ms. Reid-Witt also asked if certain classes were weighted more heavily than others on students' GPAs. Ms. Martin told her that some classes, like AP classes, had greater weight for GPAs, but they did not provide more [Carnegie Units](#).

Mr. Foster asked what would happen if a school provides Algebra II but does not provide geometry. Mr. Tansey said that geometry is required and must be offered, even if it is listed under a different course name. Mr. Tooley responded that there might be materials that explain how decisions were made, and added that he would take these questions back to the Office of the State Superintendent (OSSE).

Dr. Bibb asked about language around flexibility or timing for courses; would the order that students take courses in line up across LEAs, and would this affect a transfer student's ability to graduate on time? She noted that students move across LEAs regularly, and said that this is important context.

Mr. Tansey explained to another that four science courses are required, but three must be lab courses. He added that students typically take 32 courses, and since there are only 24 required credits, there is wiggle room with classes. He then asked if students had to take requirements in high school, or if they could be taken before.

Ms. Wilson Phelan said a competency-based waiver was required to take a class before high school. Ms. Reilly added that students could take algebra prior to high school without a waiver. Mr. Batchelor said that he found the foreign language requirement onerous, and Ms. Reilly responded that he could have asked for a waiver.

Ms. Martin noted that incoming students have a variety of experiences; many students will take Pre-Calculus in 9th grade if they took Algebra I in eighth grade, and others will take Algebra I as freshmen. She explained that students enter high schools as part of a cohort, based on their incoming math or language ability.

Discussion: Preparedness and the Requirements

In the interest of time, TF members moved directly from the conversation on the meaning of the requirements to developing questions for student focus groups.

Work Period: Developing Common Questions to Understand the Impact of the Requirements on High School Students

Ms. Wilson Phelan noted the article on deeper learning, mentioning that it was included in the pre-reading so that the group could consider a range of possibilities about what the requirements could be. She said, for example, that the group could recommend fully competency-based requirements, adding that she was not advocating for that, but was sharing the range of possibilities.

She suggested using the questions the group had brainstormed in advance to use as a framework to discuss the article, thinking about questions to ask students.

Ms. Wilson Phelan suggested asking, as a potential focus group question, if there is a course that students have to enroll in that feels like a burden or otherwise amiss. A TF member said she would like to know from a graduated student, whether he/she is in college or at work, what challenges he/she identifies that arise from being inadequately prepared in high school.

After engaging in small-group discussion, each of the groups shared the questions they wanted to ask high school students about the graduation requirements. They generated the following questions:

Meaning of a Diploma

- What does a high school diploma mean to you, and what should it mean?

- Do you know exactly what the graduation requirements are?

Post-secondary Preparedness

- What is the connection between HS graduates' preparedness and graduation requirements?
- Is there a difference in preparing for college vs. careers, should your high school prepare you for both, and what do the existing requirements prepare students for? Could a college preparation, entrepreneurship, or internship course help you prepare for college?
- Graduates: which courses prepared you for what you're doing now, and which HS experiences are not relevant to what you're doing now? Students: which HS experiences are not relevant to what you want to do? What is your dream job, and what class would help you prepare for it?

Potential Areas for Change

- What requirements are you nervous about meeting?
- What is missing from the list of requirements? Is there room for more requirements, i.e. computer science?

Opportunities for Flexibility

- What are your thoughts on seat time and mastering one standard before moving to the next?
- Would you have benefitted from starting to complete your requirements earlier?
- Are the requirements too strict or too flexible? What would you do with additional flexibility, and where is there room for it?
- Are there classes you wish you didn't have to take, classes you wish were requirements for all students, or classes you wish counted as core requirements?
- Did you take courses that spent too much or too little time on the material?
- What additional opportunities do you wish you had, i.e. travel, summer school, after school classes?

Requirements beyond Math/Reading/Social Studies/Science

- What should the community service experience look like – why do we have this requirement, how should students be able to fulfill this requirement, how does your school define CS, and how does CS prepare students for college/career?
- How many electives does your school offer, can you choose them, and which ones are the most popular? Which electives would you have liked to take if time permitted?
- How do you feel about the 1.5 credit health/PE requirement?

Other

- What conversations do you have with adults at your school about your standardized test scores and what they mean?
- What are implications of a requirement vs. a recommendation?

TF members wondered what the most popular electives are; Ms. DeVeaux stated that they track transcripts and could provide data on the courses students take, and Dr. Spence noted that all of their courses are tracked through Aspen, so it might be possible to find out which classes are barriers to graduation.

Additional questions raised by TF members included wondering whether the group's assumption that students fail algebra regularly is true, asking if [deeper learning](#) competencies should be tied to community service experiences, and considering whether the group might make a separate set of recommendations for its ideas about high school that reach beyond changes to the graduation requirements themselves.

Closing

TF members responded to an exit slip asking:

- What went well?
- What suggestions do you have for improvement?
- What should we discuss next time?

The group will hold its next meeting on September 27, 2017, from 6:00 – 8:00 PM. TF chairs and Board staff will follow up with minutes, an agenda for the next meeting, and requests to participate in student focus groups. The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.